

# The Washington Times

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## A Rare Influence in the Lives of Others

By Richard W. Rahn

Published July 1, 2009

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Mary Lou Forbes was one of those rare people who changed many lives for the better. She had the courage to challenge prevailing opinion by running columns written by knowledgeable economic, political, scientific and social dissidents to provoke readers into thinking about the consequences of existing policies and beliefs.

As a result, her Commentary pages tended to be on the cutting edge of policy debates, which often resulted in constructive change. She truly was a great lady - principled, wise and always of good humor.

As is the case with many academic and professional economists, I occasionally wrote articles for papers such as The Washington Times and the Wall Street Journal, but never really considered doing it on a regular basis. About eight years ago, Mary Lou called me and said "Richard, you have a knack for making complex economic issues understandable and interesting, and I encourage you to write a regular column for us." Obviously, I was highly flattered and readily agreed to give it a try. And thus, after several other careers, I became a middle-aged protege of Mary Lou.

Mary Lou and I had dinner every couple of months where I was often treated to Virginia and Washington area history lessons. Over her long career as a reporter and commentator, she had known most of the key players who made what the modern Virginia is today. Her stock of knowledge on the evolution of Virginia from a largely segregated rural state to a very civil, prosperous, high-tech powerhouse was unrivaled. She had begun to work on a book about how the leaders of Virginia finally gathered the courage and wisdom to manage the desegregation of the state in a civil manner. We can only hope she had sufficient notes so that the project can be completed as one of the many lasting tributes to her.

My last dinner with Mary Lou was on June 10. As I took her home, she said: "Richard, thank you for taking an old lady to dinner, because it is always fun for me." And yet I was thinking I was the lucky one to have been in the company of a most remarkable entertaining and interesting lady.

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