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Pat Aller, A Humble Tour de Force

By Susan Klingelhoefer

She had so many good qualities that it was almost selfish. Except that she was anything but selfish. With each passing year, as I got to know Pat better, I'd learn something more about her character, and realized that she was anything but ordinary. She shared her interests and gently taught me her values. In the early '80s, when I knew Pat personally, she kept a rack for drying out plastic bags that she was rinsing and re-using. She was a woman ahead of her time, doing this practical task well before the term "environmentalist" was on everyone's lips. She never had, nor ever wanted to own a television. Pat's love of music, particularly opera, was evident in the continuous playing of classical music on her radio. And the Pat that I came to know personally became a paradox to me professionally, because, as I look back on those important years of work we did for the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, the Pat I knew then was *devoted*. She was so devoted to the work that it often kept her from her music, or Lincoln Center, or an evening at the theatre. She sacrificed much for the Foundation and did so with humility and grace.

Pat arranged my interview with Oscar Johannsen in 1985 so that I could have an office job in Manhattan. Initially, I did the bookkeeping for RSF in a very large ledger that when opened, occupied most of the top of my desk. Pat was a positive influence from day one. She lived in the city then, and I in Larchmont, so she was in the office when I arrived and there when I left. She managed the office with a meticulousness that was at once annoying and admirable. If Pat had a task she wanted to complete, she wouldn't eat until she was finished, which made her diligence all the more inspiring to me. Pat's paradoxical ways carried values. She taught me to be frugal at RSF – we were non-profit, after all, and if three staples were sufficient on a Jiffy bag, then so be it. But when we received a book order, she'd recommend adding a free pamphlet or two – giving a little something more, which was also a habit of the private Pat. I once saw her, years ago, give a homeless person \$10. Life lessons like that can leave a lasting impression, as that act did for me.

When we had to move RSF from 44th Street to 72nd Street, both of us were determined to do it on a dime. She joined me in the basement so that we could label boxes of Concordance, a tome that Pat respected intensely

(“imagine the work required to create it”). I can still hear her saying, “Susan, don’t hurt your back.” The boxes were heavy, but I persisted. We had Progress & Poverty in hardcover, and paperback, and all of Henry George’s major works in cloth, and so much more, but we persisted. Pat had found office space for us across the street from Ralph Lauren’s infamous Madison Avenue store – at half the cost of the midtown rent! The office, formerly private space, had an Ecuadorian rainforest mural on the back wall. Getting to the office meant climbing a wide, sweeping staircase, or riding in the antiquated, private elevator. We loved the space and flourished there.

Being employed at RSF, attending conferences, and partnering with Pat afforded me repeated opportunities to meet influential people. It was because of Pat that I met Agnes DeMille. At RSF, I worked indirectly with Will Lissner, founder of the American Journal of Economics & Sociology, and a true genius. The conferences were special occasions, attended by interesting & erudite Georgists, loyal, serious, and alarming. Pat was too shy to be a speaker, but that choice belied her brilliance. She had an encyclopedic mind. Pat encouraged me to attend the conferences, to travel, have adventures, get outside of my comfort zone, which she also challenged me to do in Manhattan. Pat loved to travel, going to France as a young woman fresh out of college, learning the mellifluous language, and using it thereafter throughout her adult life. To Pat, it was imperative we both travel to the conferences, near or far, Philadelphia or Sante Fe, Denmark, Russia. She would often explore on her own, further her personal interests, or enjoy a quiet meal of local cuisine. She was not afraid to be alone anywhere. I loved her for being my mentor, my friend, for making me a better person, for being a woman who supported other women, for loving literature so much that a quote could bring a tear to her eye, and for choosing an apartment near Lincoln Center to be as close as possible to the best of the best in the world of great performances. It was fitting she lived there and thrived there. Greatness can be measured in many ways. Pat possessed a plethora of great qualities and it was my privilege to have been taken under her golden wing. I find I am still in a state of disbelief that Pat is gone, having lost her during these most unusual of times, and having always thought that I would be by her side when she died. Yes, we were that close. And so, I must remind myself that I cannot invite her out for French food; I must say merci, and au revoir. Je t’aime Pat.