

**HALTON'S PEOPLE**

# Kids find a friend and ally in 'Mrs. O'

By **MAGGIE HANNAH**  
Herald staff writer

Working with children has been a tradition for several generations in the family of Esme Ball, a Georgetown resident who has been instrumental in establishing guide and brownie groups, a school for retarded children and several entertaining library programs in which she has found some of her most devoted fans and admirers.

Mrs. Ball began working in the Georgetown library in 1969, telling stories to the little ones and working with classes from various schools at the request of former librarian Marjorie Nazer.

"The library was closed in the morning in those days," she recalls, "so I could work there with classes from various schools. I taught the children to run the library themselves. We worked on an honor system, and in the eight years I was with them, the kids never let me down."

"It's amazing what you can do with kids when you get them out of the classroom. If they know they're on the level with them, it's amazing what you can get out of them. Telling stories was very much my thing and the children enjoyed them. They used to work on a song through the week and then come in and sing it to surprise me. Or they'd learn a poem for me. That's when I realized what a need there was for a place for the kids to go after school. If you went to the library after four o'clock the place was full of kids."

There's a standing joke about Mrs. Ball's age which dates back to her early days in the library, when one of the youngsters asked how old she was. Without thinking of the consequences she replied she was 100.

**HONOR SYSTEM**  
"He believed me," she laughs. "I couldn't correct him because we had the honor system and we didn't lie to each other. I just hadn't realized he wouldn't see it as a joke but he was too young to grasp it as I had expected. I'm in my



**'COMMUNITY'S HELPER' Esme Ball readies books for delivery to shut-ins.**  
(Herald photo)

eleventh year at the library so that's why I'm 111. I couldn't back down on it so I just have to keep adding every year."

In 1976 Mrs. Cornwell asked Mrs. Ball to organize the visiting library service and she has been busy with the project since that time.

Although the service is often seen as being mainly for senior citizens, Mrs. Ball quickly points out that its intention is to serve anyone who can't come to the library. She has a handful of drivers and helpers to run the service and without these volunteers, the project

couldn't continue. The drivers visit all the senior citizens residences, bringing books and other materials to residents each week and picking up what was left the previous week. Drivers get to know the people they serve and often stop to chat a few minutes with residents.

The shut-in service is actually the fourth project Mrs. Ball tackled since her arrival in Canada in 1951. Her first project was the revitalization of Georgetown Girl Guides in 1956.

"Rev. Richardson at St. George's (Anglican) church was over discussing (my son) Chris' christening with me and he suggested that I should try getting the Girl Guides going again at the church," she says. "There had been a Guide company here but it had fallen by the wayside."

Mrs. Ball says she went to Marion Reed in Norval, who was the area Guide commissioner at that time, and with her help, got things organized. She had been a Guide herself as a young girl in England, but had had no experience leading a group.

**BROWNIES, TOO**  
"We earned our own uniforms," she says. "The girls taught me more than I taught them."

The first Guide company eventually grew so large a second one was formed. Then a Brownie pack was formed for the younger girls. She eventually gave it up in 1958.

That was not the end of her interest in children, however. It was just the beginning of a four-year stint on a different children's project.

A friend of Mrs. Ball's belonged to a support group for retarded children in Guelph, and got her involved. Before she knew it, she had become a member of the Milton association for retarded children and was deeply concerned with the facilities available to them in north Halton. She found herself on the provincial board of directors and spent several days at the Smith's Fall hospital living with youngsters and discovering just what was available to them.

It disturbed Mrs. Ball to see Halton youngsters going to school in a "dreadful garage place" in Milton because there

was no better facility available here. Georgetown and Acton children didn't even have that school.

"I think part of it stemmed from the fact that I was so glad Christopher was a normal youngster," she says. "I didn't think it was fair that he should have this lovely new building to go to (Park School) and the retarded kids were stuck in this converted garage."

It wasn't long before the Milton association wanted to know what could be done about starting an association in Georgetown. A pilot group began giving talks on mental retardation to anyone interested.

About the same time it was decided that fundraising projects were needed since plans were under way to build what is now Sunshine School near Horby although at that point, there was no site picked for it.

**CENTRAL SITE**  
Mrs. Ball says Peggy Treahy became interested in working for the association and was a great help in organizing activities to raise funds. She stepped into Mrs. Ball's shoes when the Ball family went to New Zealand in 1962.

"Ernest wanted to see the other side of the world before he turned 40," Mrs. Ball says, "so we picked up and went as a family. It was a great adventure and I loved it. I toured all the schools for handicapped and retarded and they could have taught us a great deal."

Mr. Ball works for DelHaviland in public relations. Sunshine school was open by the time the Balls returned to Georgetown in 1964 and since Mrs. Treahy was doing an excellent job with the retarded, Mrs. Ball felt there was no

need to return her attention to that work.

In the five years between her return from New Zealand and starting her work at the library, Mrs. Ball did a lot of studying. For her it was fun rather than work. She received her doctor of philosophy degree from Oxford in 1976 and has just recently returned from England after presenting a paper for the International Year of the Child.

"I don't know what comes next," Mrs. Ball chuckles. "I'd like to do family law eventually but not for a while. I'd just like to be a cabbage for a while."

**RESTRICTIONS**  
"Life has gone step by step

for me and I've been enormously lucky," Mrs. Ball comments. "This house was one of the first ones we visited socially and I always loved it. The valley behind us and the golf course have been my Utopia. They're my quiet places. I enjoy reading, music, flowers, bugs. I like to be out of doors; I like cross country skiing although I'm not very good at it. I just like to be outdoors. If I'm addicted to anything, it's the sun. I run around the track in the park every day. When I get done I think 'well, that wasn't bad for someone who's 111'."

**HIGH POINTS**  
Mrs. Ball recalls one of the high points of her years in Georgetown occurred several

years ago when she received a card from one of the kids who used to visit her with his class in the library. He had left town and sent her a letter from his new home. The letter was addressed to Mrs. O, had no stamp and was still delivered directly to her without difficulty.

"I taught the children that I was Mrs. 'round ball' (she makes a circle with her arms) and that's how they always sent me letters from their class," she says. "That's when you know you're part of the community; when the mail arrives addressed like that and still the postmen knew exactly who to bring it to."

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