

## "Sister"

*Robert Cantrell*

*Betty's Brother*

*When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them to another - - - We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all **Men** are created equal, that they are endowed - - - with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.*

I'll bet you big time that if Betty had lived in those days, 235 years ago, she would have found a way to sign that paper, Only, the word Men would have been replaced with **Persons**. That solid bastion of male mortals only would have been breached and the likes of Hancock, Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton, and associates would probably be shocked to learn that our Betty was a power to be reckoned with. But, we speculate.

We are come here today to honor a great lady, my little sister, Betty. But you knew that already, didn't you?

Back in the late 20's, long before most of you were born, there were 3 of us kids – our older sister Mary (always our moral compass, guiding our actions or more often vetoing them altogether), me, and then Betty, who, even when she was very young, pushed at the limits of our cultural norms. She would ask “why” things were the way they were (why is it bad for girls to wear shorts or even slacks?; Why are the rules different for girls?). She not only asked “why?” She sometimes asked “Why Not?” And if no reasonable answer was forthcoming, she proceeded to take whatever action she deemed OK.

When we were quite young, our family was comfortable financially – our Dad had a very solid and good job with the railroad. Our mother made sure we always wore clean nice clothes, and we learned our manners at home and how to behave in “polite society” by going to nice restaurants, to the movies, on trips on the train.

But then, during prohibition, Dad drank some bad booze, which paralyzed his legs. He clearly could not work anymore, and Mother suddenly became the breadwinner. And the Great Depression was upon the land and upon us.

Now we were suddenly poor. How poor were we? Well, we couldn't pay the \$7 per month rent on a house on the wrong side of the tracks so we moved next door into a smaller house for only \$3 per month and couldn't pay the rent there either. But our Mother thought it the decent thing to do – at least it was less money the landlord was not going to collect.

We learned early about personal strength from our Mother, who took in washing and then got jobs created by the Roosevelt WPA (Work Progress Administration). And we learned about the charity of individuals, organizations, and government because our clothes now came from donations, and our food often came from food banks and the Salvation Army.

Our Mother believed that schooling was very important. That did not change when our financial situation changed. To her, being poor was not a possible excuse for not being in school every day and doing our homework. And so we were poor but we did our education chores..

Growing up, Betty was a real tom-boy. When we were kids in Texas: She could climb a tree higher than I could, She could hit a ball as far as I could, and she could run faster than most kids in the neighborhood.

She also played “Running Back” on a girls tackle football team. They had pads, uniforms and the whole nine yards of equipment. She could run well and block pretty good. (Now you know why her first preferred college major was physical education.)

Once, when we found some boxing gloves, we put them on and I challenged her to a sparring match. After a few seconds of trading light blows, Pow! she smacked me clean on the nose and I bled. We stopped our short boxing match and she said, “Bob I'm sorry you're hurt, but you challenged me to a fight so I thought you knew I would hit you”. I said, “Yeah I know, just don't tell anyone”. She said “OK”. Maybe a few grown men here in Oregon should have known about her propensity to swing hard whenever she was challenged.

After Betty graduated from High School in 1939 she wanted to go to college so I borrowed \$225 for her first year tuition and first month room and board. She worked and paid for the rest herself. When World War II came along she met a “soldier boy”( Our mother called all service men “soldier boys”) from Oregon.

When she and my friend Bill, decided to get married in Wichita Falls, Texas, way back in 1942, it was decided that I would “walk” her down the aisle of the First Methodist Church. I said to her “If you want, we can turn around and walk out of this, or”, she said “let’s keep walking”. We continued our walking. She committed to that path and tried to be the perfect wife and mother.

I had no clue at that time, but now I realize that with that walk down the aisle, Oregon got one of the greatest gifts ever. She fell in love with the state and its people and she gave all that she could muster that they might know compassion, equality, and impartial justice. And me, I got the great gift of her four marvelous children as my nephews and nieces.

Just like one of your early pioneers, Nimrod Kelly, who staked a half section claim in the upper reaches of the Willamette and then protected it with all the firepower he had. So too, did my sister, Betty, protect her claims of equity and justice, not just for her own life, but for all of us.

This fact brings to mind the famous quote from John F. Kennedy at his inaugural address, “Some people see things as they are, and they ask, ‘Why?’” I see things as they could be and say, “Why not”. Surely our Betty was so inclined.

You have read in her book, and you have heard today, about how important being prepared for opportunities was to her. And how strongly she felt that access to education was the first step to being prepared... for everyone.

And you have read in your program, the last paragraph from her book. That’s her creed - If we are to consummate our goals, and we find no solid footing for our quest, then we must indeed learn how to be creative and learn how to innovate. That’s what my little sister, Betty, did.

After I retired from Johns Hopkins, I went sailing for almost 3 years. I carried this poem, that is called "INVICTUS" on my little boat named "INVICTA". I think it sums up Betty's life philosophy. It starts like this:

*Out of the darkness that covers me,  
Black as a pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever Gods may be,  
For my unconquerable soul.*

It ends:

*It matters not how straight the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the Captain of my soul.*

I do believe that those who are inspired by her life can reach those unscalable heights, right those unrightable wrongs, and yes, dream the impossible dreams.

So, if, in your quest, there is no place to stand, then learn how to fly. Betty would love you for that!

So, it is Good Bye Betty, and hello to a brighter tomorrow. Because she lived, and she loved, and she learned how to fly, that we, the recipients of her great legacy can also know how to fly.

My little sister, Betty, was a great lady! But you knew that already, didn't you?