



Dr. Betty Lentz Siegel
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From Appalachia to the World

Dr. Betty Siegel: One of the most inspiring human beings on the planet. Well, that's certainly the consensus among the many people who know her leadership or have heard her speak.

But *inspiring* is just one of many descriptors for this extraordinary individual. She's also *bright, witty, warm, caring, humble, inclusive, energizing, collaborative and...indefatigable.* Oh, and don't forget: *tenacious in spirit.*

All of these characteristics are indeed accurate and yet, if you really want the absolute best answer to the question of who she is - ask 'Dr. Betty Faye' herself.

Who is she?

Perhaps her first response would be another question.

"Whose am I?" Her answer: "**A child of God.**" And then she'd go on.

"I come from a long line of Scotch-Irish ancestors, some of whom settled in the mountains of Kentucky, the heart of Appalachia."

"From those roots, you only have to go back a couple of generations to begin to see what's in my DNA. I'm the great-granddaughter of Leah Lewis. Her epitaph reads, '*She served her country well.*'"

"I'm the granddaughter of Rose Hogg - another strong Scotch-Irish mountain woman whose epitaph is '*Servant to God, community and family.*'"

"I'm also the first-born daughter of a coal miner and his wife – Nick and Vera Lentz. My father went from working in the mines of Kentucky to owning the mines. He died before seeing me become the first woman president in the University System of Georgia, but I've never stopped feeling his presence. His legacy lives on in his epitaph: '*A man much loved by family and friends, who dared to dream and do.*'"

"And my mother – a true woman of iron, has been a constant source of inspiration throughout my life. Everything she gave me by being the woman that she was is summed up in her epitaph: '*A perfect woman, nobly planned, to warm, to comfort and command.*'"

"The litany of who I am continues with my being the sister of Ella Mae Lentz – now Ella Mae Shearon, Ph.D., Founder and Director of The Institute of Psychodrama in Cologne, Germany and Virginia Beach, VA. Coming from parents whose formal education was limited, Ella Mae and I gave our mother and father much joy by becoming college graduates, and ultimately, receiving our doctorates."

“And now to the Siegel part of who I am. My life would certainly not have been the same if I had not become – the wife of Dr. Joel Siegel. What joy! To find the love of your life, a life partner in family, in learning, and in service. That’s really what it’s all about.”

“And, with a little help from Joel, I’m also blessed to be a mother....mother to two very loving and equally talented sons – Michael and David. Michael grew up to become Dr. Michael J. Siegel – Assistant Professor and Director, Administration of Higher Education Program, Education and Human Services Department at Suffolk University in Boston, MA. He’s also a Research Fellow with the Policy Center on the First Year of College, located at Brevard College in Brevard, NC.”

“David is also a Ph.D. and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. (Notice any maternal pride, family trend, etc.?) Both are married and have made me a mother-in-law to two wonderful women.”

“My newest and very exciting family role is grandmother, or BeBe to David’s two sons, Jacob and Nicholas. I feel doubly blessed, two sons, two grandsons – and there’s nothing I’d rather do than spend time with them.”

“Beyond my familial roles as wife, mother and grandmother, I’m probably most proud of being a psychologist and teacher. From that frame of reference, I’ve spent my life trying to help people unlock their untapped potential. You know, the new studies of leadership and leadership style grew out of perceptual psychology. Self- actualization, not self help.”

“In addition to being a psychologist and teacher at my core, I think I’m a convener – someone who brings people together for ‘out of the box thinking.’ I believe this kind of association produces so many more ideas than any one person could develop alone. Personally, I know I’m not (Thomas) Jefferson. I get many more ideas if I sit around a table and talk with others.”

“An invitational leader: that’s another part of who I try to be. I wrote about this in my book - *Becoming an Invitational Leader*.” This is about the leader as servant, collaborating with others to fulfill mutually beneficial goals, and ultimately a community-builder for the future. By creating a community in the workplace that represents the best of civic life, the Invitational Leader can have a profound effect on those who work within his or her organization.”

“I think people would agree that I typically see the glass half full and look at the world with hopeful optimism. I would say that I’m a realistic optimist, seeing how things are as well as how I’d like them to be and how I can help create a better place.”

“Perhaps you could add ‘joyful inspirator’ to ‘realistic optimist.’ I try to look for meaning in everything I do and help others to do the same. I’ve found it’s not enough to ask ‘who am I, where am I from and where am I going’. You have to ask ‘what’s the meaning of life and how do I matter?’”

Act III – a new beginning

Just like her father, Dr. Betty always carries a \$100 bill in her wallet. Why? Because “**you can always start over.**”

“Now that I’m entering what I like to call ‘Act III’ of my life, I do feel that I’m starting fresh and the questions that really drive me are ‘what’s the meaning of my life and how do I matter.’”

“You’ve probably heard me say that I’m psychologically only 39, somewhat younger than my chronological age! But I think that’s true of all of us. It’s certainly why in Act III, I believe my new favorite description of myself will be.....minister for education. This could also be my epitaph.”

“I believe education - the larger classroom – is a window to the world, a way to change the world and a way to make a difference. And so, my purpose now is to continue that work, the work of the ‘larger classroom’....the classroom of the world.”

As she stepped down from her role as president of KSU – and even as she was named as the Distinguished Chair of the Siegel Institute of Leadership, Ethics and Character, Dr. Betty has continued to receive numerous invitations to speak, to teach and to do many things in her “retirement.” But, as she often says, **“Serendipity: Plays so much a part of our lives.”**

Serendipitously, Dr. Betty gave a speech over 5 years ago in Hawaii – a speech on “Leading with Spirit.” That speech was heard by a man who is a vice president at Stellenbosch University in S. Africa, a prestigious private institution of higher learning situated on a harbour just outside Cape Town. This individual was so impressed with Dr. Betty that he went back to the university and promptly told the Chancellor, “We must bring her here.”

And so they are. In March, 2007, Dr. Betty and her husband, Dr. Joel, will begin a three month engagement at Stellenbosch. While there, Dr. Betty will teach, collaborate with others in higher education, and meet with leaders from across the continent.

This isn’t her first trip to the region. She visited with the 2006 Presidential Mission of the American Association of State College Presidents and Universities. The group has traveled to many other countries including France, Japan, China, and Cuba – to name a few.

It was also Dr. Betty’s initiative that brought a group of educators and university administrators from around the world together at Oxford. They called it “The Oxford Conclave on Global Ethics” and it will be held again in the fall of 2007. Who will lead the charge this year? You guessed it: Dr. Betty Siegel!

She is also continuing to work internationally with leaders in education, business, government, and philanthropy to establish programs in social responsibility and global ethical leadership.

OK – sounds like Dr. Betty has a very full plate. But for someone who’s psychologically so young, she’s not even close to being overbooked. She plans to continue speaking at special venues across the U.S. (although many think she’s too busy and haven’t tried to book her yet! That’s bound to change.)

But mention a special project featuring the lives and stories of successful Scotch-Irish, Appalachian women like herself, and watch her eyes light up even more! At present, she’s pursuing a Kellogg grant to fund the project. She envisions a documentary that would include interviews with high profile, notable women of Scotch Irish descent, women like Martha Lane Collins, former Governor of Kentucky. Where possible, Dr. Betty wants to also include the mothers and grandmothers of these women before their stories are lost.

Among those of us who look up to Dr. Betty, there is no doubt that she will make an impact on the world, starting in S. Africa, spreading to Europe and on to Asia. As always, she’ll continue to seize the moment, and bring people together to do more than any one person could ever do alone.

John Knapp, the founder of the Southern Institute for Leadership and Ethics wrote a book entitled *For the Common Good*. Not surprisingly, he dedicated it to Dr. Betty Siegel. In it is a poem written for her by one of her favorite poets, David White. Also included are praises from family and friends, colleagues and top leaders.

But, after all that’s been said and written about her, who is Dr. Betty Siegel? Well, she’s clearly a phenomenal woman - one whose resume lists more accomplishments that most of us can even imagine - more appointments to various boards, more awards, more honors, more speeches, more academic accolades, etc.

Actually, though, she’s the sum of everything in her resume and all the descriptions by the legions of Dr. Betty fans – as well as all that she shares about herself – her heritage, her talents, her story.

Simply put, said Dr. Betty, **“It all fits.”**

And...it’s just the *start* of Act III!

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