

1999 International Conference on Volunteer Administration

Harriet Naylor Acceptance Speech

Betty Stallings

Being selected to receive this award from peers in AVA is an incredible honor, but having it presented to me by my professional and life mentor and dear friend of many years evokes emotions that simply defy words. Although I never personally met Hat Naylor, I have marveled at the stories Marlene has told me of Hat's remarkable pioneering impact on our profession.

I am not certain that Marlene knows how I first met her. It occurred nearly 25 years ago when I was establishing a volunteer center in the San Francisco, California area.

One day someone phoned me and said, "Betty, there is a woman by the name of Marlene Wilson who is coming to speak in the Bay Area. You absolutely must hear her." I discovered that the workshop fee was a whopping \$7 a person. I had missed the \$5 cutoff date. Having no money in our budget for such extravagances, I immediately called the sponsor of the event and asked if I and 6 other volunteers could receive working scholarships to attend. I promised we would set up for the workshop, handle the registration and serve on the clean up committee.

Little did I know that what I would hear from Marlene that day, while I was giving out her handouts, would stimulate the course of my work for the ensuing 25 years. And believe me, if anyone had told me then that Marlene would be presenting me this award today, I would surely have questioned what they were smoking. And so, it is with overwhelming gratitude and a new appreciation of the song, the *Circle of Life*, that I receive this award.

My mind is flooded with the hundreds of people who have supported, nourished, challenged and humored me in my professional journey — many in this room. I wish I had the time to thank each of you personally this morning.

I do, however, want to pay special tribute to my very dear family who has flown here from California. Those of you who have been in my seminars have, no doubt, heard me tell stories about them. They are here to deny all of them!

First, Charles, my wonderful husband of over 34 years (nearly a record in California), and my two talented and beautiful daughters — Debbie and Sharon.

Their love, support and tolerance of me in my often hectic, passionate career has

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Formerly, Betty was the Founder and 13 year Executive Director of the Valley Volunteer Center in Pleasanton, California, where she initiated numerous programs which served as national models of volunteer utilization. While directing the Center Betty obtained hundreds of grants, produced varied fundraising initiatives and events bringing millions of dollars to the organization. Currently Betty is an instructor in nonprofit and extension programs. Her rich background in human services and volunteer management, her broad based experience as a volunteer and fund raiser, and her vitality and inspiration have made her a popular trainer for state, national and international conferences, nonprofit organizations, corporations and public sector programs.

been a wonderful gift.

There is an additional person to whom I wish to pay tribute, my dad, Brooke Bright. I know how proud he would have been had he lived to be here today.

Throughout my lifetime, he was always in the first row of my balcony cheering me on and, along with my mom, were incredible role models for volunteering.

I have two cherished mementoes to remind me of my dad's dedication to volunteering; the plaque presented to him at the White House by President Reagan, honoring my dad for his lifetime of volunteer service, and a simple cup given to him at age 85 by the volunteer coordinator at his final home, a residential care facility in Columbia, Maryland.

My dad carried this cup across country for me to see on his last trip to California. It had inscribed on it; "You are a Treasure." He had been the treasurer of the recycling club at his residential facility. (My dad as a treasurer at any time in his life is a scary thought.) But, this was a very smart volunteer manager. She knew he could no longer hold the chair position he often held in the past and also that there was no money passing through this organization. Serving on this committee gave him an opportunity to continue learning while volunteering to advocate for recycling among fellow residents.

I often think of the cup, which to me symbolizes the incredible ripple effect of our profession and positive power we, in this room, share in our broken world.

In my few remaining minutes I would like to share what is on my heart and mind about the future of our profession. In the many years I have been involved in volunteerism, I have been thrilled to experience its increasing breadth, moving from activities once described only on the society pages of newspapers to becoming community engagement in the broadest sense. Volunteering is now an *in* thing to do. But, conversely, our profession, which has had such an impact on this movement, continues to be — virtually invisible.

Increasingly I see the root of our profession's ongoing frustrations and challenges to be caused or aggravated by our often reactive rather than proactive stance on issues that directly impact us.

I was facilitating a state hospital conference a few years ago and one participant shared that her volunteer department was spending a great deal of time in "pity city" when things went wrong or they weren't ask for their advice or were misunderstood as a professional.

Collectively they were spending numerous hours expressing — to themselves — just how terrible things were! The participant went on to say that one day in a retreat setting they realized how much of their time was invested in pity city and vowed to only go there 5 minutes when times were challenging. Instead, they began to proactively use their energy and time to solve the questions,

"Why weren't we asked?"

"How can we get better understood by our Executive Director and staff, funders and others?"

With this altered proactive mindset and time usage, response to them dramatically improved.

Two years ago, AVA was challenged by Jane Justis to seek answers as to why only a few funders supported the infrastructure of volunteer services. This challenge led AVA to begin taking a proactive look at the barriers which keep not only funders but the media, other civic engagement organizations and our own internal staff from understanding what we do and why it is so essential to the health and well being of our organizations and communities. For too many years we have been nice people producing miracles, mostly behind the scenes. Is it any wonder few folks know or understand us?

I believe, however, that we are moving from the "pity city" phase to facing issues forthright and I want to encourage many of you to join in the dialog at this afternoon's Advanced Institute. The focus will be on creating and articulating effective case statements that explain the purpose

and impact of our profession.

I am excited about this proactive movement but I caution that it must not remain an intellectual exercise alone but rather we must embrace this process and begin to proactively articulate these messages to all who must understand and rely on our unique and critical professional skills.

I believe it is at the very heart of creating a future for our profession. It is somewhat of a re-positioning or branding effort — an exercise that is occurring in all organizations and professions with intentions of being relevant players in the new millennium.

One of my favorite overheads shows a little baseball character with his foot on first base but with obvious thoughts of trying to move to second base. The quote beneath it, by Frederick Wilcox, says, "Progress always involves risk; you can't steal second base and keep your foot on first."

Like any change effort, this will be difficult even though nearly all of us agree we need to move forward. But, there is a strange comfort in staying in a place we know and there is always the risk that we might be tagged out on our way to second and, it is nearly impossible to return to first base once you have made your full commitment to move ahead.

But I think we face a far greater risk if we do not take this opportunity to break out of old boxes and stereotypes — step off first base, and move to a better future.

Our profession has incredibly powerful potential. We have an evolving skill set that needs far more understanding and recognition.

I pledge to you my continued efforts to reach the day when I don't spend my time explaining what we do but rather respond to requests from conferences of executive directors, funders, and the media who are saying, "Help us learn to readily utilize the expertise of your profession."

I hope we are together in this effort.

Thank you, once again, for this great honor.

Enjoy a wonderful conference!