

**Icons of Health Education Leadership:  
Revisiting Our Past to Inform Our Future**

**62<sup>st</sup> SOPHE Annual Meeting  
Renaissance Arlington Capital View  
Arlington, VA  
October 29, 2011**

**Sigrid G. Deeds (Nov. 16, 1923 – Feb. 12, 2011)**

I am honored to have been asked to compile and share reflections on the life and contributions of Dr. Sigrid Deeds. It was my great good fortune to have had her as my advisor during my masters degree training at Hopkins in the 1970's. Our relationship continued over the years, and I always treasured the times we would get to catch up at meetings, or in the more recent years over lunch in Baltimore with Elaine Auld and Nan Stout. We always had a good laugh, shared professional and personal updates and sometimes woes, and I always came away with new insights.

To start with Sigrid's contributions to SOPHE, Paul Mico recapped her many leadership roles, noting that they were topped off with the three-year commitment of President-Elect in 1977, President in 1978, and Past-President in 1979. He described these years as "a period of high ferment and evolution in the field of public health education." There were substantial increases in the number of health education training programs. There were high level government hearings on national health insurance that with Sigrid's help included discussing health education services as a covered benefit for the first time. With Sigrid's leadership, SOPHE was reorganized to facilitate improved relationships between the Chapters and the National organization. She also contributed extensively to the Role Delineation Project, which led to the credentialing of Certified Health Education Specialists (CHES). Sigrid also wrote the first textbook to help health educators prepare for the CHES certifying exam, and it was a widely utilized resource around the country.

Richard Windsor described how Sigrid welcomed him into SOPHE and encouraged him to take leadership positions in the organization. In reflecting on her support and mentorship, he noted:

*Next year I will celebrate 40 years as a SOPHE member. You go through a life and career and are touched by many wonderful people.*

*I deeply appreciated her support at a very formative stage of my career. I am thankful that I had the chance to work with her, and enjoy her wit and wisdom. She was a special colleague.*

My experience parallels that of Richard's in that Sigrid always encouraged her students to become active in their professional associations. Sigrid contributed to both SOPHE and APHA, holding leadership positions in both organizations. She encouraged me to get involved, and the professional colleagues and friends I've made as a result have been a highlight of my career. Sigrid always spent time nurturing young professionals, and we really appreciated her giving us the "inside scoop" on both the work and play of attending annual meetings.

One of the great annual meeting stories of Sigrid's tenure as President is a favorite in the lore of SOPHE history. Her Presidential address was to be given during the conference dinner, being held in a Chinese restaurant in New York City. The story goes that the restaurant was very loud with poor acoustics and no working microphone, so Sigrid, ever the clever problem solver, climbed on the table and delivered the speech from there.

One important piece of advice I'll never forget her giving me was her belief that you had to speak up and advocate for yourself and what you believed was right. To use her words, "Don't wait to be invited to the dance – just show up and dance" (or words to that effect). This was before I heard about her delivering her Presidential address from atop a table. I missed that meeting, but have often wondered if the true story was that she was dancing atop the table!

Larry Green wrote that he met Sigrid when she was an evaluator for the Doctoral Research Training Program in Health Education at Berkeley and he was a doctoral candidate. When Sigrid left for Pittsburgh, where she completed her own DrPH, Larry took over the role of Coordinator of the Doctoral Training Program and as he says,

*came to appreciate more fully the work she had done. With that appreciation and an always general admiration for her style and grace as a practitioner, she was one of my first recruits to the faculty in health education at Johns Hopkins.*

Larry went on to say that

*many others will recall instances of Sigrid's great sense of humor, her feminist spirit, her courage in mounting a table in a Chinese*

*restaurant in New York. We were good and close friends though our Hopkins years together. Sigrid was a great asset for our students in overseeing their field work and assuring that they were connecting the dots from the classroom to the work they did in their projects. The spectacular success of some of our Hopkins students can be attributed in large part to the mentoring Sigrid provided them. She also had a major hand in one of the first publications on application of the PRECEDE model in hypertension, one of the first in maternal and child health, as a co-author of the first edition of the textbook published in 1980, and in each of the PRECEDE summer workshops we sponsored between 1975 and 1979.*

As one of Sigrid's students during that era, I can attest to the enormous impact her work and mentorship had on my colleagues and me, both while we were in school and well past our training years. And everyone trained in our field since then, probably anywhere in the world, has been influenced by the early work that Larry described.

Another characteristic of Sigrid's that I truly admired is that she didn't suffer fools lightly. Never harsh, but always determined, watching Sigrid go after what was right was inspiring. This tenacity and interpersonal skill is well illustrated by this story from Ed Roccella, who calls Sigrid "my dear mentor, colleague, and friend."

*On another occasion, as Chief of the Allegheny County Health Education Bureau, she met with city officials about the deplorable rodent problem in the inner city. The Mayor, while cordial, suggested that the problem didn't appear serious, and the city had many priorities. Sigrid adroitly suggested the problem was more serious for those who resided in the inner city than for those who did not. She suggested the problem should be addressed before political pundits could use this as an arguing point; the city has done nothing about this disgraceful public health menace. She pointed out other communities even had marches and demonstrations and left dead rats on city hall steps. Her point was quickly taken and there was a rodent control program. Sigrid taught me social policy can be changed and social justice can be achieved by working within organizations. The work begins with preparation, fortitude, patience and a commitment to help others.*

Let me conclude by simply stating the obvious – Sigrid was an icon in our field. She led SOPHE with energy, grace and good humor; she was an early pioneer of the notion that public health is social justice; and she was an exemplar of how academics and practitioners can work together to improve public health through health education. I couldn't agree more with Ed Roccella's closing in his letter ..... "Time slowly eases the pain of losing my dear friend, but her lessons and beauty remain."

Thank you.

Andrea Gielen

Dear Deeds Family and SOPHE Colleagues,

Although I cannot attend today's session honoring SOPHE notables and stalwarts, I would like to share a few memories of my dear mentor, colleague, and friend, Doctor Sigrid Deeds and what she meant to me. Time permitting I would share more but no doubt others will have equally fond memories and stories to tell.

In the Spring of 1969 I arrived in Pittsburgh to do field work as part of MPH training. Sigrid was my supervisor. To appreciate how our friendship started and grew, one must understand the social fabric of that time. In the mid to late 1960s the nation was undergoing unprecedented social change. Inspired by John and Jacqueline Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, young people took seriously their message that the torch was being passed to a new generation and we were letting our voices be heard. The civil and voting rights movements were underway and many marched for equality and fair treatment. The Vietnam War was bitterly disputed especially by students who saw their friends return home dead, maimed or not at all. Schools of Public Health were affected by these societal changes. At that time more than ½ of the MPH Health Education students at Michigan, were Peace Corps volunteers.

Sigrid and I spent some time discussing the 1967 *Health Education Monographs* paper published by Dorothy Nyswander on "The Open Society, Implications for Health Education". It crystallized for some of us, Health Education's role in societal change, Health Education as Social Justice and Social Policy. However, to me at that time, action was not matching the rhetoric. We were disillusioned. The "establishment" was difficult to change, we were naïve and trusted no one older than 30. Civil disobedience was the frequent strategy used especially on college campuses and in communities to effect change. Sigrid Deeds showed me there were other effective and efficient ways. It became a life long lesson.

Sig understood the social ills of the day and the changes that were needed to address them. She knew how to make a community diagnosis and how to create positive social changes. I watched her work with the Medical School to open a primary care teaching clinic in Homewood Brushton, a poor neighborhood with meager medical care services. During one meeting

with Department Chairs, she eloquently suggested the way to teach real medicine was to leave the ivory tower and come out to the community and treat people not diseases. She facilitated a win-win situation by working with the Medical school, to open the clinic, and by convincing a leery community the service provided by medical residents would be excellent. She demonstrated how to change the establishment by working within it. She later received her doctoral degree from the same university. On another occasion, as Chief of the Allegheny County Health Education Bureau she met with city officials about the deplorable rodent problem in the inner city. The Mayor while cordial suggested that the problem didn't appear serious and the city had many priorities. Sigrid adroitly suggested the problem was more serious for those who resided in the inner city than for those who did not. She suggested the problem should be addressed before political pundits could use this as an arguing point; the city has done nothing about this disgraceful public health menace. She pointed out other communities even had marches and demonstrations and left dead rats on city hall steps. Her point was quickly taken and there was a rodent control program.

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Later, I was fortunate to work with Sigrid on hypertension control issues when she was with the American Red Cross and with SOPHE during her Presidency and mine. She continued to provide sage advice.

Time slowly eases the pain of losing my dear friend, but her lessons and beauty remain.

Ed Roccella  
Irvington, Virginia  
September 2011