

Janet Dempsey Steiger

June 10, 1939 -- April 3, 2004



Janet Dempsey was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on June 10, 1939 to Raymond and Kathleen Dempsey, the second of two daughters. Ray Dempsey was a lawyer and Kathleen was a homemaker and a community volunteer. Janet attended St. Peter Grade School and Oshkosh High School before entering Lawrence College (now University) in Appleton, Wisconsin. She was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year and received her BA in 1961 with a 4.0 point average. Janet won a Fulbright Scholarship for postgraduate work at the University of Reading in England. She also did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Janet married William A. Steiger on August 10, 1966, while he was a Representative in the Wisconsin State Legislature. She participated in his successful 1966 campaign for Congress; he represented the 6th District of Wisconsin until his untimely death at the age of 40 in 1978. William Steiger was well-respected in the House for his work on the reorganization of Congressional Committees, OSHA, and the Volunteer Army. Janet and Bill were lifelong friends with many members of Bill's Congressional Class, including the Rumsfelds, Pettuses, Bushes, Vander Jagts, McClures, Joneses, Esches and Hatfields. Vice-President Richard Cheney was an intern in Bill's office. Janet loved Washington and she introduced their son Bill to all the city's great cultural institutions. The whole family worked in Bill's Congressional campaigns.

As young Bill entered grade school, Janet looked for opportunities to use her skills. She joined two friends, Jean Levin and Beverly Nadel in the Work Place which offered an office away from home to Washington visitors as well as services to organizations such as the ABA. Janet co-authored their monograph on "pro-bono" work, titled **To Light One Candle**. After the death of her husband, President Carter named her to the Postal Rate Commission as a Commissioner in 1980. President Reagan named her Chairman of the Postal Rate Commission in 1981, which position she held until August 1989. Her friends and staff marveled at her ability to conduct the hearings on postal rates and her mastery of the details of each rate case. During her time at the Postal Rate Commission, she also chaired the Congressionally mandated Commission to Assess Veterans' Education Policy from 1987-1989. The Commission's report was presented to the 100th Congress. The Federally Employed Women of Washington named her the Outstanding Woman in Government in 1984.

When George Herbert Walker Bush was elected President in 1988, he named Mrs. Steiger Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission. She was not a lawyer or an economist, and her Senate confirmation was greeted with little enthusiasm. But Janet had learned a great deal about independent regulatory agencies during her tenure at Postal Rate, and she was determined to restore the credibility and effectiveness of the Commission. She served as Chairman from August 11, 1989 until April 1995, and continued as a Commissioner until September 1997. She reestablished ties with the Attorneys general throughout the states, the Antitrust Section of the ABA, and with the Antitrust section of the Justice Department. She helped establish a strong voice for consumer protection, and she maintained a cordial relationship with the Congress. A Resolution of the Federal Trade Commission at the time of her death stated: "She was an extraordinary public servant, and provided inspired leadership to the Federal Trade Commission at a critical time in its history." Finally, as the USSR broke apart, she was instrumental in providing guidance and help to newly independent nations on matters of competition and consumer protection with the help of a grant from the Agency for International Development. When she retired, she served as a Board member for Wisconsin Blue Cross-Blue Shield, which became COBAL and is now Wellpoint.

Janet Steiger was also a warm and caring person who had a mischievous sense of humor. She was a gifted mimic and an accomplished jokester. She once filled a staff member's office with live frogs on his birthday. (She collected all the frogs afterward and sent them off to another staff member's pond.) She loved being across from the National Gallery of Art and never missed an exhibition. Foreign travel meant hard work, but always included museum forays as did vacations. She was also a gifted needlewoman whose canvases are treasured by many of her friends. She always had two or three needlepoint projects in progress and a huge jigsaw puzzle on her office conference table. Nor was a day complete without the New York Times Crossword puzzle which she always did in ink. She always said her "toys", helped her think through problems and make decisions.

Her office was a testimony to style and frugality. She was scrupulously ethical and used government issued furniture, paid for her own drapes, and used what she called her "objets" to decorate. She kept it filled with flowering plants or bouquets that she brought in, the predominant color was blue both at home and at work.

She served under four Presidents: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, William Clinton, and George H. W. Bush. Her goal was always to serve the people of the United States and she used her formidable intelligence to master the complex cases that came before the independent regulatory agencies she chaired. She believed in mentoring her staff and she encouraged all of them in their careers. She also knew everyone in her building by name. At the FTC, she helped keep the Child Care facility as a vital part of the agency. She would have been very pleased to know that the Section of Antitrust Law of the American Bar Association has established the Janet Dempsey Steiger Fellowship Project in her memory.