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## A tribute to Betty Roberts, who made Oregon a better place to live

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By **Guest Columnist**

By Katherine Heekin

When I first met Betty Roberts, I had no idea how much she had contributed to my autonomy, independence, economic well-being and self-worth. What she did happened before I became an Oregonian, back when I was coming of age in Michigan, and has made all the difference in how I have been able to contribute to Oregon.

She read Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" while she was a representative in the Oregon Legislature during the 1965 session. Back then, in Oregon, women were not able to rent apartments, buy homes, obtain loans, attend Portland's City Club or keep their maiden name when they married. They were denied entrance to graduate programs at the University of Oregon and vocational and training schools, and they were told not to wear pants in the Legislature, all because of their gender.

I read "The Feminine Mystique" at Princeton in 1988, which had been coed for nearly 20 years by then. When I moved to Oregon in 1991, I was able to attend the University of Oregon's School of Law. I've rented apartments, bought homes and obtained loans in Oregon in my name.

When I married in Oregon in 1998, I kept my maiden name because it was my family name; my parents had died, and it was my bridge from my past to my future. It had independent significance that I was not willing to give up. Because Betty Roberts spearheaded and worked on legislation for women's rights, human rights and equal rights from 1965 to 1977, I have been able to do all of those things.

My first boss when I graduated from law school was Judge Ann Aiken. She introduced me to Justice Betty Roberts. By then, Roberts had served as the first woman on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the Oregon Supreme Court. Roberts and I played golf together and won a prize in a best ball tournament among lawyers. She relished the thrill of victory, and would remind me of ours whenever we ran into each other. She always sought to cultivate champions, identifying the potential in each woman she met and then challenging her to use that potential to make life better for others. She knew failure too, having unsuccessfully run for governor and U.S. senator, but she believed that somebody has to go first so that many others can come later. She understood that one person, one voice, one vote can make a difference and that each of us should be the change we wish to see in Oregon.

That was her essence and her calling, but still I had no idea what she had done for Oregon until I read Brent

Walth's "Fire at Eden's Gate" and her book, "With Grit and By Grace." Walth described how she maintained her integrity by exposing an attempted bribe and outmaneuvered her opponents in gaining the Senate's approval of Oregon's bottle bill. In her book, she explained what it took to create equal opportunities, equal pay, equal access and a woman's right to choose in Oregon. In her own way, she shouted, "Give me liberty or give me death." Because of her, we all have more freedom, and, consequently, she is as much a part of The Oregon Story as Tom McCall. Her history is our history and should be taught as a part of Oregon's history in our schools.

She would say, however, our work is not done, as she did a few years ago at the Oregon Women Lawyers' holiday lunch when, once again, there were no women on the Oregon Supreme Court. Although there are women serving on Oregon's highest court today, only one woman has served as a United States senator from Oregon, none as Oregon's attorney general or as Multnomah County's district attorney, and the number of men and women serving in Oregon's Legislature and as judges in Oregon is not equal.

Her legacy is to risk failure so that others can have victory. We owe it to her to continue to take the risk and seek liberty, equality and justice for all.

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