

IN MEMORIAM

Elizabeth (“Betty”) Baum

This year, the Oriental Institute lost a longtime friend with the death of Elizabeth (“Betty”) Baum. I write this on behalf of Betty Baum’s many friends at the Oriental Institute, especially Volunteer Coordinators Terry Friedman and Catherine Dueñas and the many volunteers and docents with whom Betty worked over the years. They have been kind enough to share their memories with me.

As a member of the very first Docent Training Class in 1966, Betty’s thirst for knowledge and intellectual curiosity never waned. It is hard to imagine a Volunteer Day at the Institute without Betty in the front row listening attentively to the guest speaker. Betty came to these monthly programs to listen, learn, and spend time with old friends in a place she truly held dear in her heart. Despite her frail health in recent years, she continued to remain involved and dedicated to help the Volunteer Program through her eagerness to lend support wherever needed. She would frequently ask, “What do you need? Tell me what will help the program.”

Betty’s persistent questions were finally answered when after much discussion, the Volunteer Program asked for a carousel slide projector for use in the Outreach Program. She was so excited finally to have a tangible object she could purchase to help the program that she even decided to help select the make and model. “Always buy the best,” she insisted, “It will last a long time.” She was right. Ten years later, after countless outreach visits and a lot of hard use, the projector still runs like new. This was just one of several other purchases Betty would help make possible. Her generosity was greatly appreciated and helped the program operate with greater efficiency and productivity.

Betty was a private and reserved person who was diligent as well as dedicated to her beliefs and responsibilities. For nearly four decades, volunteering at the Oriental Institute gave Betty a real sense of community as almost a second home, while at the same time allowing her to pursue her deep interest in the richness of other cultures. She will be remembered with great fondness as our godmother, someone who knew intuitively how she could contribute to our work to further our mission of outreach and education. Her lifelong love of learning new things — especially new things about old things — invigorated her and kept her going.

Betty had a special affinity for ancient Mesopotamia, the heartland of civilization where the world’s first cities and writing began. In tribute to her deep love for and interest in the art and culture of this area, we have dedicated one of the most beautiful exhibit cases in our Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery to Betty’s memory. This case features several masterpieces of Sumerian art — alabaster votive sculptures of worshippers placed in the main sanctuary of the temples. My favorite of these sculptures has large inlaid eyes, and stands with hands clasped in a reverent pose. On the shoulder of the statue, the Sumerian inscription reads the man’s name and the phrase, “His eyes are always on the god.” It is fitting, because Betty Baum was someone who never lost sight of the important things in life — people, community, and the curiosity that



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makes us human. On behalf of all of us at the Oriental Institute, I want to extend my condolences to Betty's family and loved ones. We will truly miss her.

Gil J. Stein

