



In Memoriam for Ruth S. Harley
by
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Good Afternoon. Welcome to this historic occasion.

At times like these we turn to memory for insight and to literature for expression. I quote,

First, do nothing unintentionally
or without some end in mind.
Second, make the common good the
only end of all your actions.¹ If it's
not right, don't do it. If it's not true,
don't say it.²

These words, written 1800 years ago by Marcus Aurelias, describe our friend and colleague, Ruth Stratton Harley. Her concern was for the "common good"; she did and said only what was right.

O cruel death, you have
exactd your toll,
But from your grip
has slipped her soul.

As was said about her mentor, Dean Anna Harvey, "None knew her but to love her; None names her but to praise."³

My memories of Ruth are grounded in my conversations with her, and the oral history I initiated and which then was conducted by Dr. Marsha Darling. I have often told the story of my first meeting with Ruth, in September 2000. That's when she told me, on our way to my first State of the University Address, that she had known all of Adelphi's presidents. In that way I learned that I was about to be compared to Presidents Levermore and Blodgett.

I consulted Ruth for information and advice often. When? Why? Who? These were questions I posed as I tried to comprehend the history and heritage of Adelphi. And Ruth was always forthcoming - - after asking about my children and grandchildren. She remembered the name, age, gender, and hometown of each. I visited her on campus, at Parker, and in Westhampton. She was always witty and gracious.

¹ Aurelias, Marcus. *The Emperor's Handbook*, Book XII, 20.

² Ibid. XII, 17.

³ Fennelly, James. *The Adelphi: Love Child of the Brooklyn Brownstones*. New Jersey: The Laughing Leprechaun Press, 1996, p.19.

Memory provides reminders but literature helps us cope; the expressions of others can assist us in reflecting on the meaning of life and loss. For example, Yeats, in a poem about death, wrote, “but a thought of that late death took all my heart for speech.”⁴

We are speechless, but we know, as Edmund Burke said, that “the true way to mourn the dead is to care for the living who belong to them.”⁵ We also grasp the wisdom of these words: “The soul would have no rainbow had the eyes no tears.”⁶

We cry because we miss her; we loved her as a person and as an institution. Ruth Harley was an icon, not because of her age but because of the person she was. We miss her because of what she meant to us as individuals, and because we know that, “Those whom we honor we have the possibility of becoming.”⁷

D.H. Lawrence captures these sentiments in this way:

When the ripe fruit falls,
Its sweetness distills and trickles away
Into the veins of the earth.
When fulfilled people die,
The essential oil of
their experiences enters
The veins of living space, and
adds a glisten to the atom, to the
Body of immortal chaos.
For space is alive
and it stirs like a swan
Whose feathers glisten
Silky with oil of distilled experience.⁸

Ruth’s concern was for the common good. She did the right thing; she said the right thing. She was a moral compass, and her passing takes our heart for speech.

We will now hear from three speakers, and then invite you to share your written remarks and special comments in the journals outside for Adelphi’s Archives.

Thank you.

⁴ Yeats, William Butler. “*In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*.” 1919.

⁵ Burke, Edmund.

⁶ Cheney, John V.

⁷ Coffin, William Sloane.

⁸ Lawrence, D.H.