

## MEMORIES OF E. LUCY BRAUN

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In the mid-1930's, Richard, my husband, and I were geology students at the University of Cincinnati where we took three botany courses from a marvelous teacher, E. Lucy Braun. The first course was world botany in which we roamed the world from pole to equator. Next was geographic botany in which we studied the vegetational types in the United States. The third course was plant succession, using the communities in the Cincinnati region, together with their changes as our laboratory. Lucy illustrated many of her lectures with superior slides of her own taking.

These courses have added immeasurably to our appreciation of the earth. An important part of our travel experience is our awareness of the vegetation. Facts learned so long ago jump into our minds, for example, the drip tips of leaves in tropical rain forests, the wide spacing of desert plants, and the vivid blue of alpine plants. After all that Lucy had taught us, what a thrill it was to see our first baobab tree, the flat top acacias of the African savanna, or the myriad species of eucalyptus in Australia. Although there was little talk about land conservation in those early years, Lucy planted the seeds of awareness and concern in her students. Her interest and knowledge inspired the creation of the nature preserve system in Adams County, Ohio, beginning in 1959 with 42 acres (16.8 ha) for Lynx Prairie, a system that has now grown to over 3000 acres (1200 ha).

Lucy's teaching continued long after her early retirement. Professional scientists, such as Jane L. Forsyth at Bowling Green State University, came to her for help and advice. Jane told me that Lucy wanted to shift the glacial boundary slightly in southwestern Ohio on the basis of her knowledge of the distribution of plants. Amateurs who wished to know something about species and where to find them came to her. One of those individuals is a well-known Cincinnati who has given generously to help The Nature Conservancy with land acquisition in Adams County. This person said, "She introduced me to all the plants. She showed me how to use a hand lens; she opened up a whole new world for me. From her I learned so many things about nature." This same admirable woman has recently deeded her estate overlooking the Ohio River to the Hamilton County Parks and her wonderful woods will become a nature preserve.

In 1969 at the age of 80, Lucy assisted the Woman's Committee of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History plan a short-term adult course. She gave two of the lectures, and assisted by Richard, led a field trip to Roosevelt Lake in Scioto County, Ohio, for over 80 people.

Another active conservationist, a learning companion on field trips with Lucy in her latter years, described Dr. Braun as a very lively lady. On one excursion in search of trailing arbutus, they scurried up a steep slope in the Shawnee State Forest. However, both Lucy and her sister, Annette, said nothing when they found the arbutus, allowing this friend to have the delight of her own discovery of the plant.

Lucy was born in 1889, five years later than her sister, Annette. Their parents were exceedingly strict and protective. Her mother, a retired teacher, taught Lucy at home for the first three years.

Annette by her 30's had already established a reputation as a microlepidopterist, but parental supervision continued. One time a staid and well-respected colleague came from out-of-town to consult with Annette. Her father, a school principal, said, "You may have one hour with my daughter." During that whole time he sat on a chair outside the open door.

Their parents took the two girls by horse-drawn street car to the woods in Rose Hill, now a part of Avondale, and Lucy began collecting and pressing plants during her high school years. Throughout her life she made an extensive herbarium, which now resides at the National Museum in Washington, D. C.

As the neighborhood changed following their parents' death, the two little old maids were mocked and teased by young boys. Life became unbearable and it was necessary to leave their old-fashioned, narrow house in Walnut Hills and find a new home.

In 1943 Lucy purchased two acres (0.8 ha) with a spacious and beautiful limestone house on Salem Road, a drive that winds up from

the Ohio valley to Mt. Washington. A wonderful large-paned window in the dining room looks out to the majestic trees which surround the house. Into this woods with a rich herbaceous flora, Lucy introduced numerous native plants, many from the Appalachians. Luckily, her land lay on leached Illinoian glacial deposits so the acid-loving plants flourished.

Richard and I would receive a call from Lucy, "Come, you must come; the red azalea of the Cumberlands is in bloom." It was a summons and dutifully we would go. She took great pride in the *Magnolia ashei* that she had started from seed collected in western Florida.

In this tranquil setting the two sisters lived serenely, surrounded by their Victorian furniture which took on beauty in their new home. Befriended and helped by their neighbors, the Brauns became a source of pride to Mt. Washington, where they were known as the two lady doctors.

Their social life was limited. Occasionally they entertained with a slide show, always with an intermission for lemonade and cookies. For visiting scientific peers, I only recently learned, to my surprise, that they had the simplest of suppers.

Both ladies enjoyed their many western motor trips. Lucy, the photographer, took hundreds of slides, labeled by date, place, time, and direction. Her only relaxation at home was her plants and her mystery stories. When a friend expressed surprise, she retorted, "Why, all scientists read mysteries."

Annette, who had assisted Lucy in all phases of her life, bloomed after Lucy's death. For the first time in 87 years, she made the decisions. One day she proudly proclaimed, "I made a coffee cake this morning." Annette, although missing her sister dreadfully, lived in their home for five more years. In 1976 it was necessary to move her to a nursing home, and she sold the house to De Vere Burt, Director of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History. Annette died 27 November 1978 at 94. She was a remarkable lady in her own right.

At Iowa State University, De Vere had been fully exposed to Lucy's book, *The Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America*, and to her studies in ecology. When he came to Cincinnati, he found it a thrill to rub elbows with E. Lucy Braun. He still experiences nostalgia when walking through the garden where she nurtured so many plants. With Annette's help from her nursing home, he kept a log of the blooming dates of the plants. De Vere still tends the coleus and the begonia plants, some of which are over 100 years old, continuing the sisters' ritual of taking slips in the fall. A forsythia planted by their mother in 1850 on May Street and moved to Mt. Washington in 1943 still blooms beneath the kitchen window. Her mother's primroses still flower at the edge of the woods which border the front yard.

De Vere considers it the greatest honor to live in her house. Guests in the natural science field who come to visit are honored to know that they are sleeping in the home of E. Lucy Braun. For her they hold a reverential feeling.

Field trips were very much a part of Lucy's and Annette's lives; Annette was usually her companion. They first went to Adams County on the Norfolk and Western Railroad and stayed at an old-fashioned spa in Mineral Springs. In her early studies she took her students with her for a week to make transects and plot studies.

One of these early students tells that the scheduled entertainment one evening was a fungi watch. Lucy and the students climbed the hill behind the hotel and waited for darkness to fall. It became perfectly dark, but to Lucy's dismay, the species down slope identified earlier as phosphorescent did not glow as she had predicted. When she went down the hill to investigate, she found, to her chagrin, that the fungus was glowing only on the underside.

Lucy could not be fooled about the many native plants, for her knowledge was encyclopedic. She also had total recall of all her trips, their dates, what plants she had seen and where. On request she could give you the exact directions for the location of a certain species in such detail as "40 feet [12 m] southwest from the big beech."

After 1930 when Lucy bought her first car, she and Annette made many trips to the Kentucky mountains. While walking in the hills during prohibition, moonshiners posed a serious problem. It was hill protocol never to approach a still. Luckily the ladies never had a direct confrontation. Local residents warned them of locations; sometimes the calls of the moonshiners alerted them to danger or even the lookout men directed them away from the stills.

The Braun sisters got along well with the suspicious mountain people because they heeded the local customs. They made friends and they never tattled on the moonshiners. They often rode the logging trains to remote areas. One day, while attempting to climb Big Black Mountain in Kentucky, they approached a mountain cabin where they had been told a trail started. When Lucy asked the woman where the trail took off, the woman replied, "There's no trail up Big Black Mountain. It's too overgrown, too steep; you would never make it from here." The two sisters stayed a little longer, chatting. Suddenly the light in the woman's eyes turned friendly, "Oh, you're the plant ladies living with the Mullins family. You're the ladies that take pictures of trees. Come along, I'll show you the trail."

One day in the Natural Bridge area in Kentucky, Annette and Lucy were returning to the lodge late in the day by a different way than they had gone. They suddenly sensed they were approaching a still, so they retreated over the divide into another valley where Lucy remembered ten years before she had used a wooden ladder to climb up over the steep sandstone rim. The ladder was gone. It was necessary to make a wide detour and they did not reach the lodge until 9:30 pm, well after dark, much to the relief of the management. It would be interesting to know how many miles these sisters walked in pursuit of Lucy's plants. Annette said they walked 24 miles (38.4 km) on one long day.

Lucy's field trips continued almost to her death. Her last long excursion was to Carter Caves, Kentucky, in 1970; she died a year later. In the last year or so, her vigor was gone. She walked slowly stopping often. I remember she told Richard, "I can't go with everybody now, but you are willing to go slowly enough."

Thanks did not come easily to Lucy's lips; instead, she could be blunt and ungracious. A delicious soup brought during her illness prompted, "I don't like it, take it back." A lovely pink blanket initiated by a friend especially for her fared equally, "I don't need it, take it back." Only now do I realize that Lucy did sometimes show appreciation, although not often. Despite her idiosyncrasies, she had a wide circle of friends: notable scientists from the University of Cincinnati, her students, and nonprofessionals. Known and admired by botanists in her field, she carried on an active correspondence often feuding with them if they opposed her views. These letters are all on file at the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, where DeVere Burt hopes to research them for a future paper. Elizabeth Brockschlager, a retired school teacher and proficient botanist of Cincinnati, has kept a collection of personal letters written about Lucy's trips.

She was admired and respected by her students, a number of whom went on to develop careers in botany. Many were faithful to the end. However, one noted botanist commented, "She treated me like a sophomore until she died." In the early 1920's, Dr. Braun sparked the university botany club, The Blue Hydra, to raise money to purchase the botanical preserve of Hazelwood for the university. The students organized money-making projects and asked for donations. They sold homemade candy on Tuesdays and Thursdays to the engineers. How different from today; now someone would ask for a grant.

Lucy might be characterized by four D's and an F: *dedication*, *determination*, *domination*, *demanding*, and *frugal*. She was *dedicated* to plant science, to her department to which she brought renown, and to land preservation. It was she who brought the attention of The Nature Conservancy to Adams County. How well I remember Lucy in April of 1967 leading a group of Cincinnatians over the shoulder of Whip-poor-will Hill to an elbow of capture and on to the one of two stations for *Pachystima canbyi* in Ohio. All of this land is now part of The Wilderness Preserve and four of that original group have been generous contributors.

The second D is for *determination*. A former student tells this story. Moving into a new office in Old Tech Building, Dr. Braun found the room on the ground floor unbearably hot. A call to the maintenance department brought no results. It then became her policy each morning when she arrived to take a temperature reading and call maintenance. "This morning my room is 100 degrees," The next day

another call, "My office is 98 degrees." This pattern continued for several weeks and finally the head of maintenance replied, "All right, all right," but then she heard him say, "Go up and wrap those steam pipes in Old Tech and shut that blankety-blank woman up."

A story is told of how she intimidated a member of the Ohio Flora Committee when some changes were suggested for *The Woody Plants of Ohio*. She was determined that her way was the only way, and she set up such a tantrum that the member retreated saying, "What can I do?"

Her strong will appeared on field trips even with adults. One would eat where Lucy wanted to eat, one would rest where Lucy wanted to rest, and she was always in complete charge. She was determined that no fire should ever touch the prairie patches in Adams County. She believed the rocky soil was too shallow to withstand burning. Dr. Warren A. Wistendahl of Ohio University innocently asked what she thought about the management of preserves. She launched into a heated attack on the practice of burning for Adams County. It was indeed a scorching reply.

The third D is for *domination*. Lucy, the bread-winner, was particularly dominating towards her sister who served as housekeeper. Annette was a renowned authority in entomology, but she did her research at home. Lucy was in complete command. She would say, "Annette, get me that book" or "Annette, go find the map." It was hard sometimes not to rebuff Lucy's treatment of her sister, but I always held my tongue. Dr. Milton B. Trautman commented, "She was the only person in the world with whom I usually kept my mouth shut."

As for the last D, she was *demanding* of her students, requiring a complete report after every field trip, and of her illustrator, Bettina Dalvé. Having never done any botanical drawings when Lucy approached her to do the drawings for *The Woody Plants of Ohio*, Bettina started with the low price of \$1.50 an hour. Evidently, Dr. Braun was satisfied with her work since Bettina illustrated the whole book. When Dr. Braun asked Bettina to do *The Monocotyledoneae: Cat-tails to Orchids*, Bettina replied, "I can't possibly do them at that price." Lucy answered, "I wondered when you would ask."

It was Dr. Braun's practice to bring a fresh plant and written instructions concerning the essential details to be sketched. Bettina marveled at the clarity of these words, particularly in how effectively they communicated to her, a nonbotanist. She could easily follow Lucy's instructions. Lucy spoke glowingly of the drawings to others, but Bettina waited eight and one-half years hoping for some sign of appreciation, but none ever came even after the wide public acclaim accorded the two books.

Bettina commented that "She was a very difficult woman to work for. The manner of disdain with which she treated my mother who did all the layouts was especially hard for me. Mother was a talented artist and Dr. Braun behaved like an intellectual snob." Bettina recounts how she and her husband returned from a long western trip hot, tired, and dirty. Lucy Braun was waiting on the porch steps, plant in hand, demanding an immediate sketch. Bettina complied.

The F is for *frugal*. The two sisters were exceptionally frugal. One day in the field I admired a black-and-white wool coat that Annette was wearing. "Oh, yes," she said, "I bought it in 1913." I gasped in amazement; that was before I was born. The coat was then already well over 50 years old.

When time came for friends to break up the house, their saving ways came into even sharper focus. Many packages from their May Street moving, about 30 years before, still remained wrapped: three coat hangers labeled "3 rusty hangers" and a package labeled "2 good empty boxes." Numerous small gifts still remained in their boxes.

Lucy was free to give criticism, but she did not take it with grace. The Kenneth Casters of the University of Cincinnati tell about an incident when a micropaleontologist came to lecture in the Geology Department. Because this lecture was after Lucy's retirement, the newer students in attendance knew nothing of E. Lucy Braun. To them the two white-haired sisters appeared like two characters out of "Alice in Wonderland." As the lecture continued, challenging Dr. Braun's origins of the mixed mesophytic forest, Lucy's lips grew tighter and tighter. When the speaker sat down she rose to battle and made a ferocious attack upon him which was followed by a vast silence that filled the room. Finally, the speaker arose and said, "Thank you, Dr. Braun, I wanted to hear your opinion."

Lucy was the master of the "put-down." To me, when I mentioned a new and delicious cookie recipe, "Oh, I couldn't waste my time on that sort of thing." Or to Marion Becker, author of *The Joy of Cooking*, a creative person who led several exciting lives in conservation, promoting the arts, and creating a wonderful wildflower garden, "How can you fritter away your time on all those different things?" To her sister who might want to show a friend some new drawings of her moths, "Oh, they don't want to see pictures of your old bugs."

Many years ago Dr. Milton B. Trautman observed the peculiarity of the skunk cabbage in which the pistillate portion of the flower is mature before the pollen is ready. Excited that he had found something rare in nature, he told Lucy of his discovery. Lucy very quickly pricked his balloon of elation by a terse comment, "Not at all, not at all uncommon."

Lucy had a strong self image. In 1956 she was included in the 50 most outstanding botanists by the Botanical Society of America. When I asked Annette for Lucy's reaction she answered, "Why she didn't say anything. She knew she deserved it." Annette also commented that her sister considered *The Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America* her crowning achievement.

Kenneth Hunt, former Professor of Botany at Antioch College, gave me this thumbnail sketch: "a mild-mannered, gentle person, confident and sure, a woman of steel, a master of her craft, quiet, absolute." I can agree with all, except perhaps the "gentle."

Annette spoke of her sister only with admiration and affection. Lucy respected her opinion and Annette played an important role in the writing of Lucy's books. The cooperation appears one-sided; Lucy's contribution to Annette's research was the identification of the food plants of her moths. When they carried on a joint conversation, one sister would start a sentence and the other would finish it.

We visited Lucy several times in her last three months as she grew weaker. As she lay wan upon her bed, Richard and I sat beside her while she plotted strategy to help save the Red River Gorge in Kentucky. Her mind was clear.

Lucy was born a Victorian, and she died a Victorian in 1971 at 82 years of age. Times change, but she did not change. We marvel now at a life so full of significant scientific achievement. Our lives and those of many others are richer and fuller because of E. Lucy Braun.

E. Lucy Braun is still generating stories. She was known to a number of garden clubs in Cincinnati, many of whom contributed money to the projects in Adams County. After her death the ladies were accustomed to calling her the late E. Lucy Braun. One young woman inquired, "Who is this Lady Braun, is she from England or somewhere?" Say it fast, the late E. Lucy Braun. I know Emma Lucy Braun is pleased that she has entered into the nobility.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express thanks to all who have shared with me their memories of E. Lucy Braun.

## REFERENCES

Additional information with photographs on the life of E. Lucy Braun is contained in the following articles:

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**The Braun Sisters in the Field**

E. Lucy Braun (right) and her sister, Annette Braun, at Lynx Prairie, Adams County, Ohio. Annette is wearing the black-and-white coat mentioned on p. 38. (Photograph courtesy of The Nature Conservancy. Originally printed in the 1973 fall issue of *The Nature Conservancy News*.)