

Who Was Doris Stansell?
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At the summer 2002 board meeting of the Washington State Society of Medical Assistants, the guidelines for the Doris Stansell Memorial Leadership Fund were approved. The Doris Stansell Memorial Leadership Fund was established in August 1997 by action of the WSSMA board as a formal memorial to Doris Stansell. Doris was a Life Member of the Washington State Society of Medical Assistants, held the office of state treasurer, and served as editor of the WSSMA newsletter. She held many additional committee roles and offices at both the state and chapter level. She greatly enjoyed attending state and national medical assisting conventions and served as Washington State Delegate to National on several occasions. She died on June 29, 1997 after a short illness.

If you are a WSSMA member of long standing, you might have been mentored by Doris, known Doris, or noticed the lady with the beautiful white hair at board meetings and conventions who most often observed from the back of the room. Otherwise, you may have wondered who Doris Stansell was, or why a Doris Stansell Memorial Leadership Fund exists.

Doris was born in Colorado on August 25, 1915 to Walter and Sarah VanCleave. She was one of eight children, and she has a surviving sister who lives in Mt. Vernon, Washington. The family moved to Port Orchard in 1920 and later to Concrete, Washington. Doris graduated from high school in Concrete in 1933. After high school graduation, she moved to Seattle and later to California to live with her sister May. May and her husband had a good friend, Lester Stansell. Doris and he dated during the early years of World War II, but ended up taking separate paths in life. Doris later met and married her first husband Luther Powhatan. They had photography studios in California, Tacoma, and Oklahoma. After his death in the late 1960's, Doris returned to Tacoma. Lester found out from Doris' sister that she was available and he headed to Tacoma to find her, and they were soon married. In Tacoma, she was employed as a medical assistant until her retirement in the early 1980's. Doris was a charter member of the Pierce County Chapter of Medical Assistants and held many offices in that chapter in addition to the active role she took in WSSMA. She seemed to have boundless energy, and if a job needed doing, she just got it done. She published many newsletters in the day when such a task was much more labor-intensive than now. She spent hours at the typewriter, the ditto machine, and finally folding and stapling. When we needed tote bags for a state convention, Doris made all 150 of them on her sewing machine. She loved to travel and made trips to Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and China in addition to wide and varied travels in the United States. On her return from these trips, she took pleasure in organizing and displaying her pictures in albums and providing a narrative related to each one.

Lisa McCollum, CMA, Washington State Life Member, and former Director of Membership for AAMA, knew Doris well. At the time of her death, Lisa wrote some special comments to be read at the celebration of her life. These comments tell a great deal about Doris and what she meant to WSSMA. Lisa spoke to Doris by phone a few weeks before her death. Of that conversation she says, "Though Doris' voice sounded

tired and weak her mind was clear and she was just as direct, determined and funny as I always remember her. She told me she wanted to stay in her own home and that she didn't expect to see her next birthday. And, as in most things, Doris got what she wanted, and she was right." Lisa met Doris at her first WSSMA convention. Lisa didn't know what a House of Delegates was but thought if she was a member of WSSMA she should go and find out what it was about. To quote Lisa, "being a shy thing at that time" she sat alone in the back of the gallery, slipped off her shoes, and tried to follow what was going on. A white haired lady came and sat next to her and introduced herself as "Doris Stansell from Pierce County," asked who Lisa was, and proceeded to explain who the people were and what was happening. She patiently answered all of Lisa's questions. She didn't know Doris was state treasurer, and Doris didn't tell her. When Lisa attended her first WSSMA Board meeting as vice president of the Kitsap County Chapter, Doris was there and knew her immediately. Doris made Lisa feel welcome and comfortable, beginning their special friendship.

Many of the WSSMA long time members can tell of meeting Doris in similar ways. Quoting Lisa, "Doris was a nurturer and a nudger. She thought you could, and should, do anything you (or she) could think of. When I was with Doris I could always 'feel' her patting me on the back with one hand and firmly pushing with the other. Sometimes I could even feel it when she wasn't there. Due to the encouragement and support of Doris, and others, I ended up doing unexpected things and going in directions I didn't know that I wanted to go. She has left a legacy of chapter and state leaders that she has nurtured over the years. Always quietly, out of the spotlight, from behind, she led. She was a generous woman with a gift for bringing out the best in people."

At the time of Doris' death Lisa McCollum and many of Doris' friends in WSSMA felt that a formal memorial seemed necessary for one that gave so much time and energy to the organization and its members. They believed that this memorial should be something that kept Doris' name and her commitment to the development of leaders alive for future members of WSSMA. From Chicago, Lisa proposed that a memorial fund in Doris Stansell's name be established. This fund would grow by donations and would be used to subsidize the cost of the leadership training retreat in the spring. The goal would be to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, the registration fee for chapter and state officers and members attending the retreat. "In a small way Doris would still be helping to shape future leaders of WSSMA."

At the time of Lisa's suggestion in July 1997, I had recently taken office as State President. Doris Stansell had been one of my installing officers in Ocean Shores just weeks before her death. She had been my mentor both in Pierce County and in WSSMA and had had to push more than nudge on several occasions. It was a privilege for me to conduct the board meeting in August 1997 when it was decided WSSMA would establish the Doris Stansell Memorial Leadership Fund. The fund has grown over the years by donations and the balance as of August 2002 was \$10,367.45. The fund was able to subsidize 73% of the registration fee of the 2002 Leadership Retreat. Doris was not a "spotlight" sort of person and might be a little embarrassed by this honor, but she would be greatly pleased at the opportunities for leadership being made available to members of WSSMA in her name.

The guidelines that were approved in August 2002 for the fund state the proceeds of this fund will be used to reduce and hopefully eliminate the registration fee for chapter

officers, state officers and interested members of WSSMA attending the leadership retreat. The Doris Stansell Memorial Leadership Fund Committee reviews and acts upon disbursements from the fund for the benefit of the leadership retreat in an attempt to make it affordable to the members of WSSMA.

After reading this, hopefully you know a little about Doris Stansell and what an important role she played in the development of the Washington State Society of Medical Assistants. Through this memorial fund, Doris continues to contribute to the development of leaders in the Washington State Society of Medical Assistants.