



*The Historical Society of Long Beach Presents*

## ***A Woman's Place in the Spotlight***

Join the Historical Society of Long Beach in highlighting remarkable women who uplift our community.



## **Harriette R. Ellis**



By Dr. Lisa Raufman

Harriette Ellis has been involved in journalism since the seventh grade, having launched her middle school's first newspaper. In high school she was a charter member of the national Quill and Scroll Club (Nashville, Tenn.) and wrote for her college newspaper, also serving as art editor of the year book. Such experiences foretold her future. Meanwhile, she majored in art and English at Memphis State University, University of Alabama, Memphis Art Academy, Chouinard Institute and later worked toward a master's degree at U.C.L.A.

While living in Albuquerque, NM when her husband served in WWII, she edited and wrote for a magazine. One time, it was published while she was in the hospital giving birth to her first child!

Returning to California in 1954 and moving to Long Beach (while raising two more daughters), she worked as a freelance graphic designer and copywriter, as well as volunteering in the community.

She had worked on several political campaigns in Los Angeles, but still had to educate herself about the city of Long Beach: the schools, houses of worship and cultural/civic opportunities. She started with P.T.A., becoming secretary then vice-president at Cubberly School. Involvement in her children's education was a priority, but helping other children was also important as she became a leader in Girl Scouts as well as Campfire Girls.

## **INFLUENCES**

Her best role models and influences were family! Her father was a dedicated member of the Social Democrats. Her oldest sister, Estelle, was a strong supporter of the unions, active politically, and worked in non-profits in Los Angeles. Estelle's son, Harold Meyerson, is an Op/Ed writer appearing in the LA Times, Washington Post, and editor of The American Prospect, a non-profit magazine based in Washington, D.C Her older sister, Liz Lieberman, taught Early Childhood Education at Long Beach City College for over 25 years. Her mother was a civic-minded volunteer, always raising funds for hospitals and the blind and defenseless.

**“Our door was always open to the lost stranger, the tortured union organizer, and the hungry.”**

In fact, both Harriette's parents raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the now well-known Cedars Sinai Medical Center. They were not wealthy people, so Harriette went to college on scholarships.

As immigrants, her parents were convinced that education was the most important thing in life. But they also believed in helping those who were less fortunate, and “our door was always open to the lost stranger, the tortured union organizer, and the hungry.”

As immigrants, both her parents firmly believed in democratic principles, and the only way to keep that dream alive was to stay involved and vote!

That lesson was learned as soon as she became old enough to vote. She was taken to city hall in Memphis, Tenn. and ordered to register. The importance of voting in every election, whether sick, or busy with studies and friends, voting came first! No excuses. When each of her daughters turned 18, they were registered to vote and reminded to vote in every election. Harriette still calls them on Election Day to see if they voted!

## **VOLUNTEER WORK**

She joined League of Women Voters, and additionally, spent much time volunteering at Temple Israel, helping to start their Social Action Committee. She currently chairs the Archives Committee, working toward their 100th anniversary in 2024!. When workers were striking for decent wages and health care, she was on site offering support by carrying signs. During the past five years, she has marched with CLUE

(Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice) to support immigrants, women hotel workers and to help the grocery store workers get a contract signed for better wages and hospital workers get better working conditions and pay. She served on the first Long Beach Interfaith Committee, and proudly served as a member of the Commission to bring fluoridated water to the families of Long Beach. As a member of NCJW (National Council of Jewish Women), she edited the newsletter for 10 years while serving on the Board. She has served on the Jewish Studies Program Leadership Board at Cal State University Long Beach for 20 years.

## "We might not finish the job, but it is our task to keep trying!"

Protesting for worker's rights started early in the 1970s when she and two daughters stood outside Ralph's grocery and passed out leaflets to protest for the striking grape workers. Her family gave up grapes for many months, thus learning to give up something in order to help others. Her No. 2 daughter, who is the Director of Gender Violence and Social Change at the University of Virginia, has followed this path.

She exclaims "I have been handed a wonderful legacy by my parents to follow the Jewish tenet of social justice and advocacy: *'tikkun olam,'* to 'heal the world' in our own unique way, and as best we can. We might not finish the job, but it is our task to keep trying!"

### PROFESSIONAL WORK

She became editor of the Jewish community newspaper (now titled Jewish Community Chronicle) in 1979, serving a readership from South Bay to Newport Beach. She edited, wrote stories and did the layout of a 16 to 36-page tabloid twice a month for 12 years.

Harriette was also writer for four of the five newspapers published by the California Apparel News Group in Los Angeles, editing two of them. Working in public relations, she represented clients of some of the top restaurants in Los Angeles. Earlier she edited Valley Magazine, which covers the San Fernando Valley.

After about 11 years in the Los Angeles-Beverly Hills world, she returned to the Jewish



*Harriette with Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin*

Community Chronicle published in Long Beach for 16 more years. She was involved with the paper celebrating its 50th anniversary, where it received congratulations from dignitaries all over the country. During her years at the "Chronicle," she received 38 awards for the paper!

In 2005, at age 81, she became a contributing editor of the magazine Orange County Jewish Life, writing profiles and special features.

She has been a member of National Federation of Press Women since 1981 and served as vice president, president and treasurer (twice) of the Southern California chapter and is listed in Who's Who of American Women and Who's Who in America.

Much has changed for women in Long Beach, she says, and she was one of the first editors to drop the "Miss" or "Mrs." with the husband's name in news stories, but some things are still the same. "We still don't make the same salary or respect as men! We must continue to work on that."

## **Harriette is still working, volunteering, and protesting at 95. Retire? Never.**

Project Director Julie Bartolotto

