

Appreciating Shirley Fine 1927 ~ 2023

by Susan S. Trout, PhD, Cofounder and President,
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One of Shirley and my fondest memories was about how she and I first “met.” In 1948, Shirley was on President Truman’s whistle-stop campaign across the United States. She had served as Harry Truman’s secretary when he was a senator and later joined his staff in the White House when he became President. The train stopped in the small farming town of Kouts, Indiana, in order to switch tracks from the Erie to the Pennsylvania Railroads. There I was, standing on the platform with Kouts’ residents, all eager to greet the President, including members of my sixth-grade class. Since Shirley was on the train as a member of President Truman’s secretarial staff, she was aware of who came to greet him as he traveled throughout the United States. Sometime after our paths crossed in Washington, DC, in the 1980s, Shirley and I discovered we had actually first met, so to speak, in the farming town of Kouts, Indiana, in 1948.

In 1981, two years after she retired from her 30-year Foreign Service career, a brief item in the *Washington Post* caught Shirley’s attention. The notice said, “A newly formed organization is seeking volunteers to support children with life-threatening illnesses and their families.” She called the number listed and was told that inquiries should be directed to Molly Whitehouse, a co-founder of the Program. She had known Molly in the Foreign Service; in fact, Molly’s husband was Ambassador to Thailand, Shirley’s last overseas post. Molly was as surprised to hear from Shirley, just as Shirley was surprised to learn of the new direction Molly’s life had taken. Molly invited her to attend a program that Molly and I were giving the next evening.

Shirley remembered that Molly and I explained the program goals with enthusiasm. In her words, Shirley said, “The linking of self-responsibility and service to others was, for me, a compelling and challenging combination. It took becoming a volunteer to a different level of experience and opportunity.”

Shirley immediately began her *second* career by volunteering for office duty and enrolling in many classes, workshops, and trainings at the Institute for the Advancement of Service. Indeed, without Shirley, the Institute would not be what it is today – a nonprofit, globally aware service organization that offers programs in personal growth, soul development, leadership, and group life.

As a volunteer for 28 of its 43 years, Shirley served as administrator, member, past president of the board, steward of the garden and house, and leader of numerous projects and committees. She always cared foremost about the wellbeing of the Institute and its destiny. Even after she retired from her Institute

duties following her eightieth birthday, Shirley remained active as a loyal, steadfast, and generous supporter.

I especially cherish the way that Shirley described her years at the Institute, comparing them to being on an archaeological dig. **In her words:**

“Instead of searching for ancient artifacts and treasure, I feel like I have been on an inner dig. Through trainings, study groups, and workshops, I learned about the workings of the human psyche, issues relating to healthy boundaries, communication skills, and many other subjects that I had not previously examined in depth.

Act One of my life had been outward focused, full of adventure and great opportunity. Upon retiring into Act Two, I found in the Institute a place where I could experience just as much excitement but on an inward journey. I’ve earned continuing education units, so to speak, learning and practicing self-responsibility and how to genuinely be of service to others. It has been rigorous and the journey is never-ending. I have been in good company and salute the many others whose sharing and presence have so enriched my experience.

The Institute is a place for anyone who asks: Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here? and who seeks a space that provides safety, structure, depth, and beauty in pursuit of answers to these questions. And, for all these years, it has been the steadfast support, example, and friendship of Susan Trout that kept me coming back.”

For me, as an Institute co-founder and its long-time teacher and leader, Shirley was a colleague, a friend, and a mighty companion on the spiritual path – one who celebrated with me in the joys of the Institute’s accomplishments and who joined me in solving many challenges over the years. Shirley was a genuine example of one who served and supported others with a humble, wise, generous, lighthearted, and selfless spirit.

Indeed, as we all know, she was a “sunny knockout” in absolutely every imaginable way! We honor the inspiring and loving ways she touched hearts and enriched lives.

Indeed, she taught us all that love is at the heart of a life well-lived.



The Institute for the Advancement of Service is an educational and spiritual organization in Alexandria, VA, cofounded and pioneered in 1980 by Susan Trout, who is currently its Executive Director. The Institute can be found at its website, www.showanotherway.org. The Institute and Susan can be reached at its email address, info@showanotherway.org.