

Fostering families

Beverly LaHaye marks three decades of promoting traditional values through CWA

By Lori Arnold

SAN DIEGO — Fresh from a day of domestic engineering, the Southern California pastor's wife took her customary place next to her husband as they turned on the evening news. They watched as Betty Friedan, an activist writer, told interviewer Barbara Walter that feminism would liberate America's enslaved women and that she would be their voice.

"She (Friedan) said, 'I'm speaking for the women of America,' so I thought well, I'd better hear what she is saying since she is representing us," the housewife recalled.

"I listened and she ended her little, brief interview by saying, 'And Barbara, I plan to spend the rest of my life seeing that America becomes a humanist nation.' After what she had said, if that is what a humanist nation was going to be like, I did not want any part of it."

The feminist's comments catapulted the woman out of her seat with enough motivation—and grace—to qualify her for the U.S. Olympics.

Beverly LaHaye was riled.

She believed that Friedan's plan represented not a march to liberation, but rather a misguided attempt to dismantle the bedrock of America culture: the family.

"My husband says I jumped up and said, 'Well, Betty, I'm going to spend the rest of my life seeing that America doesn't become a humanist nation,'" LaHaye recalled, referring to Tim LaHaye, a prominent pastor and prolific author, whose works include the best-selling "Left Behind" series.

"It doesn't look like I won my statement, but I think we held Betty Friedan back."

Just over three decades later, LaHaye is still working to push back on progressive attempts to render traditional values and Christianity as mere relics of the American past.

"It seemed like the Christian women of America did not have a voice in any of the women's movement, nothing at all," she said, adding that many women in her church didn't seem engaged in the women's movement or the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. Many women, she said, just shrugged their shoulders when asked about the issues.

The birth of a movement

LaHaye, then 50, decided it was time to for action. With the blessing of her husband, Tim, who was pastoring in San Diego, the mother of four decided to host a rally to discuss some of the social issues that were threatening the traditional family. To her surprise, a capacity crowd of 1,200 packed a local civic auditorium to hear what she and several other speakers had to say.

"The women got so excited, they kept saying, 'We've got to do something, we've got to do something, and for the first time Christian women seemed to realize they were being shut out of any discussion on women's rights,'" LaHaye said during the interview in her Alpine, Calif. (San Diego County) home.

What emerged was Concerned Women for America, the nation's



Beverly LaHaye founded Concerned Women for America in San Diego 30 years ago after becoming concerned about the feminist agenda.

largest public policy organization for women, with membership listed at 600,000. The group—celebrating its 30th year of lobbying under six different presidents—operates prayer chapters in nearly every state, and volunteers help to monitor local, state and federal legislation. Trained leaders also lobby elected officials on matters in six core areas: family and marriage, sanctity of human life, education, pornography, religious liberty and national sovereignty.

Once a month, 535 trained volunteers—100 for the Senate, and 435 for Congress—travel to Washington, D.C., to lobby members of Congress on pressing national issues through the ministry's Project 535. The public policy organization also uses e-blasts and newsletters to keep its membership informed

on family matters. At the core of their training, whether for a school board matter or a major federal reform bill, LaHaye said the women are taught to speak with dignity and integrity in representing the need for pro-family legislation.

"We've trained them, and today the Concerned Women for America have a voice in their city government, their state government and the federal government," LaHaye said.

The approach has given them much more than a seat at the table. Paid staff members are frequently invited on cable and network news programs to discuss their take on national issues. Some have gone on to run for local school boards and city councils. U.S. Representative Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., an emerging leader in the conservative movement, attributes much of her background knowledge to materials provided by LaHaye and CWA.

An unusual bridal gift

Bachmann said she first heard of CWA in its infancy when, as a new bride, she received a cassette tape featuring LaHaye's views on the feminist movement and other social issues of that era.

"I was highly motivated by what I heard Mrs. LaHaye say," the Republican offered before casting a vote at the U.S. Capitol. "Something got ahold of me about the course of where our country was heading."

In 1998, while caring for some of their 27 foster children, Bachmann said she became more involved in the process by addressing concerns she had with public schools and with

the “political correctness” movement that threatened her values, attitudes and beliefs.

In 2000 she was elected to the Minnesota state senate until six years later when voters sent her on to Washington as a U.S. Congresswoman. Bachmann said she found LaHaye to be an authoritative and credible voice to listen to, primarily because of LaHaye’s commitment to research, skills she is finding useful as she now represents her own constituents.

“She (LaHaye) doesn’t see herself as extraordinary, but we see her as an extraordinary woman of God who has completely abandoned herself to the will of God,” the congresswoman said. “I consider myself extremely fortunate to be her friend and to have benefited from the sacrifices she made early on in this effort. And she did sacrifice by holding on to what works, what matters and what’s right for our society.”

LaHaye is equally enamored with Bachmann and her pro-family tenacity.

“I thought, ‘Praise God,’” the CWA founder said. “This young woman had a lot of capabilities. She was a farm wife, a lawyer, she’s now a congresswoman, and she is standing up for our values in Washington D.C. I’m so proud of her, and there are others, too, who just come to the top. God is using them in a mighty way. These are the women that I think of when the Bible talks about ministers of God. These women are truly ministers of God.”

Battles rage

Among LaHaye’s favorite victories was one of the first, working to block ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, which was narrowly thwarted.

“God didn’t call us to win the battles; he called us to fight the battles,” she said. “The winning is up to Him as long as we stand up for righteousness. We had a lot of battles. We didn’t win them all.”

And for the future, with such issues as health-care reform, same-sex marriage, abortion and potentially speech-restrictive hate crimes legislation?

“I don’t know if we can win any of them, but we can slow them down,” she said. “But we are going into each battle with an expecta-



Before retiring from day-to-day operations Beverly LaHaye, founder of Concerned Women for America, used her live radio show to champion traditional family values.

tion that, with God’s help, we’re going to win this one.”

The battles, she stresses, are not against people but the “wiles of the devil,” which is why her heart was rarely away from the verses in Ephesians 6, where believers are extolled to wear the full armor of God. There were times, especially early on in the ministry, in which death threats prompted security details for her protection.

“We have all that strength and power and God’s help behind us,” she said. “When God says it, then we can go out and say this is true, this is what righteousness really is. You know, God is able. If God calls us to do it, then you have to know that God is going to see you through it.”

Important role of pastors

As society shifts, LaHaye said she is thrilled to see more pastoral involvement in cultural issues, a far cry from what she termed frustrating days of inaction.

“I will say that today there are more pastors who have been awakened than there were 20 years ago. I think it had to get just down and dirty to wake up pastors and to realize we are losing it. If we don’t get pastors in churches involved in voting and standing up for righteousness,” she paused before

changing gears. “It’s not what we think; it’s what God says that we are standing on.”

Her hope for the future is to see prayer chapters, now numbering about 500, to pop up in every county across America. She also prays that supporters remain faithful with financial contributions. Although volunteers do the bulk of CWA work, there are expenses associated with maintaining the office, training and publications.

“We need more leaders. We are willing to train. We’re willing to do everything we can to help them, give them material,” she said. “We just need people who are willing to say, ‘I am deeply concerned and I am going to volunteer my help.’”

Leaving a legacy

Now 80, LaHaye said she is content to leave the day-to-day operations of CWA to her staff, a move she made about a decade ago. She remains involved in the vision of the ministry and touches base several times a month.

“I’ve got nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren,” she said. “I’m a senior citizen and I don’t want to leave behind a world that is so sinful for my great-grandchildren to grow up in. I want to do everything I can. My legacy is to try to leave some righteousness behind

for them to have and to grow up and live in.

“I’ve done it for 30 years. It’s time to let a younger group pick up the loose ends. They can probably do a better job than I. They need to attract younger women. This is not just a senior citizen’s club. This is for young moms who have little children who are going to suffer under these things if we don’t do something about it. I would love for every young mom in America to know what CWA can offer because we are fighting for their children’s rights.”

She still chuckles when she thinks of that day so long ago when a simple television interview transformed one life and took with it one large swath of conservative women.

“That’s not my nature to do (activism),” she said. “But I think God just pushed me up out of my chair and said, ‘Beverly, go for it.’ Anything I’ve done is not my natural way, but God has put it in my heart to do it. You know, when you say, ‘Whatever Lord, wherever you send me, whatever you want me to say, whatever you want me to do, here I am,’ you better hang on. You better hang on tight.”

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