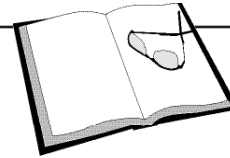

With Grit and By Grace

Breaking Trails in Politics and Law, A Memoir

By the Honorable Betty Roberts (Oregon State University Press, 2008)

Book Review by Cashauna Hill



On Monday morning, February 8, 1982, three days after my fifty-ninth birthday, I raised my right hand and said, "I, Betty Roberts, do solemnly swear . . ."

. . . .

After the final words ". . . so help me God," the applause went on and on, thundering the audience's enthusiasm for the breakthrough my appointment represented for women. I swallowed once, twice, as I prepared to make my remarks.

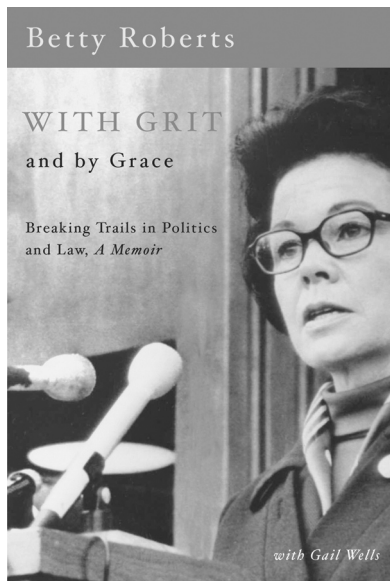
Today, one woman. Tomorrow, many more.

So begins the autobiography of former Justice Betty Roberts, *With Grit and By Grace*. In 1982, Justice Roberts became the first woman to serve on the Oregon Supreme Court. Twenty-five years later, she completed this memoir. In her book, we may see and begin to understand not only the importance of documenting history, but also the legacy that has been passed down to future generations of women lawyers.

The final sentence quoted above reflects Justice Roberts's philosophy on mentoring women lawyers and illustrates her willingness to share her story in the hopes of inspiring and assisting others. Her autobiography highlights her professional successes, but also delves into the personal. Justice Roberts presents herself as a whole person, and her candidness will serve as a source of inspiration for OWLS members. In her struggles and triumphs, we learn that we too can accomplish what others thought we never could.

Justice Roberts details her childhood in Kansas and Texas, and writes with eloquence about the first time she saw

Oregon. As a young woman, and after completing a year of college, Betty married Bill Rice and moved with him to Oregon, where he was a bank employee.



Her decision to marry Bill and her pragmatic approach to taking a husband will likely be of interest to many OWLS members, as many working women across the country struggle with work/life balance, as well as whether and when to marry, have children, or both. Justice Roberts illustrates that these concerns are not new, and that women can weather them and remain strong, successful individuals.

Betty and Bill produced four children: daughters Dian and Jo, and sons John and Randy, and it is obvious that she sees them as some of her life's greatest accomplishments. Even as a mother of four, Justice Roberts (then known as Betty Rice) was determined to complete her education

and begin a career. She graduated from Portland State College in 1958 and became a high school teacher. After divorcing Bill, Betty earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Oregon. She then set her sights on completing a PhD in political science.

Instead she went to law school. Her book provides engrossing details about how she became a lawyer, a story most OWLS members have heard. She graduated from Northwestern College of Law (now Lewis & Clark Law School) in 1966, one of two women in that class.

Even as a first-year law student, mother of four children, and full-time high school teacher, Betty continued to display tenacity and reach for new goals. She was first elected to public office in 1960, when she won a term on the Lynch Elementary School District Board. Later that year, she married Frank Roberts, then chairman of the Multnomah County Democratic Party Central Committee. During her marriage to Frank, Betty took his last name. In an ongoing discussion in the book, Justice Roberts writes about a woman's decision to use her husband's name, versus her birth name or any other name she chooses. It is a discussion that will surely resonate with OWLS members, as the 2007 discussion on the OWLS listserve about this issue evoked many heartfelt, poignant, and sometimes heated responses from OWLS members.

In 1964, fired up from her 1962 loss in a bid to win an Oregon House of Representatives seat, Betty Roberts was elected to the House from her East Multnomah County district. During her 13 years in the legislature, Betty honed her skills as a politician and advocate. Throughout

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Book Review: *With Grit and By Grace*

her career, she worked on some of the most progressive, landmark legislation of that era, championing many causes and working to give a voice to people who had been historically marginalized, including women and racial and ethnic minorities. Her priorities included civil rights, state-funded kindergarten, ethics reform, tax credits for child-care payments, and women's rights. She spearheaded campaigns to pass laws decriminalizing abortion and allowing women to keep their last names after marrying, and she worked tirelessly to make Oregon the 25th state to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

Betty served as a legislator during turbulent but triumphant personal times. She and Frank Roberts were divorced after four years of marriage; she failed the bar exam on her first attempt, but passed in 1967 (giving credit to the skilled tutoring of Jena Schlegel, later the first woman judge in Marion County); she won a difficult race for the Oregon Senate; and she and Keith Skelton, a fellow legislator, were married in 1968. They maintained a flourishing law practice together for the next 10 years.

At this point in her narrative, Justice Roberts writes of her contentious dispute with the Oregon State Bar and state election officials. Although the attorney general had issued an opinion serving as precedent for "allowing" women to keep their former names after marrying, the OSB referred to Betty as "Betty R. Roberts Skelton" upon her marriage to Keith. She protested this designation, determined to keep the name "Betty Roberts." She won the battle with the OSB, but the registrar of elections refused to register her to vote unless she used her husband's name, although she remained on the ballot as "Betty Roberts."

Justice Roberts's life story reads as that of a woman in the right place at the right time, who is intelligent and savvy enough to capitalize on opportunities, and determined enough to create opportunities where none existed. In 1974, Betty ran for governor of Oregon,

joining five other female gubernatorial candidates in the United States that year. Betty narrowly lost to Bob Straub in the Democratic primary, but another opportunity presented itself in July 1974. During his bid to unseat Senator Bob Packwood in the general election, former Senator Wayne Morse died. Betty was picked as the new Democratic candidate and given 84 days to campaign before the general election. She lost a close race to Senator Packwood that year.

Betty, still in the Oregon Senate, continued to work on issues of importance before being tapped by Governor Bob Straub in 1977 as the first woman appointed to the Oregon Court of Appeals. She welcomed the challenge, and writes that she looked forward to again being successful in a male-dominated environment. As an appellate judge, she continued to advocate for the advancement of women in the legal profession, and continued to offer advice to other women judges and law school graduates.

In December 1981, Republican Governor Victor Atiyeh appointed Justice Roberts to the Oregon Supreme Court, where she served until 1986. Justice Roberts writes of her decision to resign

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from the Court, made after driving from Salem to Portland in a rainstorm in which her vision was obstructed by two large trucks: "Somehow, I again had to call on that idea of faith leading me into a safe and productive future. I wouldn't be idle, I knew that. So why not take a chance? It wouldn't be the first time, and maybe not the last."

With Grit and By Grace is a well-written, insightful account. A flowing narrative, historical snippets, and colorful participants (including some familiar OWLS members) come together to make this a most interesting autobiography. Through three marriages, numerous careers, and some of this country's most turbulent times, Justice Roberts displayed her trademark spunk and pioneering spirit to break trails for herself and for women who would come later.

Cashauna Hill is an associate at Ashcroft Wiles Ammann in Portland.

With Grit and By Grace: Breaking Trails in Politics and Law should be available in local bookstores. To order it online, please go to <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/press/u-w/WithGrit.html>. Or you can call 1.800.426.3797.

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