

Counselor shared love students never forgot

If anyone knew the value of a good education, it would have been Marjorie Mae Rowe Belton, and one of her greatest strengths was in guiding others to achieve it.

Marjorie, who was executive director of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA in the 1950s, died Sept. 21 at age 83. Her career as a high school guidance counselor in the 1960s and '70s may have been her most rewarding and one for which she will be most remembered.

"She was a premier director of the Y and gave those girls skills they never heard of," said Kat Crosby, a retired area school superintendent who had known

Marjorie since 1946. "She was a lady with class."

Marjorie, a valedictorian, received a full scholarship to Hampton University and earned a master's in education from Columbia University. She came to Charlotte in the early 1940s and was a student counselor at Second Ward and West Charlotte high schools.

"I saw the standards she maintained for the kids," said Irving Edelman, a former West Charlotte associate principal. He had also worked with Marjorie in summer programs. "She was an outstanding school counselor - absolutely the best. She had a feel for young people that was amazing.

Her high standards set her apart."

Said Gerson Stroud, retired West Charlotte principal, "She was a real genuine asset to the total school population. She was not only sought out by the students, but also by the parents."

Her influence helped swell the rolls of educators. One was Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board Chairperson Arthur Griffin, a West Charlotte student. He told The Observer in 1986 that it was people like Marjorie who helped him get a college scholarship.

Marjorie's son Gordon said, "Arthur Griffin came from humble beginnings, but Mother didn't care about that. She saw a need and she was going to help. ...

"It didn't matter if you became a physician, attorney, a CPA or a brick mason. She was the same way to everybody," Gordon said.

Marjorie's older son, David,

agreed. "She could see a person's potential before that person knew it was there. She nurtured it in very positive ways."

Her helpfulness wasn't confined to schools. Former co-worker Lou Benson recalled her friend as being "one of the most caring, helpful persons I've ever known. She was always so gracious and any favor you did for her, she was so thankful."

Did the students remember to thank Marjorie? "They remembered like it was yesterday," Gordon said. "It was amazing; you couldn't go anywhere with her in a hurry. People would come up and speak with her. Every time we'd go to a mall, people from 25 or 30 years ago would hug her and thank her."

Marjorie read the Sunday New York Times and taught her sons that "readers are leaders." She

also cautioned them not to be so aggressive and assertive. "The archer hits the target partly by pulling and partly by letting go," she advised them.

David remembered that she gave them unconditional love. "It was difficult when you saw her give that same love to all the kids. It came with the territory," he said. "She had a great capacity to give this love."

Marjorie Belton showed love to her family, students and friends alike. Perhaps that love - and all that it accomplished - will be her living memorial.

Gerry Hostetler's obituary column appears on Wednesdays and Saturdays. If you know of someone recently deceased that she should write about, please call her at (704) 358-5075. Her e-mail address is ghostetler@charlotteobserver.com.

Gerry Hostetler



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Belton