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Not Just Somebody's Grandmother

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INSPIRATION

NOT JUST SOMEBODY'S GRAND-MOTHER

— Leroy Thomas

At age 74, Margaret Friedrich (pn. Fredrick), revered charter member of the Weatherford Wordhandlers, considers writing a dream-fulfillment: "The invitation to join Weatherford Wordhandlers and the OWFI freed my spirit." Her publication credits now include WESTVIEW, PRAIRIE LORE, and HOME LIFE.

This retired English teacher could sit back and relax, but her option is much more exciting. She says, "Life is a miracle — every day of it. The prayers and love that enabled Henry and me to rear our two children, the patience needed to teach other people's children for 29 years, the health that keeps me eager and active — all are profound everyday miracles."

Margaret's professional background has aided her in breaking into a writing career. She excels in OWFI and Federated Women's Clubs contests, having won firsts, seconds, thirds, and Honorable Mentions.

She has also remained active as president of the Custer-Dewey Retired Teachers' Association, as chairman and now secretary of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Clinton, and as secretary of Weatherford Wordhandlers.

Margaret nevertheless asserts, "I'd rather be a mother and grandmother than anything else on earth. The greatest contribution anyone can make is to influence others to make a better life for all of us." She therefore spends much time with her children and their families. Son Bruce has a Ph.D. in

Chemistry, and daughter Margee has an M.S. in Counseling. Margaret is justifiably proud of her two children and four grandchildren.

For Margaret, "widowhood is only a continuation of the faith we shared. Except for the great loneliness and the added responsibilities, life is no different than before. It's all there, waiting to be tried," she says.

Members of Weatherford Wordhandlers wait for the beautiful, white-haired Margaret to give her opinion of manuscripts that are read. Although Margaret in her unassuming way considers many of her colleagues better qualified than she is to judge, it's the Friedrich opinion that really matters. It shouldn't be any other way for a woman who vows that the "most fulfilling aspect of my life today is the love and wholehearted support of my family and friends in all the projects my curiosity prompts me to try."

Margaret Friedrich, active writer and retired English teacher believes life is a miracle.



LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

— by *Walter Crouch*

Notorious more than forty years for fun and foolishness, Weatherford's "Snake Pit" is alive and well today under the guidance and goading of their founder and patron saint, Barney Elmo Christy.

The young-at-heart octogenarian is a man of many talents, not the least of them the spreading the gospel of "Laughter is the Best Medicine." He has become a prime candidate to be remembered as the city's legend in his own time.

He was born December 19, 1898, on the bank of Wild Horse Creek near Velma, Indian Territory, the son of Jim Christy, a former Texas Ranger, and Annie Cross, whose ancestors were Eastern Cherokees of North Carolina.

Barney is best known around town as a master of tall tales and of fun and games, but there is much more to this versatile, talented man. He is one of the most widely read history buffs in this university city, his mind a storehouse of Southwestern Oklahoma facts and legends. His travels have taken him to most historic landmarks in the South and East and in Europe.

During his early life he was an accomplished violinist. The most famous group of which he was a member was a Navy orchestra directed by Paul Whiteman during World War I. In recent years he has emerged as a "bluegrass fiddler," one of the faithful attending Weatherford's Cross Timbers sessions.

Masonry has been an important part of Barney's life for more than fifty years. His influence has been felt in Weatherford's Western Star Lodge 138, which today has a record membership and a list of good deeds to match. As in all his other areas of interest, he is well versed in Masonic history.

This World War I veteran is a patriot

of the old order. Sixty-three years a member of the American Legion, he has no tolerance for those who downgrade the United States or show disrespect for the Stars and Stripes, a trend so strong during the Viet Nam War.

Influenced perhaps by his Cherokee ancestry, Barney is this area's accepted authority on Indian lore and artifacts. From some fifty-odd ancient tribal mounds he has assembled an imposing collection of relics displayed in his "Wigwam Neosho," a converted workshop.



Barney Christy, owner of an early restaurant in Weatherford, The Snake Pit.

Tina, a diminutive rat terrier, beloved member of the Christy household until her death at age 16, was the heroine of one of Barney's most impossible, but often believed, yarns. More than one gullible newcomer to the community were convinced that Tina could point Indian arrowheads, moving her tail up and down if the specimen was a good one and wagging from side to side if it was flawed. In his farewell address, one pastor of the First United Methodist Church told his congregation that he had fallen

victim to Barney's arrowhead hoax.

Barney and his wife, Jewel, moved to Weatherford from Granite in January, 1939, so that their children could attend Southwestern. All three graduated: Dick in pharmacy; Bill, business administration, and Jean, art.

The Christys opened a small restaurant on North Broadway just off Main Street. Three years later, on December 7, 1941, they were in the process of opening at a new location in a small frame building that still stands at 114 East Main when word came of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. There was an immediate massive exodus of young men from the Southwestern campus and the Weatherford community rushing to volunteer. Before long both Christy sons had followed in their father's footsteps and enlisted in the Navy. Before the end of the conflict, the college enrollment had ebbed to a low point of 94 students, only five of them males.

The original Snake Pit was born during these troubled times. Barney's place became a refuge for those seeking a cheerful interlude from the harsh realities of a world at war. There was rarely a serious moment within the confines of the tiny diner. A daily diet of the cross, the double-cross, the frame-up, the charge and the counter-charge entertained the Disciples and bewildered occasional strangers.

The Snake Pit flourished after the war ended. Barney and Jewel retired from the restaurant business in 1963, but tales of the Snake Pit have become legendary and are retold after forty years. During the 18 years since he served his last bowl of chili (according to Barney, the recipe was stolen by an ancestor from a Mexican general during a revolution south of the border), the "retiree" has worked as a house painter until recently. On his 80th birthday he was plying his trade.

Barney has outlived most of his earliest Disciples, but still has a following among Weatherford residents

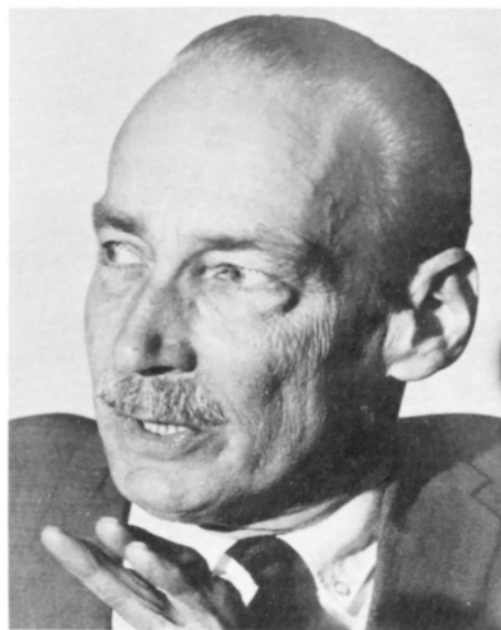
of all ages with whom he shares his vast knowledge of frontier life, of Masonry, of Indian lore, of bluegrass music, and occasionally a brand new fantasy, an impossible tale to which he gives the aura of reality.

Barney Christy, advocate of cheerful living, will never grow old.

GEARY'S "WINDOW ON THE PAST"

— *Pat Sturm, in collaboration
with Joe Brooks and
David Shanklin*

Kent Ruth's name is in the history books. It might not be in the glossaries, but if you look on the title pages, you'll find that this writer from Geary has published seven books on travel and historical subjects. Among these are OKLAHOMA: A GUIDE TO THE SOONER STATE, GREAT DAY IN THE WEST, and TOURING THE OLD WEST. He is also the author of the Oklahoma section of COLLIER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA.



Behind-the-scenes writer, Kent Ruth from Geary, shares his expertise with high school students.

A 1934 graduate of Geary High School, 65-year-old Ruth travels about two months out of the year to get his stories. He writes newspaper columns and magazine articles on "out-of-the-way" vacation spots for tourists. Primarily, he stays in the United States, but he has ventured into Canada for some stories he thinks might be interesting.

Readers have the opportunity to enjoy Ruth's work every week; he pens two columns, "Trip Teasers" and "Window on the Past," for THE SUNDAY OKLAHOMAN. In 1973, both Ruth and Oklahoma Publishing Company received a special award from the Oklahoma Heritage Association for "Window on the Past."

One who does not know Kent Ruth might never suspect that this writer who contributes travel articles to THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST, THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, and THE DENVER POST, as well as to THE SUNDAY OKLAHOMAN has a disability; he suffered a severe case of polio in his youth which shrewdly distorted his form. That Ruth is an accomplished writer is one thing; that he has become a noted travel writer in the face of such difficulty is quite another. Kent Ruth has not only made a living, he's made a life.

In addition to writing his books and weekly articles, Kent Ruth takes time to instruct and encourage young writers of the area. Frequently he notes the efforts of students in his Sunday columns. Instructing a writing class of Geary High School students, Ruth sagely stated, "Lots of people want to be writers, but most people don't want to write. They're like doctors," he quipped, "who enter the profession so they can play golf on Wednesday afternoon. But you should worry about becoming a doctor first, and then worry about your golf game."

Not all of Ruth's advice is comic. He is very careful to remind students

to study guidelines, write for the markets, send query letters, and be very precise about the technical aspects of their writing. He shares his experience and always credits his mentor, the late W. S. Campbell, who began the professional writing program at the University of Oklahoma where Ruth earned his bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Geary residents are proud of Ruth. He is "their" local celebrity, and they all have good words to say when his name is mentioned. Of course, Ruth has earned their respect. He was chosen Oklahoma Handicapped Citizen of the Year in 1972 and was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1976. He is a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Geary Chamber of Commerce.

Kent Ruth is a lucky fellow — he likes what he does. He enjoys travel, and he keeps his eyes open. His talent as a freelance writer has enabled him to turn his love for travel and history into bread and butter. He communicates his satisfaction, for a visit with this man leaves one feeling glad that they met. ■

