

CHAPTER 21

THE MAYOR AND HER HUSBAND

MIKE AND THE CITY OF MANHATTAN. Not long after John Mark died, Richard Fox visited in Manhattan. He counseled Mike, as a kind of therapy, to get involved with other people: get involved in some activity not directly home centered. Mike had never been a joiner, but she had always had a keen interest in things political and governmental. She began to explore the concerns of the women of the League of Women Voters in Manhattan. They appeared to be women of kindred spirit so she joined the League and initially enjoyed serious study of what government ought to be and how it ought to operate. In line with this, Mike became the League's observer at City Commission meetings.

She also got involved in Democrat Party activities where she met Professor Lou Douglas, Chair of Political Science at the University. They became special friends with special concern for improving government in Manhattan.

Lou Douglas and another professor named Stan Wearden (Statistics Department) began to conspire in an effort to convince Holly Fryer, Chairman of the Statistics Department, to run for City Commission. That they had other conspiratorial plans did not become evident until several months before the 1963 city elections. They invited Mike (and William C. could come, too) to meet for lunch at the University Student Union Cafeteria. They reported that Holly Fryer had agreed to run. Now plans must be made to get him elected. So they talked "plans" for a while.

However, It Just So Happened that before the end of the "plans conversation," the second part of the Douglas-Wearden conspiracy surfaced. There were three seats up for election. It would be good to get another candidate in the race. Who could it be? They talked names. Then one of them said, "Mike, you could run." It struck me as ludicrous so I chimed in with my odd sense of humor: "Yes, Mike why don't you run?" Thirty-seconds later I realized that the Douglas-Wearden proposal was no joke. And that Mike was already waffling in her, "Oh, no, I couldn't do that."

We left the Student Union without any commitment, but I knew she wanted to do it, so I did a little conspiring of my own. I told the kids about what transpired at lunch time and asked them their opinions. All seemed to agree on a positive answer, so I drew up the petition: "We, the undersigned, believe that you should run for City Commission." We had a signing ceremony and then at an appropriate time (at the dinner table) we presented our petition to our friend, a solidly responsible person, who was therewith destined to be elected as Commissioner and Mayor of a city founded for freedom, religion, and education, 100 years earlier. As we expected, Mayor Mike upheld those original dedications with renewed dedication and success.

Holly Fryer was also elected, and between Tremmel and Fryer things began

to happen. They went after more reasonable zoning regulations for the city.¹ They went after the "illicit love affair" that had been going on for decades between the city government and the Chamber of Commerce. They investigated questionable bids made by the city's engineering department.

But most important of all that female Commissioner and Mayor (even before she was mayor)² began to dedicate herself to the problems of race relations in Manhattan. Before her election Mike had met a young, bright (what we now call Afro-American or African American, but was then called Black or Negro)³ woman named Barbara Hanks. They met at City Hall where Blacks had gathered to request paving the streets on Manhattan's south side of town (literally across the R.R. tracks) ghetto. Mike immediately respected the talents of this attractive young woman.

And apparently that same kind of respect was reciprocated. When Mike decided to run for Commission, Barbara Hanks contacted her and volunteered to help in Mike's campaign. Mike, of course, was delighted with the offer. She soon visited the Hanks home (Barbara's husband's name was Murt Hanks), an apartment in an old converted barracks building on the south side of town. Mike was also invited to speak (more than once) at the Douglass Center⁴--recreation and meeting place for blacks. The Manhattan Negro/Black community had a champion "in high places" and they knew it.

Once elected Mike maneuvered the City of Manhattan into establishing a Human Relations Board. Then she got that Board aimed in the direction of Black-White race relations in Manhattan, and, even more important, managed to get a good number of her League of Women Voters friends on that first Board.

Our special Mayor also, in support of the freedom movement of Martin Luther King, Jr. and in protest to the Salem, Alabama disgrace, lead a freedom march through the streets of Manhattan, Kansas--to the shock of some residents, but also to the quiet approval of The Reverend Professor Isaac Goodnow, Mayor Andrew Mead, the New England Emigrant Society, and people across the railroad tracks.

Sometime later Barbara Hanks went back to school to obtain credentials as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). She gave Mike a special invitation to her graduation. As a graduation gift, Mike gave Barbara Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*. On page 23 Gibran spoke of both Barbara Hanks and the Mayor she helped elect:

¹The former Old Boy Commission was to be curbed from its smiling promise to pave over downtown Manhattan into parking lots for Poyntz Avenue merchants and to approve anything the Chamber of Commerce might think up.

²Mike was the second woman ever elected to City Commission, and the first female Mayor of Manhattan.

³As, in fact, Martin Luther King called his people.

⁴Named for Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)--Negro abolitionist.

Then said a rich man, Speak to us of Giving.
And he answered:
You give but little when you give of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

And something more: After moving to Tampa, we learned that Murt Hanks not only completed a degree at Kansas State, but sometime thereafter was elected to the City Commission and during his term served a term as Mayor in that town founded for freedom, morality and religion a hundred years before.

REAL DAMN FOOLISHNESS. There was also another LARGE dimension of politics that our favorite mayor got involved in both in Manhattan and across the country: The Vietnam War.

Mike was on to what was happening in Vietnam before it was a news item across the country. Her friend and City Commission partner Holly Fryer clued her in. Fryer was getting his information from right up front. Some time in the fall of 1963, his son-in-law was sent to Vietnam as part of Kennedy's American military build-up in Vietnam. In 1962 there was a handful of U.S. military advisers in Vietnam. By the end of 1963, under Kennedy's orders there were 15,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. But nobody seemed to notice, except a new female Commissioner in Manhattan, Kansas and her colleague with a son-in-law in Vietnam.⁵ Starting with Kennedy's build-up of troops, the American engagement with North Vietnam began with aerial bombing in 1965 and a tremendous increase of American troops on their way to a half-assed war in Asia. It was in that year that Manhattan elected its first woman mayor.

As councilwoman she had already been involved in Martin Luther King's efforts. Now in her own words her concerns with the viciousness and stupidity of American race relations "melded" with the viciousness and stupidity of that undeclared war against little communists in a little place nobody had ever heard of, or wanted to hear of. Almost completely out of step with the general residents of Manhattan, the Mayor found anti-Vietnam War support among her professor husband's colleagues and their wives. A Vietnam Committee was organized. Bill MacMillan, Episcopal campus chaplain and Mayor Mike Tremmel were co-chairs. Later MacMillan stepped aside and Mike was it.⁶

THINGS TO BE DONE. Vietnam Committee activities: (1) Teach-in at K-

⁵I was right about Kennedy. Remember I was the longest holdout in the family. I have always been a little disturbed that in all the Kennedy adulation we still have to put up with, nobody ever remembers that (1) once a stubborn, uncompromising, boy president set us on the edge of nuclear annihilation, and (2) on an ego trip started the Vietnam War.

⁶Among other members of the committee: Bill and Barbara Boyer, Katie Brown, Dorothy Wright, Jean Hulbert, Nancy Twiss, Lou Douglas, Ruth Friedman, Wayne Rohrer (all University people) and, bless his heart, a retired banker named Arthur Peine.

State with Mayor Mike, among others, acting as instructors: Mike on the cost of war. (2) Letter writing campaign to Kansas Congressmen. (3) Petition to President of the United States. (4) Search for new members for the Vietnam Committee. (5) Organized protest of pro-war speakers invited to participate in University's Landon Lecture Series--such speakers as Ronald Reagan, Governor of California, and General Westmoreland, commander of the troops in Vietnam. (6) Pressure that lead to more acceptable speakers--Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator J. William Fulbright. (7) A fantastic anti-war "festival" in City Park. (8) A write-in anti-war candidate for Congress.

The festival and the write-in candidacy were really different. The concern of the festival was to get together, picnic together, talk to each other and educate concerning that *real damn foolishness*. The candidate for Congress was even more different. There was no expectation that a write-in, anti-war candidate from Manhattan, Kansas, would be elected. But what the candidacy did was make it possible for a person to cast a vote of protest that would get not only newspaper attention in Manhattan, Kansas but newspaper attention all over the state of Kansas. Vote for a candidate of choice dedicated to what you really want to see happen. And the candidate was not a college professor, or a wild-eyed liberal. He was a widely respected, retired Manhattan banker: Arthur Peine, another person willing truly to give by giving of himself.⁷

MIKE'S PERSONAL COMMENTS ON HER POLITICAL CAREER:

- 1) I was "touched" by the support I had from family and friends.
- 2) I realized it was my biggest ever-yet popularity contest. But I was completely dispassionate. My attitude was (and I voiced this): If I win, I will have new duties tomorrow. If I lose, I will go right on doing what I am doing.
- 3) I had won my biggest popularity contest! It was nice the whoop-la was over. I felt very humble and very honored.
- 4) I never felt myself a politician, or had attitudes usually connected with being a politician. I was only interested in public service--giving service to the public. This meant a lot to me. I have always believed that each person should give of himself in this way, if: (1) He is so inclined; (2) He has the opportunity. Reason for this kind of thinking? Others have made my world better. I need and want to be a part of making the future world better.
- 5) I was conscientious. I always studied the agenda carefully before each meeting, and researched items that needed further study.
- 6) I voted in ways that I felt would benefit the greatest number of people.
- 7) In the area of social concerns, two situations stood out where I hoped to make/cause a difference: (1) Race relations. Blacks had been completely ignored. Some of their streets were not paved. They were

⁷America finally retreated from its REAL DAMN FOOLISHNESS in Vietnam on March 29, 1973.

not allowed hair cuts in local barber shops, etc. There were many examples of efforts to keep them stuffed "across the tracks" in the south side of town and to keep them from mingling throughout the community. (2) Town and Gown relations. The Chamber of Commerce and downtown merchants were envious and completely misunderstanding of the University. To downtown people, the University and President McCain were like a fortress designed to keep them out. Of course, none of this was true and the merchants showed their ignorance by not acknowledging that Manhattan would not really have been much of a town without the University.

8) Some successes along the way: (1) I led the movement to create a Human Relations Board for the city, and I succeeded in getting some of my best League friends on the board. (2) About the K-State relations with downtown: There came a breakthrough one day during a meeting at which the desire for widening a street at the corner running along the edge of the University near Aggieville, a fun hangout place for university students. This would require the University giving up some land for the right-of-way. Indications were that this had been desired by the city for 20 years. But it was "felt" that the University would not cooperate. I said, "Well, has anyone ever talked to President McCain about this?" The answer was, "No". I was asked if I would approach McCain about this. I said, "Of course". I braved my way in to see the President. He was completely cordial. He agreed. Simple. You never know until you ask. The street got widened.

9) There were speech makings. I was never bashful. And I never lacked confidence. I never minded a "soap box". But speech making of this kind was challenging. And rather "heady"--speaking for the entire city.

10) Fun things remembered: (1) During campaigning, one business man (merchant downtown), when I handed him my campaign card, said, "You may not be the smartest, but you are certainly the prettiest." (2) Toward the end of a commission meeting one of my fellow commissioners (Richard Rogers--now a Federal Judge in Kansas) who was sitting by me said (in frustration as he childishly broke a pencil between his hands), "If you weren't a woman, I would hit you." I turned and looked at him and said, "Don't let that stop you." It was amusing how disarming my comment proved to be.

WILLIAM C. AND K-STATE. In its origins Manhattan, as reported above, was founded not as a wild frontier town, but as a town based on freedom (anti-slavery), civic morality, religion and education. The Commissioner-Mayor dimension of the family worked to improve the freedom and civic morality. William C. at least made a pass at improving religion and education at that school once called Blue Mont Central College, and then Kansas State Agricultural College, and finally (just after the Tremmels arrived) Kansas State University.

As reported earlier, President John King blew the Danforth Grant that was

to launch a program/department of religious studies at Kansas State Teachers College, and I went storming off in a rage.⁸ I then got word of a new position being established at K-State (Director of Religious Activities and Professor of Religion in the Department of Philosophy) and off to Manhattan exploring I went.

ANOTHER DOUBLE BONUS. The hiring dean's name was Herbert Wunderlich. And It Just So Happened that this dean was destined (as Jim Buchanan had been) to be instrumental in my going to two different universities. Not only would he open the Kansas State University door to me, but later, also, the University of South Florida door, where he moved in 1962. But first about K-State.

TYPICAL SITUATION. John King's reluctance to dash into religion in a state college/university arrangement was not an exception, it was almost the universal rule in state funded institutions of higher learning. The easiest way for a state college or university to deal with the Church-State separation declaration in the Bill of Rights was simply not to allow anything religious to happen on campus.

But students are people, and people are (whether they recognize it or not) religious animals. And also, of equal importance, if not more importance to education, is the fact that the social structures, cultures, histories of humankind, have always been shaped for better or worse by something called religion. Of central importance in higher learning are such questions as: Religion. What is it? Why is it? How has it affected human history?

Colleges and universities (even state funded colleges and universities) could not responsibly avoid considering religion as an essential dimension in higher learning. Such avoidance was going to break down. It Just So Happened that I was in on the beginning of that breakdown, and K-State was my second big step in that direction. Wunderlich and company wanted to get on campus someone who knew religion both as a matter of commitment and as a dimension in history and intellectual life. And there I was.

I was in Wunderlich's office. We talked. Then he did a surprising thing. He said, "Let's go to my house and talk." So we did. And there at Herb's house was the "best mistake Herb Wunderlich ever made." Her name: Helen, and Helen was (and is) one of the most dynamic, exciting, vivacious persons you could ever meet.⁹ I have always insisted that Herb took me home to meet Helen to get her endorsement. She has denied this many times, but I have

⁸Actually John King was a decent fellow and good president. Indeed, after I accepted the K-State job, King told me that if it did not work out, he would rehire me at KSTS. Later, John King visited in our home in Manhattan.

⁹Helen and Herb Wunderlich became two people high on the list of our list of lifetime friends. Helen was, among many other things, a music teacher in public education. She is still a violist and an avid writer of mystery stories. Herb, with a career of college/university administration, is also an excellent artist with two houses full of beautiful paintings.

observed that whenever I raise the point, Helen denies but Herb just smiles.

DIRECTOR AND PROFESSOR. At K-State I attempted to do two things: First, I encouraged, organized, even directed religious life in the denominational ministry institutions surrounding the campus.¹⁰ To accomplish this I encouraged, organized, even directed programs aimed at pluralistic interchange in campus religious life; e.g., Religious Emphasis Week programs that could lead to better interfaith understanding, and even, on occasion, to valentine gifts for small Susans.

Second, I strove to teach not religion, but "about" religion in my classes in the Philosophy Department.

ACURA. This sort of position (Director of Religious Activities and Professor of Religion) was so new that there seemed to be no place to go to get advice on what to do and how to do it? But I kept looking. So It Just So Happened that one year I attended a conference of university chaplains at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. At that meeting I heard suggestions on how to *teach religion*: what scriptures to use; what orthodoxies not to use; how to attract students to chapel worship service.¹¹ I was getting nowhere, learning nothing. Then a round-faced, smiling fellow stood up and said, "My name is Franklin Littell. What you are saying is interesting, but I am associated with a public university, and what you are proposing is not only improper in my school, but is probably illegal.

Ah-ha, a brother under the skin! You can be sure I did not let Franklin get away. We talked. We plotted. We researched. We found a few other "fellows rocking along in the same boat": at the University of Wisconsin, Michigan State, Cornell, Kansas University, Iowa State, Wayne State, Florida State, Kansas State. What to do? Of course, arrange for a national conference. We did. And at that conference, held at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, the conferees agreed that we should make this an annual meeting. At the second meeting we decided that our annual meeting should be organized into a conference organization, and we decided that we should call ourselves the Association for the Coordination of University Religious Affairs--ACURA.

In the 1960s, the half-dozen plus institutions listed above were the only state institutions of higher learning attempting to establish not religion, but religious studies in programs and departments in their publicly funded colleges and universities. Today, the last time I counted, there were more than 400 such programs and departments. Thus it appears that while Mike was working to help *fulfill* freedom and civic morality in areas social and political, her other half, William C., was working *to begin* religious studies in public supported colleges and universities. I must admit that Mike did her thing with intention

¹⁰Places like the Wesley Foundation we served in Boulder.

¹¹The members of this conference were all chaplains at private, religious colleges and universities.

and forethought. I just fell into my thing accidentally, just at the right beginning time. In both cases, Manhattan was a good place for both Mike and William C., and it was a good place to raise kids.

GETTING EDGY AGAIN. But it was a fact in his life that William C. was never quite satisfied. What he really wanted was to establish a real live department of *religious studies*, and for a while it looked as if K-State would be the place to do it. There was talk of developing a program of religious studies. Each year this proposal would be reconsidered, but always funds were short. Also, Herb Wunderlich, a supporter in this proposed project, got a new job at some school in some far off place in Florida: University of South Florida, in Tampa.

Then It Just So Happened that I was elected President of ACURA for the year that ACURA was scheduled to have its annual meeting at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. As President, I was to make (on November 11, 1968) the presidential address. That address, reasonably enough, would be on how to do religious studies in a state institution, in a proper and legal fashion.

Some time before the date of that address, the telephone rang in my office at K-State: Herb Wunderlich. He had heard that I was coming to Florida State to talk about religious studies in state funded schools. How would I like to extend my trip to include the same talk on the South Florida campus.

WATER IS SPLASHING AGAIN. As a matter of fact, I was not really interested in doing this. My life was full. I did not want to take time to go someplace else in Florida to deliver myself of my already delivered brilliance. Then Herb threw the irresistible bait. He said, "I just bought a new sailboat. While you're here we can go sailing." Water was sweeping me along again. Of course I would come. And come I did and had my sailboat ride on Lake Carroll.¹²

I also delivered my brilliant words at the University of South Florida, and It Just So Happened that Irving Deer, the Associate Dean for Arts and Sciences heard me talk. After the talk, Dean Deer, in his happy-smiling, blustering, manner approached me with a handful of papers. He said, "Good, good, what you said is good. We're trying to develop something like that here at South Florida. Would you look over these papers and tell us what you think about our plans so far?" Sure. Why not?

So I examined the plans, and later reported that Deer and company were off in the right direction. Irving then asked me if I would act as a consultant for getting the plans finalized. I agreed. So for the rest of that school year, I was advisor in the development of a program/department of religious studies at the University of South Florida. Plans completed.

Then one day the telephone rang: Irving Deer. The plans looked great. They were setting up the program. One more thing: did I know anybody who might

¹²When Herb and Helen retired, I bought that boat and it is right now sitting out back on the beach.

be interested in taking on the job of chair for the new program to get it launched.

Did I! Of course, I did!

When I gave him the name of my recommended candidate, he said, "O.K. Let me get back to you when we have the authority and funding in order."

Eventually he got back.

I was excited about the possibility, but I knew Mike would not be excited about it. Indeed, she had already, on more than one occasion, declared that she did not intend ever to live "in the decadent south." And, in addition, there was Susan getting ready for her junior year at Manhattan High School.

MAKE A DEAL. Maybe I could get all this and heaven, too: that is, with the offer of a new job elsewhere, perhaps, I could get an equal counter-offer at K-State. So I made an appointment with Dean John Chalmers, Dean of Arts and Sciences. He did not want to see me leave. He talked about how he really intended to launch such a program at K-State. It was in his plans--etcetera, etcetera. Next year. Next year.

I came away from that meeting feeling good. It was going to happen right there in Manhattan. But I did not have anything in writing. I talked to the dean who had taken Wunderlich's place: Chet Peters. I told him about Chalmers' enthusiasm and promises, but that I did not have it in writing. Chet said, "Sit down and write a letter to Chalmers. Start it by saying 'It is my understanding from our conversation...'. Then spell out the what and when of his promises." That I did. And I got back a very nice letter that really committed to nothing.

Then Irving Deer was back in touch, inviting me to come to South Florida for an interview. Mike and Susan went with me to check out this new "port of call" called Tampa. Mike and I actually did check it out some, but Susan absolutely refused. She stayed right there at the Holiday Inn swimming pool the whole time. To hell with that other stupidity!

When the official offer came, Mike and I (back in Manhattan), got in the car and drove to City Park. We sat and talked. Sitting in that park, in Mike's town, knowing I wanted this very much, my girl kissed me and said, "All right, let's do it."