A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

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Memories of Estelle L. Kelley
By Dr. Richard Kelley

My father, Roy C. Kelley, usually gets most of the credit for founding our company in 1947, but the truth is that my mother, Estelle Kelley, played an equally vital role, and I believe her influence is still felt in the DNA of every part of Outrigger Enterprises Group. I was reminded of that this past week and would like to share some memories of my mother with you.

My thoughts about Estelle became focused last Monday evening as I attended a dinner in Denver honoring this year’s “Citizen of the West.” This annual event is part of the huge National Western Stock Show. Cowboys, ranchers, farmers, their suppliers and other members of the agricultural community converge on Denver from all over Colorado and adjacent states to exchange ideas, demonstrate their skills and pick up information on the latest technology and equipment needed to survive in today’s world. The person named Citizen of the West is one who embodies the spirit and determination of the Western pioneering heritage and ideals. This year’s honoree was Lynne Cheney, wife of the former U.S. vice president, Dick Cheney, who also attended the event.

Even as a girl, Lynne Cheney demonstrated the spirit, determination and ideals of the West. As I listened to her story, I noted a great deal of similarity to the life of Estelle Kelley, even though the two ladies grew up in different parts of the country and different decades of the 20th century.

Lynne Ann Vincent was born in the little town of Casper, Wyoming, on August 14, 1941, less than four months before the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. As a teenager, she rode horses in barrel races and roped calves in the local rodeo arena. She served as a majorette in her high school’s marching band, and today she can still amaze her grandchildren with her baton-twirling skills. Her high school sweetheart was classmate Richard Cheney.

After high school, Lynne attended Colorado College, received her master’s degree from the University of Colorado and earned a Ph.D. in British literature from the University of Wisconsin. She married Dick Cheney in 1964, when they were both 23 years old. She raised two children and, although her husband started a political career in 1969 as an intern to Congressman William Steiger, Lynne pursued her own talents in writing. She has published 14 books, six of which were best-selling history books for children and their families. Others focused on the importance of knowing about the leaders, events and ideas that have shaped our nation and the world.

Lynne has demonstrated that she is a leader with many skills. She served as chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1986 to 1993. In 1995, she founded the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a think tank devoted to reforming higher education. She is a senior fellow in education and culture at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. From 1995 to 1998, she served as co-host of the Sunday edition of CNN’s Crossfire, replacing Tony Snow.

In Blue Skies, No Fences, a book about growing up in the West, Lynne wrote, “You could see yourself creating your own future rather than having one handed to you. And it never occurred to me that my chances of doing this were diminished because I was a girl.”

At the Citizen of the West dinner, former U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson spoke about Lynne and Dick Cheney’s partnership over the years, saying, “I can tell you that Dick would never have had the success he’s had without her.”

At the end of the evening, as I reflected on the life of Citizen of the West Lynne Cheney, I came to the conclusion that she is a modern-day version of Estelle Kelley.

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Like Lynne, Estelle came from humble beginnings. She was raised in the Los Angeles area and demonstrated a great deal of spark and drive even in her high school days. To go to college in the early 1920s, she would boldly drive across rough fields and poorly maintained roads to get to a recently established branch of the University of California a number of miles west of her home. That institution is now called UCLA.

When she and Roy came to Hawai‘i in 1929, Estelle secured a job as a legal secretary with Judge James Coke to provide household funds while Roy pursued his architectural career. Later, as she and Roy began to rent out apartments in Waikīkī, she interviewed prospective tenants, kept the books, and cooked and served lunches to the workmen building new apartments that Roy had designed. She raised three children and, in 1942, was a single parent in Los Angeles for some time after she and the children were evacuated to the U.S. mainland following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Women and children were given priority and Roy stayed behind.

After World War II, Estelle took on more and more responsibilities in running the fledgling hotel company that would eventually become Outrigger Enterprises Group. She booked reservations by sending out personal letters to prospective guests using a manual typewriter, placing the letters into an envelope and affixing a three-cent stamp in the upper right-hand corner. She was the gentle but firm person who handled difficult guests and occasional employment issues. Then she would come home and make dinner for the family, including a delicious dessert, which I can still taste in my mind.

It is interesting to note that in the late 1940s, we spent several family summer vacations in Wyoming and once or twice stayed at a dude ranch, the HF Bar Ranch, just 125 miles north of Casper. Maybe there was something in the local water that sparked leadership in both Lynne and Estelle.

Those were the days when opportunities for women were limited. But, like Lynne Cheney, it never occurred to Estelle that she could not do anything she wanted “just because she was a girl.” Roy and Estelle were a great team and, just like in the Cheney family, I can tell you that Roy would never have enjoyed the success he did without her.

Estelle’s character, strength, leadership and determination are remembered today in several ways. Outrigger’s unique computerized reservation system – the successor to her individually typed confirmation letters – is named “STELLEX.” In addition, each year the Estelle Louise Kelley Scholarship Program helps many young men and women at Kapi‘olani Community College who are developing their skills in Travel & Tourism.

I recently received a letter from one of these students, who wrote, “My college education has benefited immensely from this scholarship. I would not have been able to take the classes I wanted without it. I am currently working towards my associate degree in Travel & Tourism and plan to transfer to the University of Hawai‘i to get my bachelor’s degree in Travel Industry Management. It is very touching to find people like you in the community who generally care about the well being and prosperity of others.”

Outrigger’s roots run deep, right to the spirit of our founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley. Just like Lynne Cheney, they were both unique, memorable Citizens of the West!