

Linnie Lee Briggs Townsend



Alamogordo lost one of its most beloved citizens with the death of Linnie Lee Briggs Townsend on April 15, 2014, after her long, but courageous battle with Parkinson's disease.

A loving wife and mother, community servant, local historian, and, above all, educator, Linnie was widely respected as a public school [teacher](#) and professor of English at New Mexico State University at Alamogordo.

Her love of the English language in both prose and poetry led her to help a multitude of students for more than thirty years. Nothing was so thrilling to Linnie as having students reach out to her many years after a class to thank her for having given them the boost that was needed to make a successful career. She loved teaching in the public schools of Alamogordo, but it was at the college

level where she found her niche.

NMSU-A was, in her words, "Camelot." She loved the non-traditional student, such as: the one who was just putting a tentative toe in the water, or the mother who had raised her kids and was looking to do something different with her life, or the person who had not done well in school; but thought he could do better. Linnie had an amazing gift for allaying fears and instilling confidence. At the same time, she had a knack for making students appreciate the beauty of the language with all its quiriness and its nuances. Her success was recognized when she became the first female full professor in NMSU's branch college system.

In addition to teaching in the secondary and post-secondary systems of New Mexico, she also served as chairperson of the English Department at Alamogordo Senior High School. She was a life-time member of NEA and a long-time member of the National Conference of Teachers of English. She was an active member of the Southwest Regional Conference of Teachers of English. She was a long-time member of the professional sorority Delta Kappa Gamma. And, she was a member of the AO chapter of PEO.

It was, however, her work in library and literacy programs that gave her some of her greatest moments. On Sept. 12, 2008, the Advisory Board of the Adult Basic Education recognized her "dedicated service" on the Otero County Literacy Council where she had been instrumental in establishing and funding "Linnie's Little Bees," a program which provided books to young children. On Oct. 18, 2012, her commitment to literacy was recognized by the Alamogordo Public Library with the dedication of the Linnie Townsend Centennial Collection in the Rhodes Room. The article in the Daily News which covered the ceremony noted that one of the effects of Linnie's Parkinson's disease was to compromise her sight. The article noted her continuing optimism by quoting her as saying, "It doesn't matter what the subject is, just keep reading."

Linnie was an instrumental part of several celebrations during the Alamogordo-Otero County 2012 Centennial Celebration of New Mexico's statehood. During the Centennial, Linnie was an important member of the Women's History Committee, the planning group for that year's activities. She was one of the costumed group which performed at many functions, often appearing in the costume and persona of Amy Lowell, reading Lowell's poem "Patterns" to audiences in Otero County.

She also edited several local history books. Among these were David Townsend and Cliff McDonald's "Centennial: Where the Old West Meets the New Frontier"; Barbara McDonald's "Weavers of a Tapestry of Time: The History of New Mexico School for the Visually Handicapped"; "Things Remembered: Alamogordo, New Mexico 1898-1998"; and "Things Remembered: Otero County, New Mexico, 1899-1999." Linnie insisted on making these volumes as readable as possible without "squeezing the juice out of

the language." The profits from all four of these books were donated by the Centennial Committee to the Tularosa Basin Historical Society, another of Linnie's beloved causes.

She and Dave will be remembered from local parades, riding their special bicycle-built-for-two, championing the Historical Society and its campaign for the Historical Museum of the Tularosa Basin. Dave and Linnie won several trophies with their bicycle, although she loved to point out that they were usually the only entrant in whatever category was available for their bicycle. The last trophy they won was one given for non-musical marching groups.

Her marriage to Dave led Linnie in a direction she had never intended: politics and governmental service. Dave ran for the state legislature in 1990 and was elected to the House of Representatives. Linnie, who was new to political campaigning, proved to be a natural in the door-to-door, give-and-take of politics. Her help proved to be invaluable and she turned the campaign into a true "our" campaign, not just "Dave's" campaign. The effort was successful; Dave was elected and served two terms in Santa Fe. Again, Linnie proved to be a major force by helping in Dave's office. She played hostess to an almost daily flow of constituents and became a very capable guide for statehouse and city tours of the state capitol. Somehow she still found time to read and occupied a regular seat in front of the third floor east entrance to the legislative area. It was common for legislators and legislative staff to stop by to discuss books with her. She became the "reading lady."

Linnie's developing skills in political and governmental matters brought her to the attention of Governor Bruce King, who appointed her to the Board of Regents of the New Mexico School for the Visually Handicapped (New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, at present). She served on the school's board from 1991 to 1996. These were exciting years when the school became one of the nation's leaders in the technological revolution which was bringing unlimited possibilities to blind education. Linnie was particularly interested in the school's involvement with the new technology for the teaching of reading. She developed a love for the school and especially for the faculty and staff who serve students with some tremendous problems.

Linnie's community involvement and professional success was recognized in 2000 when she was named as one of the first of Alamogordo's Women of Merit recipients. She believed that this recognition of her achievements might mean that there was a wider appreciation of libraries, museums, and literacy in our part of the world.

As would be expected for a woman of Linnie's background and interests, she was a member of two reading groups. One of them reads general literary works of all kinds and has been meeting regularly for over 30 years. The other met as a group to read and discuss the Shakespeare canon. They lovingly called themselves "The Willies." Fortunately, this group finished with Shakespeare's works before Parkinson's diminished Linnie's ability to read and actively participate in the discussions of the group.

Linnie was born on Oct. 19, 1934, in Clovis to Carl and Winnie Briggs. She graduated from Portales High School and earned both a B.A. and an M.A. degree from Eastern New Mexico University. Her graduate thesis in 1962 was entitled "Images of Light and Darkness in Edwin Arlington Robinson's Poetry," once again celebrating her love and appreciation for the written word.

Survivors include her husband, David H. Townsend; a son, Monte Lynn Jones of Alamogordo; and three sisters, Carlene Briggs of Cloudcroft, Nelva and her husband Wesley Williams of Hobbs; and Melva and her husband Everett Jaycox of Alto. She was blessed with a myriad of nieces, grand-nieces, nephews, grand-nephews scattered throughout the entire United States.

She considered Dave's children, David Townsend of Las Cruces and Kristi and husband Jimmy Spence of Las

Cruces; and Dave's grandchildren, Renee and her husband Evan Thurm and David Spence and his wife Mary of Encino, California, as her special family.

Her body has been cremated. At her request, any memorial gifts should be given to the Friends of the Alamogordo Public Library or to Books Revisited. An informal memorial service involving the reading of some of Linnie's favorite poems as well as prose selections will be held at Grace Methodist Church in Alamogordo, where she was a long-time member, on Saturday, May 31, 2014, at 2 p.m.

Linnie's family has entrusted the care of her body to the Hamilton-O'Dell Funeral Home.
To sign the online register book, please visit www.hamiltonodell.com
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