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## Evelyn Thurman Oral History Project (FA 769)

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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives  
 Department of Library Special Collections  
 Western Kentucky University  
 Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

Descriptive Inventory

FA 769      EVELYN Thurman Oral History Project

1 box. 33 folders. 64 items. 2014. Digital interviews.

SC2015.25.1

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Known to countless thousands of Kentucky school children as Miss Thurman, Evelyn began turning kids on to reading from her very first teaching assignment in Simpson County schools in 1951. A native of Burkesville, Kentucky, she was born in 1921. In 1946 she obtained a Diploma in Bookkeeping from the Bowling Green Business University. Five years later she received an A.B. from Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. While teaching in Simpson County and Franklin elementary schools, she enrolled at George Peabody College in Nashville, from where she received an M.A. in Library Science in 1962. In between, she pursued her interest in all things international by teaching for the Defense Department in schools in Japan, from 1954-1956; Germany, 1957-1959; and Bermuda, 1965-1966.

Her career as a librarian began with a stint at Fort Knox High School from 1962 to 1965. In 1966 she joined the library faculty at Western Kentucky University serving in a variety of positions as General Reference Librarian and Juvenile Bibliographer. In 1984 she became the first librarian to win the University Public Service Award. In 1988 she was promoted to Professor in recognition of outstanding teaching, public service and research. In 1989 she received the Sara Elizabeth Tyler Merit Award for outstanding service to the profession of librarianship. In a letter of October 25, 1989, Sara Tyler commenting on her award wrote: "I express my appreciation to you for your creative writing, your sharing of time and experiences with many groups, and your aggressive persistence in getting things done." A former student of hers wrote that same year "in his acceptance speech for Nobel Prize—John Steinbeck said that in your lifetime you'll probably have only two or three teachers that will shape your history. You have been one of mine!"

For most of her career at WKU, Evelyn taught courses in Children's and Young Adult Literature and Storytelling for the Library Media Education program in the College of Education. By all accounts, she was an extraordinary teacher. A student from her 1981 LME 411 class wrote: "this course has been the highlight of my time spent at Western." Said another: "I will be half finished my Master's this summer and this has been the first course I feel to really benefit me." Another student in a LME 288 class commented: "this is the most enjoyable class I've ever had."

Evelyn's success as a teacher was enhanced by her love of research. She developed a passion for the stories of Laura Ingalls Wilder. After several research grants she visited all of the many sites where the Ingalls or Wilder family had lived and wrote about it in her *Ingalls-Wilder Homesites*, which went through six editions and was a bestseller at Wilder museums in Minnesota and Wisconsin. She published five other books including: *Little Houses on the Prairie with Search and Find the Word Puzzles*, *The Canary Who Wants to Talk*, *Christmas in Kentucky With Little Bernel*, *A Pioneer Civil War Story for Molly and Ben*, and *Rebecca Caudill: Kentucky Author*. She wrote hundreds of reviews of children's books for the *Bowling Green Daily News* and other regional papers and was a frequent writer for the *Franklin Favorite*.

Over the years, Evelyn perfected her storytelling skills. She would begin by reading a book to a group of children, changing her voice for each character, and mimicking the sounds of animals, and then get the group so involved in the story that they would be on the edge of their seats waiting for the next event or the ending, but she would stop just before the climax of story refusing to go on—telling them that if they really wanted to know the “rest of the story,” they'd have to read it themselves. The students would make a mad dash to the library shelf so they could get the book before anyone else. She also used props to great effect. Her rendition of “*There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed A Fly*” was particularly memorable. For most of the 1980's, she gave upward of 20 presentations a year to more than 4,000 students. Her calendar in 1989 included presentations in Bowling Green; Monticello; Breckenridge County; Owensboro; Central City; Pepin, Wisconsin; Spring Valley, Minnesota; Butte, Montana; Tillmook, Oregon; Portland, Oregon; Monmouth, Oregon; Reno Nevada; Scottsville, Kentucky; Louisville; Atlanta and back to Hartford. She covered these distances by bus or in her aging VW car.

When not traveling, she could be found on one of her epic walks across the city, checking out her rental properties, picking up interesting objects for future stories, or even dispensing coupons to needy students. Careful with her money—she spent almost none of it on herself. Instead, she endowed a series of scholarships at Western to support graduate students in elementary education; to tutor athletes in the men's and women's basketball programs; and to support students in Library Media Education. She established a library reference fund, an endowment for the radio station, a Glasgow Library Fund, and the Evelyn Thurman Children's Author Fund to bring a distinguished children's author to Western each year.

Following her retirement from the library in 1990, she returned to teaching in the College of Education until finally retiring again in 1995. In 1996, she toured Australia and New Zealand, where she visited countless libraries and wrote about her travels in a series of articles in the *Franklin Favorite* in 1997. While her mind remained sharp almost till the end—a series of falls and a stroke made life difficult. She died, January 12, 2005 in Woodburn. Kentucky

## COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of 32 interviews conducted by Lisa Karen Miller, providing oral histories about Mary Evelyn Thurman about her life and teaching career. These interviews are in TopSCHOLAR, WKU's Institutional Repository. The Folklife Archives does not own copies of the interviews.

## SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Evelyn Thurman	2014	64 items
Folder 1	Inventory	2014	32 item
Folder 2	Interview with Mark Wayne Adams	2014	1 item
Folder 3	Interview with Janet Burks	2014	1 item
Folder 4	Interview with Michael Burnight	2014	1 item
Folder 5	Interview with Reba Bush	2014	1 item
Folder 6	Interview with Doug Butler	2014	1 item
Folder 7	Interview with Ellen Micheletti	2014	1 item
Folder 8	Interview with Clutz Carpenter	2014	1 item
Folder 9	Interview with Mary Carrothers	2014	1 item
Folder 10	Interview with G. Corrington	2014	1 item
Folder 11	Interview with Brian Coutts	2014	1 item
Folder 12	Interview with Alex Downing	2014	1 item
Folder 13	Interview with Vivian B. Fae	2014	1 item
Folder 14	Interview with Vera G. Guthrie	2014	1 item
Folder 15	Interview with Julie R. Hale	2014	1 item
Folder 16	Interview with Janice Haley	2014	1 item
Folder 17	Interview with Sylvia T. Harris	2014	1 item
Folder 18	Interview with Tammie Honeycutt	2014	1 item
Folder 19	Interview with Cheryl Hughes	2014	1 item
Folder 20	Interview with Sean Kinder	2014	1 item
Folder 21	Interview with Marvin D. Leavy	2014	1 item

Folder 22	Interview with George E. Lyon	2014	1 item
Folder 23	Interview with Marion Napier	2014	1 item
Folder 24	Interview with Jeffrey K. Newton	2014	1 item
Folder 25	Interview with Deanna K. Rash	2014	1 item
Folder 26	Interview with Debby S. Shain	2014	1 item
Folder 27	Interview with Lea Shumaker	2014	1 item
Folder 28	Interview with Adolfin V. Simpson	2014	1 item
Folder 29	Interview with Donald Smith	2014	1 item
Folder 30	Interview with Nancy Steen	2014	1 item
Folder 31	Interview with Sally A. Strickler	2014	1 item
Folder 32	Interview with Doma J. Vincent	2014	1 item
Folder 33	Interview with Peggy Wright	2014	1 item

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

FA EVELYN Thurman Oral History Project 2014  
769

This collection is an oral history project about Mary Evelyn Thurman a librarian, educator and storyteller. 32 interviews were conducted by Lisa Karen Miller, an employee of Western Kentucky University's University Libraries. These items are stored in the digital Sound Archives.

1 box. 33 folders. 64 items. Digital interviews.  
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## SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Adams, Mark Wayne (Informant)	B1,F2
Burks, Janet (Informant)	B1,F3
Burnight, Michael (Informant)	B1,F4
Bush, Reba (Informant)	B1,F5

Butler, Douglas J. (Informant) B1,F6  
 Carpenter, Clutz (Informant) B1,F8  
 Carrothers, Mary (Informant) B1,F9  
 Corrington, G. (Informant) B1,F10  
 Coutts, Brian E., b.1948 (Informant) B1,F11  
 Downing, Alex (Informant) B1,F12  
 Fae, Vivian B. (Informant) B1,F13  
 Guthrie, Vera G. (Informant) B1,F14  
 Hale, Julie Renee (Informant) B1,F15  
 Haley, Janice Carol May (Informant) B1,F16  
 Harris, Sylvia Thurman (Informant) B1,F17  
 Honeycutt, Tammie (Informant) B1,F18  
 Hughes, Cheryl (Informant) B1,F19  
 Kinder, Sean (Informant) B1,F20  
 Leavy, Marvin D., b.1938 (Informant) B1,F21  
 Librarians  
 Lyon, George Ella, b.1949 (Informant) B1,F22  
 Micheletti, Ellen, b. 1951 (Informant) B1,F7  
 Miller, Lisa Karen, b. 1963 (Interviewer)  
 Napier, Marion (Informant) B1,F23  
 Newton, Jeffrey K. (Informant) B1,F24  
 Rash, Deanna Kennedy (Informant) B1,F25  
 Shain, Debby Smith (Informant) B1,F26  
 Shumaker, Lea C. (Informant) B1,F27  
 Simpson, Adolfin V., b.1931 (Informant) B1,F28  
 Smith, Donald (Informant) B1,F29  
 Steen, Nancy (Informant) B1,F30  
 Strickler, Sally Ann (McLeod) Koenig, b.1933 (Informant) B1,F31  
 Teachers and teaching  
 Thurman, Mary Evelyn, 1921-2005 – Related to  
 Vincent, Doma J. (Informant) B1,F32  
 Western Kentucky University – Relating to  
 Wright, Peggy (Informant) B1,F33

Ray/Jeffrey 04/01/2016