

Betty



Remembering Betty Reid Mandell

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On Sunday, June 28, 2015, about a hundred people gathered at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts to honor the memory and the enduring work of Betty Reid Mandell, who had died the previous fall.

The ceremony was made up entirely of testimony, and was introduced by the Rev. Russ Pregeant, a longtime friend of Betty. The present chapbook follows the order of speakers Russ determined. Unfortunately, two of the most passionate and eloquent speakers, Diane Dujon and Lea Rios, spoke extempore, and no record of their words is at hand.

For those who know little about Betty, the most factually informative entries here are the talk by Ann Levin, the published tribute (in *New Politics*) by Scott McLemee, and the well-researched obituary by Bryan Marquard in the *Boston Globe*. And of course the moving words of Betty's husband, Marvin Mandell, who had worked joyously with her for sixty years in the intellectual striving, publishing and activism, a life they shared in immense generosity with so many friends.

Betty Reid Mandell
by Russ Pregeant

Betty Reid Mandell loved flowers. This might seem to some an odd way to begin a memorial to a person known for her activism in social causes, her selfless use of her time in guiding welfare recipients through the tangle of a system designed more to keep them in line than to help, and her writings that demonstrate both knowledge and wisdom in her academic discipline. I have a specific reason, however, for beginning this way. Many years ago, when I began to study the writings of the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, I was at first taken aback by his claim that the basis of reality is *aesthetic*, which means that what life is finally all about is *enjoyment*. I would have nominated the moral dimension of life instead. However, as I pondered the issue over time I came to the conclusion that Whitehead was right, as long as we distinguish his technical term “enjoyment” from mindless hedonism. And the way I worked the issue out in my mind was to ask this question: “What do we do after the revolution?” That is, what is the ultimate goal of the kind of activism to which Betty gave her life, or to any of our actions on behalf of peace, justice, and a sustainable way of life? That was the question I asked, and the answer that came to me was this. We work for a better world precisely so that all people can in fact *enjoy* the blessings of life in this world. That is, so that all people can enjoy the experience of human relationships, or a flower garden or a good novel or a fine concert or an excellent stage play or film as Betty did—or whatever humanizing forms of activity they prefer. So here is my simple contribution to our memories of Betty: she had that rare ability to combine a fierce and uncompromising dedication to justice causes with an appreciation of what life in the final analysis is all about—that is, of being together with family and friends, while enjoying the blessings that

life affords. For that reason, she was never in danger of descending into the kind of hardened outlook that some revolutionaries develop and that can ultimately lead to fanaticism. Betty was a gentle revolutionary who never forgot that the ultimate goal of justice activism is not defeat of an enemy but the inclusion of all persons in a circle of fellowship as all partake of the bounties given by the earth and by one another.

Betty loved the company of people. She and Marvin created a home that was as warm and welcoming as it was unpretentious. To sit around the table at a meal that was always delicious, to converse with them and other of their guests, was always to feel very much at home. It was also to be treated to a feast of ideas, to explore with others the issues of the day or the richness of some aspect of human experience. Some of the dearest memories I treasure, as I look back on my own life, are what I playfully called seminars—Sunday lunchtime conversations I shared at the Mandell household over the course of quite a few years. I have no doubt that the ideas we explored could have solved most of the world's problems, had anyone been listening. But because no one was, the world remains in pretty bad shape. It is, however, a much better world than it would have been without Betty and Marvin in it. And what keeps me going is my firm belief that the good that we do in life is never lost but always has some positive effect on some level of reality. So I am convinced that Betty's activism and her determination that all persons on earth should have access to flower gardens and other joys of life in some way lives on. It remains, like the seed of a beautiful plant, ready to spring forth when the sun and the rain provide the opportunity. So—"Comes the revolution" ...Betty will be there!

for Betty
by Robert Kelly

Not for the first time I'm writing you
a poem, maybe, that's what I do,
the way so many intellectuals,
curious beasts, write poems, stories,
essays, letters to the paper,
monographs, dissertations, angry
editorials. And you did all that too,
lucid, urgent stuff, but
that never struck you
as being and doing enough.
So you stood there with the poor,
the rejects, the racial evidence
of our corrupt economy,
stood there and helped
one person at a time.
The way writers (think of Whitman)
always think they do
and never can. But you did —
your example is glorious
and terrifying, you learned
languages late in life
to help those whose tongues
are silenced in this society.
The love I feel for you
is tinged with shame,
of a man who stayed,
stays, safe inside the
only sometimes dangerous
comfort of words.

Remembering Betty by Charlotte Mandell

My mother had so many wonderful qualities it was difficult for me to think of a few to talk about here; if I had to describe Betty in one word, though, I think it would be *virtuous*, in the way that Spinoza understood *virtus*: as being a positive, active force. For Spinoza, being virtuous didn't mean not doing bad things, but rather actively doing good things; from this practice of doing good things, one derives a sense of joy, which Spinoza called *beatitudo*. I think Betty derived her sense of joy, her beatitudo, from her love of helping people and working for the benefit of others; she genuinely enjoyed her work, and her work was her life; throughout her entire life, she never stopped working for the benefit of others. She was the kindest person I've ever known, and the most compassionate. I feel very lucky to have known her, and lucky that she has touched all of us in so many different ways. My aspiration, now and forever, is to be as virtuous, compassionate, and loving as Betty always was.



Betty
by Chris Mandell

Speaking in front of lots of people isn't really my thing, so I'll make this short and sweet.

The best example I can think of to illustrate what sort of a person Betty was comes from a story she told me sometimes about when she was a kid and her parents used to take her and her siblings on a shopping trip. Or rather, they would drive them to the parking lot of the store, which was somewhere off in the prairie dust bowl, and leave them in the car while they did the shopping. Of course, if they did that these days, they'd get arrested for it, but back then they got away with it. Betty's sisters and brother would always gripe about how bored they were with being left in the parking lot with nothing to do, but not Betty. She told me that she really enjoyed it; she liked looking out the window at the people in the parking lot and imagining what their lives were like. This is what Betty was like, from an early age: you could plop her in a dust bowl parking lot for hours, and she would find a way to make the experience all about connecting with people. She was wonderful at connecting with people.

That's all I have to say, except that I loved her very much, and I've vowed to be more like her.

BETTY

by Janet Kilkenny

I first met Betty in Iowa, when I was her student. I had just arrived from the London School of Economics and, while not exactly a firebrand, I found the climate at the Iowa School of Social Work traditional, not to say right wing. This, obviously, did not include Betty.

As her student, in one assignment, I found Betty unexpectedly rigorous: I remember trying to pass off as mine other people's ideas, paraphrasing them elegantly, I thought, hopefully disguised – but she saw it. Betty didn't let me off the hook or go along with my pretense, but gently pointed out that I'd borrowed them. . . . while appreciating my stylistic technique!

Betty also gave us really interesting reading lists, a great range of sources, always relevant to helping our understanding of people, not just dry social work programmes.

I live in the Italian Alps and went across to visit Betty and Marvin in the French Alps many summers. I shall miss her: she was so wise and strong, strong in standing up for her principles but tolerant of others and their weaknesses, a combination many of us find elusive.

A Homage for Betty **by Everett Frost**

We met in Iowa in 1965 or 1966, where I was a New Left organizer and, like Marvin, undergoing a doctorate in literature. Like Betty my orientation had moved on from its religious origins into pacifism, political organizing, and nonviolent direct action. In the fog of the then appalling justifications of Mao, Ho Chi Minh, etc. it was difficult to remain trusted and accepted among other activists, while insisting on one's (anarchic) distance from the totalitarian rhetoric then fashionable. Betty and Marvin were a breath of fresh air; an island of sanity. [It is hard to speak of them separately: they were my model of what a marriage is: two very distinct individuals, mutually supportive, and empathically inseparable from each other.]

The publications for which Betty later became well known emerged from her daily practice: arguments that the remedy for disenfranchised poor — notably single moms on ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) and other welfare recipient/victims — lay in their empowerment, and that empowerment began with achieving the self-respect, the sense of community, and the skills (individual and collective) with which to struggle for these things. Simple, modest, and very hard to do. Did I want to see how Johnson's War on Poverty was playing out in Iowa? Yep. And so, to the amusement of both constituencies, connections developed between the welfare group and our campus SDS chapter. (Through Betty, one member, Fred Wallace, remained in Iowa to take a position in its poverty program). Enter Penny (and cat), a single mom who sometimes crashed on our couch and ended up applying

for admission to the University (she got in; we got one of the kittens). Did Betty want to write a piece on ADC for Middleearth, our 'underground' newspaper? Instead she suggested that we invite people in the group do it. So it was. By the time I left Iowa, through Betty I had met not only welfare recipients but townspeople, local administrators, politicians, farmers and farm hands (her origins lay, after all, in rural agriculture).

How she, as we would have said then, kept her cool amid the desperation and injustices that were her daily experience, I never understood. But I never saw her angry or impatient or despondent.

Not long after Iowa, invited to Cuttyhunk, I accepted my first teaching job on the payphone outside the Island's general store. (It is still there, but doesn't work anymore.) After hugs, Betty disappeared briefly, and returned with some lobsters from the little stall on the wharf. A nice bottle of wine appeared. Maybe two bottles. Ah, yes, she loved people and loved life: living it, celebrating it, sharing it, improving it.

Christine is right, her mum was a bodhisattva.

Reading, England

In Memory of Betty Reid Mandell
by Sandy Lyons

A few years before I met Betty, an issue of *Survival News* arrived at our Displaced Homemakers women's center in Ithaca, NY. I was impressed by the quality of the newspaper: clear, straight forward writing about the lives and struggles of ordinary women; a collective effort; free of jargon and in print that was big enough to read! Little did I know then that after coming to Boston I would become a part of the organization behind *Survival News* — really because of Betty.

In November of 1993 I first met Betty for coffee at Today's Bread in JP — a favorite meeting place of hers in those days. As a result of that get-together I joined Survivors Inc., and took part in many aspects of that amazing group over the next 10 years and more — welfare office organizing, community organizing workshops, finance and fund-raising, demonstrations, and countless meetings around kitchen tables, in community rooms and on the U Mass Boston campus. After I could no longer give time to the work of Survivors, I count myself lucky to have sustained a friendship with Betty. Lucky to have seen her for lunch on April 14 of last year and to have received one of her summer postcards from France last July. "We swim in a lovely municipal pool at no charge because we are old. There are some advantages to being old." What a shock to learn of her death in October. What a tragic loss to all of us and to the world.

What has always struck me about Betty is her unique blend of qualities:

- her caring deeply about others and about the quality of their lives.
- her clear-headed thinking and writing (for *Survival News*, for books and journals, and for the best letters to the Editor)
- her commitment to radical social work and social change
- her creativity
- always coming up with new ideas for supporting, organizing, and inspiring others to work and to lead
- her personal generosity
- her unwillingness to give up

Examples reflect Betty's collaborative style. She was not alone in developing the work at Survivors (and beyond), but her imprint was strong: the Jericho Project to bring a group of welfare mothers and workers together; sitting at the Welfare offices to help women apply for benefits *and* know their rights; raising money so that low income participants and leaders were paid; offering "community service" (work relief) placements at Survivors as a form of Sanctuary from the indignities & abuses of the welfare system; recognizing the "digital divide" and helping women get computers & training to use them; offering *Survival News* planning, editing, writing, layout opportunities to as many folks as possible; making sure there was child care & transportation to activities when needed; always reaching out to welcome new women to the group; standing by so many women through trouble — as she did for Dottie Stevens in the time before her death.

Betty certainly inspired me. Her vision of social work was true to that of our foremothers in the settlements movements, both Black and White, and to those who organized in the '30's and the '60's for the rights of unemployed, low waged workers and the unpaid caregivers who deserve recognition and material support from the community. Betty was an older woman who defied the stereotypes and continued to act despite the lousy limitations inflicted by age. Thank you dear Betty Reid Mandell.

Betty Mandell
by Carol Dorr

While I was at Regis College, Betty served on my Advisory Board for the Social Work Program. She generously gave her time and shared her wisdom in the field that led to new directions for the Program and placements for our students. In addition, she volunteered as a classroom speaker in several social work classes and even supervised a couple of our students, teaching them advocacy by doing it in welfare offices. When I was working on my book and videotaping mock client interviews, Betty suggested I include one in a welfare office, and went one step further to actually role play a welfare client. This has turned out to be my favorite interview. As if this weren't enough, Betty gave an endorsement for my book that appears on the back cover. As you can see, Betty meant a lot to me, and I will never forget her. I was impressed with her generosity and kind spirit. She will be greatly missed.

Betty by **Mary Jo Hetzel**

I first met Betty when I moved from Northampton to Boston to write my doctoral dissertation on the devaluation of women's work of care and service and to get involved in grassroots politics. It was within that context that Ann Withorn introduced us. The three of us used to meet once a month at the Yenching restaurant across from the Boston Public Library and talk way into the night about all things human service and politically-related. After these dinners came to an end, Betty and I kept up our friendship and mutual support. It has been one of the greatest honors and joys of my life to have had Betty as one of my closest friends.

Betty was a woman of the utmost integrity in all aspects of her life. You never had to guess where she would come out on any matter of integrity, whether it was grassroots politics around issues of women, poverty and welfare, or her teaching and writing, her friendships, relationships or parenting. She always came through no matter how tough, difficult or complicated; she never took the easy or expedient way out. Betty walked her talk, was down-to-earth, met people where they were and treated everyone with the greatest respect. She had the stamina and endurance of a hundred, no a thousand people. Her intellectual and political and personal accomplishments are mind-boggling.

Betty was also a mentor to me in a time when most of us women had no real mentors that we could count on. The male mentors that

I did have were more intent upon getting me into bed, or attempting to destroy me, than supporting me, a story that has been repeated many times over. Betty taught me by example what it meant to be true to myself, to be uncompromising with regard to my fundamental principles, to be unafraid to speak my truth, write it, live it, be it.

Betty had an indomitable spirit, one that lives inside me every day. I felt a true comfort in her friendship. She shared virtually everything with me, her personal troubles and trials as well as her political questions and dilemmas, which allowed me to do the same with her. She knew how to live well and in balance, fully enjoying all that life had to offer and sharing that enjoyment so generously with all who knew her, along with Marvin, with whom she had a wonderful relationship. I am deeply thankful for Betty in my life, and for the beautiful ways in which Marvin and Christine and Charlotte have chosen to honor her.

Betty
by Bill Littlefield

A couple of summers ago, Mary and I were visiting Marvin and Betty on Cuttyhunk. Marvin was restless. He suggested an activity. Betty said she was going to sit in the sun on the deck in front of their house. I sat down in the chair beside her. She was smiling, and she looked as comfortable as a person could be.

I've never met anybody who could be so comfortable, so aware of the joy available to us when we're with family, and with the people we love, doing nothing more ambitious than eating and talking together, or sitting in the sun.

And consider her energy. I've never met anybody more dedicated to helping people who were in difficult circumstances. As a writer, a counselor, a teacher, and a witness, Betty helped a great many people. And she did it with grace. She offered her expertise to folks trying to find their way through the tangled bureaucracy of the state's welfare system. She wrote a guide to help people secure housing, meals, and medical care. It was included in *Survival News*, and Mary told me it was the most popular reading material ever featured at the Women's Lunch Place, where she was volunteering. When Mary told Betty how quickly *Survival News* had disappeared, I'm sure Betty was pleased, but I don't think she was surprised. In the most positive sense of the phrase, she knew how to find a need and fill it.

Betty was a great listener. Her principles were unshakable, as was her devotion to those less fortunate than she was. But she was curious. She liked to hear what other people had to say. She was never in a hurry to argue, though her experience and her wit made her a formidable opponent when an argument arose.

She could laugh at herself. Many years ago, she was invited to appear on a TV program, perhaps to discuss some especially unfair aspect of the welfare system. She was enthusiastic about the opportunity. She hoped it would help. After the program ran, she smiled and shook her head and talked about how silly she had been to expect that the TV program would allow for any substantive discussion of a political issue.

What a combination of qualities Betty Mandell had. What a lovely and loving person she was. She knew how to help, and how to accept help from others.

I miss her. That is, I miss the extraordinary, giving woman I was fortunate to know. But on my best days I feel her influence, her encouragement, even her presence, and that helps. That helps a lot.



Tribute to Betty Mandell
by Ann Levin

I first met Betty at a dinner party at the Mandells' home in West Roxbury in late 1970. I was a new faculty member at Curry, a colleague of Marvin's. I had no idea that this was the beginning of a friendship with Betty and Marvin that would last more than four decades and shape my life in ways I could never have imagined.

The same evening when I met Betty, I also met the person who became my life partner, Larry Beeferman. Apparently – although unbeknownst to me – Larry and I were being introduced or 'fixed up,' as they used to say. So Betty and Marvin were in fact what might be called our 'matchmakers,' which also means they, at minimum, are honorary grandparents of our two children.

In the years since, Larry and I have spent more time at the Mandells' than at any other home in Boston – besides our own. Betty and Marvin entertained effortlessly and often. They were consummate hosts – warm, hospitable, welcoming, relaxed, and comfortable – with plenty of food; diverse, interesting, smart, challenging, and sometimes controversial guests; and lively (to say the least) conversation. While there was some 'rotation' of the dinner party 'crowd,' somehow Larry and I managed to stay on the 'A' list and became 'regulars.' For many years we have belonged to the Mandells' film group (of course with dinner beforehand). We have visited the Mandells at Cuttyhunk Island, immediately

appreciating the beauty and allure of this special place where Betty and Marvin had the imagination and foresight to buy a cottage many years ago. We visited them at their rented vacation home in the French Alps. And wherever we were, we went to concerts and plays, discussed books and politics, world events, of course shoptalk about our jobs, particularly the joys and challenges of academic work, and much more.

A generation older, Betty and Marvin were life mentors and role models for me. They were a devoted couple – together for 60 years – who managed to do it all: to have jobs and careers in the same locations; to combine and balance work and family; to share parenting and domestic responsibilities; to travel, enjoy life, take summers off, and have wonderful vacations and adventures; and always, to live by the values they espoused and work to achieve the kind of society they envisioned. Betty, in particular, distinguished herself not only as a social work academic, but also as a practitioner, activist, and welfare rights organizer.

What a blend. What a gift. What a life. And while I've been aware, for more than forty years, of Betty's strengths, talents, attributes, and more, recently I had the extraordinary experience of reading Betty's memoir – starting with her early life in rural Colorado. Most of the 'stories' were more or less familiar to me. But as with a jigsaw puzzle, while each piece is important, the overall assembly of the puzzle is really what matters. Here, I recount only a few of the amazing – I would even say awesome – details of Betty's life that I gleaned from her memoir.

Betty's early life was not one of luxury or ease. Creature comforts were few. Daily reality included outhouses, party line phones (with 10 households sharing one line), a mostly unheated home with no refrigeration, kerosene lamps, an attic bedroom shared with two sisters, a weekly bath (with the four children sequentially sharing the same water — each one, of course, vying to go first). What she wrote, though, expresses no sense of deprivation. Betty loved nature, prairie sunsets, the comforting sounds of train whistles and planes overhead. She was savvy and experienced in the outdoors (climbing trees, raising chickens). When toilet paper was unavailable, she knew which leaves were soft and which were scratchy, and while appropriately cautious, seemed unfazed by the proximity of coyotes, rats, or rattlesnakes.

Even from an early age, Betty describes herself as the family rebel and I have no doubt it was true. She loved to tell people that she kept her mother, a staunch Republican, from voting for Calvin Coolidge by being born on Election Day. She began college at 16, and one of her first acts of resistance or rebellion was to violate the 9 p.m. dormitory curfew (simply by standing outside in the cold). When she learned that the sorority she had joined had a national whites-only policy, she sent back her pin. She spoke against the internment of Japanese Americans at a local Rotary club.

This was the outset of Betty's journey from her farm family background to a progressive, even bohemian, lifestyle in New York and elsewhere, not to mention her evolving radical politics. It is nothing short of extraordinary. While every life involves transitions of all kinds, the story of Betty's exposure and openness

to a range of people, places, experiences, and ideas is one of remarkable personal evolution.

But a life's story may be more a matter of revelation than evolution. That is, over time, we reveal who we really are. Based on my personal experience of Betty and what I learned from her memoir, I think that may have been true for her. I now see the deep continuity between the Betty whom I knew personally and the one whose life is recounted in the memoir. I see her as possessing a remarkable but understated strength: of high purpose, of will and commitment, and of character. It was a strength of high purpose manifest in her special concern for those with the least, whether in material well-being, in lives of stability, or in political power or social influence. That purpose informed her life's work, whether it was in the context of a Harlem settlement house, a Newark foster care and adoption agency, an upstate New York residential psychiatric institution, opposition in Iowa against the Vietnam War, or writing and teaching about the failures of social welfare in Boston and beyond and being in the trenches to change it. Betty's strength of will and commitment enabled her to persist in such struggles in difficult and often daunting circumstances. Her strength of character enabled her to speak truth to those of power and to offer not only care and concern, but also respect, for those without it.

All these strengths were understated. Betty was not an "in your face" person. She was not interested in being "high profile." In conversation, it was not about who she was, but what we had to share with and learn from one another. It was not about her accomplishments or her position, but rather about what all of us

need to do to bring about positive change. It was not about talking the talk that might make one look good, smart, or superior. Rather, it was about getting the important jobs done, but in a quiet, modest, almost unassuming way which, perhaps, we did not quite appreciate as much as we should have.

The last time I saw Betty was a year ago. On this occasion we did not discuss politics or social change or other “serious matters.” Rather, I came to the Mandells’ house to visit and get some plant cuttings from Betty’s lovely garden. I had done this before, always under Betty’s direction and with her approval and encouragement. This time, as Betty was walking with two crutches, I urged her to stay inside, assuring her that I wouldn’t take much, it would be unobtrusive, and from the areas she had indicated. But, no surprise, Betty, still the farm girl and always the consummate gardener, accompanied me outside, to all sides of the house no less, to cheer me on, offer advice, and recommend that I take more generous portions. The plants, like their predecessors, are perennials; they grow in our yard and are constant reminders (not that we need any) of Betty’s green thumb, generosity of spirit, ties to the earth and nature, love of people, and sense of community. I will never forget this visit. And I will always love and remember Betty.

Tribute to Betty Reid Mandell by Scott McLemee

The editorial board of *New Politics* is saddened by the loss of one of our own: Betty Reid Mandell, who, with her husband Marvin Mandell, served as one of the journal's co-editors for most of the past decade.

Betty was also one of our most popular writers. Her articles from the magazine and her commentaries posted to the *New Politics* website have been the pieces we're most often asked for permission to reprint. (And by a large margin, according to those who handle the requests.) Readers seem to have picked up on Betty's genuine commitment to not just the rights but the *dignity* of poorest and most disenfranchised people in this, the wealthiest society in the history of the planet.

It was just two issues ago that we thanked Marvin and Betty for their years of service to *New Politics*. The only people who know enough to write a proper account of Betty's life are members of her family, who have enough to bear for now. But some kind of tribute is in order.

Here, then, are a few notes that may be of interest to *New Politics* readers — many of whom will join us in offering condolences to Marvin, and to their daughters, Christine and Charlotte.

Betty Reid was born in Denver, Colorado on November 4, 1924. “I like to think that keeping my mother from voting for Coolidge was my first political act,” she wrote not long ago, adding that it was “as effective as most of my subsequent political acts.” (This and most other quotations here are taken from a manuscript of personal recollections she prepared for her family, who have graciously shared it.)

The youngest of four children, Betty grew up in Roggen, a town with a two-digit population about fifty miles northeast of Denver. Her father farmed a small tract of land acquired under the Homestead Act. It was not an especially fertile plot, and the threat of financial ruin would have been in the air even without the ecological catastrophe of the Dust Bowl.

Betty’s mother was a loyal and active Republican, and the source of her earliest political memories, including visits to their home by GOP candidates. “Although my mother opposed Roosevelt and said any improvements he made were actually due to Herbert Hoover,” Betty recalled, “she nevertheless was thrilled over the New Deal program of the Tennessee Valley Authority and my father participated in the New Deal program of the ‘ever normal granary,’ which involved not planting wheat but letting land go fallow on alternate years.” When Betty had to write a composition for school expressing excitement at finally having electrical lighting, her mother helped: “In fact, I suspect that my mother wrote most of the essay.”

Woven into Betty's childhood memories — along with the chickens she helped raise and the sounds of coyote howls and train whistles she sometimes heard before falling asleep — were traces of agrarian radicalism and Progressive-era reformism still lingering in the 1920s and '30s. Her mother's membership in the Women's Christian Temperance Union: a group now much maligned, but one with a strong labor and feminist aspect in its heyday. There was also the Grange Hall. Like the church, it was one of the town's social centers (with the important difference being that dances were held there) but it also embodied the solidarity of farmers against the power of the railroads and other middlemen.

While writing her memories, Betty did some Googling and learned that Grange members “had been active in establishing rural free delivery of mail, the county extension service, and cooperatives. They were also active in women's liberation. Susan B. Anthony delivered one of her speeches in a Grange Hall. Roggen had two cooperatives — the gas station and the grain elevator. I wonder if the Grange Hall was instrumental in that, or was it the influence of the Farmer-Labor Party?”

These details seem meaningful with the advantage of considerable hindsight. But they don't add up to a destiny, no matter how you reckon them. At least as pertinent to Betty's future course was another side of American life expressed at the Grange Hall: “The Cooper boys stood on the sidelines, never daring to ask any white girl to dance. Jim Cooper was handsome and I wished I could dance with him, but understood the unspoken taboo against black men dancing with white women.”

Her antiracist streak seems to have been nurtured by a Methodist youth group on one of the Colorado State College campuses. Conscientious objectors from a nearby CO camp sometimes attended meetings, and Betty read in the group's national magazine about the forced relocation and detention of Japanese-Americans, which she denounced in a speech at the local Rotary club. Betty had entered college in 1940, at the age of 16, meaning that her protest occurred while the internments were still underway. It would have been a courageous act anywhere in the United States at the time, much less in front of the Rotary club. And when the atom bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she understood it as an atrocity. Her rebellion against Roggen norms may have taken no bolder form than registering as a Democrat, but she was on the way to something more radical.

By her own account, Betty learned about Marxist theory in the mid-1950s, after falling in love with Marvin, whose gregarious manner and years in the Workers Party and Independent Socialist League undoubtedly made him the ideal tutor. But a decade passed between finishing her undergraduate studies at Colorado State and meeting him in New York City. In retrospect her twenties look like a time of steady movement from being "religious in a diffuse and unfocused way" (she says she prayed without feeling "very convinced that it did any good or that anyone was listening to me") to commitment to the very worldly challenges of social work.

That was to be her profession, and something of the scale of her contribution to it is obvious even to a layperson. *An Introduction to*

Human Services, a textbook she co-authored, is now in its eighth edition, while *Survival News*, the newsletter she helped start in 1986, continues to report on and contribute to the struggles of low-income women. One of her colleagues really ought to make a project of collecting tales of her work in the trenches of social work – not just as advocate for the poor but as someone who worked with people in need, helping them fight their way through bureaucratic obstacles built into the systems that are supposed to help them.

Betty Reid Mandell approached social work not as a liberal (hoping to make an easily distracted democracy live up to its claims to decency) but as someone who could – and did – cite Hal Draper’s “Socialism from below” as a statement of basic orientation. In a two-part essay published by the journal *Social Work* in 1971, she characterized the evasive, invasive, humiliating, and arbitrary practices of the existing welfare system in provocative terms:

“Mechanization and depersonalization of life have become pervasive social problems. As Arendt says: ‘Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous.’ If we can help welfare recipients find a sense of community together, we will be working toward a society in which people care about what happens to each other.”

Fuzzy communitarianism was not the solution she had in mind, as her next sentence makes clear: “History teaches us that democratic power is not given to the dispossessed; it is achieved through their own struggle.” Here the influence of “The Two Souls of Socialism”

seems quite clear. (Probably that of Marvin as well, though only Draper is cited in the footnotes.)

“Looking back over my history of wearing political buttons,” Betty writes in her memoir, “is an interesting way to view my political education. In 1936 I wore a sunflower button for [Republican presidential candidate] Alf Landon. In 1952 I wore a button for Adlai Stevenson. In the 60s, I wore a peace button against the Vietnam War. I don’t remember how we got it, but Marvin and I owned a black anarchist flag with the anarchist A on it. In 2011, I wore an Occupy Boston button.”

Betty once quoted a passage from Hannah Arendt that might serve to sum up the perspective that took shape across the seventy years of her steady movement leftward:

“[E]quality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.”

For Betty this seems to have been not a doctrine but a pledge. Like Marvin, she was in it for the long haul. They devoted most of their eighties to *New Politics* — in solidarity with its aims, of course, but also in tribute to their longtime friends, the late Phyllis and Julius Jacobson, who founded the magazine. Only someone who has been trapped in a room with the editorial board of a Socialist journal can imagine what Marvin and Betty put themselves through by taking the helm. We will always be grateful to them for it, and hope the generation that took its first political steps during Occupy will learn to see in her an inspiration and a standard of the commitment to expect from themselves.

In Memory of Betty
by Mathis Szykowski

Yeah Right! That is how Betty responded to the cynicism of politicians. There is nothing like irony to puncture balloons.

I met Betty in the early 50's, and I believe that my ex-wife and I "fixed her up" with Marvin.

I will never forget the day when Betty and Marvin came knocking at my door. Betty was waving a copy of the NYT where an article was presenting a new program for adults. They helped me fill the application and borrowed the money from the CU ad handed me the book. They changed and saved my life.

I have tried to repay, in some way, their generosity.

Betty
by Marvin Mandell

The following letter was published in the Greeley(CO) Tribune.

Letters to the Editor
The Greeley Tribune
Greeley, Colorado 80632
WINTER 2007

AN ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES about Representative Marilyn Musgrave, sponsor of an amendment to ban gay marriage, caught my eye because I also was born and raised in the prairies in northeastern Colorado near Roggen. Her chief of staff, Guy Short, says he had no doubt that Ms. Musgrave's rural roots on the plains were fundamental to her perspective. "Her family and her life are a mirror of Greeley," Mr. Short said. I can match her in rural background. My father was a farmer, a homesteader; my mother stayed home to raise the children, and I raised prize 4-H steers which I showed at the county fair in Greeley.



I even once beat Richard Montfort, featured in Frederick Weisman's Meat documentary, in a competition. I graduated from Greeley High School and Colorado Aggies (now Colorado State University). We might have been neighbors, but we have certainly taken different paths since our rural childhood. I have been married for over 50 years, and I am mystified by people's assertion that gay marriage will threaten heterosexual marriage. I can't conceive of how it would threaten my marriage. I have some wonderful homosexual neighbors. They shovel our sidewalk

when it snows. They take our trash barrels in when we are away. We exchange garden plants and garden advice. Their house is a jewel to behold. The improvements they have made to it will raise the value of all our property. If they got married, they would still shovel our sidewalk, take our trash barrels in, and exchange garden plants. The Catholic church has done incredible damage to the family by allowing priests to sexually abuse children. Are they making a fuss about gay marriage to divert attention from their sexual abuse scandals?

Sincerely yours,
BETTY REID MANDELL
Boston, MA

I wanted to share this letter with you because it shows how very personal all political acts were for Betty. When she was 18, a freshperson at Colorado Aggies, she organized a protest against the internment of Japanese-Americans. This, six years after joining her family in posting Alf Landon stickers on cars. Once in 1962 she read a newspaper article about a terrible injustice being done to road construction workers. The next day she went to the site, interviewed the men, and then wrote her first published article.

After this there were dozens of articles and some books, as well as many acts – all motivated by her fierce personal commitment to a better world.

A confession — a difference between Betty and me: I always did a cost benefit analysis — what an action would cost us and what we would get from it. Betty seldom did. And so, many years later, she and several women tried to take over an abandoned building for homeless women. After she was arrested, the sergeant asked if she had any tattoos and then offered her a sandwich. Betty lost that battle as she lost many others but she never wavered.

The medieval poet François Villon lived in a dark time, but he believed that “God has shown me a fair city.” Betty believed in that fair city.

I cannot share with you the kind of love that Betty and I had for each other for over 60 years. I don’t have the words. Some human experiences cannot be described adequately by words, which would only circumscribe them.

Flaubert said, “Human speech is a broken pot, a cracked drum, on which we beat out rhythms for bears to dance to when we are trying to wring tears from the stars.”

Everyone here knows of Betty’s wisdom, her courage, her humor, her loving kindness, and her love of justice and willingness to fight for it, no matter how daunting the odds. She often joked how her being born on November 4, 1924 prevented her mother from voting for Calvin Coolidge and how that act was futile like most of her subsequent acts. She never gave up. She had a passion for life itself, for life as it could be lived.

However dark the world she lived in, she carried in her heart a vision of a new world — a just world, a loving world. My guess is that everyone in this room, every friend of Betty, shares that world in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.



Betty Reid Mandell, at 89; longtime advocate for the poor

By Bryan Marquard

| GLOBE STAFF | OCTOBER 01, 2014



Ms. Mandell, a retired professor, was passionate about social justice.

Long after retiring as a professor of social work at Bridgewater State, Betty Reid Mandell kept putting her teachings into practice in her 80s by lending assistance to the homeless who were seeking help from the state Department of Transitional Assistance.

When she stopped by to volunteer, she recalled in an essay, the homeless section of Boston's welfare offices reminded her of the front line in an endless conflict.

"The Homeless Unit feels like a war zone where refugees have been displaced from their homes," she wrote for the winter 2001 issue of the journal *New Politics*, which she co-edited until a year ago. "I feel like a war reporter as I tell their stories. There is a war going on against the poor, and most fiercely against people of color."

Handing out survival tips she had penned to point people in the direction of food and housing assistance, Ms. Mandell would explain that as poor as they were, the homeless still had rights. "The security guard called her the fairy godmother of the welfare office," said her daughter Christine of West Roxbury. "People would be surprised when she walked up and said, 'Would you like my help?' "

A lifelong advocate for the dispossessed, Ms. Mandell combined an upbeat demeanor with a fierce presence on the page, where she picked apart laws and government policies that she believed hurt the poor residents they ostensibly were designed to help. She died Friday in Faulkner Hospital of complications from a blood clot. Ms. Mandell was 89 and lived in West Roxbury.

“She believed in helping people, and that was her whole life,” said her husband, Marvin Mandell, a retired Curry College English professor. “She was a wonderful person. She was passionate about everything: about causes, about life itself.”

In the mid-1980s, Ms. Mandell was among the founders of Survivors Inc. and the journal Survival News, which provided a forum for low-income women. In Survival News she also published Survival Tips, a guide that offered phone numbers, websites, and very specific advice on how to apply for everything from food stamps to fuel assistance and therapeutic shoes for diabetics. The most basic necessities were often in short supply for those trying to survive with no homes, no money, and few job prospects in a difficult economy.

“Government officials tell us how many people are living at or below the poverty line, but they don’t tell us how low the poverty line is,” Ms. Mandell wrote for New Politics in February 2012. “A more appropriate name would be the ‘near starvation line.’ ”

Though Ms. Mandell was ardent in her advocacy, “I never knew her to be angry,” said her daughter Charlotte Mandell Kelly of Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. “She always was more concerned about other people than she was about herself. She was the most generous person I ever knew, and also the most caring and loving.”

The youngest of four children, Betty Reid was born in 1924 in Roggen, Colo., a small ranching and agriculture community northeast of Denver. Her parents had been homesteaders, and as a teenager, she exhibited a prize-winning steer at a national livestock contest.

“She was a good horsewoman, but she really wanted to come east and go to college,” her husband said. “She wasn’t that fond of the farm.”

After graduating from Colorado State University with a bachelor’s degree in sociology, she went to Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where she received a master’s in religious education.

“She mostly lost her religion at Union seminary,” her husband said. Although she embraced the Christian message, “she thought it was being betrayed all over the world by organized religion.”

After receiving a master’s in social work from Columbia University in 1952, she worked at the Hudson Guild settlement house in New York City. Through friends, she met Marvin Mandell, a committed socialist.

“There was never any doubt in my mind that she was perfect for me,” he said. “She embodied everything I always believed in. She was passionate about social justice and helping the poor.”

They became a couple and married in the 1950s. She taught at the University of Iowa while he completed a doctorate, and she was a social worker later while he taught in Connecticut.

At the end of the 1960s, the couple moved with their daughters to Boston, where both found college teaching jobs. Ms. Mandell taught at Boston State College until 1981, when she switched to what was then Bridgewater State College. She retired from Bridgewater in 1994.

Ms. Mandell wrote numerous essays and articles for *New Politics*, other publications, and [her blog](#), and she wrote and edited books

including “An Introduction to Human Services: Policy and Practice” and “The Crisis of Caregiving: Social Welfare Policy in the United States.”

“Betty has been one of the more visible social activists on the Bridgewater State College campus,” said a December 1994 profile in Bridgewater Review, a college publication. “Over the years she has organized a number of workshops, public hearings, and demonstrations in support of those on welfare.”

Arrested on occasion at demonstrations, she once found herself face to face with one of her former Bridgewater State students: the police officer who led her away. “He actually apologized and said, ‘I’m so sorry I have to arrest you,’ ” her daughter Charlotte recalled.

Ms. Mandell “was amazingly tireless,” Charlotte said. “She never seemed to get tired of helping people.”

A service will be announced for Ms. Mandell, who in addition to her husband and two daughters leaves a sister, Shirley Stanosheck of Longmont, Colo.

With her husband, Ms. Mandell spent alternate summers at their cottage on Cuttyhunk Island and a chalet they rented in St. Jean d’Aulps, in the Alps region of eastern France near the Swiss border. There and in Boston, her presence was welcomed by all she encountered.

“I really feel everything I’ve learned about kindness and patience and being good to other people I learned from her,” said Christine, who added that the meals she shared with her mother at home and in restaurants were always “filled with laughter and happiness.”

“My sister and I are both Buddhists, and she said she believes that Betty was a real bodhisattva, that she was somebody who was put on earth to give people happiness, and I feel that way too,” Christine added. “One time we were out at a restaurant laughing together and the waitress came up and said, ‘I just wanted to remark on what a wonderful relationship you two have. I wish I had that relationship with my mother.’ ”

This article can be found online at the Boston Globe:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/obituaries/2014/09/30/betty-reid-mandell-west-roxbury-social-work-professor-was-longtime-advocate-for-poor/v4AG0b115FCcjXUcHL7HgK/story.html>

Betty Reid Mandell
Curriculum Vitae

Education

B.S. in Sociology, Colorado State University, 1945

M.A. in Religious Education, Union Theological Seminary, 1947

M.S.W. in Social Work, Columbia University School of Social Work, 1952

Books

Where Are the Children? A Class Analysis of Foster Care and Adoption. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1973.

Editor, *Welfare in America: Controlling the "Dangerous Classes."* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975.

Human Services: An Introduction (co-authored with Barbara Schram). New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

Human Services: Strategies of Intervention (co-authored with Barbara Schram). New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

Human Services: Introduction and Interventions (co-authored with Barbara Schram). New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1985.

An Introduction to Human Services: Policy and Practice (co-authored with Barbara Schram). New York: Macmillan, 1994. The 8th edition of this book was published by Allyn & Bacon, 2011.

Articles

I have written numerous articles about social welfare and related subjects which have been published in *New Politics*, *Social Work*, *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *Journal of Education for Social Work*, *Social Development Issues*, *What's Left in Boston*, *Feminist Economics*, *Alternative*

Views, Survival News, The Human Service Educator. Recent articles include the following:

“Family Policy in Post-Communist Nations,” review of *Social Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Fall 2007. To be published in *New Politics* in 2008.

Special section on caregiving work. I coordinated a special section on caregiving work in *New Politics*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Summer 2006. The section includes my article “Foster Care.”

“Adoption,” *New Politics*, Vol. XI, No. 2, Winter 2007. Also on the *New Politics* web site, www.newpol.org.

“Women, Family, Welfare and Work,” Review of *American Dream* by Jason DeParle. *New Politics*, Vol. X, No. 3, Summer 2005.

“Diminishing Welfare: A Review Essay,” Review of *Diminishing Welfare: A Cross-National Study of Social Provision*, by Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Marguerite G. Rosenthal. *New Politics*, Vol. X, No. 1, Summer 2004.

“The Future of Caretaking,” *New Politics*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Winter 2003.

“Welfare Reform After 9/11,” *New Politics*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, Winter 2002.

“The Privatization of Everything,” *New Politics*, Vol. IX, No. 1, Summer 2002.

Speeches

I have spoken at numerous conferences, churches, social agencies, and colleges. I was the keynote speaker at the conference of the New England Organization of Human Service Education in 1995.

Honors and awards

I received an award from Rosie’s Place, a shelter for homeless women in Boston, in 1997. I was selected as a Social Work Pioneer by the National

Association of Social Workers in 2000. I received the Curry College Human Rights Award in 2003, along with my husband Marvin. I received an award from the Democratic Socialists of America, Massachusetts chapter, in 2003 for my work with Survivors, Inc., a grass roots welfare rights organization. I was honored by Survivors, Inc. in 2007 for my work with them and their paper *Survival News*.

Consultant to Carlow College, Pittsburgh, PA and Curry College, Milton, MA

Co-founder and member, Survivors, Inc., a nonprofit welfare rights group, 1997 - present

Co-editor, *New Politics*, 2004 - present

Editorial Board, *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 1997 - present

Editorial Board, *Social Work*, 1967 - 1973

Advisory board, Regis College Social Work Program, 1999 - present

Professional career

Social work:

New Jersey Board of Public Guardians, Morristown, New Jersey; Newark Children's Aid Society, Newark, New Jersey; Red Cross, Brooklyn, New York; Hudson Guild Settlement House mental health clinic, New York City; Department of Public Welfare, Greeley, Colorado; State Hospital, Ogdensburg, New York; Child Welfare Service, Cornwall, Ontario, Canada, Child and Family Services, Hartford, CT. Group work at Community Church, New York City; YMHA, New York City. Organizing of foster parents and welfare recipients.

College and university teaching:

1964-1967: Assistant Professor, University of Iowa School of Social Work, Iowa City, IA. **Field supervisor**, Department of Public Welfare, Iowa City (part of my course load)

1969 - 1972: Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA

1973- 1976: Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Boston State College, Boston, MA

1977 - 1994: Professor, Department of Social Work, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA

Field supervisor for a student at Regis College Social Work Program 2000 - 2001

Supervisor of 2 students from UMass/Boston in welfare advocacy work for Survivors, Inc. at Grove Hall Department of Transitional Assistance.

Professional organizations: Social Work Action Alliance; Massachusetts Teachers Association

Volunteer work: I have been retired since 1994. Since then I have been doing volunteer welfare advocacy and organizing work for Survivors, Inc. at Grove Hall and Dudley Square Department of Transitional Assistance. I have done organizing work on CORI reform with various agencies, including Mass Alliance to Reform CORI, Mass. Law Reform Institute, Boston Workers Alliance, and Union of Minority Neighborhoods. I am doing organizing work on home foreclosures with City Life. I have recently organized a group, called the "Care Caucus," to discuss alternatives to welfare and strategize about providing supports for caregiving.