

Getting to Know: Barbara Birkeland

Friend of the Cloquet Public Library, Avid Reader, Dedicated Letter Writer

Barbara Birkeland credits her progressive views in life to being raised on Long Island, NY. Joining the Cloquet community in 2002 with her husband (an ELCA pastor and lover of Western fiction books), the clergy couple accepted pastoral calls at Zion Lutheran Church. An ordained pastor herself, Barbara has been retired for 10 years, but still fills in to preach when called upon.

“What are you reading right now?” she asks her 5 grandchildren, ranging from 10 to 17, over the phone. All are inveterate readers and live in the Twin Cities and Montana. They take after grandma who averages reading 10 books monthly and belongs to 2 book clubs.

Barbara gravitates towards non-fiction books, historical fiction, letter collections, biographies, and fiction. It’s possible some day we will be reading her letter collection, as she writes about 15 a week to friends and family. A dwindling art, Barbara takes pride in writing to something solid, something that may be kept.

As a child she loved classics such as Heidi, Swiss Family Robinson, and Little Women series. (She’s a *Jo*: independent and feisty.) She also read title trios: Betsy/Tacy/Tib, Flicka/Ricka/Dicka, and Snip/Snap/Snurr.

A Friend of the Cloquet Library for over 17 years, she also participates in the Power Lunch reading programs at local schools where first and second graders enjoy one-on-one reading time with a paired volunteer.

She would like those considering joining the Friends of the Library that being a Friend is “multifaceted” where one can contribute talent, time, or treasure. “Volunteering enriches my life far more than what I give out,” she says. “So pure joy is my favorite part of the activities of which I’ve been part. It has brought me into new friendships and acquaintances, all of whom fill my life with greater exposure to ideas, a wider lens on life, and precious connections.”

Author’s Note: In the short time I spent interviewing Barbara, I quickly realized I could write a whole novel on her experiences, wisdom, and positive outlook. With respect to word count, there was a lot to condense. The title should be “Getting to know a bit about Barbara Birkeland.” SKS