

A dear, sweet friend of ours passed away a week ago this coming Sunday. Some of you might have noticed a tribute in the paper or on the news. Though neither a parent or grandparent, she nonetheless was loved by thousands; who as adults - or more likely as a college-aged youth - came in contact with her over the last century. She shied away from attention as she found it embarrassing to be the focus of excessive accolades, yet was honored countless times by individuals and institutions for her contributions. Her gifts, both personal and professional, were many.

In the modest surroundings a small East Texas town she thought to reach out and shake the bushes to see what opportunities lay beyond her humble origin. And boy, did she ever. In a time when it was rare for women to seek opportunities in higher education, she did so with the prodding of friends and family. With a degree from UT Austin she spent her earliest professional years as a small town teacher. Margaret pursued post-graduate work at Columbia and served as the dean of women at Navarro Junior College. Her professional road led her back to Austin and UT where our family eventually met her.

Margaret Berry was a hundred and one. And these weren't atrophied, old lady, fossil years. A month before she passed away, she was still actively texting, e-mailing, reading, writing and sharing with her many friends. Sometimes it was hard to keep up, even when you were just visiting with her. A while back, a friend talked her into one of those senior scooters when she complained that her legs were slowing her down. She could throw that thing into gear and task the healthiest among us to keep up. You got game? She would shame the best marathon gamers among us with her late-night (2:00-3:00 am) conversations and e-mails. And, after a good nights (morning really) rest, she would get up and do it again.

She was a regular at University Methodist and comfortably kidded about death as she would about having the wrong earrings. She was neither fearful or sad about what lay ahead. When the doctors told her that there wasn't anything more to be done for her at the Heart Hospital she insisted on returning home so that she could calmly prepare to meet the waiting souls she so dearly missed.

I am saddened by her passing but as Margaret had no regrets, I am okay with it. Along with others, I will miss Margaret for many things, but mostly the conversations we could have had but didn't. I will always remember her for the many exchanges we did have. She was an educator, writer, and mentor who was funny, thoughtful, curious, engaged, and always an inspiration and a friend. Joie de vivre? I am envious. She lived life fully and took every moment as a gift, and in turn, gave back with dividends; two simple lessons worth remembering. Your takeaway may be limited to my inadequate words, but anyone should be so lucky to live (even a fraction) of their days as this remarkable woman did.

Robert S. Brown