

Leisure Worlder of the Month

Ruth Grossfeld

There have been more than 100 Leisure Worliders of the Month, but few have told of their struggles for an education as has Ruth Grossfeld. But there's no doubt that the lessons she learned from early setbacks in her quest for an education are partly responsible for the woman she is today.

Her family brought her to Los Angeles from Chicago in 1923. The honoree's schooling was in Glendale and Los Angeles. The needs of her very sick mother forced her to drop out of Glendale High School where she would have graduated before her 16th birthday. Her father was home at night so it was decided that the only way she could graduate would be to enroll in night high school. Accordingly, the family moved back to Los Angeles.

To Ruth's dismay she found that no one under the age of 18 could attend night school. Rules provided that underage "drop outs" had to go to a daytime trade school which she couldn't do.

She was very young but had the courage to appeal to the Los Angeles members of the board of education where she tried to argue away their bureaucratic refusals. Finally, one member turned his back on red tape. Understanding her desire for a diploma with college credits, he arranged that she attend Manual Arts High school at night. She graduated before she was eighteen, just a few months before her mother's death.

The lesson, never forgotten, was that if the cause is right, grit and determination can win.

Graduation was followed by secretarial courses at Woodbury Business College. She intended to pay the expenses of her higher education by working part-time as a secretary. In 1933 Ruth enrolled at the University of Southern California School of Business Administration where she worked as part-time secretary to the Bureau of Business Research. She was the sole woman student studying business and accounting.

Three and a half years later, the head of the accounting department asked if she was planning to take the state CPA examination. With an answer in the affirmative he warned that she could never be certified in California. There had never been a state qualified woman CPA. With three members of the U.S.C. faculty on the state board, they would flunk her on the oral tests although they knew her written work would be 100 percent correct.

Bitterly disappointed she cleaned out her locker and walked out of the building crestfallen, not to return to the campus for 40 years. This experience, too, had its valuable lessons. It created a strong believer in the equality of women and women's rights. Also, reflection showed that impulsive surrender was wrong. She should have tried to outflank the obstacles and not have left college without her degree. She should have fought for the right to take the CPA examination.

Ruth recalls that 1937 was a good year for accountants. New employment tax laws opened many new opportunities. She accepted an offer from J.J. Haggerty's as assistant controller where she stayed for four years until she married a Chicagoan, Edward Grossfeld, and returned to the place of her birth.

She opened her own public accounting firm in 1941. Later, in 1945 a son, James was born. The accounting business was very successful, but one of her clients died in 1960 and she was asked to manage his business. She was propelled into a wholesale dry cleaning business in Waukegan Ill., where the business was mainly with the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, and Fort Sheridan. As General Manager she enlarged the scope of the business and over the years until her retirement fifteen years later, it grew.

During her 35 years in the Chicago area the American Society for Woman Accountants was taking root. Ruth became a part of many civic organizations and was active in the PTA organization, parent education, Cub Scouts, March of Dimes, and served as an officer in local trade and professional associations.

Many times she said that her objective in life was to return to her community some of the benefits which had so enriched her life. Ruth recalls countless hours she and her family spent in U.S.O. activities and many more as treasurer and officer of the Wauconda Children's Camp.

Upon retirement in 1976, the Grossfeld's headed back to sunny California. They came directly to Leisure World where life offered so many joys and satisfaction.

New areas of knowledge have been experienced in a busy retirement. Some through Emeritus classes in literature, history, Spanish, lapidary and jewelry making, with time off for fishing, golf, swimming and travel.

During these busy years Ruth spearheaded a movement for earthquake disaster preparedness and helped write a pamphlet on the subject which the Community Association mailed to every Leisure World resident. She joined the Rock and Gem Club, the African Violet Club and others. She also became president of the Community Association. She is a member of the League of Women Voters and Common Cause.

About five years ago she realized that the area did not offer any respite for caretakers of the frail elderly. In fact there were only seven in the United States. Today there are more than 1,200 adult day care centers. Ruth spearheaded a drive for funds and information on the care of Alzheimer patients as well and started what has become the Saddleback Y.M.C.A. Adult Day Care Center. This is a permanent community project of which Ruth was the founder and part of its board of directors.

At present she is an adviser of the Golden Rain Health and Welfare Committee, and an advisor on the Area Projects Review Committee. The Golden Rain and the Third Mutual governance are also vital interests.

Ruth has also been an officer of the Foreign Policy Association and continues to be a group leader.