

# Nancy-Lou Patterson



As a very young child, Nancy-Lou Patterson’s imagination drew her into a fairy tale world and made her believe she had a dragon of her own. As an adult, Patterson’s colossal imagination loomed larger than any dragon – producing stained glass and textile art, poetry, novels, and scholarly papers.

Hundreds of local artists owe a debt to the world-renowned artist and teacher who helped found the University of Waterloo’s fine arts department in 1968. Patterson, who retired in 1992, was named Distinguished Professor Emerita by the University of Waterloo the following year. That same year she received an honorary doctor of letters degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in recognition of a “life dedicated to expression.”

Patterson is well-known locally for her liturgical art which includes the stained glass windows she designed for the Conrad Grebel Chapel at the University of Waterloo. One of her largest commissions was a 27-foot wall hanging for St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Kitchener. Her stained glass work can also be seen at the Beth Jacob Synagogue and the Kitchener Public Library complex in the Pioneer Park neighbourhood.

Patterson, who was born in 1929 in Worcester, Massachusetts, spent her early life in southern Illinois. When the Second World War broke out her parents, both intellectuals, returned to their hometown of Seattle, Washington, where she attended high school and received her B.A. in Fine Arts from the University of Washington in 1951.

The 1950s were a pivotal time for Patterson who, in addition to spending two summers on aboriginal reserves, taught art and became a pacifist committed to the Civil Rights movement.

She and her husband Dr. E Palmer Patterson\*, arrived in Waterloo in 1962 to take a teaching position at the University of Waterloo. After founding the Fine Arts department, Patterson served as its department chair twice.

She became widely known for her writings in the areas of mythopoeic art and literature, and on the traditional arts of native Canadians, and the Swiss German and Dutch German Mennonites of Waterloo County.

Patterson wrote several novels including, *Apple Staff and Silver Crown: a fairy tale* (1985), *The Painted Hallway* (1992) and *Barricade Summer* (1996).

When asked what her novel *The Painted Hallway* was about, Patterson replied, “It is a story of the imagination, and if it’s about something, it’s about the way in which works of art gradually communicate meaning.”

Acclaimed Canadian novelist Jane Urquhart wrote of *The Painted Hallway*:

“Nancy-Lou Patterson has magically combined family history, romance and the mysterious to create a lyrical and engaging coming-of-age story which is, ultimately, about the power of love and art to transcend time and sorrow.”

Nancy-Lou Patterson, who was always so fascinated by the fantasy worlds contained in the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, has the highest regard for the magic in art and life. “Art is a kind of door into an alternative world. The world is just full of these sorts of magical things that just happen all the time. To act as if the only things that ever occur are what happens in daylight is like disregarding your dreams,” she said.

*Photo courtesy of K-W Record Photographic Negative Collection, University of Waterloo Library.*

\*Note: Dr. E Palmer Patterson: there is no period after the “E” because “E” is an actual name