



Betsy's 90 Facts

Betsy Plank, commonly referred to as the First Lady of public relations, was a pioneer for public relations education. She served as the first female president of the Public Relations Society of America in 1973. Her legacy lives on through the Plank Center's research & work in advancing the profession & public relations education.



THE PLANK CENTER
FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Betsy's Professional Career

In 1947, Betsy started her first *Public Relations job* in Chicago at Mitchell McKeown Organization as an Account Executive.

'47

'57

In 1961, Betsy moved to Daniel J. Edelman Inc. (now known as Edelman) in Chicago and worked her way up to *Executive Vice President*.

'61

'73

Public Relations Director for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

Betsy took on *Public Relations* in New York, working at Edelman as the Director-Plan and Employee Informa

1944

'54

'58

After graduating college, Betsy's 1st job was the Continuity Director & Assistant Program Director at KQV. *She made \$18 a week.*

Vice President of the Ronald Goodman Public Relations Counsel, Inc. in Chicago in 1958.

Betsy worked at Co... at Illin... numerous Development ('80), AV... ('84) a

Public Relations Consultant at the American Red Cross in Chicago.

PRSSA



New
AT&T
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tion.



Betsy served as the co-chair of the 1987 *Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education*, which produced recommendations for public relations education.



Helped establish *The Chicago Network*, which the Chicago Tribune described in 2010 as "a still-prominent organization of professional women."

Betsy retired from Illinois Bell in 1990 & started her own public relations agency in Chicago called *Betsy Plank Public Relations*.

'79

'87

1990

'74

'81

'89

returned to Chicago as the AVP Community Relations & Urban Affairs Illinois Bell, now SBC/AT&T. She held positions including AVP of Program Management ('74), AVP of Employee Information and AVP of Corporate Programs & Planning and AVP of Community Affairs ('85).

Betsy played a key role in creating PRSA's *Certification in Education in Public Relations* program, which provides the opportunity for universities to obtain PRSA's feedback about their public relations programs and potentially earn PRSA's endorsement.

Betsy & Jon Riffel started a group that is now called *Champions for PRSSA*, which is composed of public relations professionals who have taken a special interest in public relations education & PRSSA students.

Personal life

Betsy Ann Plank was born on April 3, 1924 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

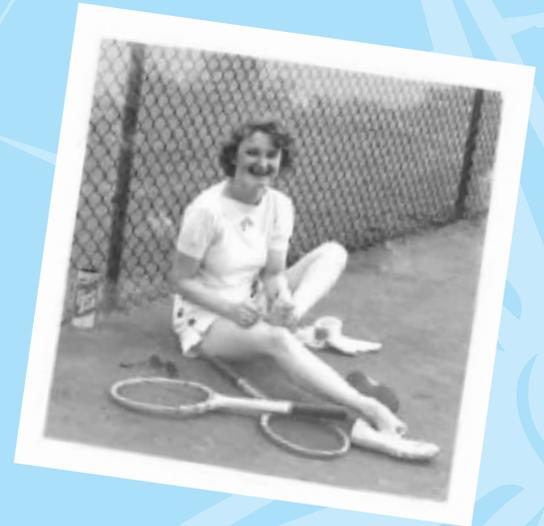
She was an only child.

She spent her childhood years in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

One of Betsy's early influencers was her father whom she described as a native public relations practitioner.

At Mt. Lebanon High School, Betsy was very involved as the Editor-in-Chief of its 1940 yearbook, Ways & Means Chairman, Banquet Committee, Key & Guard, National Honor Society and Merit Parade.

By the time she went to high school, she had attended 8 different schools.



Betsy was a member of the Theta Chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority at Bethany College.

In 1942, Betsy was Organization Editor-In-Chief on the Bethanian Yearbook at Bethany College.



In 1943, Betsy transferred to the University of Alabama for her senior year.

She graduated from the University of Alabama with a Bachelor's degree in history & a minor in English literature in 1944.

"My sainted mother left this world convinced that public relations sounded like something no "nice" southern girl should be doing!"
- Betsy said this several times

In 1965, Betsy participated in the final leg of the Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery.

Betsy would place inspirational quotes on her bathroom mirror as a way to start off her day.

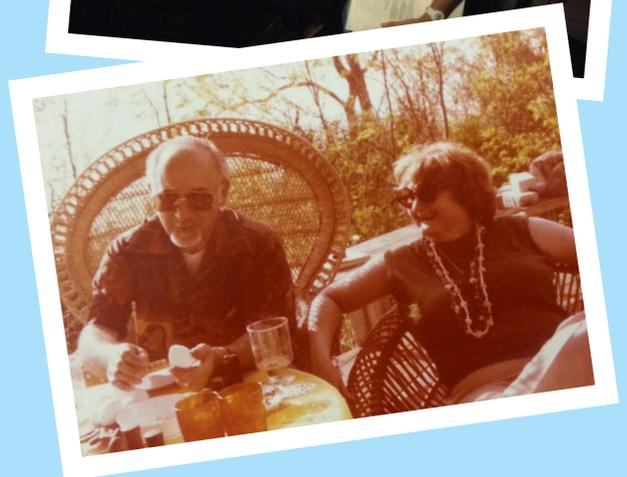
She married Sherman Rosenfield, film producer, on April 10, 1954.

On their 1st anniversary, Betsy and Sherm bought a powerboat, called the Yearling.

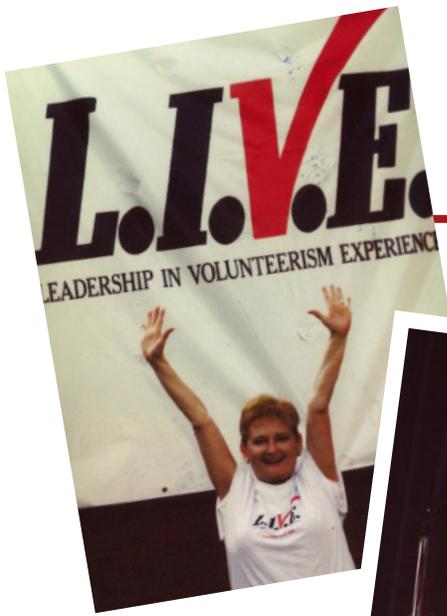
Betsy's cat was named Cinderalla.

Betsy drove a cherry-red Cadillac convertible.

In 2005, the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at UA was established and named for Betsy.



Accomplishments & Accolades



1961 - Outstanding Service Award presented by the Chicago Publicity Club.

1974 - Outstanding Service Award presented by the PRSA Chicago Chapter.

1975 - Outstanding Service Award presented by Northern Illinois University.

1977 - PRSA's Gold Anvil.

1979 - First woman elected by PR News as Professional of the year.

1980 - Outstanding Volunteer of the Year
- The Girl Scouts of Chicago.

1982 - Outstanding Public Relations Professional Award presented by Ball State University.

1983 - Outstanding Public Relations Professional Award presented by the University of Texas.

1984 - PR News' World's 40 Outstanding Public Relations Leaders.

1985 - Chicago's Leading Woman in Communications - YMCA.

1989 - PRSA's Paul M. Lund Public Service Award.



1989 - Tenth Anniversary Award
- The Chicago Network.

1989 - The Woman of Achievement Award presented
by the Girl Scouts of Chicago.

1993 - PRSSA's 25th Anniversary Award.

1997 - First recipient of the PRSA Educators Academy's
David W. Ferguson Award, which recognizes
outstanding contributions to public relations
education by a public relations professional.

2000 - The Distinguished Lifetime Achievement
Award from The Arthur W. Page Society, an association
of the nation's top corporate public relations executives.



2000 - First to receive the Alexander Hamilton Award,
for significant contributions to the field of public
relations, from the Institute for Public Relations.

2001 - First to receive the Patrick Jackson Award for
Distinguished Service to PRSA.

2001 - Inducted into The University of Alabama's
Communication Hall of Fame.

2006 - The PRSA Foundation established the Society's
first-ever scholarship endowment fund - the Betsy Plank
Scholarship Endowment Fund.

She also has a PRSSA Chapter at Northern Illinois
University & an established scholarship in her name.

Named Who's Who in America and was a lifetime
member of the Publicity Club of Chicago, a member of
the Economic Club & Union League Club of Chicago &
the International Public Relations Association.



Fun Facts



Betsy is often referred to as the “First Lady of Public Relations” and the “Godmother of PRSSA.”

Betsy’s summer home on Lake Michigan was called Zanahoria, the Spanish word for carrot.

Betsy’s aunt was a personal friend of Helen Keller.

One of Betsy’s hobbies was photography. She always had a camera in hand to capture the incredible moments.

Betsy’s favorite founding father was Alexander Hamilton.

In Betsy’s spare time, she loved to draw.

Betsy & Sherman made a movie called “Supergasman” which was inspired by her father.

Betsy always enjoyed being on the water.

Did you know Betsy dabbled in acting?

Betsy always used a typewriter and fax machine.

She always signed off with
"Godspeed, Betsy!"

She was a creative writer.
From poems, parodies to screen
plays and much more.

She was a world traveler and visited
Mexico, China and Scotland.

She loved to celebrate
special occasions.

Betsy entertained many
with her costumes.

She had a semi-precious
stone collection.

She collected lapel pins
and buttons.

Morning or Night person?
Betsy was a night person!





Betsy's Wisdom

Public relations people must be eternal students.

Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action *to earn public understanding and acceptance.*

Graduation is not a signal that one is prepared to practice for a career lifetime. It's simply a license to *hit the turf running and to keep learning.*



Aspire & be inspired.

Anyone who knows me well knows that the loves of my professional life are *public relations education, its faculty and students - and particularly those who are part of PRSSA.*

Public relations is a product & practice
rooted in the genius of a democratic society — one in which its citizens make choices — in the voting booth, in the marketplace & workplace, in their everyday lives. Our mandate is to be a part of that precious process of choice — informing, persuading, contributing to honest, ethical debate and consensus.



Public relations is on a continuum of change and growth,
subject to the needs and trends of the economy, government & society, to problems and aspirations of society-at-large.

After looking at impressive resumes and portfolios,
my favorite question always was 'and aside from a textbook, what's the latest book you've read?' It was greeted by instant panic.

Unless it's illegal, unethical or immoral,
volunteer for EVERYTHING!

Build a can-do reputation.

Public relations is a work in progress.
Has been; is today; always will be.



It's amazing how much can be accomplished if it doesn't matter who gets the credit!

- Betsy Plank, in a letter to Lejane Carson, said this quote always graced her desk

Mentoring is really one of the strongest ways to spell success in public relations. As students, you had mentors. As young professionals, surely you have them — or will. All along my way in the business, I was blessed with them. A mentor pointed me to my first job in public relations when I didn't even know what it was. And quickly discovered that you're never too young — or too old — to mentor others, especially students.



All of us become more knowledgeable and sophisticated about patterns of human behavior if we are to *understand and communicate effectively.*

When I sit down at the *typewriter*, it's akin to playing the piano, and *I enjoy it.*

The best communicators are agents of change - responsible change to enable our institutions to serve better. And in the process to fulfill and balance responsibilities to customers and clients, owners, employees, and the community of which we're a part.



This quote, in a discreet black frame, hung on Betsy's wall:
But we've found that if you feed it facts and figures, and coffee and a sandwich maybe; and leave it alone for a while... there's no limit to what it can do. Frankly, *no mechanized model is ever going to replace it. Not around here, anyway.*



We have a responsibility to ensure that the new means of communication are not distorted, not misused. What is communicated — its clarity and priority, its truth and integrity — is becoming more important than ever before, And that is a responsibility which you must never forget. Credibility, truth, integrity, the ethics of communications are treasures to nurture, to protect. *Human communication is a most precious - ever sacred - commodity.*

Be forewarned, you'll hear no sad stories from me tonight about discrimination or glass ceilings that have deterred women in public relations. Sure, it's happened from time to time... but to let yourself become captive to occasional stupid obstacles such as that it to... *defeat yourself.*
- Betsy speaking to PRSSA on women in PR



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