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A Great Lady Passed Our Way: Angie Debo

Gladys Toler Burris

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Our purpose is not to record her accomplishments for those have been told by the media. We write to celebrate the friendship we shared when she was an active member of Stillwater Writers during her years with OSU, a friendship kept alive through letters, visits, and an occasional club meeting at her home in Marshall, to which Charles Dutreau would chauffeur us in his roomy Winnebago.

Many of us recall the last time she appeared before an OWFI Conference, speaking on “Ethics in Writing,” a subject close to her heart. She and I rode to the Conference with Geneva Wise, the three of us chatting; and although we never knew that someday she would receive the Award for Scholarly Distinction from the American Historical Association, she made clear her First Commandment: spare no effort to be true to facts and exact details.

So we admired Angie for her integrity, but loved her for the humility so evident in her concern for others. She never failed to encourage, with constructive comments, our club members’ writing. “Keep on. You have a bright future,” she often added. On one occasion, this amateur had received a second-place award for a biographical article in the OWFI Contest. Angie, sitting beside me — she, whose portrait hangs in the State Capitol as the First Lady of Oklahoma History — said, as proudly as though she were my mother, “See how successful your writing is.”

Only the great can be unassuming. I once asked, looking around her small home, “Where do you write, Angie?” She smiled, “In my bedroom. You see, I have the filing cabinet on my left, and the bed on my right, so I spread out my files on the bed. It’s quite handy.”

Oblivious to her towering shadow, she took delight in simple things, such as showing her rose garden, one time saying, as she clipped a rose, “You in your pretty pink dress should have this one.”

We doubt there will ever be another Angie Debo. We celebrate her: a great lady who passed our way, reaching out as a warm loving friend.

GLADYS TOLER BURRIS, a longtime resident of Stillwater, is a free-lance writer and retired Language Arts teacher.

Photo compliments of G. H. Wise.