KATHERINE GREACEN NELSON

Katherine Greacen was born in Sierra Madre, California on December 9, 1913. She was married to Attorney Frank H. Nelson of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She died on December 29, 1982 in Milwaukee after a short but valiant fight against cancer.

After receiving the first Ph.D. in geology from Rutgers University in 1938, Katherine began her distinguished career of service at Milwaukee Downer College. After World War II duty in the oil fields of Texas, she returned to Milwaukee and made contributions at Milwaukee Downer Seminary, the Y.W.C.A., and Wisconsin State College before joining The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Faculty in 1956.

Although Katherine’s professional accomplishments include numerous scholarly papers, she is best known for her devotion to teaching others about the earth. Most university professors restrict their teaching to college-level courses and the supervision of graduate students, but not Katherine. She was always generous in her educational endeavors, and was equally available to, and comfortable with, a bus load of school children visiting the Greene Museum or congressmen contemplating the potential for the Ice Age Scientific Reserve. She never undertook any assignment with thought of personal reward or recognition. All she ever cared about was helping an individual, a group, or an organization. Such selfless people are rare in our society.

In addition to being the first chairperson of the Department of Geological and Geophysical Sciences at UWM, Katherine found time to serve the University on dozens of committees, including two terms on the Faculty Senate. She was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, and a member of the Paleontological Society and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.

Katherine held offices in a score of service-oriented organizations. For special contributions toward the establishment of a Sigma Xi Club at UWM, she was elected President. In recognition of assistance to the Milwaukee Public Museum, she was appointed an Honorary Curator. For long-term service to the Wisconsin Geological Society, including a term as President, she was appointed an Honorary Member. She was President of Phi Kappa Phi, and was a nominee for President of the Earth Science Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the time of her death. The Midwest Federation of Mineralogical and Geological Societies honored Katherine as Educator of the Year in 1982. She was an active contributor to programs of the National Association of Geology Teachers, and served as President of the Central Section. In 1978, this organization selected her as the first woman recipient of the prestigious Neil Miner Award for distinguished contributions to earth science education.

There is much more one could record about Katherine the doer, but what about Katherine the person? She was tranquil and energetic with a kind word and helping hand to all; and always with a beautiful smile. To her, the earth was a remarkable place—to be understood, appreciated and enjoyed. She labored tirelessly for this belief while imparting warmth, enthusiasm and joy to everyone with whom she came in contact.