

In Memoriam – Betty Havens

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When Betty Havens died on the morning on March 1, word spread quickly that our dear friend, colleague, mentor, and consistent supporter was gone. Many people are going to miss her hearty laugh, quick one-liners, and little winks. We marvel at the privilege we were afforded by having her as a part of our lives.

Betty had a multi-faceted life, and yet relatively few of us got to really see and appreciate all that there was to her. We hope that by collaborating on this memoriam, and sharing our individual memories and knowledge of Betty and her work, we can provide others a better appreciation for a loving and industrious woman who has for over 30 years shaped Canadian gerontology, gerontological research, and seniors' services in remarkable ways.

Reflections from Neena Chappell

I first met Betty in 1974, shortly after I moved to Winnipeg, when I went to see her about her large data set on Manitoba seniors. We started publishing those data, became colleagues, and quickly developed a friendship that remained until her death. She was a constant and a major influence in my life. We all know her commitment to – and unstinting readiness to fight for – seniors and gerontology. Her interest in gerontology was unquestionable even at the end, reading the *Gerontologist* from her bed in palliative care.

I would like to talk about her more personal side. Although not demonstrative, she supported, without reservation, those she believed in. I have vivid memories from early in my career of her so warmly taking me by the hand at GSA, ISA, and other meetings to introduce me to Bernice Neugarten, Matilda White Riley, and many other grandpersons of gerontology: “We’ve finally got a great one in Manitoba,” she’d say. She was beaming with pride; her warmth was palpable. Her strong practical interests and my receptivity to applied research were a perfect match, even though the academy was not yet ready to embrace such multidisciplinary “real world” research. She considered the university a most undesirable work place; government was the base from which she wanted to work. My commitment to the university as my abode meant we could work together for the things we both believed in, but from different platforms, adding strength to the cause. And we often discussed our struggles in terms of causes. I’d say to her, “we make a great team”; she’d chuckle a “Yes,” or, “You’ve got that right.” Occasionally we would disagree, and if I did so in public, I would be faced with her chair moved so that her back was to me for the remainder of the meeting, after which she would try her utmost to convince me of the error of my thinking. Never, though, did she reprimand or lecture – except once – when I told her I was leaving Manitoba. That passed after I moved, and we quickly resumed our friendship, calling each other to discuss issues and people and strategies. I felt unwavering acceptance and support from Betty for who I was, and what I was trying to accomplish. She, along with Bruce McFarlane, were constant supports in my life, beginning with my early career. Each knew what the other meant to me, and Betty was there for me when Bruce passed away a few months ago.

Betty was much more than work and gerontology. She understood and supported the need for “a life” in

addition to work, despite the long hours she devoted to many diverse aspects of gerontology. She enjoyed her friends, nature, photography, turkey stuffing, Skinner's hot dogs, and she not only listened but delighted in many stories of my children, my dogs, my adventures with people accompanied by sometimes very emotional descriptions, and, of late, my painting. Even at the end, she was asking how I was, if I was all right, under protest that this was about her, not me. Finally I said, "Of course I'm all right, I've had you and Bruce for so much of my life, how could I not be?" She smiled her approving smile.

Reflections from Marcia Finlayson

When I first met Betty Havens 20 years ago, I never could have anticipated the impact she was going to have on my life and career. She was a guest speaker in one of my occupational therapy classes, although I no longer remember which one. I do remember her being both intimidating and immensely interesting. It felt as though she filled the room – Betty was a woman with presence. As she talked about seniors' services in Manitoba and her role as the provincial gerontologist, she informed us that she minored in occupational therapy as an undergraduate, and thought we had made a wise career choice. She treated us as future colleagues.

Despite my commitment to myself upon graduation that I would never work with older adults, life has a strange way of unfolding. I soon found myself registered in the Advanced Certificate in Gerontology Program at the University of Manitoba, with Betty as my project advisor. Many years later, after she had guided me through my thesis and dissertation and sent me out into the academic world, we were reminiscing about that very first project. We laughed together about the irrelevance of the question, and my inability at the time to see that reality. I feel fortunate now that despite my early naïveté, Betty saw something in me that was worth mentoring – and she was a great mentor.

I try my best now to emulate her when I work with my own students – introducing them to others in the field, giving them opportunities to present their work, and making sure that I respond quickly to their queries. I don't think Betty ever had any of my work, even the final versions of my dissertation, for more than a couple of days – even when she was traveling extensively. And she *really did* read it all, right to the last period of the last reference. She never missed a detail, and never left a meeting or returned a draft without providing a positive comment. Because of Betty, I don't think I will ever again confuse the use of *which* versus *that*, or dare to use *additionally* instead

of *in addition*. Betty is my inspiration for how to work with students, build their confidence, and gently guide them to success.

I'm not exactly sure when our relationship crossed over to include a close friendship, but I'm glad it did. It allowed us to share our love of perogies, historical fiction, beautiful gardens, fine arts and crafts, and the Whiteshell Provincial Park. Betty spent her initial years in Canada as a Girl Guide leader at Caddy Lake Camp, and she continued to have a special place in her heart for that area of Manitoba throughout her life. A couple of years ago, my husband and I bought a cottage on another lake, close to Caddy, and last summer we were able to have Betty join us for a weekend. Even though she was not particularly well, she was determined to come. I think she knew that it would be her last opportunity to visit the area. It was a perfect weekend, and Betty positively glowed for the whole time – snooping around the yard identifying wildflowers, and naming the birds flitting around the trees. We spent one morning sitting on the porch watching a box turtle lay her eggs near the shore. It saddens both my husband and me that we will not have the opportunity to share a weekend at the cottage with Betty again, but I am so grateful that we had that time together.

As I write this, it has been one week since Betty passed away. Twice already I have been doing something and thought, "I'll have to call Betty." This is one reflex that is going to take a long time to go away, if it ever does.

Reflections from Lynn McDonald

I first met Betty in the fall of 1971 in Dr. Jack MacDonnell's office at Deer Lodge Hospital in Winnipeg. It is a meeting I will never forget. I opened Dr. MacDonnell's door, hit Betty's chair by mistake, dropped my files, stammered I was sorry, and made a beeline for the exit. Betty picked up my files, came after me, introduced herself, and invited me back to join the conversation about gerontology. We carried on our conversation from that day forward in places like taxis, airports, parking lots, airplanes, hotel rooms – and as neighbours. I can honestly say that to this day I am still in awe of her astonishing intelligence and incomparable memory, her vast knowledge of aging, and the constant kindness she extended to me as a colleague.

Betty took me under her gerontological wing, and decided that I had to have a doctorate. As far as she was concerned, there were not enough social workers doing research in aging, and that had to be set right. She somehow talked me into a program, held my

hand through the hurdles, and convinced me that I could really do a regression analysis. When I faltered, she was always there, offering her support and common sense. When I graduated, she had a great laugh and said, “I told you so.”

She has selflessly mentored me all of my professional life, often in the strangest of places and at the oddest of times. In an airport lounge in New York, she critiqued a chapter for a book, in a hotel in Budapest she introduced me to retirement researchers, in Boston she insisted I share a cab with her to the airport (even though I wasn't leaving) so I could meet an important gerontologist. When my wallet went astray in Mexico, my hotel bill was paid by Betty, no questions asked.

Betty was a friend from the beginning, probably because we lived a block apart. There were countless times that I would wander down the street and spend an evening in her beautiful house that she designed herself. There was no end of wonderful things in this home, from the artwork, to the music, a library brimming with books, her endearing collection of raccoons, and her bonsai gardens. Betty was a complex and fascinating woman with an encyclopedic knowledge of most subjects that she generously shared with those around her. I was always welcome in her home, along with my husband, my dog, or my friends, the coffee was always on, and the conversations were part of my education, not just for gerontology, but for life.

I know Betty has touched many lives as she has mine, and I know I am very privileged to have been part of her milieu. She will always be in my heart and my mind. I have a gold standard for what a gerontologist should be, and Betty will always be mine.

Reflections on Betty's Achievements

A memoriam to Betty would be incomplete without recognition of her incredible contributions to gerontology in Canada, and around the world. The research problems that Betty tackled throughout her career were always grounded in the everyday lives of the people she studied. She maintained this consistent focus, and it is because of her vision that she leaves a great legacy. In 1971, she initiated what later became known as the Aging in Manitoba Longitudinal Study. It is the longest-running and most comprehensive study of aging in Canada and is recognized internationally as the only population-based study of aging that incorporates both interview and individually linked health services utilization data. For the past 30 years, Betty's work on AIM has guided the development and evaluation of seniors' health and social policy in Manitoba, and

has influenced thinking about aging and seniors' services the world over. Because of Betty's ability to mentor others and build strong collaborative networks, work on AIM will continue, although it will not be the same without her.

Betty's expertise in aging, gerontology, health services research, and health policy made her the obvious choice for many consulting roles. Over the years, she was a consultant to Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Health Information, and the World Health Organization. She has also served as a senior advisor to Health Canada and to Veterans Affairs Canada on a range of issues relevant to applied aging-related research including but not restricted to quality of life, health, disability, home care, facility care, housing, gender differences, and age-related differences. During her career with the Manitoba provincial government, Betty was instrumental in the establishment of the Manitoba Home Care, Pharmacare, and Support Services to Seniors Programs, and in extending provincially insured services to include personal care homes.

Betty was a founding member of the Canadian Association on Gerontology, nurturing the association along in its first office in Winnipeg until its move to Ottawa. She had a hand in the development of the *Canadian Journal on Aging* and the *Newsletter of the Canadian Association on Gerontology*. She served in many capacities on the Board of the association and was our president from 1979 until 1983.

Over the years, Betty was the recipient of many honours and awards from provincial, national, and international groups. A few examples of her achievements include the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation Award, the Manitoba Science and Technology Certificate of Achievement, the Commemorative Medal for the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II (awarded by the Canadian Association on Gerontology), and the YWCA Professional Woman of the Year Award. Most recently, Betty was awarded the Order of Canada on February 18, 2005. She was immensely honoured to receive this recognition, questioning whether she really deserved it. Those who knew her and her work have no doubt.

Betty was known and loved by many, and will be remembered for her deep and personal commitment to the lives of older adults around the world. She consistently gave her time, knowledge, and support to students, colleagues, friends, community groups, and policy makers. She was a true scholar. Although the gerontology community has lost a great one, her many contributions will remain with us for years and years to come.