

## **"Legislator"**

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How fortunate we are to have Betty's written labor of love, WITH GRIT AND BY GRACE. – Must reading, in my opinion. Her own words and stories and memories are there for us to savor.

But today we get to tell a few of our own stories – mine will highlight her unique legislative contributions – to feminists in particular - and attempt to explain the role she played in our lives.

REMEMBER THE TIMES - THE LATE 1960S

Betty was first elected to the legislature in 1965: she had been active in East Multnomah County politics. It was the 1968 Presidential Elections that began the passionate years of political engagement for many of us somewhat younger people. Betty herself was a strong supporter of Robert Kennedy. Others were for Eugene McCarthy. This all meant that by 1969 some deep rumblings of change had begun in the country – the war protests, civil rights, protecting the environment; all these movements became much more active.

Betty herself became better known state-wide during the 1969 session – in part because she was the lone woman in the Oregon Senate; but for many of us this was the beginning of the Women's Agenda. Successfully, she added sex/gender to the Civil Rights section on prohibited discrimination in Employment.

Certainly more controversial was her introduction of abortion law changes. Betty was committed and visible on this issue, and she began to be viewed as a leader – and role model. She was impatient, she writes, about changing the laws on this very basic women's health concern; but she was also a pragmatist – and willing to compromise. The final legislation was not what she had sponsored – but began the process of legalizing the procedure.

On this issue she never wavered in her support – with Grit she continued her fight for “choice” through the courts, public opinion - and sadly, 40 years after her display of courage – we have not resolved this issue.

**BUT THE WORLD WAS CHANGING RAPIDLY, AND HOPE WAS IN THE AIR!!**

By the next presidential elections in 1972, Oregon was a different place politically.

Enthusiastic “feminist” groups had formed – including chapters of the National Organization for Women and the Women’s Political Caucus. A campaign was underway to integrate the all male Portland City Club.

Another wise woman leader, Eleanor Davis, called together some 18 women’s organizations to form the Equal Rights Alliance – our goal (hence the catchy acronym) was to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment at the 1973 session.

Betty became our natural political leader. By calling together all women legislators – there were 11 by now – she formed the first Women’s Caucus in Salem. This diverse non-partisan group – including newcomer Vera Katz; Nancie Fadeley, Norma Paulus and Mary Burrows from South of Portland, and even conservative Gracie Peck – were all asked to sponsor the ERA ratification! Joined by many terrific male legislators - (of course! they were still the vast majority...) the ratification was completed in record time.

We celebrated briefly and regrouped: So what to do with all this energy and enthusiasm??? Again, under Betty’s guidance, we decided to keep the Alliance together and forge ahead on a number of additional Women’s Rights changes.

To highlight just a few others from that historic session was a personal one for Betty herself, allowing women to legally change (or keep) their name – with the burden on the court to prove that your personal choice was not OK. Others she supported were non-discrimination in Vera’s aptly named “animal clubs” like the Elks, Moose etc.

\*\*\*This doesn’t sound particularly earth shattering, but under the surface, it was important dig at the Private City Club, who by now had voted 3 times to keep women excluded. (audible sighs and groans are appropriate!)

Some bills were more light hearted – allowing women to wrestle and box – but most were important to some group of women like making men johns culpable in prostitution arrests (our Gracie Peck loved this one...) – and all contributed to our mantra of Equality Now!!

The most comprehensive piece of legislation passed that year was the Oregon mini-ERA – HB 2116, –making additional changes to the Civil Rights Law to prohibit discrimination in credit, housing and we hoped, insurance. This passed with almost NO OPPOSITION in the final days of the session, and we all were indebted for the success of this first organized attempt for Betty – for her wisdom, patience in public, and guidance.

I should note one big loss for civil rights in 1973 – and another issue for which Betty would become a 40 year champion – the narrow defeat of the bill to add Sexual Orientation to the prohibited discrimination in our state. It failed on a 30-30 tie in the House and we could never get to 31. You may remember that it took 30 years to pass. (She took modest revenge when she officiated at the first marriages in during the brief window supported by Multnomah County...)

I appreciate Steve Shell's mention of her environmental work. Betty was never a Single Issue Legislator. Her record included passionate advocacy for public education, seniors, protecting the environment, early land-use planning and much more.

By the time she was appointed to the Court of Appeals in the fall of 1977, her role as a leader of the fledgling women's liberation movement was solidified. Her courage and tenacity had been proven.

BUT WHY – YOU MAY ASK - WAS SHE SO IMPORTANT TO YOU YOUNGER WOMEN????  
HOW DID SHE MAKE SUCH A RADICAL DIFFERENCE???

Very simply, she was our definitive role model –

She was what we wanted to be like, even before we KNEW what we wanted to be!! By the end of her legislative years, she was a mentor, the path breaker, our Dean and our friend.

Perhaps what I loved personally the most was her welcome and encouragement as we who followed her began our own political careers. In fact, my first contribution in 1976 was by return mail – a \$50 check from Betty. How affirming this was!

Her feelings have come through in her own words about those years - “I was tired of fighting and feeling so alone in my efforts. I welcomed the educated, energetic and impatient young women.”

My words will conclude by saying she never felt challenged or threatened by MORE of us – she loved the debates, relished diversity and nudged, supported and cared for us.

We will continue to be inspired by her example – We will stiffen our spines, keeping fighting for justice and equality, compromise when necessary and keep on with our work.

Thank You