



**ETHEL SEIDERMAN**



*May 10, 1932 - July 26, 2016*

*In order for a child to thrive, the family needs to thrive.*

– Ethel's Lifelong Motto

## ABOUT ETHEL



Ethel Seiderman was a fierce social justice advocate who made social change her objective in life. Ethel rallied against injustice of all forms, especially inequity and exclusion. She was a champion for equality and respect for all people, regardless of one's economic standing or ethnic background. She understood that through honoring and sustaining others we can truly build a better future.

Ethel's life and work reflected her passion for children and families. She created innovative programs which became national models for meeting a broad range of needs.

The daughter of Jewish immigrants from Poland, Ethel attributed her passion for children and social justice to her working-class Bronx childhood. Her life began in the Bronx, New York in a four-story walk-up cooperative apartment that she shared with her parents, older brother Bernie, and her maternal grandmother who influenced her belief system. Her father Max—a ladies' hat maker—held three jobs in order to support the family. He was a dedicated union man who instilled in his daughter the values of hard work and fairness. Ethel's father often took her to union meetings with other garment district workers.

Ethel attended Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx and graduated in June 1949. She enrolled at Brooklyn College where she met Stan Seiderman, the love of her life. After finishing at Brooklyn College, she married Stan on June 21, 1953. Ethel, Stan, and their son Seth relocated to the Presidio, San Francisco in 1955 where Stan was an Army Reserve

officer. In 1957, their daughter, Abby, was born at Letterman Hospital, San Francisco, and the family moved to San Anselmo where Ethel contributed to the establishment of the San Anselmo Cooperative Nursery School. The family moved back to New Jersey where Ethel continued her career in childhood development at the Henry Street Settlement House in Manhattan. She also attended graduate school at Rutgers University.

In December of 1963, the family returned permanently to San Anselmo. From there Ethel directed the Cross-Cultural Education program at San Francisco State University where she completed her Masters in Early Childhood Development in 1969. Her first teaching job was at the Florence Crittenton Infant Center, which provided childcare for teenage mothers in the Visitacion Valley District of San Francisco. These teenage mothers could attend school knowing their children were being looked after. In Marin, Ethel directed the Terra Linda Cooperative Nursery School. She also worked in the Fillmore District in San Francisco at two other childcare centers, including a Head Start Project. Around the same time, she taught at San Francisco State through a program sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health.

After working in childcare centers in San Francisco's African American Fillmore District, Ethel battled the state bureaucracy to get funding for the Fairfax-San Anselmo Child Care Center, the first low-cost child care center founded by a community member, not by an established school, church or other institution. Ethel and Stan founded the Fairfax San Anselmo Children's Center (FSACC) in 1973 under their shared philosophy of working with families to make children thrive. She and Stan established one of the most innovative programs in the USA: first, by involving both parents in developing the focus and direction of the center; then by instituting after-school and weekend activities; and finally, by creating the concept of having a "get-well room" onsite so that working parents could continue in their jobs and trust that their sick children were in the best of care. Through the family support program Ethel and Stan increased fathers' involvement through the Men's Group and its various projects.

## ETHEL'S CALL FOR *GRIT*

*"I want us to stop being the good guys and just stand tall for all those who are unable to speak for themselves."*

In 1979, the San Francisco Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation chose Ethel's center as one of four in the Bay Area to launch a national project aimed at giving low-income and "ethnically isolated" families access to resources and a sense of community. Ethel stepped down from her position of Director of FSACC in 1979 to form the Parent Services Project (PSP). Ethel realized that, in order to promote the well-being of children, we must also promote and incorporate their families. PSP became a nationally recognized childcare training program that enabled childcare workers from socio-economically disadvantaged areas to empower children and their families to have a voice in the decision-making processes, both within the educational setting and in the wider community. It also became the subject of a Harvard Family Research Project in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. PSP's concepts continue today under new leadership, based firmly on the principles of supporting families and raising children through effective parental involvement. Ethel remained a director of PSP until 2009 when she retired.

Ethel received numerous honors through her work with children and other social causes not just within Marin, but also throughout the U.S. California's State Legislature named Ethel, Educator of the Year in 1996. Marin named her Citizen of the Year in 1988. Also in 1998, the Marin YWCA inducted her into the Marin Women's Hall of Fame. In 2006, she received the Beryl H. Buck Award for "Community Giving in Action." The Dominican University of California awarded Ethel an honorary Doctorate Degree in 2008 for her devoted career in childcare. San Geronimo Valley honored Ethel's "Living Legacy" in 2012. Ethel continued her advocacy and volunteerism throughout her retirement. She was an active volunteer at Legal Aid of Marin, served on the board of E3 and the Milagro Foundation. In 2015, she received the Heart of Marin's Lifetime Achievement Award. In

2016, the College of Marin renamed the College Institute for Excellence in Early Child Care to the Ethel Seiderman Institute for Excellence in Early Education; and a documentary film of Ethel's life, "*A Love Poem to My Friend Ethel*," by Mill Valley filmmaker Wendy Slick, was shown at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

Ethel mentored many leaders over the years. In 2008, Ethel brought together a diverse group of hand-picked community leaders that embodied the values and aspirations of her life. The group formed the Wisdom Trust and gathered with her up until her passing. Ethel imparted her many years of wisdom to the group. Wisdom Trust members continue to honor her legacy of service.

Ethel gave tirelessly her entire life and remained an active and influential leader up until her passing at the age of 84 years. Ethel was loved and respected by everyone she worked with over the decades. We all thought we were her best friend and confidant. We have all been fortunate to be blessed by her love and compassion. She was an extraordinary woman.

Ethel would say, "*When the work is done, I'll go to Bora Bora.*" The work isn't done yet, and now in these times when we so desperately need Ethel's voice and fierce advocacy, her words continue to inspire us.

*"Now get to work!"*

