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## Remembering our teacher, CLAIRE OGLESBY

February 5, 1932 - August 5, 2009

Claire was a mentor, advisor, champion, and friend, but mostly she was a teacher. From the mid sixties till 2001, Claire Oglesby's classroom (stage, salon, and living room) was to the right of the Westminster West School's front door.

That door was always open. When she became Vermont's Teacher of the Year in 1970, an article noted that her classroom averaged two visitors a day. Past students returned during vacations from college, parents shared special skills, and retirees listened to learning readers.

International visitors described growing up in India, Japan, or Mexico to kids who hadn't been much farther away from Westminster than grandma's house.

Claire's philosophy that everyone has something to teach, her family homework projects and the West School's small size contributed to vital PTAs and a loyal corps of students, graduates and parents who vehemently supported her small school approach, despite pressures to economize by centralizing. And then in 1990, when leaders were casting about for models of exemplary education, Westminster won a \$40,000 state grant to restructure town schools along the lines of Westminster West's two-room schoolhouse. The Westminster Center School was reorganized into "minischools" so that children could learn as members of a close community and families could become involved with a team of teachers over a several-year span. "Claire's school" was the model and Westminster Schools' vibrant and vocal parent participation is just one of her post-retirement legacies.

In 1995, Claire masterminded the mother of all field trips, bringing a group of 40+ students and family members to Puerto Rico to see a real rainforest. A later trip explored Montreal. Honoring her "creative and unique strategies for making diversity part of the learning process," Claire received an award in 1996 from the Anti-Defamation League's World of

Difference Institute.

A few years later, documentary filmmakers Lisa Merton and Alan Dater asked, "What can a classroom of first and second graders in the whitest state in the union teach us about respecting diversity and building community?" Their film, *The World in Claire's Classroom*, demonstrates how Claire prepared her young students to become global citizens. The movie, released in 1999, was celebrated at a gala community event, complete with flashbulbs and a limo. When asked, "What does it feel like to be the spouse of a celebrity?" Mac Oglesby noted, "It's not the first time."

Two years later when Claire decided to retire, her celebrity earned a lengthy proclamation from Governor Howard Dean. But at her retirement party it was a former student who summed up Claire's magic best: she "shows kids how to get to a higher level even if they don't know they want to be there." Who could resist? Claire enriched us all and we mourn her passing.