

The Classroom Bookshelf

by Mary Anne Cree

Love Every Leaf: The Life of Landscape Architect Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

written by Kathy Stinson
Tundra Books, 2008
978-0-88776-804-0 (hc) \$28.99
for Grades 5 and up

Biography – Landscape Architecture – Women

First up is Kathy Stinson's inspiring story of a visionary landscape architect who is not well enough known here in the country she now calls home.

Fleeing Hitler's Germany in 1939, Cornelia Hahn ended up in New York. At the age of 11, Cornelia had decided to pursue landscape architecture and in America she began to follow her dream.



Although it was a field not particular welcoming to women, Cornelia's professor described her as "a person of imagination, efficient, and capable". Her future husband Peter Oberlander was studying town planning and their first date turned into a four-day work session, with each one helping the other.

After graduation, one of her first projects was a playground for children, work that continues to be nearest to her heart. Her philosophy – that children needed natural features like hills, trees and bushes, and what she called "beautiful junk" (materials to encourage creativity) – developed through the years as she planned successful playgrounds both large and small. One of her most successful projects was the children's play area at the Canadian pavilion at Expo 67. Making her home on Canada's west coast, Cornelia also worked on projects like Robson Square in Vancouver, the National Gallery in Ottawa and the Yellowknife legislative building. Now 85, she continues to work on landscape projects around the world.

Stinson tells the story of this remarkable woman's life with beautiful prose. While attractively designed, the book may appear a little daunting to a child – the text is dense and the photos are all black and white. But don't let the traditional design put you off. It is an interesting story of a woman with amazing drive and creativity, and Stinson's passion for her subject is clear throughout the telling. I learned a lot about the importance of good landscape design and how crucial it is for children to have creative play spaces. Kudos to Kathy Stinson on her first biography and I hope it is not her last.