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NEWS RELEASE

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Eric Carle Artwork, Letters, Donated to Library by Retired Elmhurst Teacher

Elmhurst Public Library unveiled a new collection of original artwork and handwritten letters of Eric Carle, famed author and illustrator of the modern children's classic, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

The collection was generously donated to the Library by Mrs. Trilby Porter, an Elmhurst resident and beloved kindergarten teacher who taught at Edison Elementary School until her retirement in 1995.

Over several decades, Porter's classes corresponded with Carle by sending him art projects. Carle wrote back, encouraging the children to keep up with their creativity, often including whimsical doodles, or small gifts for the classroom. In the 80s, Carle traveled to Elmhurst to promote one of his books; he also visited Mrs. Porter's classroom at Edison.

"I have always found it just incredible that a person like that would take the time to hand write—especially in this world—and every one of his correspondences were handwritten by him," says Porter. "I have met him, I have talked with him, he's been in our classroom before. He is a very, very reflective man. I feel very honored to be able to have had him in our classroom."

At the exhibit's grand opening at Elmhurst Public Library, Mrs. Porter told stories about art projects in her classroom inspired by Eric Carle. She'd give each child a big piece of paper, a bright splotch of paint, and these instructions: "Do not put your fingers in your mouth after fingerpainting."

But one day was different.

“Most of the children were unaware that it was pudding that we’d be painting with, not paint,” remembers Porter. “My instructions of the day were totally opposite of what they had been all year long: be sure to lick your fingers clean.”

Porter laughs at the memory. “They looked at me like I was crazy.”

Sarah Alvin, a former student of Porter’s, said seeing the Eric Carle artwork evoked strong emotions. “It’s surreal because it’s a really potent memory,” said Alvin, cradling her newborn son, Soren. “I remember the chocolate pudding painting. That is probably my favorite learning memory of all time. It really touched me because I became an art teacher, and [Mrs. Porter] was my favorite teacher.”

Michelle Parker also remembers fingerpainting in Mrs. Porter’s class. “We’d tear it up into little pieces, then make a big picture out of our little tiny torn up pieces,” she says. “I know my parents still have one of my fingerpaintings in the house.”

Jill Johnston worked alongside Porter as a classroom assistant at Edison. “I got to be part of all the wonderful times the kids had, learning about Eric Carle and the art projects, and engaging in such creative activities within the classroom,” she says. “Trilby [Porter] made it fun.”

The collection includes several framed original works of art by Carle, in addition to many letters handwritten to “my friends in Elmhurst.”

Porter says since she and her husband recently moved to a smaller home, she knew the collection was too valuable to be put in boxes. “I needed to find some place—a safe place—for my collection, and one that would be around a long time. I called [preschool librarian] Sarah Burnside, made an appointment, and the rest is history!”

Burnside thanks Porter for entrusting the collection to the library’s care. “Eric Carle’s images have welcomed so many children to the world of books,” she says. “We’re proud that Mrs. Porter’s collection will also welcome them to our library for years to come.”

“This collection is donated with much love. I trust that it will be enjoyed by all who visit this beautiful library,” said Porter. “Eric Carle would be so pleased.”

Carle turned 87 years old on June 25, the day of the exhibit’s grand opening. Carle lives in Massachusetts.

The collection is on display at Elmhurst Public Library.

Elmhurst Public Library enriches life in Elmhurst by providing opportunities to connect, create, and explore. EPL provides the support, resources, and environment for Elmhurst patrons to: pursue a love of reading; access information; explore interests; engage with technology; connect with others; and create and innovate. Elmhurst Public Library is the place for discovery at the heart of the community.

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