

## A Young Boy Who Remembered

The young boy wandered through the small coastal city where he grew up, his head filled with...well, things he knew were there, but couldn't quite describe.

He wanted to be an artist, but the cards weren't exactly in his favor. His father was an immigrant factory worker, and at the time, the tight years just after World War I, there wasn't much extra money in the house to buy things like books.

And then he discovered the Beverly Public Library.

"As a child, climbing up the white marble stairs to the rotunda seemed an adventure," he wrote many years later. "This new discovery opened up a world that I had never known before...The library provided the only way for me to reach out beyond my immediate environment."

Will Barnet soon reached out so far beyond his environment that he became one of today's leading American artists. His paintings and prints hang in major museums and galleries across the country.

They hang, too, on the walls of the Beverly Public Library.

As high as he rose, as much acclaim as he garnered for his work, Will Barnet never forgot the place where, as he later wrote, "I spent my youth in the company of the great artists." Every time he returns to Beverly to visit relatives, he also visits the library, a couple of his latest prints tucked under his arm.

When Barnet, who was born in 1911, first became a regular visitor to the art section of the Beverly Library, he attracted the attention of Marjorie Stanton, then the head librarian. She asked the young boy what he wanted to be when he grew up.

"I want to be an artist – a painter," he told her.

So Stanton took him to an upstairs room filled with valuable art books and reproductions of the Old Masters. He spent the long winters in that room, learning from silent teachers like Rembrandt and Daumier.

"All my dreams were awakened and nourished by the wealth of inspiration with which the wonderful Beverly Public Library was endowed," he later wrote.

Barnet went on to art school and to New York, where he found fame but didn't forget Beverly. In 1942, when he was a young instructor at the Art Students League in New York, he wrote a letter to Marjorie Stanton – a letter the library now has in its proud, bulging, Will Barnet file.

"I have never underestimated the impetus that the Beverly Library art books gave to my growth as an artist," he wrote. "To you I owe many thanks."

In the letter, Barnet went on to offer to donate copies of his prints to the library, as a way to "repay my debt of gratitude." The collection has grown ever since. If and when the library, which is outgrowing its present home, ever gets a new building, library officials hope to include a Will Barnet room for the collection.

Barnet still visits the library when he is in town, and he knows most of the staff members by name.

The young boy hasn't forgotten.