

Dr. Mary Bernice Craik, Mother, Educator, Artist, and Feminist 1924-2019

“My life has been a wonderful adventure with good times and bad times, full of twists, turns and changes.” – Dr. Mary Craik

By J. Michael Higgs



Dr. Mary Craik and her husband
James Craik. Photo: Courier
Journal, 2019.

Dr. Mary Craik, in her 95 years on this earth, was a change agent that created possibility. She was a mother, artist, teacher, and advocate for women’s rights that opened closed doors and shed light on the hypocrisy that darkened the future of far too many for far too long.

Born in 1924 in West Louisville, Mary Craik came from a meager beginning. Characteristic of the time, her parents had little formal education. However, this didn’t stop her from looking beyond her situation. Exploration of fiber as an art focus was first tapped into when she was just eight years old as she made her first dress. Just a few years later, she made her first quilt. The ravages of nature and life took these tokens away, but they created a spark that would return later in life.

Craik’s role as mother (her first career) began when she was just 19. She married her second husband, James Craik, a member of the United States Air Force, just after World War II, and continued her journey into motherhood with two additional children. As a military wife, she managed to live in eleven states and two foreign countries. Her experience traveling led to a tremendous opportunity to explore higher education. She obtained her Bachelors of Arts Degree in Art Education and English literature, eventually landing her second career as a teacher in El Paso, TX. While teaching, she was asked to join a racist teachers’ association, which she adamantly refused. This proved to be a defining moment in her life, prompting her to pursue a Master’s Degree at the University of Texas.

As she began teaching education courses at the University, Craik became increasingly familiar with inequality among the sexes. Even though she was a working professional, Texas law in 1963 prohibited a married woman from owning a car. Suppressive attitude hit even closer to home during her work at the University when she was compiling statistical data about employment needs when the University President instructed her to “place zeros in the female column for every position, except maids and janitors, and that he didn’t need any smart women working for him.”

This was a second defining moment for Craik as she set out to pursue a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology at the University of Iowa with a goal of doing so in just three years. Needless to say, she accomplished this goal. However, the permeating attitude of the majority tried to curtail her success

when she was denied a Department Chair position. She immediately filed a class action law suit claiming inequity, lack of promotions for women, lack of tenure for women, and lack of openings. The court sided with Dr. Craik, and the University of Iowa was made to create an annuity for life to pay Dr. Craik for the injustice she received.

This victory for Dr. Craik then turned into an open door of possibility with the creation of the Mark Craik Scholarship for Women at the University of Louisville. All of the money that Dr. Craik received from the annuity was used to create the scholarship fund, which as of 2019 has served 60 students. The goal of the fund is to enable women to help other women through education.



Fiber art created by Dr. Mary Craik that resides at the U.S. Embassy in Quito, Ecuador. Photos from U.S. Department of State.

Dr. Craik's final career move, after her official retirement from education, took her back to her roots on Market Street in Louisville. With her artistic instincts honed by the experiences of a life well-lived, she

picked up where she started, with fiber. As a pioneer in the NuLu district, she devoted her time to creating beautiful pieces of fiber art. Her gallery featured a vibrant palate of work that was recognized and celebrated in the community. Dr. Craik's fiber art legacy is even celebrated at an international level, as four pieces hang in the U.S. Embassy in Quito, Ecuador, a sister-city to Louisville.

Some of the many accomplishments of Dr. Mary Craik include:

- President of the Minnesota State Board of Psychology
- Chair of the Patients' Right Board at the VA Hospital in St. Cloud, MN
- Outstanding Service to University Women, State Teachers Union, IFO 1984
- Sex Equity Policy for Women Educators, a national women's organization, 1984
- Shawnee High School Hall of Fame, Louisville, KY 1997
- Presentation Academy Tower Award for Women Leaders in Education, Louisville, KY 2000
- Women of Spunk Award, Actors Theatre, Louisville, KY 2007
- Lucy M. Freibert Award, Project Women, 2006
- Women Who Have Made a Difference, Louisville, KY 2007

Dr. Mary Craik is interred in Section F Lot 495, Cave Hill Cemetery.

Sources:

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/louisville/name/mary-craik-obituary?id=2181792>

https://art.state.gov/personnel/mary_craik/