

"Teacher"

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Former Teaching Colleague*

Dian, Jo, John, and Randy, family, and friends.

I had the honor of speaking at Frank Roberts' service some years ago. Afterward, Betty came to me and said that when she saw my name listed on the program as a speaker she said to herself, "Oh, no, not Pete! He knows everything." Well, Betty, here I am again. Only I don't claim to know everything. I don't even know much. But I do know a little about Betty's teaching career and how it branched and branched to a much broader public service.

We knew each other as undergraduates at Portland State, graduated in the same class in 1958, began teaching careers -- she at Reynolds High -- and were on the same staff at Centennial High in 1960 -61. I moved on at the end of that school year. In 1962, Betty moved from Centennial to David Douglas.

Betty left Reynolds after two years because the administration insisted she be the full time dean of girls. Needless to say, she loved what she had been teaching -- American history and what the old-timers would call "civics". By the 1950s "civics" was "American Problems". She left Centennial because she announced her intention to run for the legislature and the superintendent and school board wouldn't give her a leave of absence if she won the election. Well, she had four kids to help support and she still wanted to teach. She stayed at David Douglas until 1966 because the administration valued her service both as a highly productive teacher and as a state legislator sympathetic to public education. In 1966 Betty moved on to Mt. Hood Community College, where she taught at least part-time until she joined the Court of Appeals.

Most of you in this room knew Betty, knew her forthright and engaging manner. You knew her constant quest for sound public policy based on fairness and practicality.

It was those very same characteristics that she used to teach effectively. Her point of view was: What constitutes good public policy? Young people ought to be thinking about that.

So, it wasn't simply a matter of teaching the history of American public policy -- pros, cons and points of view. It was a matter of insisting that young people think about who they are and their responsibilities as citizens.

Betty's concern ranged well beyond the young people who were obviously going to do well with their lives. She was deeply concerned for those that were probably not going to go to school beyond high school. She thought her course might be the last chance many of them would ever have to prepare to be good citizens. She was devastated when, in her first year at Reynolds, a student picked up his books and walked out of her classroom, and just kept on going, reportedly into the Paratroops.

I never watched Betty teach a class during that time. I was busy teaching Dian and her classmates Western Civilization. So, the information I have about her methodology and her impact is second hand, from her students. In short, they were dazzled by "Mrs. Roberts". Their minds were being opened to new ideas, new ways of looking at life, new ways of solving problems.

Years later, one student told me Betty didn't act like most women teachers. "She wasn't 'nicey nice' or 'sweet' or 'oh, so caring'. She was there to teach, not to be an away-from-home mother. She had high expectations of all students. They had to work and learn." 1960 was well before the second feminist movement was underway. One student later told me that Betty, by simply being herself, "Taught me I could do anything and be anyone I wanted. There were no limits simply because I was female.... She was a fabulous role model for high school girls.... Everything about (Mrs. Roberts) -- her attitude, her expectations, her matter-of-factness -- made me want to not only listen to what she was teaching, but to love what I was learning and to want to do well.... If I could, I could then be a little more like her or like I thought women should be and should aspire to being."

Folks, in the spring of 1961, I was 25 and Betty was 38. And she was my role model, too.

It was obvious to her students, and to me, that Betty was highly interested in government and politics. For Betty, teaching public policy created an easy transition into practicing public policy development. So, it came as no surprise when she told me in 1962 that she was going to

run for the legislature. She asked me to co-chair her 1962 and 1964 election campaigns. Great title for me, but we all knew who really ran the campaigns -- Betty.

The morning after the 1964 victory, one of Betty's male students walked into her classroom, extended his hand to shake Betty's and said, "Thanks for doing what you are teaching."

It was a perfect characterization of Betty's life.

Thanks, Betty.