

# YONDER SHE COMES! A Once Told Li'bry Tale

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# INTRODUCTION: Why a Book?

Once upon a day I realized I had finally to decide: whether to leave our library story in bits and pieces as they were from the earliest laying out of a simple pattern in 1944, through three decades plus two years of a slowly developing service of variable texture and color and shape, or to gather the fragments dropped into Time's Totebag and stitch the segments together into a patchwork whole, reflecting my own loving touch as well as my own completion of the dream and the reality.

As I met this dilemma head-on and decided to record this life of a library, I realized that what two librarians had said to me — an Elizabeth and a Shirley — was valid: “Do this. Do it while your spirit is still so full of the joy of it all.”

I chose to write the legend —

It all begins one lazy sort of day in late summer of 1974 when Elizabeth Cole, a library consultant from the Georgia Department of Education, and Shirley Brother, Library Services Program Officer in the Southeastern states for the U. S. Office of Education, drove up to Neva Lomason Library early one morning. They didn't wear a badge or carry a special card, but they **were** “inspectors”. I knew Elizabeth was coming, because she had called to say she would like to see the Heard County Public Library. It was check-up time to determine how well I had invested the Special State Allotment (part of a Federal Grant) based on the proposal I had sent when applying for the allotment to create the Heard County Library whose story is narrated later.

When we had decided on the date for the purposeful journey to Franklin, I called the Secretary of the Heard County Public Library Board to ask her to notify all members that Miss Cole would be there at ten o'clock on the designated day and that I would appreciate it if all members possible be on hand to meet her, to answer questions, and to discuss their observations of the effectiveness of our developing public library program. I was in fine fettle and soon we were on our way in my car in a more or less southerly direction across our area.

I say “more or less” because I did meander to introduce the visiting librarians to such interesting hamlets as Little Tallapoosa, Tyus, Stoney Point, and Roosterville. Every lick of the way I was regaling them with salt and pepper episodes back in time and across county lines that had made our library development a great and rewarding adventure in more ways than one.

Six board members met us at the Heard County Public Library, including the Mayor of Franklin, the County School Superintendent, the Clerk of Court, one of the Heard County Commissioners, and a husband and wife combine representation from the western half of the county — Lonnie and Vivian Rogers. I mention their names, for truly “thereby hangs the tale”.

Let me say right here and now that I was indeed proud to show these fine library consultants what we had accomplished with the \$10,000 Grant in opening a branch library for Heard County. It was the easiest branch development of my career. Local financial support swelled the total expenditures; but more than that, the spirit of pride and harmony on the part of the total community was beautiful.

That spirit predominated the Day the Librarians “fell on” Heard County! Elizabeth and Shirley realized that beyond the beauty and grace of the physical area, made possible through the Federal Grant and State allocations, was that intangible something that makes a library a vibrant part of the life of people, with many significant contributing factors.

Vivian Rogers customarily slipped a carton of fresh eggs (or some other goody) into my car whenever I attended a board meeting or dropped by her house for one of our good ol’ visits. This day was no exception. Just as we were ready to leave the building, she said:

“Edith, I put some fresh eggs on the back seat of your car. By the way, we are gathering and shucking corn on our place (a large farm) today. I know how you like corn on the cob! If you drive back on State 100 instead of US 27, drop by the house and I will give y’all some corn.”

By this time we were standing outside, ready to go our separate ways. I looked at Elizabeth and Shirley, who said nothing; furthermore it may surprise them to learn that neither registered a glow of anticipation, whereas I thought I was about to light up like a house on fire.

“Let me take a raincheck, Vivian,” I reluctantly answered her kind offer.

“All right,” she said, “but don’t wait too long. Come down anytime.”

“Well,” the girls confronted me as I began to back the car around to leave, “I don’t know whenever I have had fresh corn,” “Ah, corn on the cob!” etc. etc. . . .

"Listen," I broke in to say, "we'll go. It will be all right. The Rogers Clan and I are Sacred Harp Sing, "kissin' kin" friends. We understand one another."

With that I turned the car a little to the south then a few miles westward, finally reaching old Number 100, through Simpson, Rockalo, on to Ephesus, the little community recognized as the Rogers' stronghold. How many marvelous experiences I had had throughout this area of our region! I kept on laughing and talking about people, places, events, other times, when I was cutting my library teeth out where folks know and care about growing pains.

The Rogers Bunch — all three generations of 'em — were gathered, industriously and happily shucking corn. As we came into view, the folks, oldest and youngest, flocked around like chickens, greeting us with the glad hand that we country folk know is the real McCoy. Elizabeth and Shirley were carried away with observing such fervid, cooperative activity.

We visited. "Visit" has a special connotation out in a rural settlement. There is no pretense, no rushing to show that there is real Irish linen in "the parlor" and priceless homespun quilts handed down for five generations customarily spread across the beds. No, with the heat fairly simmering and dancing in the air, we sat under the shade of enormous pecan trees which soon would be hanging with fall fruit, old crocus sacks and home-crafted baskets being filled with shucks moment by moment, with rows and rows of crops in the midst of harvesting, marching way, way down across the farm till they disappeared beyond view; with God's perfect blue canopy outspread like a great umbrella for our roof as we sat around on old cane-bottomed chairs and sipped homemade juice — we visited, watching the Rogerses shuck corn.

Before we knew it, it was four o'clock. "We **must** go," I said. "I forever and a day impose on you when I come, I always feel so free and easy here."

"Stay on," they said. "Don't hurry."

"Wait," Vivian stopped us as we turned to leave. With that, she produced three giant sized shopping bags and Lonnie filled them with fresh, **shucked** corn. He carried them to my car for us.

As we left, we heard: "Come again soon." "This has been fun." "Edith, I know you soon will be in corn-on-the cob heaven!"

"Edith, Edith, Edith," the girls said as I drove on to Carrollton, throwing questions at me right and left, contemplating the events of the

day. I kept up my laughing chatter about long-ago hours at Veal, at Bowdon, at Victory — on to Neva Lomason Library and its days.

As we drove up to home base, I said, “Will you girls come in for a while-”

“No, it’s late afternoon. We’d better get on back to Atlanta; but we want a word with you before we go,” they said.

Shirley said, “Edith, I wished for a tape recorder all day. My fingers are tired.”

“What have you been doing,” I broke in, “sitting on the back seat scribbling notes on what I said?”

“Yes, I can use a great deal of this. It is a fabulous true story — your library.”

Then those two “surrounded” me with:

“We want you to write your story. Do it yourself before you retire, while your spirit is so illuminating. We have talked of this as your back was turned. You **must** write your story of the library. Promise you will!”

I grinned. You guess why? I was seeing them lifting their great bags of corn from my car to theirs.

“OK,” I said. “It’s a deal — if you will promise me that you won’t tell it in Atlanta and Washington that when you came out here, all you got was a lot o’ corn!”

They were still laughing as they waved, rounding the corner and out of sight. I was left with a challenging thought, a charge to try my hand at an entirely new library venture, a promise I knew that moment I would somehow keep. (I did not then foresee a lengthy delay.) Something Chaucer wrote in **Canterbury Tales** came to mind later to shake me up:

“I have, God knows, an ample field to plow and feeble oxen.”

The delay in beginning to capture the total story of our library was due to two serious commitments I had to keep during 1976 (my final year as Director of the West Georgia Regional Library) before I honorably could step aside: the completion of the Bess H. Williamson Cultural Arts Center and the responsibility to the Carroll Chamber of Commerce to serve a Chairman of Carroll Bicentennial/Sesquicentennial Committee.

I was delayed in carrying out my resolution to set down not just events — some great, some small — but O yes, the **spirit** of West

Georgia Regional Library was definitely in focus. I was delayed but resolute. I was not only determined to keep my word; more than that, I wanted to shout from the housetops: Don't you **dare** ever take this library program and its services for granted!

Well, years have passed but I have kept the promise I made over three bags of corn following a trip to Heard County and to the Rogers Farm at Ephesus. More in the manner of using flash cards for spotlighting thoughts and images rather than an in depth analysis, I shall let you in the side-door for a look-see. In my down-to-earth, everyday style of sharing, I permit you to take a long look over my shoulder at the emerging five-county service, a state program, a library staff, friends of the library, Library Board Members, numerous state officials and legislators, some members of Congress, librarians here and there, library associations, city and county governments, institutions, clubs, organizations, people from all walks of life — and O yes! a common-garden variety of librarian who ploughed and planted, and has been fortunate enough to see in part the harvest.

Where you sense a dominant element of pride breaking through, please judge gently. Looking more deeply, you will note it is laced with humility. To make an honest confession, if I had not already found my quiet seat on the back row, I assure you I was led to it some five years ago at the hand of a small lad, whose astuteness set me straight upon the occasion of a Wee Ones Spring Fling at Neva Lomason Memorial Library.

We had established a tradition of giving our annual Magic Candle Story Hour participants a party with pink lemonade 'n' all the fixin's at a Spring Graduation Day out in the library yard. At that time we would award each tiny child (three and four year olds) a small "diploma", which we designed ourselves and had locally printed. Of course parents brought the little ones all year to the storyhour, as well as to the party; so we customarily made a fine to-do of the celebration.

Then came the occasion which was indelibly to mark the place on the library page where it plainly says the importance of the library lies in the **services** — **the program** — which bring old and young to the point of loving the library and turning to it as a dynamic part of good living. Just before going out to the grounds that day, I spoke a few words briefly to the parents, in this vein:

"I am proud of you for giving up part of your busy time every week to see that your child visits the library and has memorable experiences which will be an influence throughout life. It is good that the child learns. It is just as important in your estimation that he not



only visit the grocery to get bread to feed his body but also that he visit the library to get the books to feed his mind and spirit.”

As the parents moved on out to join the children and our Children’s Librarian, Edith Morehead, one of the mothers stepped aside to greet me.

“You may not know me personally, Miss Foster,” she said; “however, we all know you . . . I want to tell you something my little son said at a recent story hour time. You know, he thinks the library is just the grandest place in the world. He loves the Edith Foster Room, (my Board had surprised me by naming our beautiful meeting room for me) where the youngsters meet for the story-telling hour. He often talks about ‘the Edith Foster Room’. It is a part of his daily conversation.

“Well, one day just as Mrs. Morehead lined the children up to go into the room, you happened to open the door behind the Circulation Desk and stepped through, watching the children getting ready for the hour. I leaned over and said: ‘Son, do you see that lady?’ pointing you out.

“‘Yes’m.’

“‘Well, that’s Miss Edith Foster’, I told him.

“His face turned fiery red. He was seeing his first ‘celebrity’ (whatever **that** meant!). He stood there, looked uncertain, then suddenly his face lit up and he exclaimed:

“‘Oh, she’s named after the room!’ ”.

**And a little child shall lead them . . .** I humbly accept that.

No episode or small story included is intended to point laughter at any person, place, or event. I laughed always **with** people. for sheer joy of knowing them and sharing. The tools of our profession have been and are materials of use in any dynamic public library program; our product, a more enriched and enlightened people with broader horizons and — hopefully — greater challenges.

I cherish the memories of thirty-two years as Director of the West Georgia Regional Library and thank God that by some good fortune, I walked this path. Writing this book in a more or less episodic fashion has given me many quiet hours of retrospection and a re-touching of hearts and hands across distance and time.

Oh, my, it was “an ample field”!