

## Betty Tillman: a remembrance

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I first met Betty Tillman when it was really a great time for me to meet her. I was at the Southern Economic Association's meeting in New Orleans in November 1977, and excited about the possibility of spending the 1978–1979 academic year at the Public Choice Center at Virginia Tech. I had met Jim Buchanan only once when he visited the University of Colorado, Boulder where I was teaching, and I had never met Gordon Tullock or Betty. So my excitement was coupled with a dose of anxiety when I was invited to have dinner with Jim, Gordon, and Betty at Commander's Palace. It was later that I learned that Jim enjoyed letting his hair down, so to speak, and enjoy a good joke in a social setting, but at the time I didn't feel that engaging him in light-hearted banter was the right approach. With Gordon, I quickly became unsure if he was engaging in light-hearted banter or if he really did think I was a moron. Fortunately, Betty was there. Anyone who had the privilege of knowing Betty, even briefly, can understand what a comfort she was to me. Her charming comments, friendly smile and a couple of glasses of the milk punch she recommended neutralized the effects of Gordon's comments on my self-confidence. Before dinner was over I was talking to Jim and Gordon about how an article of theirs had inspired me to write one of my own and telling Betty how beautiful her ankles were. I was completely serious about the ankles.

People liked Betty because it was obvious that Betty sincerely liked them. The old joke that sincerity is important, and once you learn how to fake it you have it made, simply doesn't apply to Betty. No one can fake the pleasure in the company of others that she conveyed with her smile, exuberance and kindness. One could know Betty a long time before knowing she suffered from frequent migraine headaches. I was unaware of these painful episodes for quite a while, and I learned of them because someone told me about them.

There was nothing more natural than to think you were one of Betty's favorites—that she must have liked you at least as much, and probably more, than she liked most others. J.R. Clark and I have had a long-time disagreement that is only superficially in jest.

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J.R. claimed that Betty liked him more than she liked me. I am convinced that he is delusional about this. I cannot believe that Betty didn't like me just as much as, and probably more than she did J.R. Of course, it was hard not to feel that you were right at the top of Betty's list of favorites even though you would have to know that it was a long list. And it goes without saying that Betty was high on the list of favorites of a long list of students, visitors and faculty who were connected to the Public Choice Center, as well as many others.

Of course it is impossible to remember Betty without thinking about her importance to the Public Choice Center. Although one cannot think of the Center without Betty, I think we should still recognize that the Center would have been an intellectually exciting and stimulating place without Betty. It has been said that Betty was the glue that made the Center work. To my mind this deflects attention away from the most important contribution of Betty to the Center. She did improve the work of the Center with her hard work and competence, but that is not what made Betty so very special. What she did better than almost anybody else could have done was to provide the love and sense of family that made working at the Center more than just an intellectually inspiring activity. Largely because of Betty the Center was a welcoming and harmonious place to work and it was for a long time. That is not something that many academic settings can honestly claim. Obviously I am not saying that the Public Choice Center was free of conflict. But it is true that the only conflict that had any important impact on the Center was not a conflict within the Center, but one with those outside the Center at Virginia Tech, a conflict that was resolved when the Center moved to George Mason University in 1983.

The Public Choice Center and Betty will always have a special place in the heart of my wife Cindy and me. We met through the Center and Betty was one of a small number of friends invited to our wedding in Blacksburg. We kept in close touch with Betty when we were at the Center. Later, we saw her regularly at meetings and our visits to the Center after we left for the University of Georgia in 1985. We continued to call Betty on her birthday and send her a card for many years, a practice reinforced by the pleasure of hearing back from her and by her cards and calls on our birthdays. When we stopped hearing from her a few years ago we knew then that the stories we had heard about Betty's forgetfulness were sadly true, but we continued to send her birthday cards in the hope that she would remember us. As is true of a large number of people who were honored to know Betty, and to love and be loved by her, we have missed her as she faded away from us, and will continue to miss her now that she is truly gone.