

A Daring Decision

From *With Grit and By Grace: Breaking Trails in Politics and Law* (Oregon State University Press, 2008), a memoir by Betty Roberts, Oregon's first woman Supreme Court Justice. Breaking the rules of 1950s propriety, Roberts did something most of her contemporaries found audacious and inappropriate when she returned to college as a thirty-two-year-old wife and mother.



Hesitating briefly inside, I took a quick survey. This was just like the rooms at Texas Wesleyan—blackboard, teacher's desk, and rows of chairs with an attached desktop that required a little turn and a wiggle to get into. Students were gathering, but there was still a choice of seats. After taking one far enough back to view the room, I took a pencil from my purse and opened my notebook as the slightly built, cheerful-looking professor came in. "Good afternoon, students. Welcome to Eastern Oregon College and Sociology 101," he said.

As he gave information on our

textbook and other preliminaries about the class, I wrote it all in my notebook. Writing was awkward with my gloves on, but I staunchly continued. Other students,

younger than I and dressed more casually, looked at me quizzically. I made a mental note that I'd dress more like the other students the next time I came to class, but for now I could at least remove my gloves. As I did, the

glances drifted away.

Taking the gloves off that first day in a college classroom after fourteen years perfectly symbolized the audacious decision I'd made. It was a casting off of the traditional and conventional, baring my knuckles for hard fights that were sure to come. Given my personal circumstances—four children, two not in school yet—and society's attitudes in the 1950s, the decision to go to college was a big step away from my genteel, white-gloved life. It was seen as frivolous by some of my women friends. It was, as I would learn, unacceptable to my husband. But it made perfect sense to me.