

"Inside AARP" (staff newsletter – 1998 articles)

"I REMEMBER ETHEL" SERIES

Bernie Nash (former AARP Executive Director)

"First of all, we didn't call her Ethel, it was **Doctor** Andrus.

I met Dr. Andrus in 1961 at the White House Conference on Aging. As Director of the Minnesota Agency on Aging at the time, I knew of her and was prepared to be impressed. I was! She was very penetrating in her questions and had a no-nonsense approach which led me to hold for her a great deal of respect.

I learned later that Dr. Andrus loved to laugh. She was very energetic — and therefore everyone around her was. In those days, we traveled around by car to the states for our meetings. We didn't have national meetings. In the car, on our way from city to city, she loved to get us involved in discussions of Shakespeare — she knew Shakespeare very well. She knew the bible very well. And she loved to sing Gilbert and Sullivan songs!

Dr. Andrus was an avant-garde person. She would probably be delighted with what AARP is doing today and would probably be leading us onward and upward."

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Fred "Ernie" Reiser (student at Lincoln High School, Los Angeles in 1930s)

"When I was a student at Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, Dr. Andrus was our principal. I got there in 1936 and graduated in 1939.

When I first met Dr. Andrus, she used to bring her mother to school with her in a wheelchair. She was with Dr. Andrus there in her office all the time, so I got the feeling Dr. Andrus was a very caring person.

She was never dictatorial, by any means. She was a warm human being, always had a smile. I knew of no person at the school who didn't like her. She would talk to students one-on-one. She would ask, 'What do you want to do? Are we training you to do it right?'

We had the most diverse school, in terms of races and nationalities, of any school in the Los Angeles area at the time. Dr. Andrus was a stabilizing factor. She stressed cooperation. If everybody today was like Dr. Andrus, we would have a lot less problems. I believe if Dr. Andrus was here today, she would say to the AARP, "Keep up the good work!"

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Margo Brown

"I was hired by Dr. Andrus and have worked for AARP 33 years. Whenever I'm asked to describe Dr. Andrus, my biggest concern is if I have the right words to convey the way she looked at life, her kindness, her warmth, and what it was like to be around her. Every time I talked with her it seemed like I was the only person in the whole world. She made everyone feel very good.

Dr. Andrus was able to see greatness in people and always seemed to be able to pick the right person for the right job. She always made us feel we were important to the success of AARP. She had such great enthusiasm, she was such an inspiration, you wanted to do everything you could do to make sure you wouldn't fail her.

Dr. Andrus had a wonderful memory. I introduced my boyfriend to her and then she didn't see him again for over a year. I brought him to a party and I was about to introduce him to her again when she extended her hand and said, 'George, how are you?' I couldn't believe she had remembered his name!

I believe Dr. Andrus would be elated if she could see what we (AARP) have become. Although she knew AARP would be successful, I think this would be more than she ever dreamed it would be.

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Virginia Schott (longtime personal secretary to Dr. Andrus)

"I was secretary to Dr. Andrus for eight years. She was **the** most dedicated person I've ever known. Since she was just a little girl, she knew she wanted to accomplish a lot in the world. She said her father had told her that she must never marry if she wanted to achieve the goals she had in mind. That's why she didn't marry. But, she had a different kind of family — all of her students, everyone she worked with — they were her family. She was that close to them.

I remember her telling me she had gone back to see one of her favorite teachers who had retired and found her living in a chicken coop. That's what got her started working to get pensions for teachers in California.

There was no color for Dr. Andrus. A person was a person. It was what was inside — what the person wanted to accomplish — that mattered to her. She would make special arrangements to detour around some towns and come in the back way so she could meet with black teacher groups.

Dr. Andrus's favorite drink was a whiskey sour. She didn't indulge often, but when she did, she enjoyed them very much. One day we were sitting in a restaurant in Washington waiting for a clergyman who was to meet us. The waiter had just brought her drink when the clergyman showed up a half-hour early. Dr. Andrus said, 'Oh Virginia, here's your whiskey sour. The waiter must have left it in the wrong place.'

Dr. Andrus really was a very human person. She wasn't like some of these 'icons.' She was with it. She had a love interest, oh yes. His name was Robert. He was a well-known person in New York.

Nobody in my life has been as inspiring as Dr. Andrus."

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Laura and Monty Warren (Ruth Lana's daughter and son-in-law)

Laura:

"My mother was Ruth Lana. She was a school teacher in Los Angeles. After she had me, we were living in an apartment in Glendale. Dr. Andrus, who knew my mother, said 'You can't stay in that apartment. It's not fit for a child.' So, she brought us home to live with her and her mother. That's where I grew up.

I remember when I was a child and was worried about something, Dr. Andrus would always say, 'Now we're going to sit down and worry for two minutes and then it will be over and we won't worry about it any more.'

The NRTA office was in our house in Glendale for the first five years or so. We had a large kitchen in the back. That's where it all started, that's where all the work was done. Being an only child, I was sort of like the fourth for bridge, they'd have me helping out doing all of these little chores like licking labels.

The Association was our whole life when I was a child. It was very interesting. I got to meet famous people. Robert Young, who had been a student of Dr. Andrus, would come for dinner a lot. Robert Preston was her student, too. I got to meet Eleanor Roosevelt. The kids at school wouldn't believe me when I told them these things.

I have the fox fur you see Dr. Andrus wearing in all the pictures. I found it recently when we were moving. She always dressed immaculately. She never wore a pair of pants in her life."

Monty:

"I met Laura in Germany when I was in the Army and she was there with the AARP Travel Service. We got married over there in 1961. Laura's mother and Dr. Andrus flew over for the wedding. After my service duty, we came back to Long Beach (CA). After college, Dr. Andrus offered me a job organizing local chapters for the AARP.

When I started, we had 150,000 members. The list of members was on the old steel 'addressograph' plates. When we moved to a punch-card system, they were worried about what to do with the plates because they wanted our membership to remain confidential. So a couple of membership processing people loaded the plates into a pick-up and drove around looking for a place to dump them. They spotted men pouring concrete for a house foundation. They talked the men into letting them dump the plates into the concrete. So, today in California, a family may be sitting on top of the original AARP membership list.

Soon after I started, I was in the office when the fellow who helped Dr. Andrus with *Modern Maturity* suggested doing an article on the Louisiana Purchase. She said, 'Okay, give me an hour.' She sat down and in not more than about 30 minutes wrote a complete article from memory with all the dates, all the dollars, all the people and so forth. I had been impressed with her before, but that really got to me. I couldn't figure out how anyone could know all those things.

Dr. Andrus was an amazing person."