

Making a Difference

Remarks by Carol W. Beaver at the District 3 Conference, October 1, 2010

Tonight I'm going to talk about how Zontians make a difference to each other, using me as an example. As you know, we Zontians talk a lot about our local service projects and our international projects, especially when we are trying to interest someone in joining our Zonta club. But we seldom talk about how Zontians reach out to each other during difficult and challenging times and how we celebrate together when one of us is successful. Oh, we might mention networking benefits when you belong to a Zonta club, but then provide few or no examples of how it works. So I want to spend a few minutes telling you how strongly I feel that without the help of my Zonta friends my career achievements would not have happened. And I truly believe this.

I had been in the Zonta Club of Washington for about six years and was just completing two years as president. During this time, I had already made some wonderful Zonta friends whose help in the next few years led to my success. About this time an opportunity was made available at the Army Map Service (where I worked) for a few selected employees to attend a university of their choice for one year. On a lark I applied, and much to my utter amazement, I was selected. And then I got very cold feet. What if I flunked out; maybe I would have forgotten how to study – after all, it had been twenty years since I got my B.A. – and on and on. I'm a worrywart about some things and worst of all was the knowledge that the U.S. taxpayer would be paying for this. One just couldn't fail.

One night during this period of doubting myself, I went to a Zonta inter-city event with three Washington Zontians: Eddie Kay Vest, a former governor of District 3; Winkie Owens, secretary when I was governor and later an Area 4 director; and Lenora Hunter, owner of Logan Ford Motor Company and for our club the hostess with the mostest. During our conversation while riding in the car, I mentioned my opportunity to attend George Washington University for a year of advanced courses towards a master's degree and about my cold feet. Those three Zonta friends assured me that I could do this and that I must not give up this opportunity and that they would help me in any way that they could, including entertaining Larry, my husband, when I had to study.

And so I started at GWU in the Fall. It was hard, but after two or three weeks I remembered how to study and really began to retain what I read.

My favorite class that first semester was Public Administration 101. The professor assigned each of us to write a paper that would cover how the three branches of the federal government and a public special interest group could work together to accomplish a goal. I thought of the Indian Claims Commission and Peg Pierce, a member of our club and a Commissioner on that Commission. In our conversations she had told me a lot about the Commission and how it was created. I asked Peg if the Commission's establishment would be a good example for my paper. She was sure it would be and, furthermore, she could loan me a book from the Commission library that would provide me with most of the history. I got an A in the class and the professor told me I earned it because of my outstanding paper. Peg Pierce read it and put a copy in the Commission library. She said it was in plain English rather than legalese.

Everything was going well; I got a promotion to a staff position at the Army Map Service, which was to be held open for me until I finished school. By the end of the first summer session I had completed thirty hours and had a 3.5 grade point average out of a possible 4.0. I needed only six more credit hours of class work to get my M.A. So I decided to take two three-hour classes in the second summer session.

Big, big mistake! There wasn't too much available in the session, so I discussed it with my faculty advisor and he agreed with me that a class on microeconomic theory and one on macroeconomic theory would be a good idea.

By the end of the first week of those classes, I knew it wasn't a good idea. My math background was just too weak. And when the instructor told us we could use a slide rule during the midterm, my heart sank. I hardly knew what a slide rule was.

So who came to my rescue? A Washington Zontian, Dr. Ruth Osborn, Dean of Continuing Education for Women at GWU. On a Sunday at the end of the second week of classes, we Washington Zontians were having a brunch on the Dandy cruise ship. Ruth came up to me and said, "Carol, what's wrong? You look so sad." So I told her my problem. She said, "There has to be a good solution. Call me this afternoon and I will have a plan."

And Ruth did have a plan. First, I was to call my Personnel Office and tell them what was happening. She thought they would be sympathetic because of my good record so far and would tell me to drop the two classes and come back to work. She was right. The second part of the plan was for me to talk with my advisor and tell him I would probably flunk both classes because of my poor math background and that she (Ruth) thought that with his intervention, even though it was too late to officially drop a class, the economics instructor might be willing to let me do so.

Ruth's plan was a success. Two days later I was back at work in my new staff position. I took a class at night for two semesters and received my M.A. in May 1974 with a 3.75 grade point average. This just never would have happened without the help of my Zonta friends.

My staff job at the Army Map Service was very satisfying and I expected to stay in it until I retired. However, in late 1977 I got a phone call telling me that the Director of Aeronautical Charting and Cartography in NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – what a mouthful!) in the Department of Commerce was trying to fill a branch chief position. He was looking for a woman cartographer with broad experience and a master's degree. The caller wanted to know if I was interested. I was.

The phone call telling me that I had been selected for the position arrived at 7:00 a.m. in Denver, Colorado. It was the same day that I officially became governor of District 3 in July 1978. My Zonta friends helped me celebrate. What a night!

Three years later I got another promotion to be Chief of Staff for Aeronautical Charting. Then I thought, "Now, this is really my final position."

But no, a few years later the current director was moved to a newly created position and so the director's position was now vacant. What to do? I was planning to retire in a year. I thought long and hard and Larry said it was up to me. A day or so later, I got a phone call from a former Washington Zontian, Barbara Bond, who had worked in Washington for three years and then returned home to England to be the Deputy Director of the British Hydrographic Office. I told Barbara about my dilemma about the director's position. She said to me, "Carol, you have to apply; otherwise, you will never know if you would have been selected or not or if you really could do the job." I knew she was right. And the next day I applied for the position.

I was selected.

It was for the most part a wonderful, rewarding position. I got to do a lot of traveling to places like Beijing, China, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and even Anchorage, Alaska. Fortunately for me, with just a few exceptions, the Aeronautical Charting employees were outstanding. They had a mission and they were dedicated to it. The American public could not fly without what they did and still do. I did, however, have one real problem employee and he was vice-president of one of our two unions. Fortunately, he was caught doing something quite harmful for the agency and we were able to get rid of him. Before this happened, however, Mary Ellen and Wing Bittner listened to me rant and rave about this guy. Now and then they offered me some very good advice based on their experiences with the Labor Relations Board. Again, help from a Zontian.

I know I succeeded in this, my final position in the federal government. During my time in that position, about three years, I received two outstanding awards with substantial cash bonuses. And even better, I still get invitations to holiday luncheons and retirement parties and phone calls asking for advice. Not so many of those now. After all, it's been almost fifteen years since I retired.

Because I really believe that encouragement and actions by Zontians had a great deal to do with what I think was a successful career, I have tried to reciprocate by working to accomplish Zonta's mission and by trying to help Zontians if I could. Zonta has been my primary activity for many years and it will continue to be so.

Let me close by saying that building true and lasting Zonta friendships requires time. Time to talk and listen to each other. Time to work with Zonta friends to meet Zonta goals. And time to have fun together. One on one conversations, in person and by phone, are essential to building these lasting friendships.

I wish for all of you many, many long-lasting Zonta friendships.

Thank you.

Carol W. Beaver is a past president of the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C., and also a past governor of Zonta International District 3. She has been a member of Zonta for over 50 years. She resides in Washington, D.C. with her husband Larry and companion Princess.