



Jim Powell: A Salute to Bettina Bien Greaves

Jim Powell

January 23, 2018

Bettina Bien Greaves is an extraordinary, unsung resource for liberty. Now FEE's Resident Scholar, a FEE Trustee, *Freeman* Contributing Editor, and two-time Guest Editor, she has done so many things for so many people for so long, it's past time to publicly acknowledge her myriad contributions. If you ask Bettina, she says she has only done her job, tried to answer questions people ask, and learned a good bit herself along the way.

With her late husband, Percy L. Greaves, Jr., she attended Ludwig von Mises's fabled economics seminar at New York University for nearly two decades. She took notes in those seminars and she helped make arrangements for the Mises Dinner Circle which, during the 1950s and 1960s, gave libertarian speakers a rare respectful forum in New York. She did practically everything, even humble chores, to help make Ludwig and Margit von Mises comfortable during their last years.

Along the way, Bettina made herself into the world's foremost Mises authority. She amassed hundreds, perhaps thousands of articles by and about Mises—in Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish, as well as English. She translated some of these articles. She checked facts about Mises firsthand in Austria and Switzerland where he had lived. The material she gathered became the basis for her authoritative two-volume *Mises: An Annotated Bibliography* (1993, 1995), which provides generous selections from articles and books, illuminating the intellectual history of the twentieth century. Bettina's scholarship revealed that Mises's influence extended much farther than anybody had imagined.

Bettina made herself perhaps the premier archivist of the postwar libertarian movement. She could always be counted on to squirrel away worthwhile documents and publications virtually impossible to find later. Her files include a remarkable collection of articles by Rose Wilder Lane. She has Henry Hazlitt's 20 years of *Newsweek* columns. She has what is probably the world's largest collection of material on Frederic Bastiat—plus material on Frank Chodorov, Murray Rothbard, and many other important thinkers.

Long before mainstream publishers began to run articles and issue books by libertarian authors, there were lively debates in libertarian publications such as *Plain Talk*, *American Affairs*, *Books for Libertarians*, *Christian Economics*, *Inquiry*, *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, *New Individualist Review*, *Libertarian Review*, *Liberty*, and *Reason*. Most of these are gone, and even the ones still going can't be found at most libraries, but they're in Bettina's office.

She has material from many of the early libertarian organizations which became landmarks in the movement, including the National Economic Council, Joint Council on Economic Education, National Committee for Monetary Reform, National Committee for Constitutional Government, America's Future, and the American Economic Foundation. She has a collection of the papers presented to the Mont Pelerin Society, the international society of classical liberal scholars.

Bettina's personal library, which exceeds 5,000 books, is a major resource. It includes extensive holdings on American history, civil liberties, philosophy, economic theory, money, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression, the New Deal, Pearl Harbor, and other subjects related to liberty. She smiles, I come by this naturally. I'm a third-generation bibliophile.

Bettina recognized the vital importance of reaching young people at an age when they are embracing ideas they would likely hold for the rest of their lives. Accordingly, she spearheaded FEE's pioneering program to provide libertarian material for high school debaters—information which wouldn't be found in local libraries. For almost two decades, she assembled sophisticated yet easy-to-understand packets on foreign aid, government regulations, medical care, subsidies, the media, and many other issues. These mailings went out to as many as 1,200 high schools and several hundred colleges each year. Bettina helped students further by writing *Free Market Economics: A Syllabus* (1975) and editing *Free Market Economics: A Basic Reader* (1975) with 81 choice selections by such authors as Mises, Hazlitt, Chodorov, Davy Crockett, Jean Baptiste Say, FEE founder Leonard E. Read, and FEE president emeritus Hans F. Sennholz. Countless people have visited FEE and expressed heartfelt thanks to Bettina for helping them find their way.

Born in Washington, D.C., Bettina grew up the daughter of homebuilder-architect Van Tuyl Hart Bien; he lost practically everything in the Great Depression, and the family then moved to a log cabin in Bethesda, Maryland. At Wheaton College (Norton, Mass.), where she majored in botany, Bettina learned some French and German. When World War II came she accepted a government secretarial job with the Board of Economic Warfare. This took her to South America, where she learned Spanish, and to Europe where, among other things, she improved her German.

She joined FEE as a correspondence secretary in March 1951. That fall she began attending Mises's New York University economics seminar. Since then, she has given lectures across the United States and around the world. On her travels, she has helped maintain vital contacts with libertarians in such far-flung places as Australia, the Bahamas, Japan, Guatemala, Italy, Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, and Russia.

This month marks Bettina's 80th birthday, something that she doesn't really want to be reminded of. But so many people have expressed gratitude for what she has done that we're glad to report she continues to enjoy good health—she regularly drives nearly 60 miles to participate in discussions about liberty. Please feel free to send your best wishes to her at FEE.

Jim Powell, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, is an expert in the history of liberty. He has lectured in England, Germany, Japan, Argentina and Brazil as well as at Harvard, Stanford and other universities across the United States. He has written for the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Esquire, Audacity/American Heritage and other publications, and is author of six books.

