

## Memorial Service for Frances Humphrey Howard

November 16, 2002 Rev. Kate Tucker

**READING:** Words from Dag Hammarskjöld, who--when he died in a plane crash in Northern Rhodesia, in 1961, at age 56-- was serving as Secretary General of the United Nations.

At the time of his death, he was enroute to negotiate a cease-fire between the UN and the Katanga forces.

These words are from his book of meditations, **MARKINGS:**

"I don't know Who—or what—put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering.

But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone -or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal." (180)

"[An] opportunity was given you—as a favor and as a burden. The question is not: why did it happen this way, or where is it going to lead you, or what is the price you will have to pay. It is simply: how are you making use of it." (137)

"Do not look back. And do not dream about the future, either. It will neither give you back the past, not satisfy your other daydreams. Your duty, your reward—your destiny—are here and now." (136)

"Salty and wind-swept....  
Keeping in step with the measure under the fixed stars of the task...  
With all the powers of your body concentrated in the hand on the tiller,  
All the powers of your mind concentrated on the goal beyond the horizon,  
You laugh as the salt spray catches your face in the second of rest  
Before a new wave—

Sharing the happy freedom of the moment with those who share your responsibility.  
So—in the self-forgetfulness of concentrated attention—the door opens for you into a pure living intimacy,  
A shared, timeless happiness,  
Conveyed by a smile,  
A wave of the hand.

Thanks to those who have taught me this.  
Thanks to the days [that] have taught me this." (79-80)

## TRIBUTE

Rev. Kate Tucker

Frances Humphrey was born on Feb. 18, 1914, in Doland, South Dakota, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of 4 children born to Christine Sanas and Hubert Humphrey Sr. Christine was the daughter of a Norwegian ship captain who brought his family to the United States and homesteaded in S. Dakota. Frances' father Hubert was a pharmacist and an active democrat from a New England family of English and Welsh heritage.

The Humphrey children, in order of birth, were Ralph, Hubert, Frances, and Fern.

In school Frances was an achiever, an avid reader, an adventuresome spirit. She rode and jumped horses, she acted in plays.

In a 1999 videotape documentary celebrating Frances' life, we hear her voice as we view the photographs in her archives. She says: "Here we are in Doland, South Dakota, a little farm town of 500 people, where my father had his first drug store and where we lived until I was high school age." She says:

"The depression hit us very hard, and soon there were no customers for the store. I remember the day my father came home and said to my mother, the banks have taken our house. We don't have a house.

My mother cried; it was the first time that my father cried.

This was a tragic incident.

But we picked ourselves up and we went to Huron a town of 14,000.

There my father began his drug store business all over again.

Harry Truman was a frequent visitor to Humphrey's Drug Store, which was a Democratic center.

In a little town, you were all so closely knit, that you felt the pain of other people and you also felt their joy."

Frances' experience of the Great Depression shaped her life and work.

She saw her parents grieve--and then--go on.

She knew what it was to suddenly lose the life you've come to know.

She lived with a community of people who saw each other through the bad times and the good.

She lived close to the land in S. Dakota, out on the prairie with the big sky.

These too shaped her.

Decades later she said of her prairie childhood:

"You thought there was nothing you could not do as you walked along the railroad tracks—nothing to interfere with your vision, no trees or tall buildings, no obstacles in the road ahead.

To Frances, the horizon seemed unlimited.

Frances and her older brother Hubert had much in common—interests, values, energy. Both were people fascinated by the “big picture.”

Both went on to college.

One of Frances' entrepreneur uncles helped her go to George Washington University.

At George Washington, Frances earned a B.A. and an M.A. in sociology.

En route to her degrees she was active in college debates, in the arts, in foreign language studies, and in student government.

At George Washington she met Ray Howard, and married him.

Ray was a public health doctor.

Soon after they married, Ray served in WW II, as a surgeon.

He sailed on coastguard vessels, between Boston and Greenland.

He collected dead and wounded troops from torpedoed ships.

The trauma he experienced continued to affect him—and therefore his family—for years to come.

As for Frances—she moved quickly and naturally from the university into a life of public service.

She became Assistant Director of Social Welfare at the Washington Federation of Churches.

From there, she was hired by Eleanor Roosevelt to serve as her Special Assistant in the Office of Civil Defense.

Eleanor became Frances' mentor, and Frances was on her way to becoming a world traveler and a global thinker.

In the 1940's Frances and Ray had two children--Bill (1945) and Ann (1949)

Family life absorbed much of Frances' interest and energy for a few years.

In 1956 Ray and Frances divorced, and Frances and the children moved to Baltimore where Frances began serving as Director of Maryland's American Association of the United Nations.

From there, and for the next 40-some years, Frances' career unfolded.

It was a career of international travel, humanitarian service, politics, advocacy, forging of friendships, breaking of gender barriers, and bridging of cultures.

Frances worked on her brother Hubert's Vice-Presidential campaign and rejoiced at his election.

She was an active Unitarian Universalist. A good public speaker.

Her interest was in people. Her style was person-to-person.

For three decades she served as Special Assistant for the National Library of Medicine, in the US Dept. of Health and Human Services.

Frances' 5-page small-print resume is divided into these categories:

professional experience, honorary degrees, honors and awards, university service, community service, cultural and music organizations, professional memberships, lectures and presentations.

The lists are long.

They reveal her liberal spirit and the range of her commitments.

They tell us about the topics that were vital to Frances:

hunger, health, community development, education, women's issues, children's needs, employment, leadership, civil rights, foreign aid, United Nations, international peace.

Officially, Frances' public career ended when she retired 3 years ago, at age 85.

Unofficially, her work continued.

After Frances died, her son Bill said, "If she'd ended up in a nursing home, she'd have organized the residents into a union."

She was a fighter. She was determined.

She had a vision--this Frances Humphrey Howard from Doland, South Dakota---this hazel-eyed woman--

Who wore her beautiful, colorful scarves with flair--

Who flew around the world in jet planes and drove around town in her '88 Cutlass Sierra—

Who took her agenda to fashionable Washington parties and got things done.

Who was unconcerned with housework, drank coffee, slept little, worked always & often restlessly, was fiercely independent, was a devoted parent and grandparent--

Who cared deeply about her family but wasn't one to say it, wasn't the warm and fuzzy type

Who had a tendency to show the quality of her love through the quantity of her concern

Who disliked a lull, who (like her mother before her) tended to keep things stirred up and cooking—

Whose theme song was not "Let It Be"--

Who wanted assurance of progress, who set her expectations high—especially for those nearest her and most especially for herself, Frances Humphrey Howard.

Frances Humphrey Howard who played the game of politics and persuasion in the shadow of her famous brother and also, gratefully, in his light.

Who--if she carried with her the pain of divorce and grief over death and other losses--

Saw no need to speak of it and didn't believe in dwelling on it.

No, Frances lived life in this moment, and to the hilt.

She didn't complain; she moved on.

Her hero Dag Hammarskjold said it:

*Do not look back....Your duty, your reward—your destiny—are here and now.  
[An] opportunity was given you—as a favor and as a burden.  
The question is not: why did it happen this way, or where is it going to  
lead you, or what is the price you will have to pay.  
It is simply: how are you making use of it. (136-7)*

Her charge to herself (and others) was "Do good one person at a time."  
Her question to herself was: Have I helped each individual who came to  
me for help?

Throughout her career--and in later years when she was mentor to many  
young professional women—she remembered and lived out the  
guidance of Eleanor Roosevelt:

"You must do the thing you think you cannot do," said Eleanor. AND  
"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." AND  
"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it.  
And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it." AND  
"Life was meant to be lived, and curiosity must be kept alive. One must  
never, for whatever reason, turn [her] back on life."  
And Frances didn't.

She did not turn her back on life, and she would hope that we don't either.  
There is a deep consistent message in Frances' life and work.  
It has to do with the well-being of the world and the destiny of our nation,  
and it's captured, I believe, in a story Frances would often tell.  
She tells it again in the 1999 videotape, "Citizen Frances."

She recounts her first conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt.  
It was in 1938. Frances was a young woman of 24, and Eleanor Roosevelt  
called her to the White House for a job interview.  
(Whether it was the green or the blue room, Frances couldn't recall.)  
Frances said:  
When I arrived at eh White House I was terrified....  
Eleanor came in; she asked about my background and interests...  
I thought the interview went pretty well  
I got up to leave and Eleanor said,  
Miss Humphrey, won't you sit down again, I have a question to ask you.  
(Frances said, I didn't know what was coming...)  
Then Eleanor said, very quietly,  
What do you think is the greatest sin in the world?  
(I thought--what kind of question is this? And I had my hands on the chair arms....

and I went through the Ten Commandments one by one on my fingers and I knew I was losing the job)...

Eleanor said, Those are all bad sins but there's one that's even worse--and your state, South Dakota, was guilty of this sin...

(Frances said, then I was really lost and when I couldn't answer.)

Eleanor said, It's greed, Miss Humphrey, it's greed. During the depression the farmers—in the Dakotas [and elsewhere]—plowed up every bit of soil and they never put anything back. They didn't show any stewardship. They just took and took and they never returned anything to the soil.

Eleanor said, "That is what I mean by the greatest sin in the world—taking something away and never replacing it."

This theme and its variations continued to undergird much of Frances' life and work.

She believed our country is called to use its great might and resources not to exploit the nations of the world, but to empower them.

Her message was a message for all times.

It's relevant right now.

In a 1960's interview Frances was described her foreign aid work in the developing countries. She said: *(paraphrase)*

*"The only way the United States can remain free is to help countries help themselves—and give them opportunities to become great societies too."*

*Another time she said: It's a mistake to sell our foreign aid program to the American people as if it's primarily a safety and security measure.*

*No, she said, it's more than a security measure.*

*Such a program is based on a moral premise. The moral premise is that the United States has an obligation to serve as a model of humanitarian service.*

She believed the United States had an obligation, and she believed she had an obligation as well.

Right up to the end.

In August, Frances was hospitalized with congestive heart failure.

She had had health challenges before, but this time, at age 88, she didn't rebound as before.

She was in the hospital for a few weeks, on oxygen, her appetite gone.

She didn't complain. She wasn't one to take death personally.

While in the hospital, she contracted pneumonia, and she died the next day, on September 23, 2002.

She'd lived so fully and with such fighting spirit--

It was hard to believe Frances could die at all.

But she did die; she was that human.

She was part of our human family.  
And so we're here today to honor her.

When Doland, South Dakota, celebrated its centennial ten years ago  
Frances was invited to come and be the Grand Marshal of the  
Centennial Parade.

The organizers arranged for her to stay in the old house where  
she grew up with her siblings, back in the days of the first drug  
store, before the Great Depression.

Frances returned for that event.

She returned to the land of the endless horizon.

She ate the potato salad and took her place of honor in  
the Centennial Parade—

She rode down the two blocks of Doland's main street, perched in a  
convertible, waving to the townsfolk—  
after all those years--

Thoroughly delighted to be a part of it all.

(Dag Hammarskjold)

"Keeping in step with the measure under the fixed stars of the task...  
With all the powers of your mind concentrated on the goal beyond the  
horizon...

In the self-forgetfulness of concentrated attention...

Sharing...with others...a timeless happiness,

Conveyed by a smile,

A wave of the hand.

**Thanks to those who have taught me this.**

**Thanks to the days that have taught me this."**

Thanks to Frances Humphrey Howard, for what she taught,  
for who she was, and for all the ways she served.

We say thanks to Frances. And we say good-bye.

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