



Global Education
at Stanley Center

Catherine Miller

**MUSCATINE'S GLOBAL EDUCATOR,
ACTIVIST, AND CITIZEN**

By Jean Clark



Catherine Roxana Miller was a global citizen, progressive educator, and social activist. To honor her and her passion for global education, the Stanley Center on Peace and Security established the Catherine Miller Explorer Award which annually funds summer international experiences for selected Muscatine teachers.

Born in 1908 at Storm Lake, Iowa, Catherine graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the State University of Iowa. She taught French at the university 1930-40 before coming to Muscatine to teach French and Spanish at the high school and later community college 1942-74.

She filled her summers with social activism and travel—whether through Quaker public health work camps in Mexico, organizing local high school Spanish students to learn from and assist residents in the local migrant camps, or traveling to world fairs and conferences. She visited over forty countries.

In 1952-53 she was one of only two teachers in the United States to receive a Ford Foundation fellowship for creative teaching. She planned her own itinerary and then spent an entire school year traveling solo in South and Central America collecting experiences, contacts, and materials about culture and society to share with her students. She visited eighteen countries and flew in and out of forty-five different airports in eight months. Imagine being the only female for several days and starry nights on a boat chugging up the Amazon River!

For years she organized an annual Pan-American Fiesta where students provided family and friends with Latin American food and entertainment. Always on the cutting edge, she found funding in 1950s for an audiotape language lab. She held various local and state offices in education associations and professional language teacher organizations—all without a car or driving until almost fifty years old.

She was an outspoken advocate for civil rights, women's equality, the United Nations, and peace. She wrote many letters to editors, legislators, and newsletters, and she was always circulating petitions to Congress. She organized local activities to raise awareness, and she attended state, national, and international conferences.

She was a mentor to many women and was always pushing people to learn and do more to make the world a better place for all. For years she raised money for UNICEF through holiday card sales, and she worked with migrants and refugees relocating in our community. During World War II she volunteered as a trained enemy-aircraft spotter on the hilltop now called Mark Twain Overlook!

Her global outlook and activism were evident in the organizations she belonged to and supported. She was a founding member of Muscatine County League of Women Voters, Muscatine Sister Cities, and Muscatine World Federalists. She also was involved in American Association of University Women, United Nations Association, Ground Zero, Beyond War, American Civil Liberties Union, Muscatine County Migrant Ministry Council, and the Musser Public Library Board. In 2004 the City of Muscatine honored her with its first ever Lifetime Humanitarian Award.

Catherine's sense of service to community appears already in her 1928 Sheldon (Iowa) Junior College valedictorian address where she admonishes her classmates: "What have we given the school? The promise of a more useful life, the promise to make the most of our possibilities in service. The indebtedness of two years here is not alone to the banker, or to the teachers—it is to the whole world, that obligation that comes of opportunity, that realization that privilege is responsibility."

She ends the speech with these words: ". . . go with a smile on your lips, a song and a prayer in your heart, to live well, to laugh often, to love much, to give—everything. Let us commence tonight a broader field of worthwhile being."

Catherine Miller was the perfect example of the mantra "Think Global, Act Local."