

Activist's role inescapable for Kathryn Brookins

SOME THINGS are inescapable for Kathryn Brookins. Being a fulltime mother is one thing. Speaking out against perceived injustice is another. Supporting her husband's endeavors is another.

She has traveled a lot since being born in North Platte, Neb., in 1936, travels which have led to academic pursuits and to the writing of a book. Yet South Bend has now been home to her longer than any place she's ever been, and she spends much of her time in the blue house on the corner of W. LaSalle and Scott Sts. pursuing her writing and taking care of her children.

Her house is of elaborate Victorian vintage, Queen Anne style, and contains many of the reminders of her travels and experiences: a worn-looking chest from Zanzibar, a decoratively carved coffee table and footstools from Ghana, a shield and spears from Kenya, and many other art and craft items, mainly from Africa.

She smiles when asked about the incongruities some people find with her. A rather traditional-minded, conservative woman in some respects, she has made a reputation in recent years as a pointed critic of the South Bend School Corp. and various community development efforts, accusing school and political leaders of decimating the quality of South Bend schools and South Bend neighborhoods.

Oscar Brookins, her second husband, is a sometimes controversial school board member who ran this spring to be the Republican nominee for mayor of South Bend. A former economics professor at Notre Dame, he is currently completing a year of teaching at Virginia State College.

Kathryn is currently involved in a lawsuit against the South Bend School Corp., claiming its 1981 desegregation plan was actually a resegregation plan. She was

also a vocal critic of the city administration for its demolition of the Odd Fellows Building.

WHO IS THIS persistent fly in the ointment of South Bend administrators? An only child, she moved often with her family in the '30s and '40s as her father sought construction jobs on buildings, bridges, dams and mines throughout the West. Her family settled for awhile in Portland, Ore., where she graduated from high school and entered Reed College in 1953, majoring in history. But her academic plans soon changed as she married in 1954 and had her first child, Anamaria, in October 1955.

After a brief stint with her husband at Washington State College, during which her second child, Clifford, was born, the family moved to Chicago in 1957 as her

By Mike Knaack

husband received a graduate fellowship to study economics at Northwestern University. Their stay there proved short, however. He was granted a two-year position to teach and study in Sudan, Africa. Excited about this opportunity to see another part of the world, Kathryn began to "read every book in the library" on African culture and anthropology.

After two years in the Sudan, her husband accepted an invitation to teach mathematics at Oxford University in England. With all her reading and first-hand experience of African culture, Kathryn was permitted to study for an Oxford graduate diploma in social anthropology, despite not having a bachelor of arts degree. Her third child, Elisabeth, was born in England. "Fortunately," said Kathryn, "my mother gave me some money so I could hire a housekeeper."

The family returned to the States in 1962 and went to Lafayette, where her husband had a job teaching at Purdue. "One of the things I learned at Oxford was how to be a snob," Kathryn said with a smile. "I didn't think

the American universities could touch the English in their study of social theory. I didn't want to teach in such places." She did consent, though, to teach part time at Purdue for the next four years. Her fourth child, Ariana, was born in 1965.

Kathryn's main misgivings about those days were whether she was successful as a mother. "I wanted a lot of things. I wanted to pursue academic interests, and I wanted to pursue certain kinds of intellectual endeavors. I think perhaps it's not all possible.

"I HEARD KATHARINE HEPBURN talk about it. She said, 'You know, I made my choice. I had a career. And when I see people try to have a career and a family I always just want to tell them it's not possible.' I thought it was the wisest thing I ever heard."

Kathryn Brookins doesn't buy some of the contemporary views of child-raising: "This whole business of quality time is just baloney. I think the best mother is one that thinks only of her children and works only for them. I haven't done that."

But doesn't the mother need to do some things for herself? "The children are supposed to be for the mother," she replied. "I think the notion that there's supposed to be a separation between a mother and her children is a false one. I wouldn't have survived if there had been a separation, because had my children not been my recreation there would have been no recreation."

Kathryn said that in 1968 she got a job offer to teach at the University of Chicago and, "without thinking a lot about it I said no. Because I know how competitive I am, and I know that I will not be second in any kind of race that I'm in if I can help it. And that kind of academic environment, which would have motivated me to work hard in my profession and my career, would have been disastrous for my children."

Could day-care centers have helped? She shrugged and said, "I don't know about day-care centers. I tried to find out the long term biological and social consequences of day-care centers and I can't find anything in literature.

"My kids cried when I tried to take them to day-care centers. I decided that crying was not a good idea and to take them back. Africans don't let their children cry, and I think that was something I adopted from Africa, that when your children cry they're probably trying to tell you something. So why make your child cry? At day-care centers there's very little going on."

UNLIKE CONTEMPORARY feminists, said Kathryn, she believes it is children, not society, that enslaves women. "Every society frees women after they're through having children. It was the needs the children imposed on mothers that provided the bondage," she said, calling this "enslavement" "a biological imperative if you're going to raise children."

She taught briefly at Johns Hopkins University in the summer of 1967, teaching "mathematical sociology," which combined her learning in economics, gleaned from helping her husband with his doctoral dissertation, and her own work in sociology. The next year she contracted to write a book for Markham Publishers on social theory. However, her divorce and the bankruptcy of the publishing firm put the book on hold, and it remains one of her unfinished projects.

She next found herself teaching at Buffalo State University of New York, where her acquaintance with Oscar Brookins developed. In 1972 she and Oscar led a student field trip to Ghana, where he ended up teaching

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KATHRYN BROOKINS writes at her desk at home in South Bend. A shield and spears from Kenya are among the wall decorations. She said she hopes to finish work by fall on her book about South Bend school desegregation.

Photos by Jim Kelly, Tribune staff photographer, and Michael Packard.

KATHRYN BROOKINS

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until 1974, and where she stayed while shuttling back to the States to fulfill semester teaching commitments at Buffalo State. They were married in Ghana in March of 1973.

Her fifth child, Mary Laura, was born in Ghana in 1974, and in the fall of that year they moved to South Bend and Oscar began teaching at Notre Dame.

Another trip to Africa was ahead for them though, as Oscar returned to Tanzania to teach for a year in 1976 on a Rockefeller Foundation grant. While there Kathryn had her sixth child, Julia, and also found that she was allergic to an anti-malaria drug that she was required to have, preventing any future stays in Africa.

HER INVOLVEMENT with school board decisions began in 1980 "when my baby turned 3" and she found she had more time, she said. She recalled her first years in South Bend as "horribly hard," because "it seemed like all I did was housework."

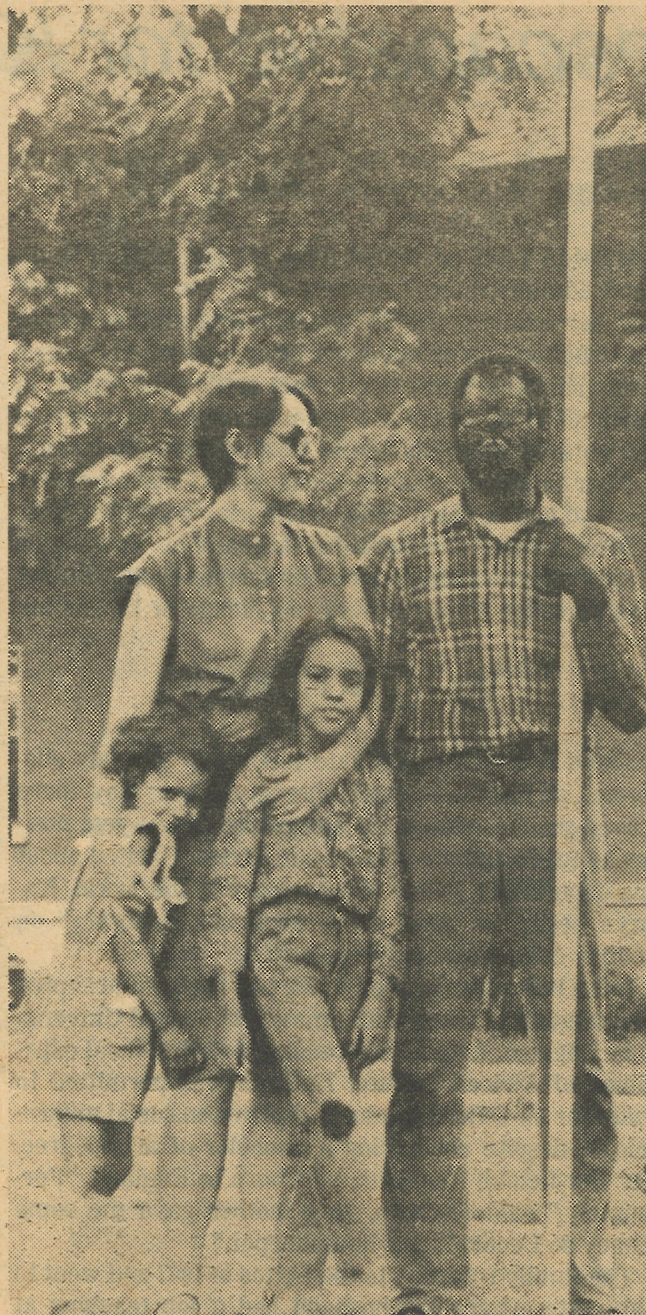
She remembers Oscar coming home from work and asking her what she had done that day and her responding, "Feed Julia." "I haven't found husbands very trainable at doing housework," she said.

But now that she had more time it seemed reasonable, she said, that "since we devoted ourselves to raising our children, to devote ourselves, at least in part, to make sure there were schools for them to go to." So how did she and Oscar, a racially mixed couple, become the leading opponents of the plan whose stated goal was to desegregate South Bend's schools?

"We were uniquely able to do that because no one could call us bigots. I think that just letting people know that opposing that foolishness did not make them a bigot was useful. The people who thought you had to support foolishness because to do otherwise would make you a bigot were engaged in a very dangerous kind of thinking."

Kathryn noted that the NAACP and the Black American Coalition (BAC) both opposed the plan. "I don't think that changing racial balance has anything to do with quality schools. I think it was just a sham to cover up the schools getting worse and increasing authoritarian controls over the schools by the administration rather than the parents," she said.

The desegregation logic, said Kathryn, was that putting white students in black schools would make the black schools better. But for her, the mark of quality schools is quality teachers, and the latest teacher con-



Kathryn and Oscar Brookins and their daughters.

tracts preclude any accountability to the parents, or adequate evaluation of teachers.

"It's not possible to have good schools unless bad teachers can be fired," she said. "It's not possible to have good schools if the school administration is not accountable to the parents. And there's no accountability. It's just various forms of political manipulation to abrogate parental responsibility." Therefore, she concluded, "It's pointless to desegregate if those white chil-

dren aren't going to make those schools better for black children."

SHE SAID that the inner-city schools that were closed down were already integrated, and "the whole notion of closing schools down is false economy. It costs you money to close schools down. You are better off with children walking to neighborhood schools, financially, than busing them to another school.

"The motive for closing schools is not saving money. The whole point of closing schools is to close down neighborhoods, and that's what they've done. And they have closed down neighborhoods because they have a whole lot of houses and new developments in the far suburbs that won't sell as long as our low-cost housing in these areas have schools. I think it's a plot. I think the bankers put all their money out there and then decided they had to choose schools to make people move out there. So I hold the banks responsible, and the mortgage companies, not any kind of economy."

Sometimes, Kathryn thinks, people don't understand that the choices they make are not as much choices for something, as they are choices between some things. When tax abatement is given to a business, she pointed out, it doesn't mean that those taxes aren't paid, it means that they're just paid by someone else—the people and businesses who have been around for years. But poor schools are not an incentive for people to stay.

"They're all in Penn Township not paying those taxes," she said. "They pay high taxes in Penn Township, but they're building and expanding and everybody thinks their schools are great. And we're left with a tremendous amount of bond indebtedness and libraries or East Races or whatever as our only tax base. And poor services."

Explaining her anger, Kathryn said, "I'm like a bear who is being bothered. I really would like to live in peace. The fact that people are doing things that aren't tolerable is an imposition on me. I certainly wouldn't go to these public gatherings to cheer them on. The ordinary citizen has reason to assume that absence compliments.

"**THIS HOUSE** costs \$13,500. If we were to find a house that was slightly smaller in Knollwood but a replica of this it'd cost us \$125,000. Now, the difference between that house of \$125,000 and this house of \$13,500 is why I'm mad. And that is the measure of my irritation. I am so furious because these beautiful houses have no value. For these reasons I'm critical. For this I am obnoxious critic. Because I'm absolutely furious."

Such anger can be abrasive. Is it a good tactic in trying to change things? "Perhaps not," she answered,

Bailey's book sheds more light on flash photography

THERE HAVE BEEN more books written on photography in the last decade than anyone can count. Most of them, however, added nothing new.

And on one of the most important subjects — electronic flash — what was said wasn't worthwhile. But James Bailey's "How to Select and Use Electronic Flash" turns it around.

Bailey, an electronic engineer who also writes a monthly column on electronic flash for Modern Photography magazine, has put more information in this book than you'll find anywhere.

His approach is nuts-and-bolts instruction, as opposed to esoteric discussion of a few dramatic photographs.

There's a brief history of electronic flash, an easy to understand explanation

of how electronic flash works, how to select and test an electronic flash unit and accessories, and then the book's great bonus — six full chapters on flash photography.

Bailey gives the reader step-by-step information on working with one flash; graduating to two or three or more; how to mix flash with daylight to get the proper illumination balance between sun and fill-in lighting; flash under special purpose situations such as close-up work; and selecting and using studio flash.

There are excellent hints on how to keep your flash unit in good shape — as well as how to protect yourself from getting zapped if, for some reason, you start probing the inner workings of an electronic flash power supply.

For the uninitiated, Bailey explains the need for background control in flash work, how to deal with reflections in eyeglasses, ways to fool automatic flash to make it do your bidding and clear examples of bounce flash, using diffusers and reflectors, and how to fire the flash to catch a wasp in flight.

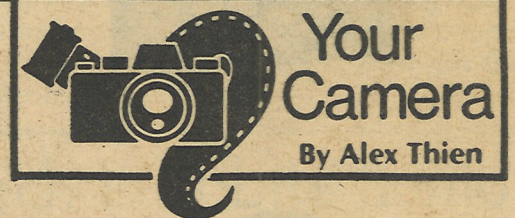
There are more than 250 color and black-and-white photographs in the book along with Bailey's well written text.

The publisher is HP Books of Tucson, Ariz. The book sells for \$9.95 and should be on the same rack with other HP publications. It's a good buy.

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Q. Can I really save money by developing my own color film?

On transparencies you usually save a



bundle, but for negative film the bother doesn't seem worthwhile unless you're doing specialized work that a regular lab won't handle for you. Where you start to save is in making color prints and the control you can exercise over the final results. The best system seems to be to have your negative color film done by a lab, then go to work on printing. This way you have a print of each negative to begin with, and this can help you make your final judgments for cropping and color correction in your own darkroom.



KATHRYN BROOKINS with daughters Julia, 6, and Mary Laura, 8. Both go to Madison School. Above right, Kathryn and her mother, Mrs. Irene B. Weibel, a retired school teacher, and Fiver, the family poodle. Mary Laura, a third grade pupil, has a hug for her mother at left below.



and laughed, "It's just true. It's another biological fact. But I have to accept that. I'd be much better if I were more cheerful. If I could see a ray of sunshine in these schools it would be great. If I could think of somewhere to run to and this collapse of civilization around me wouldn't follow me there."

What is collapsing? "I think that we cannot tolerate public officials lying, and yet I have seen many examples of it. I think you'll find my most irate public talks are a response to what I consider lying," she said.

What have public officials lied about? She gave as an example school Supt. James Scamman's appearances at hearings on the desegregation plan. "Night after night he stood in front of 700 people and told how the cost of busing per pupil was going to be a hundred and sixteen dollars. It was three hundred and some dollars." And, she said, "he lied about how long the school board had to cancel the buses." She said that her first involvement with the school board came when Scamman "lied about not wanting to close Central School" back in 1980.

"Moral quality" is an important criteria for Kathryn. "I think high moral quality will bring economic development. I think people will flock to a situation in which they can trust their resources to a political system where they will be treated fairly and equitably. "I think this is what is so scary about all these businesses leaving here. When people start being lied to they get very upset. Some send their kids to private schools. Others

become very passive and say 'I can't get involved because it's simply too much going on and I can't deal with it.'"

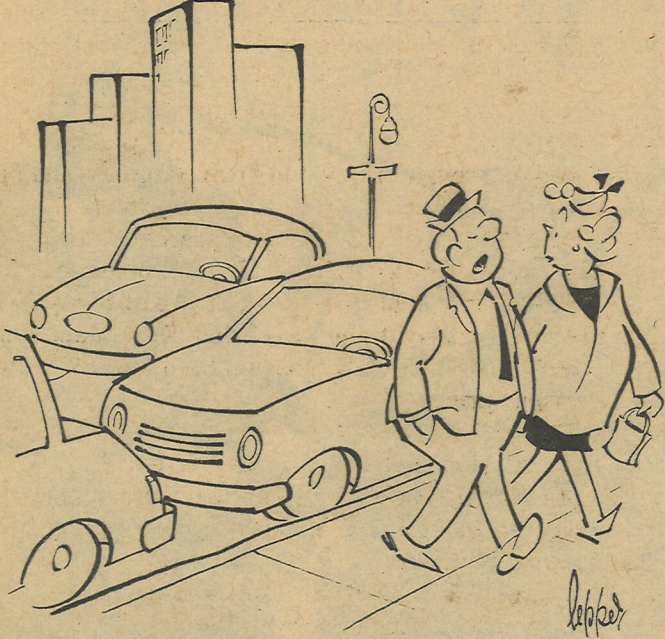
WHAT DOES a good school system look like? "Oh, I think we can just go back 15, 20 years ago. There it was. Children were expected to learn more than they learn now. I think that was good. We're talking about children being motivated to learn. Children learn because they're happy. Unhappy children don't learn. So that children not learning is a sign that they're unhappy, which will make them more unhappy.

"And private schools are no solution. Your kids still have to associate with unhappy city kids. With black kids, there are no private schools for them." Although Oscar has insisted that her two children by him attend public schools, her four oldest children went to private schools because she found the public schools "simply not trustworthy. You have to put a tremendous amount of effort into monitoring what's going on."

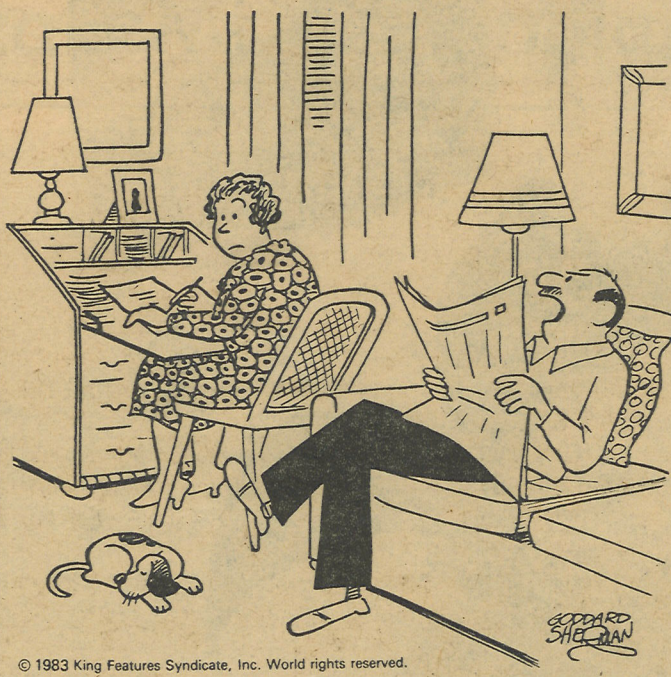
"I think ordinary people deserve better than they have been getting from their leadership, both political and financial. The people I talk to all know better—why is it that our government and financial leaders don't?"

Is anybody doing anything right around here? "Sure. It's a nice place to live. It's an easy place to live. I think

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"We'll get a ticket for double parking, but it's still cheaper than a parking lot."



"In that 'thank you' note . . . try to indicate it was really a chintzy gift."



"Get a lawyer? . . . That's what started it."

KATHRYN BROOKINS

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South Bend is one of the most blessed cities. You're two hours from Chicago on the South Shore rail line—one of the world's great centers. I think that we have been very happy here. It has an enormous amount of infrastructure that is very underutilized, which is what first of all makes it a very desirable place to live, and, second of all, shows how bad it's been governed.

"A town of this much potential that's not attracting people? People would flock here if they could earn a living. People want plants so that they can earn a living. But people also have to have schools."

Does she ever feel like she's invading Oscar's turf with the school board? No, "I only go to the board meetings so he knows he's not alone when he votes one to six. We never discuss what we're going to do before we go. Some people think it's a carefully worked out scenario. I only know what he tells me. Sometimes he doesn't tell me anything. He expects me to be able to read his mind, which is sometimes hard to do. But I try."

THE FACT THAT she is white and Oscar is black has never been a particular problem for them, she said. "When people ask about it I would say that Oscar and I are so conservative that we could never have married each other had we known that he was black and I was white. But," she laughed, "he didn't tell me." She said that they had more problems with the fact that she was Catholic and he a Protestant: "It was almost sufficient to keep us from getting married at one point. Since then we've tried to seek a more general form of Christianity."

How do two uncompromising types like Kathryn and Oscar Brookins get along? "We don't disagree," she smiled. "There are some things: he likes to drive junk cars and I would like to have a new one. The last time Oscar got really mad at me was when I wanted to join a country club."

They live very frugally, Kathryn said, and pointed to a family picture. "The thing I like about that picture is that we all have patches on our clothes." Kathryn's mother, who lives with them, does patching, mending and ironing. They make their own bread, and buy foods without preservatives. They seldom eat out. Their one extravagance is a part-time housekeeper so Kathryn

can pursue her academic and political activities, although at times she finds housework a welcome break from those endeavors.

For the first time in 27 years Kathryn finds herself with neither job nor baby to attend to. She's currently writing a book about South Bend school desegregation. She hopes to complete it by fall. After that she wants to return to completing her book on social theory, after which she would like to go back to teaching.

At 46 she's starting to feel like time is running out on all the things she wants to do. Yet she doesn't regret the time her community involvement has taken away from her academic pursuits, saying that the one problem she finds with academic people is that they get more inter-

ested in "corruption in Mexico than the problems at hand where they live."

Furthermore, said Kathryn, "the purpose of traveling is to bring something back home. I hope that I have brought an understanding of how things can and should work."

"I think that what we need to work on is the fact that this town is so fortunately situated and that the people are so wonderful. This makes the other things that are going on so awful. This is a town you could really see some hope for. If the people were not so friendly and so open one wouldn't feel that strongly about it. One would simply leave. It's the wanting to stay that makes it so much harder."

COLORFUL embroidery piece is one of several African arts and crafts articles decorating the Brookins home. Kathryn first went to Africa when her first husband was granted a two-year position to study and teach in Sudan.

