

Dear Constance, Although I have long admired your contributions to reading and feel that your election to the presidency of the Reading Hall of Fame is most deserved and appropriate, we have never had time to chat informally. A few years ago Mr. Van Cauwelaert of Belgium asked me to write an informal biography telling how I got started and developed interest in research in reading. He wanted the biography for use in a Master's Thesis on my life and work. In answering his questions in an informal way I wrote this letter. While it has no use as a "vita" I thought you might be interested in knowing a little more about me personally. While some of the things I have done seem unrelated to reading, almost all have contributed in some way to my field.

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November 3, 1969

Mr. Roos Van Cauwelaert
Ninoope Steenweg 153
Brussel 8
Belgium

Dear Mr. Van Cauwelaert:

In reply to your inquiry of September 10, 1969, which was forwarded to me by the University of Michigan, I have written this biography of my life. Just destroy this after reading.

I was born February 4, 1898 in Mt. Vernon, Indiana, the third of four children of my father, Edwin S. Monroe, Superintendent of Mt. Vernon, Indiana, public schools, and Laura Potter Monroe, an artist and daughter of a protestant minister. Both of my parents were avid readers and my brothers, sister and I all learned to read before we started to school. My father was especially interested in books and methods of teaching reading. One of my earliest memories was reading aloud to him from various first grade books "to see which ones I liked best" while he noted any errors I made in reading. He then made lists of these words and I can recall "climbing the ladder of the lists" at the top of which my father had drawn a picture of an apple or piece of candy which I thereupon "pretended" to eat. We had great fun with these games and I am confident that the books and methods I enjoyed most found their way into the schools for other children to enjoy.

When I was seven years old my father organized an experimental kindergarten for several weeks during the summer. My younger sister, then five years old, was enrolled in the experimental group. Being seven, I was given the job of escorting her to kindergarten--quite a distance from our home--and returning to pick her up again at noon. I began to linger at the kindergarten to see what was going on, and the teacher invited me to remain as a "helper." I helped the children with their many kindergarten activities which I now recognize as similar to the Montessori activities for young children, and I had a wonderful time. It seemed to me that I was born to teach.

When my sister was in the second grade, she had trouble with the multiplication tables. I was assigned the sisterly job of helping her. I found facts she had trouble with and pinned up cards containing these facts at crucial places around the house. She found a card at her breakfast plate, another by her toothbrush, another at the door as she left for school, another on her pillow at bedtime. She read each troublesome multiplication fact to me as she gave me the cards whenever she found one, and I redistributed the cards daily until she knew the tables forward, backwards, and in any order. This was my first attempt at remedial teaching.

While in high school I tutored several neighborhood students who were failing in school, at twenty-five cents a lesson. I enjoyed doing this and the extra cash came in very handy at times because my older brothers were then in

college and my father, as a school superintendent, was not highly paid. College educations were expensive. Fortunately my brothers won scholarships. My oldest brother graduated from Columbia, New York City, with a Ph.D in Chemistry. My second brother graduated with the Master's Degree in Science from Harvard and with the degree of Electrical Engineer from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

During all my youth I remember painting with my mother for recreation. When I was ready for college my father was then Superintendent of Schools at Muskogee, Oklahoma. I attended the University of Oklahoma, graduating in 1919 with a major in Education and a minor in Art, a Phi Beta Kappa key and a B.A. degree. I then went to the Art Institute in Chicago and the Art Student's League in New York City for advanced work in painting. In 1922-23 I taught Art at De Pauw University and also was Supervisor of Art in the Greencastle, Indiana, Public Schools. As I watched children draw and paint, I became more interested in the psychology of Art than in painting itself. I then went to the University of Chicago where I took the M. A. degree in Psychology in 1924 with a research thesis on The Apparent Weight of Color. I was offered a research grant at the Merrill Palmer School, Detroit, Michigan, an experimental Nursery School where I did research on The Color Preferences and Drawings of Pre-school Children. Returning to the University of Chicago I was given a part-time job in teaching courses in child development and tests for preschool children. I graduated in 1929 with the Ph.D degree in Psychology and the award of a Sigma Xi pin, a membership in the honorary research fraternity.

While studying for the Ph.D degree in the years 1927-28 I was granted a research fellowship to study reading disabilities under Dr. Samuel T. Orton at the University of Iowa, Psychopathic Hospital. There, associated with Dr. Travis in speech, and Donald Durrell in psychology, I wrote a monograph on reading disabilities using the results of research in an experimental laboratory school which we held during the summer for children who had extreme difficulty in learning how to read. Dr. Orton at this time suggested a neurological explanation for reading disabilities, calling the twisting of words with many reversals of letters that so many poor readers show, by the term "strephosymbolia." At this time I experimented chiefly with tests for right and left dominance and the kinds of errors made by poor readers in word recognition. I devised and selected a battery of tests, Diagnostic Reading Tests published by Stoelting and Co., Chicago, Illinois.

After receiving the Ph.D degree from the University of Chicago, I received a grant from The Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago, Illinois in 1929-31 to do further research in the field of reading disabilities. This research consisted of a comparison of good and poor readers in language abilities, speech defects, auditory and visual defects, physical disorders and history of diseases, educational histories, behavior and emotional disturbances. The results of the research were written in the book, Children Who Cannot Read, University of Chicago Press 1932. The chief findings led me to the multi-causation theory of reading disabilities. Each child's poor reading seemed to me to be the result of several causative factors working together to bring about the child's retardation in reading. No one cause alone was found to be the chief reason for failure. The treatment of each child was also an adaptive type of treatment owing to the pattern of difficulties shown by each individual. We were able to bring about marked improvement in reading through such methods as: reading in concert with a child supplying the unknown words for him, giving

phonetic help in relating sounds and letters owing to the "profile of errors" shown by an individual, modifying the reading methods by the addition of kinaesthetic factors (tracing words) in associating written and oral word patterns, utilizing context in predicting the endings of sentences when the meaning of the text logically led to solution of unknown words and other experimental techniques. In cases of behavior and personality problems in poor readers a close coordination of work between the psychiatrist and the educator was often fruitful. We often typed the child's own stories and gave him the typed version to read at the next sitting as well as books selected with special reference to individual interests.

In 1932 I was invited to the position of Chief Psychologist of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Child Guidance Center where my work with children having educational problems of all kinds continued. I also taught courses in remedial reading at the University of Pittsburgh. While there I was invited to participate in the Character Education Program at Washington, D.C. headed by Dr. Charters. With Miss Bertie Backus and others in the Washington, D.C. Public Schools we studied the relationship between behavior and reading disorders in the public schools at both elementary and secondary levels. The report of this research was published in the book, Remedial Reading by Monroe and Backus, Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1936.

I was next invited by Dr. Graham, Superintendent of Schools at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to the position of Specialist in Reading and Director of the Reading Clinic in the public schools. While there I turned attention to the many reading failures in the first grades. I devised a test called Reading Aptitude Tests which was published by Houghton, Mifflin and Co. In studying the causes of reading failures in the first grade, it became obvious that many of the schools having a high percentage of failures were in disadvantaged areas in which there were many language problems of children whose parents were immigrants from other countries and spoke little English. These children needed to learn to speak English preparatory to learning to read English. They also seemed to have the need for various activities which would develop greater discrimination in visual and auditory perception. In working with the teachers in these schools we developed procedures which we call reading readiness games and activities. These were prepared for use in the schools where they were needed as a part of the curriculum in a Junior First Grade. They allowed the children to move at a slower rate in learning to read, since most of the children receiving this help would spend one and one-half years in the first grade. The readiness methods plus the additional time allowed for the first grade reduced the numbers of early reading failures in the schools in which the experimental work was done.

In 1937 I was invited by Harry Johnston, Editor-in-Chief of Scott, Foresman and Company, to publish the booklet Before We Read which contained many of reading readiness activities that we had used in the Pittsburgh experiments.

In 1942 I married William W. Cox, a business man, and we moved to Long Beach, California. I was invited to participate in a program for developing remedial reading in the San Diego Public Schools, and in 1945 was invited to direct the reading clinic in the Department of Psychology at the University of Southern California. For several summers previous to this time I had taught summer sessions at the University of California at Los Angeles and at the University of California at Berkeley.

My husband and I adopted three children during the years from 1946 to 1948, and my life became full of housewifely and motherhood activities, as well as continuing part-time work at the University and further writing on the authorship staff of Scott, Foresman and Company along with William S. Gray and Sterl Artley. My husband became ill in 1950 and died in 1954. I retired from teaching at the University of Southern California to devote myself to the welfare of my husband before he died, to the children, and to the increasing amount of work I was doing for Scott, Foresman and Company.

At present two of my children are married and the third has graduated from U.C.L.A. and completed a year of graduate work.

There are now fourteen authors on the authorship staff of Scott, Foresman and Company. My co-authorship there now includes the books and materials for language, including reading, spelling, and handwriting, and the tests for measuring and evaluating achievement in reading.

I thank you for your kind letter inquiring about my life and work. I hope that I have covered most of the questions you were interested in with regard to my biography.

Cordially yours,

Marion Monroe Cox

Marion Monroe Cox

Since I wrote this letter my youngest child has married happily and I am now the grandmother of four lovely children who are in the first, second, fourth and sixth grades. Thus I have a source of very frank opinions about ideas of teaching reading at these levels which are available at any time!

Of the six people in the married couples four are teachers! So I get both teacher and pupil comments! - gratis!