

June 24, 2013

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

The 1987 R.C.C.D. Alumna of the year was Helen Brigden Bottel. Bottel was a journalist for over 40 years primarily as an advice columnist. She was born in Beaumont, California and attended what was then called Riverside Junior College from 1932 to 1935. After high school she found herself facing the limited opportunities offered to women of the 1930s. She said that with her typing skills *"fast but inaccurate"*, her shorthand *"unreadable"* and the Great Depression limiting job possibilities, she enrolled at RJC because *"the price was right"*. She described herself as a *"complete, total nothing in high school."* She moved into the college environment and *"started living"*. Her love of Journalism grew at R.J.C. where she was a student of Robert Patton (English & Journalism 1931-1956; Consultant in Journalism/Riverside City Schools Director of Information Services 1956-1961) and became a member of the staff of the *"Arroyo"* student newspaper. *"We formed the Press Club. It was the greatest thing that ever happened at college. We were so enthusiastic. It was probably the largest club on campus and we kept the college spirit going. Everybody wanted in. We knew everything that was going on. We were the 'Press Gang'."* It was as a staff member of *"The Arroyo"* that she met her future husband Robert Bottel. They were first reporters and later editors of the newspaper. As a member of *"The Arroyo"* staff, little did she know what the future held in store for her. She wrote *"hard news and features. I though advice columns were dumb."* But she didn't just write. Across the street from RJC in the basement print shop of Riverside Poly High, she and the staff set type, ran the linotype, and did everything necessary to publish the newspaper. The photo below is of *"The Arroyo"* staff from the 1935 *"Tequesquite"* yearbook. Brigden is in the front row, fifth in from the left. This photo was taken by the northeast entrance to the Quadrangle.



Geisler, Colville, Coleman, MacDonald, Brigden, Honberger, Dole, Riemer, Clink, Raby
Wilder, Paschall, MacKown, Patton, Hurley, Clark
Hagen, Copper, Sankey, Hunter, Toespen, Walker

After their 1935 graduations from RJC, Helen Brigden and Bob Bottel married and she moved from town to town following her new husband's career with the California Department of Agriculture on the California-Oregon border. *"In each town I gravitated to the local newspaper,"* Bottel said, volunteering to write features. In 1950 landed a job at the *"Illinois Valley News"* in Cave Junction, Oregon. She was a "jack of all trades" serving as editor, reporter, columnist and sometimes linotype operator. Bottel became editor of the newspaper in 1954. On a dare from her husband, Bottel decided in 1958 to challenge the advice columnists "Ann Landers" and "Dear Abby". Accepting her husband's dare to try writing a column, she did and sold the idea to the Grants Pass Courier. The column entitled *"Grin and Bear 'Em"* first appeared in the Courier on March 13, 1958. In a Writer's Digest article written by Bottel in 1971, she wrote, "All freelancers are gamblers at heart". Shortly

after the first "Grin and Bear 'Em" column was published, the subject of syndication came up. Her husband, using reverse psychology, challenged her again by saying "Haw! You can't". But Bottel did and went right to the top, sending her four published columns and a letter on family life to the three top syndicates in the country. She credits the chuckle of a secretary (while reading one of her submitted columns) with attracting the attention of a King Features Syndicate editor. In less than two months, after an all-expense paid trip to New York for contract negotiations, "Grin and Bear 'Em" became "Helen Help Us" and launched a 25-year career of reaching out to people, from Maine to California and internationally from South Africa to Japan. She shared their troubles, gave each a bit of her life, en courage self-esteem, shared their loneliness and showed them that someone cared. The column ended in 1983, but not Bottel's involvement, caring and concern. She went on to write a column for Tokyo, Japan's "Yomiuri Shmbun", the world's largest circulation daily newspaper. In 1987 Bottel said, "The Japanese are where we were 20 to 30 years ago (in interpersonal relationships). Women are second class citizens. Communication is poor". Bottel said her Japanese editor requested she "pull no punches". "I write just as I did for my American audience". Her weekly column and additional monthly feature "Helen's Letter from America" quickly became a favorite but not without controversy. One Japanese husband wrote an angry letter about his wife's complaints about her life of nothing but housework. The husband protested that his wife had read too many of Bottel's feisty columns. "A woman has as much right as a man to seek a life outside the home," the columnist wrote back, "and she deserves a husband who encourages her with words and action. Pick up a broom, my chauvinist friend, and help her with the housework." Bottel's advice column appeared in the "Yomiuri Shimbun" for five years. It was canceled in 1988 when a man took over the section in which it ran. The photo below appeared in the October 1987 RCCD publication "RCC Reports". Four RCCD Alumni of the Year were honored at a luncheon held in the RCC Hall of Fame. (shown left to right) journalist and educator Robert Patton (1981), retired County of Riverside employee Robert Fitch (1985), Helen Bottel (1987) and plant pathology professor Dr. Charles Bracker (1986). Patton was Bottel's Journalism professor while she attended RJC.



From 1992 until 1996 (along with her daughter Kathy Bottel Bernhart) she wrote a column for seniors called "Look Who's Aging". In addition to her columns, Bottel compiled three Doubleday books "To Teens With Love" (1969), "Helen Help Us" (1970) and "Parents Survival Kit" (1979). The photo (below left) is from the 1935 "Tequesquite" yearbook. The photo (below right) is from the year she was awarded her Alumna of the Year honor.



It is 2 years and 37 weeks until RCC's 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC's 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District's Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote "the book" about RCC's history. "Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History" is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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