



Eva Dudley
(Photograph: June Farrer)

Lucy Evangeline Dudley 1907–1996

One of seven children, Lucy Evangeline Dudley, or Eva as she was known, was born in Johannesburg on 12 April 1907. When she was 3 years old, her parents moved to Pietermaritzburg where she was always to live.

Her parents instilled in their children the Christian values which Eva so strongly supported and around which her whole life revolved. To those who knew her, it was this quality which so set her apart. She never flaunted her views but followed her beliefs with strength and conviction.

After completing her schooling at Berg Street School at the age of 15, she had hoped to become a nurse but it was felt that she was not physically strong enough for such taxing work. She retained her fascination for medical matters throughout her life and with her deeply sympathetic nature, interest in people and propensity for hard work, she would certainly have achieved well in that profession. However, these qualities stood her in good stead for the work which she was to choose, and in January 1923 she began work at the Natal Society Library where she worked in the Lending Department. In later years she was responsible for maintaining the file of subscribers and it was in this particular role that her special qualities were most appreciated.

On the occasion of Eva's sixtieth birthday, Miss Sue Judd the Chief Librarian in a letter of appreciation wrote: 'Your tact and courtesy have done an enormous amount towards the Library's reputation for civility and service'.

In 1967 as a measure of their appreciation of her work and in anticipation of the work load that would arise through the Library's becoming a free service, the Natal Society Council decided to retain her services. In notifying her, Miss Judd wrote: '... I very much hope you will decide to stay on, as I feel your imperturbable goodwill and your knowledge of the members will be of great assistance in helping me to effect a smooth changeover in August'.

After this time, Eva's duties were changed. With the increased use of the Library and subsequent increase in book purchases, she was responsible for many tasks pertaining to the processing of new books. She continued in this role until her retirement at the end of May 1983, after an astonishing 60 years' service.

In spite of her busy working day, she always had the time to listen as staff members, friends and library borrowers alike, who would confide in her, sharing both the joyful and sad occurrences in their lives. She came to know a vast number of people and it can well be said that she was one of Pietermaritzburg's most loved and respected personalities.

It was not only in her professional life that Eva was known. She had a fine soprano voice and it is this talent which gave her the most fulfilment and reward.

Her father was a deeply religious man, and recognizing her talent from an early age, had her voice trained so that she could, in his words 'sing to the glory of God'. In the realisation of this mission, she accompanied her father on his many preaching appointments throughout the country. She achieved an Honours certificate through Trinity College Cambridge; the quality of her voice attracted attention and she received several offers to have her voice trained overseas. Remembering her father's wish and the purpose for which her voice had originally been trained, Eva refused the offers and what might have been international recognition. She never regretted this, as she was able to follow her chosen path. She was a founder member of the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Choir and a member of the Metropolitan Methodist Church Choir.

As a soloist she made many recordings for radio broadcasts; she sang at civic functions, weddings, musical mornings and concerts. A highlight in her singing career was in 1949, when she took one of the solo parts in the Philharmonic Society's production of Handel's *Messiah*.

Although Eva's singing occupied much of her time, she was active in many other areas. She was a founder member of the Metropolitan Methodist Church Evening Women's Auxiliary and was elected its first president and was also a member of the Chapel Bible Study group.

Those of us who were privileged to have been her colleagues in both the 'old' and the 'new' Natal Society Library will remember with pleasure and affectionate admiration her many qualities, not the least of which was her unfailing sense of humour and her gracious acceptance of life's misfortunes.

In *The Natal Witness* of 4th June 1983, Angus Rose as 'Columnist at large' referring to her sixty years service wrote: 'Miss L.E. Dudley has worked for the Natal Society Library since before many of us were born. She is retiring . . . after a career which has witnessed countless changes in the world of books . . . I can but applaud Miss Dudley's devotion and tenacity and wish her well for her active retirement.'

Eva died at the age of 89 on 11 October 1996.

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