



# Simply Georgia

*Libraries helped shape Georgia Murray's life. For 13 years, Georgia's devotion to libraries shaped her mission to bring a state-of-the-art library to Folsom.*

**I**f we had known Georgia Murray all the 92 years of her life, we would never have doubted our library. When Georgia sets her sights, she doesn't aim to miss.

In 1992, she aimed high: She vowed Folsom would build a state-of-the-art library, and she would make it happen.

For more than a decade, it seemed her dream might die unborn. A bond measure failed, potential sites disappeared, challenges arose, squabbles played out.

But no matter the obstacles, Georgia, whose vocabulary doesn't include discouraging words, refused to give up.

"I kept thinking every year, as I got another year older, 'will I live long enough to see this library?'"

Proving the tenacity she's famous for, she has.

The groundbreaking for the new Folsom Public Library will be Aug. 25, 2005. The doors will open in early 2007.

A community thankful for the unwavering vision of "this pushy old broad," as she puckishly refers to herself, is honoring the success of Georgia's mission by naming the



new library building for her. The main branch of the Folsom Library will be housed in the Georgia Murray Building.

Councilman Eric King spearheaded the effort. "I got to know Georgia when I first moved to Folsom and started learning about the library," he says. "She was a motivating force to me. She had a passion to keep the library alive and an intense desire to bring a high-quality library to the city."

Georgia, insisting it was the community's library, at first wouldn't hear of having her name on it. It was City Manager Martha Lofgren who won her over. Georgia was the kind of role model she wanted for her two daughters, Martha told her, an example of what a person can achieve when she pursues her dreams.

"Pursue your dreams." If Georgia's life could be condensed into a slogan, that would surely be its theme.

**G**eorgia Pape was born on Feb. 26, 1913, in Montpelier, Vt., the seventh of eight children of George, a blacksmith, and Elizabeth, "a saint." Money was scarce in her childhood, but love and wisdom were plentiful.

*Georgia never lost sight of the importance of this library. I think it's wholly appropriate that we name our library after her. She had the vision.*

**Steve Miklos**  
Folsom mayor

*I think it's great to name this library after Georgia. She's been for it since day one. She's put her heart and soul into it. I know. I worked with her on it.*

**Jack Kipp**  
Former Folsom mayor

*Georgia wields her iron fist inside a velvet glove — that's how she helped make this library reality. She is the kind of woman I want as a role model for my daughters.*

**Martha Clark Lofgren**  
Former city manager

So were challenges. In what must have been her first, 3-year-old Georgia awoke one night unable to move. She had polio, then a dreaded disease:

*"When I woke up I was paralyzed to where I couldn't get my hand to my mouth. The doctor came from Boston. He ran a darning needle across the bottoms of my feet. When there was no response, he told my mother I would never walk again. Mama said, 'She'll walk.' She never gave up. She strapped me into a corset of wood and canvas and made me do exercises. And she was right. I've danced a million miles since then."*

**F**our years later, on Nov. 2, 1920, still convalescing from polio, Georgia learned an unforgettable lesson about the power of holding onto your dreams:

*"Mama came to me in the morning and said, 'We're going to have a party in this house today, Darling. This is a big day because women are going to vote.' All the women in the neighborhood congregated at our house to go to the railroad station to vote. With Mama pushing my wheelchair, the women marched in the road, singing and dancing all the way — they were so happy they could vote. Then they came back and had a party. When my father came home from work, he asked me, 'What is going on in this house?' I said, 'Oh, Papa, Mama and all of the women voted today.' 'Glory be to God,' my father*

*said, 'this will be the ruination of the nation.'*"

It was during her years in a wheelchair, unable to run, that Georgia's lifelong love of libraries took root. For a bright little girl in a crowded house, the Montpelier library was her salvation — and a genesis of her dreams:

*"It was heaven to get away to my library. It meant complete escape from reality. With books, I'd be in one*

*country or another, or on an adventure or in fairyland or with an animal or that kind of thing. When I got older, I was immensely interested in history. I didn't get enough in school, so I spent every moment I could at the library."*

By the time Georgia graduated from high school, the country was in the grip of the Great Depression. College was out of

the question. Georgia took a job as a cashier at a movie theater, and, in 1932, married Charles Murray, a barber she met at a school dance.

Just as nothing else in Georgia's life was ordinary, neither was her wedding day:

*"With the Depression, we couldn't afford a big wedding. I had so many friends, I said if I can't have a big wedding, I don't want any wedding at all. A friend arranged for us to be married at The Little Church Around the Corner in New York. It was just Charlie and I. We asked the cabbie to*



Georgia at 17 (top) and 19

*wait for us. He told us, 'Don't hurry. Al Capone's gang has just mowed down three men on the next corner. The police have stopped all the traffic.'*"

**A**fter the wedding, Georgia and Charlie lived in Cabot, Vt. Charlie opened a one-chair barbershop — 50 cents a haircut. Not many people could afford haircuts during the Depression.

Four years later, their daughter, Dawn, was born. A son, Terry, was born in 1948, after the family had moved to California.

Georgia recalls Cabot's gray clapboard library and its librarian, Miss McCallister, with affection. "She was a treasure. That library was a treasure."

When Dawn was 2 years old, Georgia discovered in the Cabot library a book with color photographs of the University of California, Berkeley. She showed it to Miss McCallister.

"This is where my daughter is going to go to college," Georgia declared. "Hold on to that dream," Miss McCallister told her. No surprise: Dawn graduated from Berkeley 20 years later.

Getting her there took some typical Georgia ingenuity. How would she pay for a college education on 50-cent haircuts?

Then came World War II. Georgia and Charlie were hunting rabbits for stew — on

snowshoes — when they heard the news of Pearl Harbor. Georgia knew there would be big money to be made in factories, so she persuaded Charlie to move to Schenectady, N.Y. The company wanted Georgia to be a secretary, but she would have none of it. She would become a real-life "Rosie the Riveter."



Georgia, with her daughter, Dawn James, "finagled" her way into Cuba in 1991, determined to meet the old fisherman who inspired Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea."

*"I was smart as hell — I wanted piecework. I wanted a job where I could make a lot of money, and I knew that's where the money was. I made searchlights for the big ships — the only woman in a department with 84 men. Boy, it wasn't easy. They didn't want a woman there. But I thought I had just as much right as the men to participate in the war effort."*

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**I**n 1944, the family transferred to Mare Island Naval Shipyard. They lived for 24 years in the San Francisco Bay Area, then moved to El Dorado Hills.

In 1970, Georgia happened on a duplex for sale on Folsom's Duchow Way. She reasoned rental income might allow her to travel and bought it on the spot — without telling Charlie — for \$16,000. They converted the units into one house and she has lived there since — alone after Charlie died in 1983. Even without the rental, she has seen most of the world.

Duchow Way generated a lot of police calls in the 1970s, but trouble proved no

*When we renovated the old library, Georgia was up there on ladders painting like I was. I have the deepest respect for her commitment for a library.*

**Ernie Sheldon**  
Parks commissioner

*She has certainly been the driving force behind getting a library that would be adequate for this community. Without her pushing, we wouldn't have this library.*

**Gail Kipp**  
Friends president and library commissioner

*When we think of Georgia, we think "library." Why? Because she simply wouldn't let us forget about it. That's the key to her success: She's simply Georgia.*

**June Robinson**  
Past library commissioner

*I have learned from observing my mother's unending pursuit of independence and her passion for causes near to her heart. She defies any kind of label. Failure is simply not a part of her vocabulary or life. She has set a very high bar for how we live our lives, but she is living proof of what one fiercely independent and passionate person can attain.*

**Terry Murray**  
Georgia's son

**Georgia's family:**

Daughter Dawn James; son Terry Murray; grandchildren Scott, Jeff, Jodi, Megan, Karen, Lauren and Mike; and great-grandchildren Taylor, Madelyn, Alicia, Michele, Lindsey, Amber, Alex, Brittney, Kevin, Ryan, Sara and Adam.

This publication is set in the typeface "Georgia," designed by Matthew Carter in 1992. The font "Georgia," the designer wrote, is "resonant with personality ... exudes a sense of friendliness ... with character and charm." Just like our Georgia Murray.

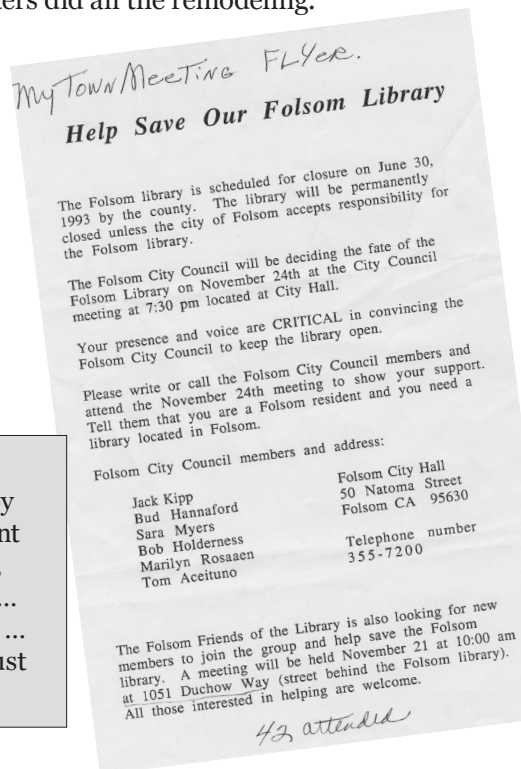
match for Georgia. She campaigned to clean up the street, often speaking at City Council meetings. "I'm Georgia Murray," she would begin, "and I live in the ghetto."

Today, thanks in part to Georgia's efforts, Mercy Housing has converted 10 Duchow Way apartment buildings into Mercy Village, a model affordable-housing project.

When Georgia moved to Folsom, the library was a minuscule county branch in a shopping center. Georgia visited regularly. One afternoon in 1992, she found the librarian in tears. Folsom's library was being closed.

Georgia flew into action. She distributed fliers inviting people to a meeting at her house. She called friends, elected officials, the PTA. She challenged developers: "Who will buy a house in a town with no library?"

Forty-two people showed up. Georgia persuaded them to build a temporary library in a former firehouse on Persifer Street, which, at Georgia's urging, the city gave them. The county let them keep the branch library's books, and library supporters did all the remodeling.



At age 80, Georgia painted walls, moved furniture, shelved books and charmed two grocers into donating food and drinks for the crews.

The doors opened in July 1993. The building was leaky, but the community loved it. "Temporary," though, stretched to 12 years before plans would be drawn and construction would begin on a new building.

**D**uring that time, whenever the dream receded and spirits flagged, Georgia punched them up again.

"It's been a rocky road," she says, "but we hung in there together. We were vocal. We weren't going to give up. With the support of the community — sometimes sitting in council meetings until midnight — we made it. For me, at 92, this is a dream come true."

Georgia is unabashedly proud of the building that will bear her name. "It's beautiful — earthy colors, neat shape, park setting." It reminds her a bit, she says, mentally reaching far back in time, of the designs of her favorite architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, whom, in Georgia fashion, she once coaxed to stay in her home in El Cerrito.

"I think Frank is giving the nod from heaven that this is a good library," she says, then closes with a true Georgia finale — "grumpy, as he would be."

*By Linda Holderness (August 2005)*

*(Georgia Murray died on January 8, 2009, six weeks shy of 96.)*

