

VOLUNTEER OMBUDSMEN

Graduation and Recognition Luncheon

Today I have been asked to impart a few words of inspiration and at the same time I want to express my gratitude for your unselfish actions. Additionally, gratitude is extended to the Inland Northwest Community Foundation for their generous support in helping us develop this program and believing in the idea that people such as you live in our community with a desire to make a difference in the lives of very vulnerable senior citizens.

Keeping in mind that this is not a common day--for the efforts of each and every one of you here today are extraordinary (I know this having once been the only backup for Jan Young just three short years ago.) With this perspective you can see why I wanted to take the time to prepare a special message to you all. I looked to a few good leaders from our history for my own inspiration, as I have reached a point in my life when history has more relevance than ever before.

Remember the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt--"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself"? Perhaps you remember that these words about fear were spoken at Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933 in the midst of the great depression. I took particular interest in reading this speech as I am currently reading a book on the depression. Roosevelt berated "money changers" for having no vision and when there is no vision, he said, the people perish. Roosevelt rallied for a restoration of values including honesty, honor, sacredness of obligations, and unselfish performance. These words reminded me that each of you has a vision, converting your effort into unselfish performance. I must say that those words bring an immediate image of a very fine lady named Jan Noyes, who has given an astounding performance coming up very soon on two years .

Your vision may well be similar to that expressed by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1931 at the occasion of his 90th birthday. Everyone about him was celebrating and after the pinnacle of the affair Justice Holmes unexpectedly approached the microphone commenting: "In this symposium my part is only to sit in silence. To express one's feelings as the end draws nigh is too intimate a task. But I may mention one thought that comes to me as a listener-in. The riders in a race do not stop short when they reach the goal. There is a little finishing canter before coming to a standstill. There is time to hear the kind voices of friends..."

Each of you are the kind voice of a friend who will be heard by a 90 year old who seeks to convert a day of boredom and restlessness into a sense of good leisure. This was one of the measures of quality expressed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 when he detailed his quest for the "Great Society", that is, a society that includes knowledge, beauty, community and justice for all. Johnson explained the goal as a "challenge...beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor." I believe that each of you will find the product of your labor as an ombudsman bringing marvelous meaning to your lives. I know that some of you have already as there would be no reason for you to fill out all that darned paperwork unless you found meaning at the other end of it.

There was opportunity to ponder why this labor brings meaning to you in the reading of a 1954 speech by Rachel Carson, environmentalist and author of Silent Spring. She expressed her belief that mankind has sought to “insulate himself, with steel and concrete, from the realities of earth and water.” Additionally, it was her belief that natural beauty has a necessary place in the spiritual development of any individual or society. What each of you recognizes is that natural beauty includes the gifts we receive from our elders and what I have come to understand is that the closer we come to life’s end, the more blessed we find spiritual development.

In a very rare appearance by Nobel laureate, Pearl Buck, she reminded the 1942 graduating class of Howard University that our nation must uphold a belief that human beings are equal and human rights must be respected. You have all learned a new perspective on human rights as they apply to the product of your labor. Ms. Buck told the graduates “this is no ordinary graduating class” and I borrow her words today as I look across the room at this fine graduating class and your peers.

I opened by saying this is no common day. And I close now with thoughts expressed by President Warren Harding in 1923 when he spoke of the majesty of Yellowstone National Park. He was reminded of a pastor of a church who had admonished his congregation never to allow the uncommon things to become common. And quoting Harding “I speak the plain truth when I say to you that I am rejoiced that I have come to know” you.

Pearl Bruno Bouchard, Director