

Who is Dorothy C. Blakely?

By Bob Isbill

Dorothy C. Blakely, who passed away on August 30, 2011 at the age of 89, was the source of much encouragement in the years we were re-building our High Desert Branch from 14 members in January 2009 to more than 100 by March of 2011. Percentage of growth-wise, we became the fastest growing of the 18 branches in California.

Dorothy was enthusiastic and supportive of the memoir idea, born in early 2009, that would generationally link students and seniors in a project that could potentially memorialize dozens of lives now, and even hundreds if implemented state-wide by the CWC.

Although we did not have the resources of qualified membership or any operating budget for such a project when I first talked to her about it in 2009, she seemed to know that we would get there and eventually be able to do it. Although she suffered from a debilitating and eventual fatal disease, her optimism and positive attitude towards life was contagious and irresistible.

A few months prior to her death, we were contacted by the Assistant Supervisor of Education (ASOE) at the Federal Correctional Complex in Victorville. They had heard of us, and requested us to do writing workshops at the prison.

On June 8, 2011, we met with two ASOE's and 8 inmates to determine their needs. When I shared that information with Dorothy Blakely, she was very excited about the possibilities that could stem from that project, and delighted that the HD CWC could and would participate in such an educational outreach program. Looking back, I now realize that she had the vision and imagination to realize and encourage the opportunities for personal development of our member volunteers, and the prospect of growth for the inmates.

Out of that meeting sprang over two dozen workshops with 25 selected inmates.

Nine of those inmates were published in our 2013 anthology, "Desert Gold". Some have since published books and other works. According to another ASOE, none of those inmates have had any disciplinary actions whatsoever during that time. We are now in the process of replicating our program to 2 other facilities at the institution which will expand our outreach program to over 75 prisoners.

We, the volunteers who go to the FCC every month, take away a great deal of satisfaction and reinforced belief in our CWC Prison Outreach Project. I believe the anonymous critique members also know what they are contributing to this effort, and I and the other volunteers *know* what their critiques means to the inmates.

Who was Dorothy C. Blakely?

She was an exceptional human being placed on earth for 114 days shy of 90 years. Each day she was here was a blessing on so many levels for anyone who knew her. She was smart, pretty, upbeat, funny, strong, tender, compassionate, loving, reliable, understanding, wise, positive, generous, courageous, and staunch. She was someone you wanted in your corner, and on your side because once she was on your side, she never left you standing alone. She experienced life in her roles as wife, mother, friend, and luckily for me and my siblings, a sister. Without the encouragement, excitement and enthusiasm of Dorothy C. Blakely, these events and our phenomenal growth may not have happened.

When I was writing the grant request for this project, the application asked for the name of the project.
And that is how and why we have named this project in her memory.