



Betty Goettsch

July 18, 1923 - August 14, 2024

Betty Goettsch was born in Texas in 1923. She graduated as a Curtiss-Wright cadet in 1943 and married Alvin Goettsch during the war. After the war she earned a B.S. at Iowa State College and began teaching at Story City, Iowa. Her continuing credit courses as a teacher led to a Masters of Science degree in biology. In 1968 she moved to Cedar Falls, Iowa and taught at Dike High School until she retired. She was active with her church and community theater throughout her life. Betty received multiple honors and awards for her community activities that continued into the last year of her life.

Living to 101, Betty's husband and oldest daughter, Theodora, preceded her in death. She is survived by her son, Stephen, daughter, Wesley, five grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

This accounting lists dates and deeds. It doesn't tell her story.

Betty Ellen Claybourn was born July 18, 1923 in Stephenville, Texas and died August 14, 2024 in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The one hundred and one years of her life spanned the Great Depression, World War II, The Korean War, the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s, the Women's Movement, and the Great Recession. Her life and the stories she shared go back so far they touch on events today's students read about in their history classes.

There is a grounding in humanity in Betty's story. Without such foundations stories ring hollow. When Betty was six or seven, a black man in Sherman, Texas, George Hughes, was accused of raping a white woman. The white townsfolk mobbed the brand new courthouse where the police held him, wanting to lynch Hughes. Betty's father, Wesley Vance Claybourn, took her to the edge of the town square hoping the scene would teach Betty about the ugliness of racism. The next night the mob burned the courthouse to the ground with the prisoner inside. Betty and her younger brother hid behind a retaining wall at the back of their yard, hoping it would protect them when the statue atop the courthouse crashed to the ground.

You can't swim in water without getting wet. Betty was born in racist Texas, her family moved to racist Fort Scott, Kansas when she was a teen. Absorbed racism became something she struggled against all her life. She tried to shield her children from it. She tried to do better. On reflection, I think an experience late in World War II drove that awareness. Without excusing it, the trying to become better is a chapter in her story.

Although her father had a job with the Frisco Railroad during the Great Depression, they suffered as did most families. Luxuries were rare. She was friends with a family wealthy enough to buy new clothes for their daughter as she outgrew them. Mom, with three brothers but no sisters, had no family hand-me-downs, but was given some of her wealthier friend's outgrown dresses. The mother also gave Betty a ticket to the Sherman Symphony. Sitting there in a nice dress, Betty fell in love with classical music.

Her father was not a schooled man. Poverty forced him to leave school to work before the sixth grade. Schooling was not the only way to become educated. His achieved ambition was for all of his children to graduate from college. Vance, as he was usually called, took advantage of their studies by reading every one of their college texts.

Betty was the third child. In high school she made pocket money playing sax in a small band. Her older brothers helped raise her expectations. She thought of becoming a doctor like her brother Norman. That led to taking “boys” science and math classes. Strong women so often have strong fathers who expect nothing less of them than they hope for their sons. Vance simply declared that she should not let anyone tell her what she couldn’t do.

We are at early days of the Second World War. A very close friend, a someone who might have been the one, was in the Air Force in the South Pacific. His plane was burning on the tarmac; he raced to save a crewman and was killed when his plane exploded. His death staggered Betty. That alone may not have been what prevented her from going to medical school. It did suspend her life despite her strong math and science foundation.

The Second World War changed expectations and careers for women, along with wartime romances. Engineers had to design the weapons soldiers depended on in the war. Too many engineering students and young engineers were in the military. Industry needed an influx of young engineers including those not yet licensed who could do all the modeling, scale plans up and down, recheck calculations. They needed strong math and science backgrounds, and the tenacity to cram two and a half years worth of schooling into ten months.

That was the goal of the 1942 emergency war training of college women to function as assistants by the Curtiss-Wright engineering department. Through interviews they selected an elite group of 750 women to be trained at seven universities, including Iowa State College. The women had 36 hours of classroom instruction, 4 hours of study hall, and a full schedule of homework every week. Curtiss-Wright hoped that 10% of the women could complete the

training. The women “cadets” earned \$10 a week and had separate classes and housing from the other college students. What seem unrecognized is that that arrangement created seven cadres of gifted women freed from male classmates prone to diminishing women’s ability in science and engineering. The power of women supporting women.

Despite being busy and largely isolated, they were women on a largely male college campus. When they went to cafeteria for supper, the men would flood the Memorial Union to watch the “flight line.” So, yes, there was some dating. As Betty’s son I’m not supposed to notice this, but when she was a cadet in 1943, Betty was 20 years old. She was a young woman I never saw. But I’ve seen the pictures: she was a cutie, which makes this part of her story surprising. Betty had a roommate that Betty says was really beautiful and all the men chased. A man asked the roommate out on a date, but she wouldn’t go out unless it was a double date. So the man yelled to his fraternity brothers, “Is there anyone free to go out with her roommate?” Alvin Goettsch said he was free. That is how they met: a blind date to a baseball game. Alvin recorded the boxscore on his program and, according to family lore, didn’t say a word. After walking her back the Memorial Union where the women were housed, he said, “I really can talk.” Betty thought, “He’s a keeper.”

Alvin was in Officer Candidate School, graduated and entered service. Betty was still in the Curtiss-Wright program where unexpected things happened. Initially, the instructors thought the women’s program would be wasted effort. The women’s dedication made the program one of the instructors’ favorite ventures. At Iowa State College 96 of the 100 women completed the program. Across the campuses 90% completed the program. Curtiss-Wright had never promised the women jobs. With their initial estimate there would have been jobs for the 75 they expected to graduate. With so many graduates, they looked for any outside ties to dismiss women. Getting married was one justification.

Alvin called Betty and said, “I have leave. We could get married?” And they did. Betty became a wartime bride, then mother traveling across the country to Alvin’s different posts. Assigned to the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma he learned to fly small planes to serve as a forward observer. He received overseas orders multiple times as a forward artillery observer, each time he was recalled to flight train the next group of officers. Fort Sill, Oklahoma was also a mental health facility to treat combat fatigue.

A returning officer receiving help lived above them. When his wife was away, they invited him to supper. Life or Look magazine had just published the first photos from the Holocaust. Betty could not believe the images were real. The officer went upstairs to his apartment and returned with the pictures from two rolls of film he had shot at one of the camps. The military had given cameras to the soldiers to record the atrocity. After seeing photos, Betty excused herself, went to the bathroom and threw up. Knowledge does not solve everything. But I think this experience is part of why Betty knew she had to do better, to act against prejudice.

When the war ended, Betty – and many of the women who had assumed careers, jobs, and responsibilities previously denied women – could not be persuaded by Dr. Benjamin Spock that their lives would be fulfilled by being a “housewife”. She returned to college to complete her degree, made simpler by Alvin working at Iowa State. Once again engineering had become a “that’s not a program for women”, so Betty turned toward teaching. At least two factors influenced her choice. She loved science. And she valued women supporting women. Betty did not want to teach in a large school where she would teach five sections of the same class term after term for year after year. She did not want to teach where she had each student for one semester of their high school experience.

She saw herself teaching at a typical small school where a single person was the science department. She understood that traditional degrees, one major and one minor, were inadequate for the career she envisioned. I haven't been able to prove this bit of family lore, but the story is that Betty persuaded or badgered the Dean of the College of Arts and Science into creating a new undergraduate degree: Distributive Studies. It shifted the course hours to create three extra hours minors. For Betty, biology, physics, and chemistry provided the breadth of fields to be the science department for Story City then Dike high schools.

That is where threads of her life weave meaning. She had her students across several years and several classes. It provided an opportunity for something of the connection shared by the Curtiss-Wright cadets.

That broad connection with students is also where making Four Pound Fudge in class the day before Christmas Break became, to satisfy the superintendent, a chemistry teaching plan study of crystallization. She loved all her success encouraging small town students to go to college. The cards, letters, and conversations that have been the most meaningful for Betty are those from women students who told her that because of her they became teachers, because of her they believed they could do science.

Betty inherited more than a desire for knowledge from her father. Vance organized the local blood drive, always surpassing his quota with stories of how the blood was used. Betty was a life long donor. Vance was a union representative for the railroad. Betty was the sometimes adversarial teachers' union representative at Story City and Dike. However much displeasure that caused during negotiations, Betty compensated by attending students' activities, being student groups' faculty advisor, albeit sometimes at a cost to her own family but with the career dedication she believed was expected of

men. Her summer teaching included university sponsored camping hikes in the Rockies and study sections with unique geology and biology.

The constants in Betty's work with the Children's Theater, Waterloo Community Playhouse, clerking at World's Window, and quilting and sewing at the First United Methodist Church were her passion to make the lives of the people at her school, church, and community better. And, reflecting pivotal experiences as a young woman, Betty was a dedicated advocate for her students, always trying to offer young women's opportunities and the types of success that her father had supported for her.

From Anita Ross (Executive Director, Waterloo Community Playhouse):
"Betty was a beloved volunteer, mentor, and friend to our theatre community. Beginning her relationship with Waterloo Community Playhouse in the early 1970s, Betty held just about every position available to volunteers. She was onstage, backstage, running light boards and sound boards when they still ran on dimmers and sliders. She was best known for her Stage Management abilities. Betty owned the position of Stage Manager for the Summer musicals and Holiday productions for many years. Her years of teaching showed brilliantly in her ability to deftly deal with many actors and technicians and directors.

She told me once that she always tried to guess which way casting would go - but she was wise enough to not question the final decisions. I appreciated that she also shared her love for Bridge, her love of working on trail building through the years, and her appreciation of a tasty treat with divinity and chocolate ranking particularly high.

Betty's legacy reigns strong within the stories WCP still shares. Her love of sharing those stories will remain in our fondest memories."

Betty's accomplishments from Jane Ingraham:

"WCP (Waterloo Community Playhouse): Her very first show was MARK in May of 1973. She was onstage. She also appeared onstage in the following productions: HOTEL PARADISO, IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY, LOST IN YONKERS, and TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD. Her first love in theatre was Stage Manager, and she managed many, many shows over the years. The summer musicals were her favorites, with big casts and long runs. She also worked Props, Costumes, Light Board Operator, and Sound Operator.

Waterloo Rec Center: In the late 1970s and early 80s, the Rec Center converted a portion of the basement into different educational historical exhibits. One I remember is Egypt, including a sarcophagus. There is no one still around with the knowledge of this program, so I don't know the other exhibits. Anyway, Betty was a docent for this, guiding school tours and giving the history behind the exhibits.

Hartman Reserve: Betty gave guided tours around Hartman Reserve to school kids, pointing out the flora and fauna and essentially gave an earth science lesson.

World's Window: Betty volunteered at World's Window (a Fair Trade store specializing in hand-crafted items from over 30 countries), starting in 1986, stocking shelves and selling merchandise. Betty was one of the few volunteers who came back after COVID and worked until her recent retirement from WW.

First United Methodist Church: Betty and her late husband Al became members of FUMC shortly after moving to Waterloo. Betty was active in United Methodist Women, Quilters & Stitchers, and sang in the choir. For

many years, you could find her greeting worshippers on Sunday mornings. She also participated in the Reading Buddy Program at Lincoln School, in partnership with FUMC.

19th Century Club: Betty was a member of this organization since 1998. She often presented programs during their monthly meetings.

Travels: Alaska, including a science trip to the Brooks Range; Africa, including a photography safari; a Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of St. Paul in Greece and Turkey; and a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

And let us not forget she took high school students from Black Hawk County to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado for several years to learn earth science, geology, and survival techniques while hiking the mountains.

Awards: Of all the awards Betty received for her service as an educator or volunteer, one of her most treasured awards was being recognized by the Waterloo Courier in 2012 as one of Eight over 80, celebrating individuals who have accomplished much in their 80+ years."

Funeral services will be 10:30 a.m. Saturday, August 24, 2024, at First United Methodist Church in Cedar Falls. Visitation will be 4:00-7:00 p.m. Friday, August 23rd at Richardson Funeral Service in Cedar Falls. Interment at Greenwood Cemetery in Cedar Falls.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be directed to The Waterloo Playhouse, the Hartman Reserve, and the 19th Century Club scholarship for women.

Cemetery Details

Greenwood Cemetery

the end of College St, north of First Street
Cedar Falls, IA 50613
(319) 273-8628

Previous Events

Visitation

AUG 23. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Richardson Funeral Service
615 Main Street
Cedar Falls, IA 50613
(319) 266-3525
richardsonfuneralservice@gmail.com
<http://richardson.funeralplan2.com>

Funeral Service

AUG 24. 10:30 AM (CT)

First United Methodist Church
718 Clay Street
Cedar Falls, IA 50613
<http://aboutfirst.com>

Tribute Wall

MB

“ I remember Mrs. Goettsch! She was my favorite teacher of the Sciences at Story City Public High School in the 60's. She went above and beyond in so many ways! Thank you for sharing her story with the wonderful obituary. I learned a lot and am now inspired to continue to raise awareness of Women Holding Up Half of the Sky! Thank You, Mrs. Goettsch!

Mary Jo Baldus - August 29, 2024 at 04:42 PM

NK

“ Being a member of First United Methodist Church I met Betty through her husband who invited me to be on his usher team. Over the years I got to know Betty and all the involvement in her life. I was always in awe of her. Betty a testimony of her walk through all what life is about and her faith reached out in so many ways to so many.
Betty was a true "icon"
Nancy Klodt

Nancy A Klodt - August 24, 2024 at 08:10 AM

DG

“ Dirk, Erik and Gwen purchased the Basket of Memories for the family of Betty Goettsch.



Dirk, Erik and Gwen - August 22, 2024 at 04:13 PM

DG

“ Dirk, Erik and Gwen planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Betty Goettsch.

Dirk, Erik and Gwen - August 22, 2024 at 04:13 PM

VY

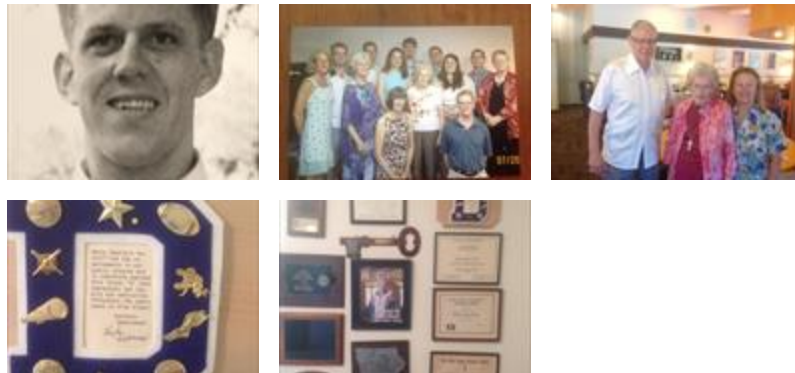
“ Betty was one of the wonderful senior volunteers at the World's Window. I did not know her full story until now. But she was one of those people whom I hoped to emulate in MY senior years. (I'm 84). Thank you, dear one.

Vonna Yoder, former Mgr. at World's Window

Vonna Yoder - August 21, 2024 at 11:33 PM

CC

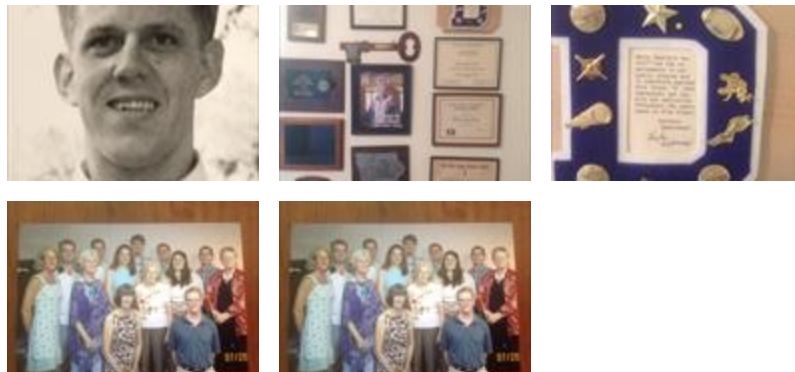
“ 5 files added to the album Memories Album



charles claybourn - August 21, 2024 at 04:19 PM

CC

“ 10 files added to the album photos



charles claybourn - August 21, 2024 at 03:58 PM

T1

“ The Class of 1986 purchased the Sweet Sincerity for the family of Betty Goettsch.



The Class of 1986 - August 21, 2024 at 01:05 PM

T1

“ The Class of 1986 planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Betty Goettsch.

The Class of 1986 - August 21, 2024 at 01:05 PM

CM

“ Christina M. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Betty Goettsch.

Christina M. - August 21, 2024 at 12:48 PM

MJ

“ I was a manager of the World's Window for a number of years. So many stories of remarkable Betty. She really disliked staying at home so if there was a need for a volunteer she was more than happy to fill in if she wasn't busy elsewhere. Nothing stopped her! Snow and ice? no problem, there is always a young man around who can help her get up from a fall on the icy parking lot! This happened more than once.

She liked to tell me the story of how she started at the store. My mother in law was in charge of scheduling and getting new volunteers. Once Betty retired from teaching, after the exercise class my mother in law taught, she asked Betty, "Now, what's your excuse for not volunteering?" That was it, Betty signed up and was a volunteer for many years.

Thank you, Betty! You have given a lot to so many. May you find blessing galore where you are now!

Margaret A Jessen - August 21, 2024 at 02:12 AM

AK

“ Such an amazing woman!!! I loved hearing about her adventures. I felt so very blessed to attend her 100th birthday last summer. It was a gift to be there. Keeping all who love Betty in prayer.

Adel Maria Kessler - August 20, 2024 at 05:52 PM

MB

“ After reading her obituary, I am in awe of Betty. Since volunteers at World's Window usually work alone, I was aware of who Betty was, but had no idea she had been such a pioneer for equal rights and education for women. Wow. Just Wow!! Thank you for sharing. (I wonder where those Holocaust photos are now)

Moria Brown - August 20, 2024 at 04:57 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Richardson Funeral Service - August 20, 2024 at 03:28 PM



“ Joe and Yvonne Juidici purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Betty Goettsch.



Joe and Yvonne Juidici - August 20, 2024 at 09:28 AM



“ Joe and Yvonne Juidici planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Betty E. Goettsch.

Joe and Yvonne Juidici - August 20, 2024 at 09:28 AM