



Betty van der Smissen

Rita Yerkes, Aurora University

I would like to read to you a composite of the sentiment of what Betty van der Smissen meant to people around the country. I will start with my own.

Betty van der Smissen – small v, small d, capital S, her name and its correct spelling was important to her, a reflection of her roots and family values. She was a frugal person. Some of her habits later in life reflected the dust bowl and the depression in which she grew up. When she relocated she moved paper cups and paper plates and used tin foil. More than once she moved a 32 oz plastic McDonald's cup which she used even up to the week she died. She used paper towels and dried them on the sink to be used again. If we sent something over in a zip lock bag, the zip lock bag was returned. She loved her tea, the secret is to get it hot enough, 2 minutes, and she would dip the tea bag 5 times and would use the tea bag 2 times, and sometimes she would proudly get 3 cups out of it. But while she was frugal, she was also generous. I watched her sit and write a pile of checks one Christmas to charities, something she did twice a year, giving away literally thousands of dollars.

She was an avid sports fan. We asked her to go with us somewhere one day but the Jay Hawks were playing. She watched football, basketball, tennis, golf, and sometimes baseball. She got 3 newspapers everyday; The New York Times, USA Today, and the Democrat Gazette, all of which she usually read. But of course, the sports section was read first, always checking how her universities did. She taught at 8 Universities including Penn State, Bowling Green, Iowa, Michigan State, Northern Iowa and finally Arkansas.

She expected everyone to stay abreast of everything. But this was also a problem for her. She was working on a second edition of a law book and she wanted to make sure it had all the cases but every day new cases came out and so she had a problem bringing it to a conclusion. She never expected anything of someone else that she did not do herself.

She loves flowers, chocolate, black licorice, and going out to dinner. She loves nature and pictures and has more pictures than she has wall space. She collects owls and people buy them for her giving her 1,00s in her collection, all quite unique. She loved giving, if you said you liked something, she never forgot it.

Many of the following statements from people who knew her, were experiences and sentiments I have.

Carol Riddick, Galladet University

Dr. Betty van der Smissen literally touched the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of students and colleagues. On the one hand, Betty was not a complicated person. She was religious, loved the out-of-doors, owls, her Universities, watching her favorite colleges play ball on television, a good cup of tea, and cook outs.

Betty also put a premium on deliberate, logical, and informed thought to guide our professional exchanges and endeavors. She worked long hours and expected those working



with her to do the same. If you gave her something to read and comment on, be prepared for it to come back “bleeding” with feedback.

On the other hand, Betty was a private and complex person. What perhaps many people didn't know or appreciate about Betty was her commitment to students. In particular, Betty loved meeting and working with graduate students. As ill as she was these past couple of years, she wanted to remain in the class room. Indeed, she opted to teach this semester, telling me a few months ago she still “had something left to teach.” Walking through her professional library (housed in a climate controlled, three car garage) this past January, she stopped to show me copies of the over 100 theses and dissertations she had chaired. She spent about 20 minutes, standing up in obvious pain, proudly talking about some of the topics of these research endeavors.

Betty was also a compassionate person. My second semester into the doctorate program, my husband and I discovered we didn't have enough money to live on. I cannot remember how Betty found this out, but I do clearly remember her reaching for her clutch wallet and writing me a check. She asked how much I needed to cover expenses and I remember muttering something along the lines of maybe a “\$100 or \$200.” She handed a check payable to me, signed it yet hadn't recorded any dollar amount. When I pointed out this omission, she told me to think about how much I really needed, making sure I “borrowed” enough.

Karla Henderson, North Carolina

I gave my first formal presentation and just about died when I saw Betty sitting in the audience. She was also about to be the incoming president of ACA. She clearly was an important person. Anyway, the presentation went OK, but later that day she tapped me on the shoulder. She shook my hand and said, "I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed your presentation. My name is Betty van der Smissen..." I was so impressed with her humility--of course I knew who Betty van der Smissen was and she didn't have to introduce herself, but she did. I never forgot that gesture and did learn a great lesson about humility.

Jean Hughes

When you were presenting at a conference, you would hope that Betty would choose to attend your session, but then when she did, you were terrified. My proudest moment was when Betty heard my session on extreme sports and requested to present with me at a future conference and expand it.

Gaylene Carpenter

My special recollection of her was from an accreditation site visit she did with us at the University of Georgia about 15 years ago. She was a "formidable" person, and even a little intimidating if the truth be known; but in spite of many flaws in our program at the time, she was thoughtful, generous and encouraging. ...and THOROUGH! I thought sure she would miss her Atlanta plane when she persisted with the review up until just a little more than two hours before she was due to take off. Athens to Atlanta by car is an hour and 45 minutes on a good day and she had a rental car to return. So I asked her if she wanted to



try to make alternative arrangements, but she said, with characteristic confidence and determination, "Oh, I'll make it." And she did.

Edwin Gomez, Old Dominion

Betty challenged you to go beyond your comfort level, and that publication for the sake of publication (e.g., quantity over quality) is a frivolous endeavor (her words), she said, so write when you feel a need to contribute.

Jim Moss a fellow outdoor attorney

Each discussion, each conversation, each time I spent with her was educational and fantastic. Each discussion made me work hard and with a great big grin on my face because I knew she enjoyed the discussions also.

We owe her a big Thank You for her work, her dedication, her devotion to her students, her friends and her discipline.

Dan Ferguson

Betty may no longer be with us but her influence on our profession will be felt for generations to come and her influence will no doubt affect the lives of millions of Americans in a positive way.

No one can deny she loved her profession and gave her all to advance it.

Rita Yerkes from AEE

Betty was an icon, mentor and friend. She changed all of us by her devotion and brilliant intellect. But most of all she was a model of "servant leadership" that made a difference in the lives of others. I feel very blessed to have had the opportunity to learn from her, work with her and laugh with her. She was a beacon on the hill that one could always count on to stand for ethics and caring.

In closing, Betty was brilliant, insightful, caring, and committed. She made significant contributions to the recreation profession over her lifetime. Rest in peace, Dr. van der Smissen, in your beloved Kansas.