

# Ruth Dunbar Biography

Viola Ruth Dunbar was born on April 9, 1912 in West Chicago, Illinois to George W. and Martha (nee Brown) Dunbar. She had one older sister, Evelyn Dunbar born on November 6, 1910. (Note: on June 30, 1989, Ruth legally changed her name to Ruth Dunbar Davee)

## Education

West Chicago Community High School

Ruth started her college education by attending Northern Illinois University for two years. She then transferred to the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana to finish her undergraduate degree, graduating in 1935 with a BA with honors in English.

Ruth then went to Northwestern University, where in 1937 she received her MA degree. Continuing at Northwestern University, she received her Ph.D. in English Literature in 1942. Her dissertation was on Henry James.

## Employment

University of Colorado, Instructor of Bibliography, 1941-1942.

Polytechnic Institute (later Inter American University) of Puerto Rico, Professor of English, 1942-1945.

While at the Polytechnic Institute (later Inter American University) in Puerto Rico, she taught English as a second language. Along with Rachel Palmer, Head of the English Department at the Polytechnic Institute, she co-authored a text book entitled Remedial English for Spanish Speaking Students. It was a standard text book in classrooms for many years. She taught at the Polytechnic Institute for three years.

Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA , Instructor of English, 1945-1946.

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, Instructor of English, 1946-1949.

Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, Assistant Professor of English, 1949-1950.

Ruth then left the classroom. As she stated in the January, 1956 Northwestern Alumni News, "Always planned to teach" and "Though I have always liked teaching, I also wondered what it would be like to do something else – and also wanted to disprove to myself that those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

## Chicago Sun Times

Ruth took a job at the Chicago Sun-Times Newspaper in Chicago, Illinois, in 1950. She was hired by Milburn P. Akers, Sun-Times Editor, brother of her friend, Rachel Palmer. 1950 – 1952: Copy reader, moved to copy desk and then to the city room.

1956: **Northwestern University Alumni Achievement Award**

1958: **Northwestern University merit** award for distinction in business or community service.

1959: **School Bell Award** for 11-part Chicago Sun-Times' series in October and November 1958 on Russia's schools (on her 30-day tour of the Soviet Union with the Comparative Education Society of the United States, she analyzed the Soviet education system from kindergarten to college, and published a series of substantive articles on her findings.) Ruth noted that when the Chicago Tribune found out she was invited on the trip as an educator and not a reporter, they tried to get someone to go on the trip also, but were too late to accomplish that. The Soviets did not know of her reporting credentials.

1959: **Chicago Newspaper Guild "Stick-O-Type" award** for "best series" at the annual Page One Ball at the Palmer House for her personal appraisal of conditions in Russian schools.

1960: **Hall of Fame of B'nai B'rith Women's Council of Greater Chicago** for her contribution to the building of a great American city – Chicago – thru her singular contributions in the field of education (installed in March 1960 with Irv Kupcinet, columnist – efforts in communication; Carol Fox, founder of the Lyric Opera; and five other Chicago notables.)

1965: **Chicago School Bell Award**, presented by the Chicago Education Association for her Chicago Sun-Times' education reporting, especially in the area of pre-school education programs.

1965: Chicago Committee of One Hundred's 1965 **Good American Award**, presented annually to distinguished Americans "for outstanding contributions in the field of human relations and for practicing the basic principles of American democracy."

1966: **Runner-up in Education Writers Association competition** for outstanding coverage in the Chicago Sun-Times for her on-the-scene report on Soviet and Communist-bloc education.

1967: Illinois Education Association's **School Bell Media Award** for distinguished service in the coverage and interpretation of education. For her series on the plan of General Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools James F. Redmond (the "Redmond Plan") for integrating and upgrading the Chicago schools.

In 1968 it was reported that Dr. Dunbar was the only Chicago education writer to have received **the School Bell Award, on all three levels, national, state and local**. This award is presented annually by a group of educational associations including the National Education Association, the National PTA, the National School Board Association, the Council of Chief State School officers and the American Association of School Administrators. (Chicago Daily News, March 1, 1968, "School Page", page 40)

### **International Travel**

Ruth was a frequent international (and United States) traveler. She traveled to over 100 countries. Ruth noted that in 1989, the year after she married Ken M. Davee, it was the first time she had not traveled abroad in 40 years. Ruth often gave slide shows/talks on her travels, including talks on Tibet and Antarctica for Chicago's centers for the aging and retirement homes and clubs.

### **Memberships**

Phi Beta Kappa Association of the Chicago Area (University of Illinois, 1935)

Education Writers Association – vice president, 1956

Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, honorary member, May 1959 (Kappa Chapter [Chicago] also lists her as an honorary member)

Northwestern University Alumni Association Council, representing the Graduate School – Two terms ending in 1969

John Evans Club member

### **Marriage**

Ruth married Ken M. Davee on December 14, 1988. They were married for just under 10 years until Ken's death in August 1998.

### **Philanthropy**

Among other philanthropic efforts, Ruth and her sister Evelyn created the Ruth and Evelyn Dunbar Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University in 1990. It was Ruth's hope that this chair would lead to more study in the field of depression.

Ruth oversaw major philanthropic efforts in the Chicago area, and beyond, as a member of the board of The Davee Foundation, and later as its president.

### **The Davee Foundation**

Upon marrying Ken M. Davee, Ruth became a member of the board of directors of The Davee Foundation, a family foundation created by Ken M. Davee and his first wife Adeline Barry Davee in 1964.

Upon the death of Ken M. Davee, Ruth became president of the Foundation, and directed it for the next 13 years, until her death on April 19, 2011 at the age of 99.

From 1952 to 1968 she was an education writer and editor (originated the position of Education Editor). Ruth said "The education beat grew on me. Now I would not change it." She confessed that she was not enthusiastic about being restricted to the education news at first. "I have found that the education beat is as broad and as rich as a reporter wants to make it."

Ruth collaborated with co-worker Ruth Moore Garbe to create the first food column for the Sun-Times, under the nom de plume of "Terry Hunter", which ran for many years, with subsequent individuals also using "Terry Hunter".

While at the Sun-Times, she took a trip to Russia on an educational tour. This was during the Sputnik years, when there was a great deal of interest in the United States in the Russian education system. The articles from that trip were later published in a separate book (see **School Bell Award below**).

It was for her by-line at the Sun-Times that Ruth stopped using her first name, Viola, and just went by Ruth Dunbar.

#### State of Illinois

1968 – 1974: Assistant Director, Illinois Office of Public Instruction (for Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, assigned to the Chicago area). In this role she was assistant director of the federally sponsored Illinois school program for the educationally deprived children in low-income areas. She worked under Ray Page, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

After retiring, Ruth did consulting work in writing, including a book on Egyptology for the University of Chicago.

#### Awards

1954: **Education Writers Association Citation** to Chicago Sun-Times for commendable achievement in education journalism during 1954 for "continuous high level of reporting and interpretation of education articles by Ruth Dunbar, education reporter."

1955 and 1956: For her series on how schools teach reading, "Why Johnny Can't Read – or Can He?" in opposition to Rudolf Flesch's controversial book, Why Johnny Can't Read. She won:

1955: **Marshall Field Award** for outstanding editorial contributions to Sun-Times and increasing its stature. It was noted that the Sun-Times sold more than 50,000 copies of this series' reprints and the series went into most major U.S. libraries. The series became a notable journalistic contribution in the field of education.

1955: **Education Writers Association Award** for outstanding work in the field of education writing. Her series was singled out as "the most outstanding series of articles on educational subjects of national importance in 1955."