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**REFLECTIONS BY LISA MILLETT RAU:
KATE MILLETT MEMORIAL SERVICE**

Lisa Millett Rau

Judge, Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas, Pennsylvania

I BROUGHT BOOTS IN HONOR OF OUT KATE, boots represented strength, power, and freedom. I might need a little power and strength right now.

For those who selected the photos and put together the program, I love that you selected pictures that captured Kate's exquisite, unconventional, left-leaning smile and used colors that she loved. Thank you for doing that.

On behalf of Kate's family, her sisters, her nieces and nephews, and grand nieces and nephews, we thank you for being here to celebrate our Aunt Kate. We know you all are part of her family, too.

We knew Kate as an artist and a playmate first. When we were kids, Aunt Kate would come to visit and she brought art supplies with her. She would sit cross-legged on the floor, as an equal with us, smile her co-conspiratorial, left-leaning smile, and make art with us. She would paint pumpkins: it was less violent and messy than using knives to carve. The painted pumpkin faces were much prettier and lasted longer than those that were ripped and carved that would droop and show the wreckage they endured. Kate spoke to us as if we were adults...like we mattered and we understood. She used grown-up words and treated us as equals. That was in the late 1950s and 1960s. Adults didn't sit cross-legged on the floor with kids and speak to them as equals back then. Even in child development, Kate Millett was ahead of her time. Kids were people, too, and should be treated that way. Kate always made her visits an adventure...like a party where we were invited.

After we went to bed, we could hear Kate and our parents (her sister Sally and Ed) laugh and talk and debate about how to fix the world. This went into the wee hours. It was fun when Kate came to visit.

Even Kate's sculptures were fun. She gave life to inanimate things. She would add arms and legs to tables and chairs to give them freedom and power. Her sculptures animated her expansive New York loft and the Farm as if they were her room-mates. Her sculptures made us laugh. They seemed like they could be our friends. They might tell us a secret or play with us if we asked them to. My favorite one was the piano stool. Kate gave it legs, feet, and a fabulous pair of strong, well-worn boots. Boots seemed to be magic to Kate. If you had boots you could do anything! If the piano stool got tired of being sit on, Kate had given it legs and boots to walk or run free if it wanted to. Freedom, independence, liberation.

For Kate, everyone and everything deserved these things. If the world didn't exist that way, Kate would sculpt it that way. As an artist Kate could envision and

sculpt the way the world should be. Kate would use all of her skills to paint it or mold it, or speak it, or write it, or protest it that way.

Kate also painted with words. She just loved words. They, too, were her playmates. When she wrote, it was as if, she sat cross-legged on the floor and said to the words, “What should we paint today?” She challenged the rules of how one should write. To Kate, there was no hierarchy among words—big words weren’t better than little ones. They were better when integrated and working together. She deftly combined long complex words with pithy, short words to give meaning, emotion, and clarity. Kate showed us that words despite their differences could get along. Kate created poems within sentences. She challenged convention by how she wrote. Sometimes a run-on sentence was necessary to evoke a sentiment. A sentence without an object sometimes had to happen.

Watching her write, she held the pencil like a brush and painted some meaning. All of us who have Kate’s silk screens enjoy the personal inscription she drafted below that looks like calligraphy and reads like a haiku. Kate wrote in the moment. Watching Kate give a speech, she would get that wonderful unconventional smile of hers just before she uttered a particularly lovely combination of words...words arranged in a certain way made her happy. The best was watching her give a speech about her art as I did in North Carolina during one of her art exhibitions. Kate looked completely blissful: art and words together. What could be better?

Kate studied words and understood them deeply. She received an English degree, magna cum laude from the University of Minnesota, where the sorority waived her dues when she couldn’t afford them because her grade cum was so high that it helped raise the collective cum of the sorority. She studied literature more at Oxford University where she was the first American woman to earn first class honors with distinction from St. Hilda’s college. Next, she went to Columbia University where she got her doctorate in comparative literature with distinction March 1970. With that pedigree of education, she had studied words deeply and could speak with authority.

Her final PhD project, her dissertation, required that she take what she learned and contribute some new angle to the field. She took the assignment seriously and found something to say that no one had said in that way before. Her dissertation was *Sexual Politics*. She wasn’t trying to pick a fight or start a revolution; she was just doing her homework. She had discovered that words could be used as tools to oppress. Romance and fantasy in fiction could subliminally convince women they were objects, not people with rights and free will. Kate exposed the truth hidden within the literature. Kate showed us that some “classic” literature was infected with sexual politics, designed to show women our “proper” role and to do it so subtly and with such beautiful prose that we would never question it. Instead, we would aspire to abide by the rules, the sexual politics, that the literature spelled out. But like all invisible ink, once it is revealed, you can’t make it invisible again. Kate was simply telling the truth.

Some of us rejoiced because Kate opened our eyes to the truth. Others were terrified. Just as Kate as a sculptor gave freedom to inanimate objects, Kate as a writer showed women’s objectification in literature and with her writing gave women freedom. She used her tools and with her words revealed the oppression of women hidden within the writing.

It was August 31, 1970, and I was 10 years old and living in Nebraska, when Kate appeared on the cover of TIME magazine. Kate was in her mid-30s. We were all so proud of her! It was so amazing to me that she got on the cover of TIME for doing a good job on her homework for graduate school. Talk about inspiration! I remember my mother telling me that Kate was upset because she didn't want to be on the cover of TIME. Kate told TIME that it was a movement and they should put a group of women on the cover to show that it was a movement of women. TIME disagreed, the cover needed to have a person, a leader, and they had selected Kate. Kate understood from the beginning how critical it was to reinforce and insist that what she and other women—many in this room--- was involved in was a movement. It was not about her or any one person. If it were understood as a movement, that meant you couldn't attack one and take down one of the leaders to deflate the movement. As usual, Kate was right. If something revolutionary was being said, and it could be associated with a single person, rather than a movement of many people, then revolution could be stifled by slander or discrediting that person. Those opposed to change for women, could try to undermine the perceived leader of the movement, in the hopes that no one would hear the clarity of her message. That was my first lesson in ad hominem attacks.

Since Kate refused to participate in being on the cover, TIME commissioned Alice Neal to paint Kate's portrait without her posing for it. The portrait showed a Kate that looked angry, masculine, and ready to fight...nothing like the pictures on today's program celebrating the Kate we all know and love. Kate had foreshadowed what happened next: attack one of the leaders to taint the movement and the message.

Just four months later in December of 1970, another TIME article entitled "Women's Lib: A Second Look" was published. Instead of the talk being about how brilliant our Aunt Kate was with her homework, people focused on a comment tucked in the middle of the article that charged Kate with being a "bisexual" as if it were a crime, and if not a crime, portrayed as something that surely should undermine her credibility to speak for "normal" women. What was a "bisexual" I asked my mother? And my friends asked me. Was it hereditary? Was it true?

Why are they talking about that? It has nothing to do with her great book. What difference does it make if she sleeps with a man or a woman if she loves the person? I knew we weren't supposed to be in the room anyway when people are having sex. It's supposed to be private and no one else's business. So why were they writing about that private thing in this big magazine that everyone reads? And what about her cool book that everyone was talking about just a couple of months ago? Even at that age, the ploy to discredit was obvious. Kate was told to back down, to deny it, to hide it. Some who were worried, said, "Don't hurt the chances of the women's movement by complicating it with gay rights." Kate was steadfast: "I sleep with who I love, sometimes a man and more often a woman."

All rights are human rights, Kate insisted. She was so brave! She would continue to paint with words and protests to make the world better for all of us, no matter what the cost. And the venomous hate and threats came towards her to try to smother the truths she told. Kate learned that letters were not always birthday cards with cash in them. That's when she stopped opening mail.

Kate took refuge at a farm outside of Poughkeepsie, New York that she bought using \$10,000 in royalties she received from sales from *Sexual Politics*. The Farm became her sanctuary. When I moved east to college and couldn't go home during

breaks because of the cost, Kate made it clear that I was always welcome at The Farm or her Loft in New York City. I took her up on the invitation. The Farm was magical. Kate believed the rooms and buildings deserved names. The barns were named for their color. The rooms had names like the Chicken Coop, the Marilyn Monroe Room, the Fibber Maggee Closet. There was a delightful story to explain each name. The rooms were decked out in country grandeur. It was a farm but every room had to have Persian rugs, beautiful artwork, crisp cotton sheets, and carefully selected estate sale furniture. We took crazy rides in broken down tractors or Kate's old green convertible. Boots were a key ingredient at the farm. If you had boots, you could fix anything. They were a powerful friend and partner. Dinners could never be a quick yogurt from the fridge. They were savory journeys filled with butter, potatoes, bread, salad, roasted meat of some variety, candlelight, intense discussions, and funny stories. Kate loved these dinners. They were the capstone to the day.

I remember early on during one of my visits when Kate posed her utopian idea for the Farm: What if she made it a women's art colony? I realized she was actually serious. She had done research. Christmas trees were an easy, low maintenance, high cash crop. Creative women would be invited to spend the summer on the farm. They would work the farm half the day, and pursue their art the other half, and the third half (of course!) of the day...everyone would get together for fabulous meals, laughter, and talk.

Kate turned this fantasy into a reality. Women did not need to have money. She would select a combination of artists each year: a poet, a musician, a silkscreener, a photographer, a novelist, or whatever would provide a nice mix for her creative utopian world. The Farm became a creative wonderland with a new crop of women artists invited each summer to grow their creativity surrounded by a Christmas tree farm that they cultivated. It was classically Kate: fun, both practical and impractical, and aimed at nourishing artistic creativity in all its forms. Of course, Kate insisted the food must be gourmet, and the wine plentiful. When the finances didn't work because women were not charged enough to cover the cost of their food and board, Kate refused to ask for more. "That isn't the point."

Kate immersed herself in The Farm, continued with her visual arts---silk-screens, drawings, and giant papier mâché figures of women. She also continued to use words to paint the world as the just one that it should become. When Kate saw a wrong, she felt obligated to use words, her dependable and powerful friends, to call it out: racism, sexual equality in work or love, torture of a group...or a person in a basement, wrongful incarceration, inhumane prisons, diminishing someone for a mental or physical disability. If someone with power was being a bully, Kate was willing to fight. It didn't matter where in the world the wrong was, she believed it had to be attacked and remedied. Kate also believed in the power of protest and took delight in the apparent scandal of it. When you see pictures showing Kate protesting, she always looks happy...like she is posing with great friends on an adventure.

In 1979, Kate went to Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini had taken over the Iranian government and quickly clamped down on women's freedoms. Girls could not go to school with boys, women were forced to wear veils at work, women couldn't divorce their husbands, women could not be judges. Feminists from around the world planned to travel to Iran for International Women's Day to show solidarity with their Iranian sisters and protest this new oppressive regime. The United

States government became concerned. They tried to discourage American feminists from going, warning them that they could not ensure their safety. Most of them backed down. Not Kate. She was fearless. Kate left and my mother worried. An estimated 20,000 women protested at Tehran University and walked through the city's Freedom Square. I received a phone call from my mother: Kate and Sophie Keir were taken away somewhere by the authorities. That's all she knew. That night I saw Kate on the national news being escorted away by police. This was a pre-internet world. News spread slowly. I remembered that when we I lived in Afghanistan as a child hearing that some prisoners were not given food and needed family members to come feed them. Was that true in Iran? Would Kate starve or be tortured or killed? All we could do was wait. Somehow Kate and Sophie ended up being secreted out of the country on a plane that brought them safely to Paris. Rather than dwelling on the terrifying time she had locked in a room at immigration headquarters where officials talked about how she was a lesbian, something that for Iranians warranted execution, Kate felt compassion and fear for Iranian women because they could not just get on a plane to freedom as she had.

Kate was able to see many of the changes she fought for come to fruition. In December 2006, the United Nations passed a Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability that Kate spent endless hours fighting to achieve. It happened the same week Kate had to deliver a eulogy at Betty Friedan's memorial, the timing undoubtedly made Kate realize her own mortality and the urgency to keep fighting for justice.

In 2014, I was so excited to write Kate to tell her that I as a judge was going to get to officiate one of the first same gender marriages in Pennsylvania the week it became legal. Kate responded to the email within moments. She was ecstatic and insisted I send pictures. Kate who was tormented in 1970 for loving women and who helped pave the way for legal marriage for everyone no matter who they loved...got the thrill of seeing it in her lifetime. The next year the United States Supreme Court made it legal nationwide to marry whoever we love.

In 2013, we all journeyed to Seneca Falls, New York to see Kate inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame. She had more than earned the honor. Kate looked aglow surrounded by Sophie, her sister Sally, and 4 out of 5 of her nieces and nephews. Notwithstanding her failing health, she delivered an eloquent, quintessentially wise and sassy Kate Millett speech.

Andrea Dworkin once said of Kate, "The world was asleep and Kate woke us up." But our Kate, our Aunt Kate, woke us up not to have a fight or to start a revolution. She just wanted us to paint a picture with her of a better world where you could be whoever you wanted to be, and love whoever you want to love, and to have fun doing it. Thank you, Kate, for being the kind of aunt who blazed a path for us and made the world a better place to navigate, and for doing it with beautiful paint. The world is so much more just now because of your artwork. If Kate were here, she would get that co-conspirator twinkle in her eyes, smile her left-leaning unconventional smile, and invite us to keep painting or sculpting a better world. So, grab your boots, don Kate's courage, pick an injustice, and fight the bully...and don't forget to make it an adventure. Let's honor Kate by doing just that.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Millett Rau is Kate Millett's niece. She was a judge on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas in Pennsylvania. <https://www.avvo.com/attorneys/19102-pa-lisa-rau-5091383.html>

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