

Ruth Huddleston

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A Calutron Girl for me for the past few years has recently passed away. She was certainly one of the most articulate of the several women who assisted me telling the story of Oak Ridge and Y-12 history. She never hesitated when asked to tell her story, even though she went most of her life without even telling her family of the time in her life when she worked on the Manhattan Project as a cubicle operator at the Y-12 electromagnetic separation plant helping to separate the Uranium 235 used in Little Boy.

That all changed when her granddaughter was at her house working on homework for school. Ruth asked her what she was working on. Her granddaughter explained that she was writing a paper for school on Oak Ridge. Ruth responded, "Well, I can help with that. I used to work there." That was the first her family knew of Ruth's early work on the atomic bomb.

Later she would tell her story to approximately 400 people at the University of Tennessee as well as to high level administrators of the Department of Energy when they visited Oak Ridge. When a Japanese film company came to Oak Ridge to make a documentary film, I suggested they might interview Ruth. Well, they did and then they changed the entire focus of the documentary film to focus on Ruth's story as seen through the eyes of her granddaughter.

Ruth would always tell the part of her story that included how she felt when she learned what she had been working on. As you know, the young girls who were recent high school graduates formed most of the women working on the calutrons at Y-12 (**CAL**ifornia **U**niversity **C**yclo**TRONS**). She would say how proud she was when her supervisor told the group working the day Little Boy was dropped on Hiroshima that the uranium for the bomb had come from Oak Ridge. They knew only then what they had been doing. She thought the war will be over and her boyfriend who was in Germany would not have to go to invade Japan. He had written her telling her that he was scheduled to go to Japan next.

Then Ruth would quickly add, "But when I got home that night and heard on the radio how many people we had killed, I became so depressed I could not sleep for a week!"

Terry Futrell is a friend I knew while working at the Y-12 National Security Complex. He shared his thoughts about Ruth Huddleston with me and I think you will appreciate what he had to say about his relationship with Ruth.

THERE'S A HOLE IN THE WORLD TONIGHT

Immediately after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, the Eagles went into the studio and recorded a new song that stated simply "There's a hole in the world tonight." For those who knew Ruth Huddleston – her family, friends, and former students – there is perhaps an even greater hole in the world since her passing earlier this week at the age of 97.

The hole in my world is especially great. You see, Mrs. Huddleston was not only my teacher, mentor, and friend, she was also my "other" mother. Whereas my biological mother molded my character and work ethic, it was through the efforts and assistance of Mrs. Huddleston that I was able to fulfill my dreams of becoming an engineer and to have a successful career working with the technology that I loved.

I first met Mrs. Huddleston when she was a customer on my paper route when I was only 12 or 13 years old. However, I never really knew her until she became my 10th grade English teacher a few years later.

She previously taught first grade but had recently obtained her master's degree in guidance and counseling. As a result, she took on the role of guidance counselor at Coalfield High School in 1961. She was also assigned to teach English to the sophomore boys. While the girls in my class learned how to diagram sentences under another teacher, the boys in Mrs. Huddleston's class learned to write – to put together sentences in a way that effectively communicated thoughts and ideas.

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Little did I know at the time that this would be a major factor in my future success. Mrs. Huddleston also served as my senior English teacher. While the other senior class spent their time memorizing the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," we wrote, and wrote, and wrote some more. It is no small wonder that college English classes were no challenge for me.

Mrs. Huddleston also sponsored the Beta Club at Coalfield. She worked tirelessly helping us to raise funds to attend the annual Beta Club convention while mentoring us at the same time. My senior year in school, she arranged for the Beta Club members to serve on the food line in the school cafeteria. Not only did we learn to serve others, but it also gave some of us an opportunity to have a free hot, nutritious lunch every day that we otherwise could not afford.

Though I had dreams of becoming an electrical engineer, going to college was a financial impossibility for me. Little did I know how far Mrs. Huddleston was willing to go to see that I had that opportunity. She took me to the University of Tennessee one day where we met privately with the Dean of Admissions. I am convinced that meeting had much to do with me being awarded a scholarship. While there, she also took me to meet with the Director of Food Services and lined up a job for me to work in the Student Center Cafeteria. She also worked tirelessly to assist me in obtaining other financial aid.

Because of Mrs. Huddleston's love for her students, she always had our back, offering sage advice in her quiet, unassuming way. I recall one instance when I went to help in the concession stand during halftime of a football game. She cautiously steered me aside and told me not to go in there. She had witnessed one of my classmates take money from the money box and feared that I might be falsely accused. On another occasion, she cautioned me about a certain girl that I was interested in. This time I ignored her and, though completely innocent of wrongdoing, I placed myself in a situation that could have cost me my life. Never again did I question or ignore her advice.

After a few years serving as Guidance Counselor at Coalfield, Mrs. Huddleston transferred to Oliver Springs High School where she served as Guidance Counselor for many years, providing the same loving care and assistance to hundreds of Oliver Springs students.

Even though she lived a quiet, modest lifestyle, Ruth Huddleston kept a deep secret hidden for years, even from those of us who knew her best. Only in recent years did her secret become public – she was a "Calutron Girl," one of the young women who operated the calutron machines at the Y-12 Plant that were used to enrich uranium for the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.

At the time, Mrs. Huddleston had no idea what the calutron machines were doing – it was top secret, and the machine operators did not have a need to know. It was only after the bomb was dropped and World War II ended that she and the other Calutron Girls were made aware of the significance of their work. Happy for the successful end to the war, but troubled by the loss of so many lives, Mrs. Huddleston tucked her secret away for the next 60 years.

As her story was made public, she became an international celebrity. Even Japanese Public Television came to Oliver Springs to film a special about her. I was honored to be a part of that show. Even with the attention, Mrs. Huddleston remained the quiet, unassuming person that she had been all her life.

Ironically, I find that because of Mrs. Huddleston's influence, my life has come full circle. Our relationship began as she taught me to write. After a long successful career in engineering and technology management and assessment, I find myself once again spending most days writing books or other papers. In our last conversation just a few days ago, Mrs. Huddleston praised my work on a chapter of a new book that I had sent to her a few weeks earlier. Even to the end, she was the same loving, caring, encouraging person who helped so many throughout her life.

Mrs. Huddleston ran life's race, not to claim victory for herself, but to enable countless students to have the opportunity to win. If good works could get one into Heaven, then Ruth Huddleston would be at the

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front of the line. But her hope was not in her own works, because her good works resulted from her faith in the perfect works and righteousness of Jesus Christ. I will most certainly shed tears at her funeral, but my tears will be for my own loss, not hers. She has achieved the ultimate victory and is in the presence of Jesus – I will move beyond the tears of my loss and rejoice in knowing that.

Thank you, Terry, for your thoughts in honor of Ruth Huddleston. She was a special person for sure to many and a blessing to you and many others she helped in her career in the school system. She was an excellent Calutron Girl for me as I used her often to help convey the history of the Manhattan Project. She was a veteran of that era and was most capable of telling her story well. She will certainly be missed by many who knew her.



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