

Visit:
caller.com /opinion

More than a role model

The article in the Corpus Christi Caller-Times by Matthew Waller (5/12/15) on the life of Corpus Christi native Francis T. "Sissy" Farenthold and the honors she recently received from the University of Texas brought home a message to me about the place forthright individuals hold in the development of young people.

The term "role model" is too limited to use for what Sissy Farenthold has been to progressive Texans from my generation of the 1960s-early 1970s. For me, she was a touchstone and backdrop for the maturation of our principles.

In the late 1960s, when I was an undergraduate at the University of Houston, Sissy Farenthold was a state legislator crusading for clean government. I was a patriotic South Texas country kid who had yet to meet her. But I knew that she stood for what was right.

In 1972, she came into sharp focus for me with her Texas gubernatorial bid and for her presence at the Democratic National Convention where Sen. George McGovern was nominated for president. Candidates Farenthold and McGovern represented the best features of my family's heroes from Franklin Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson, without whose legislation youngsters like me could never have attended college.

Sissy and McGovern went down in defeat. But that mattered less than the values for which they inspired me to campaign and vote.

During the 1970s, Sissy Farenthold went to be president of New York's Wells College while I sojournd as a graduate student in Ohio.

Fellow students at times

**THOMAS
 H. KRENECK**

FORUM

asked me questions about her.

By the 1980s, Sissy Farenthold and I were coincidentally back in Houston and involved in the Central American Solidarity Movement. There I formally met her. We struggled to stop Ronald Reagan's war upon the poor Hispanics of El Salvador and Nicaragua. She was the guiding moral light of our cause.

Sissy supported my accepting the job as head of Special Collections and Archives at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in 1990. She appreciated that we had the papers of her close friends and political colleagues L. DeWitt Hale and Dr. Hector P. Garcia. But she also wanted the rest of the history of her hometown documented.

From 1991 to 2012, she and I visited many times in Corpus Christi. This association taught me that any serious biographer of Sissy Farenthold needs to consider her Corpus Christi and South Texas roots to understand her refinement, compassion, independent thinking, political activism, and devotion to family.

Unlike most famous individuals I have met, Sissy Farenthold does not predicate her association with people on the amount of celebrity they possess. She remains one of us.

Among other things, Sissy made it possible for me to acquire for A&M-CC the papers of her aunt, local author Rachel Bluntzer Hebert.

Sissy gave us the papers of her father, the late

B. Dudley Tarlton, one of the most illustrious trial lawyers in South Texas history. She convinced her cousin, Dr. Robert Bluntzer, to donate the original, complete collection of the Round Robin. This periodical was a community effort, produced by Bluntzer's father, to send hometown news to service personnel from Corpus Christi during World War II.

Sissy ranked among our concerned advocates to hire my successor when the A&M-CC administration delayed filling that vacant position. My own efforts to prompt the university on that issue were driven in large part by the promises I had made to Sissy.

After long association with Sissy Farenthold, I looked forward to attending the reception in her honor at the University of Texas on April 24. As I stepped from my taxi in the parking lot at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, I heard that soft, distinctive voice hail me from behind. It was Sissy with family and friends.

This serendipity allowed me to walk with Sissy to the reception attended by hundreds ranging from former Attorney General Ramsey Clark to longtime Corpus Christi friend Lee Govatos.

We had the privilege of expressing thanks to the Texas touchstone of enlightened principles and human decency for our time.

Thomas H. Kreneck served as head of Special Collections & Archives at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi from 1990 until 2012, and was the university's Joe B. Frantz Lecturer in Public History. He is now a resident of his native Karnes County.