

## Collector Party: A Nancy Drew Birthday Party by Rick Sayers Page 9



Mildred Wirt Benson was born on July 10, 1905. Sadly, she died on May 28, 2002, at the age of 96. She lived most of her life in Toledo, Ohio, so it was only appropriate that the Toledo/Lucas County Public Library honor her on what would be her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, along with the character she is most famous for, Nancy Drew. It was Nancy's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Because Millie's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday fell on a Sunday this year, the event was held on Saturday, July 9, 2005. It was highlighted by a display of all 136 books that Millie wrote, which were on loan to the library from my personal collection. Millie's daughter Peggy Wirt even made an appearance to see all of her mother's books.

The display consisted of two large glass display cases containing every book Millie ever wrote, all in colorful dust jackets. The books were on display for two months. In between the two glass display cases is a six foot tall pentagon shaped tower displaying newspaper articles about Millie, enlargements of a few of the dust jackets from her books, and nine 8 ½" x 11" black and white glossy photos of her. I had seen all of the photos before except one -- a shot of Millie in 1961 demonstrating how to cook with a survival kit (during the Red scare).

On this day, July 9<sup>th</sup>, the library hosted a Mildred Benson/Nancy Drew birthday party. Children, with their parents in tow, were treated to a "Clue" style mystery game. But this time the suspects weren't Colonel Mustard or Professor Plum. They were Stumpy Dowd, Hannah Gruen, and other characters who played a part in the Nancy Drew mysteries. Suspect's names, locations, and crimes were hidden all over the library on the first two floors. Participants did a lot of walking and searching that day -- quietly!



A clue sheet was handed out to all teams, but every sheet had the clues arranged in a different order to prevent everyone from going to the same place at the same time. My favorite clue was "just keep swimming, swimming, swimming" (from the movie *Finding Nemo*). This clue led people to the very large fish tank in the Children's library, which holds several colorful saltwater fish (two of the fish looked like Nemo and Dory). On the fish tank was a card with a person's name on it, so this person was eliminated as a suspect. Then as all of the cards were found throughout the library, the teams would get down to one suspect, one location and one crime, and the mystery was solved.

Those who placed first, second and third won a large chocolate bar. But all participants got to enjoy a piece of birthday cake, on which was written, "Happy birthday Nancy Drew and Millie Benson". The solving of the mystery took about 45 minutes, and a fun time was had by all.