

Eileen S. Tarcay, writer and professor

By BY FREDERICK N. RASMUSSEN and THE BALTIMORE SUN

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Eileen S. Tarcay, who had taught English and journalism at what is now Coppin State University and was a prolific contributor of freelance articles to The Baltimore Sun, died Feb. 18 from complications of a stroke at a Salt Lake City nursing home. The former Homeland resident was 97.

The former Eileen Schultz was born in Hiawatha, Utah, and was raised there and in Latuda, Utah, both coal-mining towns.

After graduating from St. Mary of the Wasatch High School in Salt Lake City in 1931, she earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1935 at the University of Utah.

She began her teaching career at public schools in Helper, Utah, and Jerome, Idaho, and then at the Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah.

In 1937, she married Josiah M. Barr, an artist who worked for the Works Progress Administration and later became an inventor. They divorced in 1940.

During World War II, she worked at the U.S. Weather Bureau in San Francisco and later Salt Lake City. In 1953, she earned a master's degree in English at the University of Utah and taught at the university until 1959, while pursuing a doctorate in American studies, which she did not complete.

She was married in 1956 to Nuri Tarcay, a civil engineer who worked on many overseas projects in Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and other Asian countries.

After teaching for a year at the University of Missouri, Ms. Tarcay moved to Ankara, Turkey, in 1961, where she taught English and history at several academic institutions, including the University of Maryland's overseas division.

Ms. Tarcai arrived in Baltimore in 1964, when she took a job teaching English at what is now Towson University, and two years later joined the faculty of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where she taught for a year.

She began teaching English and journalism at Coppin State College in 1967 and remained on its faculty until retiring in 1979.

Even though she was living in Baltimore, she wrote for The Salt Lake Tribune and wrote a column, "Here and There in the Humanities," for the Western Humanities Review from 1963 to 1975.

Ms. Tarcai earned a second master's degree in 1974 from the Johns Hopkins University, and worked as a freelance editor and writer, producing a steady stream of work.

She wrote feature stories, poetry, book reviews and profiles, much of which was published in The Baltimore Sun, The Evening Sun, the Sun Magazine and the Baltimore Jewish Times.

While living in Hanlon Park, Ms. Tarcai wrote in a 1986 Evening Sun op-ed piece about the joys of living near Lake Ashburton.

"We hear a lot about dwelling downtown, but there's something to be said for midtown, too. In Baltimore there are other bodies of water besides the Inner Harbor," she observed. "Many of us are lucky enough to live near a lake — maybe one man made — surrounded by a park. We have flowers, birds and the year's changes to enjoy, just like the folks who own gardens."

She became close friends with Coppin colleague Lucille Clifton, who was Maryland's poet laureate and poet-in-residence at the Northwest Baltimore college from 1971 to 1974.

Ms. Tarcai had reviewed several collections of Ms. Clifton's poetry for The Sun and The Evening Sun. In 1985, when Ms. Clifton left for a professorship at the University of California at Santa Cruz, teaching the writing of poetry and fiction, Ms. Tarcai wrote an appreciation for The Evening Sun.

"When she left the state, lovers of Lucille Clifton and her poetry half expected

an outcry like that following the move of the Colts," she wrote. "Many of us thought she could be less easily spared than a football team. ... Like many notable poets, Clifton has always been concerned with the here and now, with the political, if you will."

Sidney Clifton, a Hollywood TV executive producer who is the daughter of the late poet, recalled Ms. Tarcay's "soft voice" and said she was more than a "family friend and more like a grandmother to me and my sisters and brother."

"She had always been strictly committed to her students. That was always very clear, and she enjoyed teaching at historically black institutions," Ms. Clifton, who lives in Woodland Hills, Calif., said in a telephone interview.

"And she was committed to inspiring us and supported our individuality. She was always very interested in my mother and encouraged her with her poetry," Ms. Clifton said. "Eileen was a crusader and interested in other cultures and open to them. She was audacious and such an inspiring person."

She saw humor in the ordinary, and in a piece she had written in a brief essay for Sundries in the Sun Magazine, she questioned the coded language found in want ads.

"After the reader has figured out SWF, DWM, BIBM, GWM, and S/DJWM, not to mention ISO S/DWF, there's little left that is intriguing," Ms. Tarcay observed. "I find little to indicate that any of them would meet *my* special needs at special times."

Ms. Tarcay's work won her many awards, including an honorable A.D. Emmart Memorial Award in 1977 for a book review.

Her memberships included the American Association of University Women, Baltimore Writers' Alliance and the Maryland State Poetry and Literary Society. She had served as a member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Art and Culture.

In declining health, Ms. Tarcay left her Homeland residence in 2005, returning to Salt Lake City to be near her family.

At her request, there will be no services.

Surviving are a daughter, Kim Barr of Salt Lake City; two grandchildren; and three great-grandsons. She was separated in 1970 from her husband, who returned to Turkey and died in 2005.