

# Address to In-Service Training Committee Workshop

Lumberton, September 13, 1972

by Margaret Harper  
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It's a great pleasure to be here and to speak on behalf of libraries, librarians, staff members, and all people interested in libraries. It's a special pleasure for me to be here in this building — such a lovely library that will fill a great need in this county and one that's a model for other counties to follow. I want to pay special respect to Mr. John Stedman, without whose efforts we'd still probably be thinking about a library. I also want to pay respect to another citizen of this county, Hector MacLean, with whom I have worked for many years in North Carolinians for Better Libraries. This organization has helped in the past and though it is sort of waiting in the wings now, I feel sure will come to the aid of libraries again.

It's nice to know that when there's work to be done, you are needed. And of course when you're needed, you jump up and run. There's nothing I'd rather run on behalf of than libraries in North Carolina. Libraries are a concern I've had for many years — a concern my grandmother had when she started a lending library in our little town of Southport. It's what my mother had in mind when she kept that little one room library going fifty years. In the late fifties we were able to take hold there and build it into a library that was a real good thing in the town of Southport. In the last few years we've been

able to build a structure to house the library — having had of course the library in existence for all those many years. Anytime you want to come down to see a nice little library, you come to Southport because we're very, very proud of it.

I am glad to be able to broaden my interests in libraries from my own local library. Helping all libraries in North Carolina through the formation of North Carolinians for Better Libraries is something that I believe in earnestly. I was asked to speak on the role of the public library in North Carolina. After learning that this is a communications workshop, I tailored my talk to come more within the realm of communications. Now to some when you say "communications," they have a very shallow understanding of the word. To some people it just means getting something in the weekly newspaper or in the daily newspaper. That's as far as communications go for them. But to others who dig deeper, *communications* means how we relate to other people. What sort of image do we project? How do we come in contact with the people we serve? I'm speaking now to staff members. Generally I speak to trustees or to people who are trying to help the library and their staffs. You are in the inside and you are really responsible for how our libraries relate to the needs of people.

I should like to remind you that there are various ways to communicate. Verbal communication is very important. Verbal communication — whether oral or written is what we usually speak about when we talk of communicating with other people. But let me remind you that *nonverbal* communication is as important — perhaps more important. Very often it's not what we say but how we say it. It's not the content of our statement, but it's the expression on our faces; it's the tone of our voices. And these are the things that speak louder really than the words that we say. So when I say *communications*, I'm not speaking just about verbal communication (either oral or written), I'm also speaking about that very, very important nonverbal communication that we all engage in everyday.

You can say something with a smile, and it has an entirely different meaning than when you say it matter-of-factly or hurriedly. You can take just a couple of minutes more and say something the right way and get across what you want. And you can't do it any other way. Sometimes what we fail to do or the expression that we fail to have on our faces is much more important than what we are saying.

Now you and I know that the library is extremely important in our community. You and I sometimes wonder why in the world everybody doesn't feel exactly the way we do. Why doesn't everybody have our enthusiasm? Why doesn't everybody in the community feel as strongly, as acutely, as we do about the needs of libraries? Could it be that we say it's important and then don't act as though it's important? Sometimes the service we perform, or say we perform, is entirely different from the service that people perceive us to perform. If we don't get across the right side, then we are not fulfilling our obligations. Unless we're getting through to people, we're wasting our time. We can't expect people to be as interested as we are in libraries unless we project an image that radiates enthusiasm and belief in what we are doing. We must project the image of needing, wanting, and welcoming help from every quarter.

North Carolina has not assumed its responsibilities in relation to libraries; it just hasn't. In 1965 because of the Governor's Commission on Library Resources, a report came into being with which you as library staff members are familiar. The *Downs Report* pointed up where the support was, where it wasn't, where it needed to come from. A later study came out with the same facts that the *Downs Report* revealed. It pointed up the fact that all people in North Carolina did not have library services; that there was a woeful lack of library services in North Carolina; that these library services were going to cost money. As a result of that *Stick Report* in 1968 and because of the active — and I don't mean just a little service — I mean the active cooperation of a number of very interested people in North Carolina, \$1.5 million was secured from Legislature. Now, this didn't just happen. David Stick went to every legislator in North Carolina. He hand-delivered a copy of the report. He talked with these legislators about the needs of libraries, and it was this groundwork that I believe was responsible for getting this money. It's unfortunate that this was just about the time the Federal government cut us off and I think if I'm not mistaken that we had to use this money instead of expanding library services which is what North Carolinians for Better Libraries had started out to help do. Instead of being able to do the over and above things, I think we had to use that money to take up the slack from the money that we didn't get from the Federal government. We really would have been in a horrible mess in North Carolina if it hadn't been for the \$1.5 million which we wanted to go for the extra things that we needed so badly.

Well, why is it hard to get the ideas across? Why do our legislators have to be convinced? Why in the world is it hard for us to generate enthusiasm for libraries in North Carolina? Why should something this vital be so hard to sell? Because somehow we fail to communicate.

A letter was read at my library board meeting yesterday afternoon from Philip

Ogilvie asking us — trustees, library staff members — to write our Congressmen. How many of you have done it? I'm not asking the question to embarrass anybody. If you haven't done it, go back and read the letter and do it. Get people in your communities to write, whether they're on your library board or not. Go out and get them. Say, "Look, we need you. Libraries need a great deal of help and they need it now." Congressmen are influenced by their mail; you may believe that. They're influenced by lack of mail too and if we fail to let them know how we feel, they'll think we're not interested.

Everyone has a stake in public libraries — the businessman, the technician, students, parents of young children, and everyone who has a concern for the future quality of life in that community. Everybody is affected by public libraries. Libraries are one of our best investments. They nurture intelligence, creativeness, inquisitiveness, inventiveness. But we in this country, and in North Carolina, have been skimping on this investment. Many of our nation's libraries have had to go on short hours; we know what's happened to Federal support. In fiscal 1973 I understand that Federal support for library services will be cut from \$46.5 million to \$30 million. If I'm wrong on my figures, I'm not wrong on what's happening. I understand that unless something's done, the library construction which was \$9.5 million this past year will be eliminated entirely. I really didn't come to speak in support of libraries or of the historical attempts to help libraries, but rather to speak of the concept of involvement. But I want to speak about the involvement of the library in the community.

Go back in history with me just a little bit. Years and years ago the churches

used to be the center of the community. People went to church because that's where you saw everybody; that's where you saw your friends. They even stayed around after services to visit. The church was the center of the community. Then for a period in our history, the schools became the center of the community. The things that changed in a community generally had to do with the school and branched out from the school. Today, we have consolidation. We have schools that are placed half-way between towns, and there isn't a spirit of community around many of our schools.

It seems to me that the library can fill this role of being the core of a community — of being the important institution within the community — that is the center of what goes on. We know that the library has long since ceased to be just a depository for books or a place of quiet contemplation for those who are intellectual. Libraries are becoming and must become more relevant to the needs of the community. Some libraries have not yet made that transition.

The needs that a particular library will fill are governed by the community around it, of course. If the library is in a large city, it has a different role from one that's in a small town. If it's in a city that has ghetto problems, it has a different need that it must fulfill in that community. A rural area is entirely different from a city. The area round a library *must* govern what the library must do in order to be relevant to the needs of its people. Fulfilling these needs is the reason libraries exist — to render service to people, to all people, not just white middle-class people, but all people. If there is a library that does not serve Blacks, Indians, old people, poor people, then it's failed in its obligation to

the community. Until a library is used by all people, it isn't filling its real purpose. In order to do this it takes the cooperation of the staff, the cooperation of the trustees, the cooperation of city officials and county officials. We have to work together and work toward various things. Rendering this service depends on how well you and I communicate with the people who can bring this about. It depends not only on what we say, but how much of what we say we can get across.

I love to hear of the varied activities of libraries. Many libraries fill the need of people for after-school studying, reading hours, art shows, and meetings. It was my real pleasure during a recent campaign to go into a lot of library reading rooms and auditoriums that had been offered to be used for political gatherings. I think this is a rightful thing that a library can do — on a nonpartisan basis, of course. To what better use can a meeting room of a library be put than to afford a full exchange of ideas between people who will have in their power the ability to affect change.

Lecture series are important in the life of a community. I remember when we had our Library Week program down in my library, we had a glee club come in from one of the high schools and I think it was the first time some of them had even been in the library. But every one of those kids had two parents there. They brought those parents and I think it was the first time they had been in the library. So anything in the world that you can do to get people to feel that this is their library is important. I even remember when we had a live snake exhibit in ours. Now you say what is a live snake exhibit to do in a library? I think it's got a lot to do in a library. If that's what people are inter-

ested in, let them see live snakes. They don't see them anywhere else. We have a shell exhibit, and people who come to the seacoast want to see the shells. This is the need of our particular area that we are filling. Perhaps you wouldn't want a shell exhibit because you don't pick up many shells in the county you represent.

The library must feel itself to be the core of the community and, as I say, this has to be a cooperative thing. You and I have to tell people about it. How are they going to know if we don't communicate with them. I believe earnestly, and I'm sure you do, that the public library is an extension of the basic educational system of North Carolina, and as such, needs to have the attention of all. We must not only serve present needs, but we must anticipate changes that are going to occur in our communities. As long as we are continually reacting to things after they have happened, we're not fulfilling our responsibilities. We must anticipate changes and be ready for these changes. We have also a responsibility to help direct change and this involves communication. It is your duty and mine, as a trustee, to help direct change into constructive avenues as much as is possible.

In the next few years people in North Carolina are going to have to realize that the earth is the Lord's, that we have been given it as a trust, and that we have to preserve it. We are going to have to discuss land use in North Carolina. We're going to have to come to the point where we can't let everybody, because it's a free nation, do everything that they want to do. The whole area of ecology is so very important. We must have in our libraries intelligent aids for people to help make up their minds about thing like this. This is what I mean by anticipating change and

then going a step further and perhaps directing change. Reading is the key to learning and lifetime development, but everybody doesn't know this. We know that people who are not equipped for independent, continuing learning will run the risk of becoming obsolete. Children who don't read are going to be dropouts. Dropouts can't find work. Those without jobs add to the many social problems of the day in terms of ignorance, poverty and lack of upward movement. This is our challenge. We must expand reading opportunities, thereby expanding learning opportunities.

One of the best things we could do would be to encourage local history. People are interested in their pasts and the way things were years ago. Encourage somebody to write a local history. This is one item that we are lacking in North Carolina — local histories. We must generate curiosity and interest. We must also be a steady influence, a constructively-oriented influence.

In preparing these remarks, I read again an article written by David Stick, for whom I have an extremely high regard. He wrote an article in *POPULAR GOVERNMENT*. I would like to read you the last paragraph of this article.

"The basic objective for all of us is to make modern library services accessible to all citizens of North Carolina. The success of these efforts will depend to a large degree on whether an appreciable segment of the informed and interested population in each city and county become sufficiently familiar with and concerned about the inadequate status of our libraries in today's changing society."

And in the final analysis, it is largely up to the public librarians, library trustees, and the small hard-core of library-oriented citizens to spread the facts, generate the interest and lead the fight for modern

library services in their home towns. The job is not finished. It's a cooperative job that must be done by you as staff members, us as trustees, and politicians as politicians.

One of my favorite people to read and to read about is Dr. Albert Schweitzer. One of the things he said was this, "One thing stirs me — the fact that so many people gave me something without knowing it. We all live indebted to others." And we do. Those who have gone before us have brought libraries up to this point. We owe a great deal to the past. But the future owes a great deal to us if we fulfill what we're supposed to do in our generation.

Another statement from Albert Schweitzer spurs me on. I hope it does you.

"... to do the things that I believe need to be done. I don't know what your best is, but one thing I know. The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have found out how to serve."

Thank you.

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