Remembering Betty Friedan

On Feb. 4, a one-woman play called simply “Betty Friedan” was performed at the Lakeview YWCA. The play was written by North Peorian Channy Lyons. The timing was significant because Feb. 4 was Friedan’s birthday and date of death. The play was created to raise awareness of Friedan, a Peoria native and an instrumental figure in the women’s rights movement. The following is an excerpt from the play.

I’ve always considered my husband and my kids the core of my life. But writing that book, and the feeling when I held the first bound copy in my arms was important — carrying my life forward, realizing my potential, finally.

Women stopped me on the street to say, “Your book changed my life!” They couldn’t put it down. When their husbands came home from work and said, “What’s for dinner?” they said “Make your own dinner. I’m going back to school.”

One day, Dick Graham, a Republican appointee on the EEOC, who emerged as a real fighter for women, said to me, “you need to organize an NAACP for women.” So we did. Over lunch. In 1966. We named it the National Organization for Women. NOW wrote the first sentence of NOW’s Statement of Purpose on a paper napkin that day: “to take the actions needed to bring women into the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof, in truly equal partnership with men.” Actions, not just talk. And holding men, but women would take the lead.

There’s something in Jewish theology about your duty to use your life to make life better for those who come after. I felt that mission strongly. It wasn’t enough just to start a movement for women’s rights. You had to make it happen.

NOW and the women’s movement changed our whole society.

We started it all with incredible enthusiasm, knowing somehow we were accepting the challenge history was giving us.

We were taking up the unfinished revolution for women’s equality that the suffragettes had carried forward from the 19th century when they won the right to vote.

But it had nearly sputtered out in the years that followed...the years of feminism?

I wrote in the Statement of Purpose for NOW: “The time has come to confront, with concrete actions, the conditions that now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of choice which is their right, as individual Americans, and as human beings.”
Remembering Betty Friedan
A gathering of women celebrating a legend

Photos by
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