

# JERILYN GLENN DAVIS

## *Recipient of the 2020 GBW Laura S. Young Award*

Jerilyn Glenn Davis (Jeri) is a most deserving recipient of the 2020 Laura S. Young Award, an honor named for her teacher and mentor, and given in recognition of service to the Guild of BookWorkers. A member of the Guild since 1965, Jeri's contributions to the organization spanned an era of change and new direction in Guild history. In the sixties, when Jeri joined, GBW was still affiliated with the American Institute of Graphic Arts in New York City, a necessary partnership made in 1948 due to low post-WWII membership. But, by 1978, the Guild made a break from AIGA and returned to its own entity. Research into this transitional period, through early GBW *Journals*, will find Jeri Davis on the roster of attendees of the Executive Committee meetings that set into motion important new programs and activities of the 1980s, especially as the Guild approached its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1981, with an exhibition scheduled to be held at the Grolier Club.

The GBW *Journal* Index for the Volumes IX-XVII (1970-1979) is a record of the many roles in which Jeri Davis participated as a Guild member. In *Journal* Vol. X-3 (1972) she is listed as Vice-President and Membership Chairman, a position she held from 1969 to 1977. Jeri gave the Membership Committee Reports for many years beginning with Vol. IX-1 & 2 (1971) through Vol. XV (1977). She was editor of the *Journal* too, including Vols. XII-1, XII-2, XIV-3, XVII (1975 to 1977), and she worked on the Publications Committee with a report noted in the *Journal* Vol. XVII (1979). Jeri served on the Standards Committee from 1978 to 1988, originally overseen by Mrs. Laura S. Young, and followed in 1981 by Don Etherington, who is credited for starting the 'Standards of Excellence' Seminars.

Jeri Davis, originally from Gastonia, North Carolina, was born in 1942 and worked in her family's printing business from childhood, and in summers from 1965 to 1983. It was a letterpress "job" shop started by her grandfather and run by her uncle during the years she worked there. She operated a Ludlow typesetting machine, which cast text into lead slugs from matrixes, and she hand-fed a Chandler & Price platen press she called "her press", often using it for personal projects like printing handset letterheads on stationery.

Jeri attended Belmont Abbey College near her hometown in North Carolina, where she received a B.A. in English in 1964. She was inspired to learn how to bind books when she saw a binding her sister Marilyn had bound in a class Mrs. Young co-taught with Gerhard Gerlach at the School of Graphic Arts, Columbia University. Jeri had read the introduction to Douglas Cockerell's bookbinding manual and decided that she could do that; she wrote a letter to Mrs. Young asking if she could take lessons for a year. By 1965, Jeri was living in New York City in an apartment within walking distance to Mrs. Young's bookbinding workshop located at 115<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway, directly across from Columbia University.

As one year turned into nearly two decades of working with Mrs. Young, Jeri Davis developed expert bench skills, including case and conservation binding, book repair, leather re-backing and restoration, gold tooling, and box-making. The workshop closed annually from June to September, with projects completed and the shop in order. Jeri would return to North Carolina to work in the family print shop, while Mrs. Young and her husband, a professor of geology, spent the summer months at their home in Virginia.

Laura Young acknowledges Jeri Davis in the preface to her invaluable 1981 publication, *Bookbinding and Conservation by Hand: A Working Guide*, as "my able assistant for more than fifteen years, for her sustained interest and continuous help during the period that this manuscript was in

process.” When Mrs. Young retired in 1983, Jeri took over the bookbinding business the following year, continuing to offer the same services, to take both private and institutional commissions, as well as teaching classes.

In a recent phone interview, Jeri Davis described Laura Young’s 115<sup>th</sup> Street bookbinding workshop as the place where the Guild happened. Mrs. Young was GBW President a total of 19 years (1949-52, 1958-74), and while the AIGA gave the Guild a formal meeting place and an address, Jeri said the Guild lived in the workshop. There, Jeri helped edit and pull together materials for the *Journal*, readying them for printing deadlines. As Membership Chair, Jeri recalled how they had an arrangement with Elaine Haas, the original owner of the TALAS bookbinding supply house, who gave them addresses of new customers. Jeri would hand write a personal note to the client, with GBW information and a membership form enclosed, to invite them to join, and most did. She eyed the growing numbers, hoping to make the goal of 200 members! She is amazed that GBW today is comprised of nearly 900 members.

When asked what was most rewarding about her career in bookbinding, she says simply, “It was a way of life.” She was eager to live in New York when she left North Carolina in 1965. It was an exciting epicenter of book activity, and she met so many interesting people in the field. While she trained and assisted Mrs. Young, the workspace was also large enough to allow up to four students for private instruction, up to three hours at a time, a few days a week. Jeri explained that the concept of the bookbinding workshop, in contrast to private instruction, was developed in the 1980s when the Guild began to establish chapters outside New York, and as the 'Standards of Excellence' Seminars took hold.

Well into the 1980s, even while Jeri was busy running her own business, she continued to help edit the GBW *Journal*. She worked at the 115<sup>th</sup> Street location for seven years after Mrs. Young’s retirement, until it was necessary to move her studio to a smaller space at 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway in 1991. Over the years working at the bench, Jeri expressed a pleasure in seeing the stacks of work to do, eventually becoming work that was done. She kept detailed reports about jobs, samples of materials, and descriptions in Job Jackets. Not only was she a member of GBW, Jeri also had memberships in other professional organizations such as the Designer Bookbinders, and the American Institute for Conservation (AIC). In 1998, Jeri rounded out her career by taking an institutional position as conservator at the Frick Art Reference Library in New York, doing restoration and collection maintenance repair until 2007. She maintained her 27<sup>th</sup> Street studio until 2015, when her bindery equipment and years of archives were moved to a converted garage bindery at her North Carolina family home in Gastonia. She continues to reside in New York City.

The GBW Laura S. Young Award is an important award, to honor and to remember those Guild members whose volunteer efforts have kept this organization and the book arts alive. This year, the 2020 award gives Jerilyn Glenn Davis the recognition she has earned. A member for fifty-five years, Jeri has witnessed the organization's growth in membership, success in raising the standards of the allied book crafts, improved educational opportunities, and embracing of modern communication that has brought the Guild into the twenty-first century. Congratulations, Jeri!

- submitted by Priscilla A. Spitzer