

The [Kerlan Collection](#) at the University of Minnesota is one of the most extensive collections of art and manuscripts for children's books in the world. Students and professionals in children's literature come from all over to study its holdings. If you follow [this link](#) you'll find fascinating details of how this collection came to be, to thrive and to grow.

Last summer I visited the Kerlan and gave a talk to graduate students from Hamline University. I also brought my paintings for the new edition of [AT THE SUPERMARKET](#) to Minnesota to contribute to the Kerlan's collection of my work and that of my late husband, Harlow Rockwell. When I saw his 3-color, pre-separated art for the original edition of SUPERMARKET (published by Macmillan in 1973), it was a dramatic demonstration of changes that have taken place in publishing books for children over the past 40 years.

A visit to a research collection such as this requires advance permission. This was the first time I had visited there, and I was thrilled to be given a tour.

It's the "there" that struck me. Although I was born in Memphis, Tennessee on the riverbanks where the great Mississippi flows wide with water the color of butterscotch pudding, this was my first chance to walk under the river. That's where the holdings of the Kerlan are housed, in tunnels that lie beneath the Mississippi River.

The river begins its journey to the Gulf of Mexico in this part of the world. Here is no great river, but a humble creek. It winds through the university campus, flows above the research library holdings keeping the tunnel temperature constant, even during Minnesota's deep freeze winters, and hot and humid summers. This constancy keeps paper materials housed there safe from damage brought on by changes in heat and humidity. Such changes can destroy fragile rough sketches, dummies, manuscripts, editorial post-it notes, and all the other materials that go into making a picture book for children.

While authors and illustrators, such as myself, might feel that this detritus of their work is not worth preserving, those studying the field think otherwise. And I agree. I remember seeing a James Thurber cartoon in New York's Morgan Library. I was stunned to see a grungy piece of wrinkled typewriter paper filled to the edges by a crude drawing done with a china marker crayon. Then I remembered that Thurber was nearly blind. In the Morgan's case next to this drawing was a crisp reduction of it. Reduction transformed the original's crudeness into the crisp

and sensitive line I had admired since childhood from his cartoons in THE NEW YORKER.

Indeed, process is fascinating, and educational.

Bringing SUPERMARKET up to date was a tremendous amount of work. I was lucky to have a studio assistant in the form of our granddaughter, [Julianna Brion](#), who at the time was at a student at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore.

Vicki and Steve Palmquist of [CHILDREN'S LITERATURE NEWSLETTER](#) were warm and wonderful hosts. They showed me around the twin cities, and took me to lunch beside one of the clear lakes that the American northern Midwest is rich in. Vicki took me to a delicious potluck dinner given for me by about thirty reading specialists and early childhood teachers. It's a pleasure to hear how these professionals use my books, and I'm always inspired by their feedback.

Andrew Karre of Carolrhoda Books, a division of Lerner Publishing in Minneapolis will soon publish a picture book I've written. We've been working together via e-mail and telephone, but until this past summer had never met. It was a pleasure to meet face to face and get to know each other better over dinner. Adam Lerner, the publisher, joined us for drinks, and found that we must have met years ago when he spent a summer working at Macmillan. (Of course I'm referring to the old Macmillan, which is now part of Simon & Schuster.)

This collection has been cared for by Dr. Karen Nelson Hoyle, who is retiring this month. She will be missed. I remember meeting Karen years ago at an ALA where she told me she enjoyed my book [GLASS, STONES & CROWN](#), published by Atheneum, 1968. This is the story of the building of the world's first Gothic cathedral, St. Denis of Paris. Knowing of my interest in Gothic architecture, she asked me if I'd ever seen wooden stave churches in Norway. I hadn't, but am still planning to.

I'll think of you, Karen, when I get to Norway! And in the meantime, enjoy your retirement, and thanks for the good work you've done at the Kerlan.