

A LIFE WORTH LIVING

Professor Emerita Recalls
Extraordinary Journey

By Jessica Navarro







Professor Emerita Bette Stead (Ed.D. '67) crafted the capital campaign needs assessment and plan that led to Charles T. "Ted" Bauer's \$40 million gift to name Bauer College.

Every corner of Bette Stead's home tells a story.

The framed wildlife photos are from her husband's trips to Africa. The vintage purses represent her travels to Greenland, Korea and Europe as a member of the Melody Maids, a women's chorus that performed for the military overseas during World War II.

The artifacts in shadow boxes are items found near her family's vacation home in Brazoria County. The prints and paintings, including some originals given to her by the artists, indicate an appreciation of the arts and culture.

But, the real story is Stead herself. She is a living piece of the Bauer College history books — as a faculty member in the late 90s, she created the proposal for a capital campaign that led to the \$40 million gift from Charles T. "Ted" Bauer in 2000 — and a key player in shaping the Houston business community through her work to establish the Federation of Houston Professional Women and the Greater Houston Business Ethics Roundtable.

When she recounts her role in these events, she is detailed and thorough, while remaining humble and unassuming. Each time she has led an effort for change, she said, it was the result of diligent research and planning.

"I'm very pragmatic. If I can't bite into it or measure it, I'm not interested in it," Stead said.

Stead's journey began in 1935, when she was born in San Antonio. Because her parents frequently traveled between New Orleans and New York for work, she was raised by her grandmother, Emma De Forest Stead (who she describes as "the kind of lady who could put her arms around you, and you just felt the whole world was all right") and her aunt, Lucy Ella Stead. They settled in Beaumont.

"It was the closest town to the Louisiana border that had a bus line, and we didn't have a car," Stead said. "We needed a bus line so my aunt could get back and forth to work."

Her aunt was a critical figure in her life, acting as both caretaker and the occasional push that Stead needed from her comfort zone.

"If there's anything about me that you want to talk about, it's because of her influence. She really opened up the world to me," Stead said, recalling the lessons her aunt insisted she get in swimming and roller skating.

She added: "I never could learn, but she was going to make sure I participated in life."

Stead has more than participated, amassing a wealth of experiences and connections over the course of her education and career. She earned a bachelor of business administration degree from Lamar University in 1957, followed by an MBA from the University of Texas in 1961. Lamar University named her a Distinguished Alumna in 2004 and the first woman member of their College of Business Hall of Fame in 2011.

She planned to end her schooling there and to find an entry-level corporate job where she could work her way up the career ladder.

"I went to some major companies and got turned down," Stead said. "My impression was they'd never seen a woman with an MBA. I was naïve. I thought if I had the qualifications, I could get a job."

She instead used her experience teaching at the high school level during graduate school to take an assistant professor job at Lamar. In 1964, the University of Houston became a public university, and with that, came tuition that Stead could afford to pursue a doctoral degree.

"I didn't know what else to do. I was in the driver's seat in terms of providing groceries for myself and my aunt, and I wanted a career path," she said. "At that time, we had a business education department in the college, and I knew the chairman, who said I could take 30 hours in the business school for an Ed.D."

She completed the program in 1967 and was then hired to teach in the business college at UH, a job she held for 34 years. She is now a professor emerita in Bauer's Department of Marketing & Entrepreneurship.

The experience of being turned down for a job based on gender wasn't one she soon forgot, though. She wrote and compiled the first edition of *Women in Management* in 1978, published by Prentice Hall, and used the textbook in a "Women in Administration" course at the college. In 1985, the second edition of the

book was published, and today, it is in the main reading room in the Library of Congress.

“It turned me into a feminist,” Stead said, noting that teaching male and female business students about women’s issues in the workplace was somewhat groundbreaking in the 70s and 80s.

“Women still were not getting a lot of jobs,” she added. “The way I tried to teach it was from an empirical standpoint. I didn’t teach a bunch of theory. Everything was based on facts, and I found role models around Houston — women entrepreneurs to come and talk to the class.”

Around that time, Stead extended her work outside the classroom, recognizing the need for a professional organization in Houston to give women access to networking and development opportunities.

“I knew we didn’t have a big enough women’s organization in Houston, but I thought if we could put together an umbrella group,” she said, reflecting on the first meeting to present a draft of constitution and bylaws for what is now the Federation of Houston Professional Women.

Stead also played an important role in forming another Houston professional organization that continues to thrive today, the Greater Houston Business Ethics Roundtable (GHBERT). As director of the college’s Institute for Business, Ethics and Public Issues in 1989, she presented her concept for a group that would bring together professionals from a range of companies and industries in Houston to discuss ethical operations and best practices. The idea generated little interest from businesses in the city, but when she brought it up again in 1995, the timing was right, and GHBERT was established.

“It just struck me it’d be nice if companies could get together and share best practices,” she said. “And corporations eventually realized they needed to talk to each other to see what they were doing.”

With nearly three decades on the UH campus under her belt, Stead began discussions in the late 90s with the business college administration and faculty about the need for a capital campaign to raise funds for building renovations, new technology and programs, and faculty hiring.

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supported,” she said. “That surprised me. Our enrollment kept going up, and our faculty numbers were dwindling.”

Stead’s contribution led to a document outlining the case for funding the college, along with a draft plan and a suggested strategy, which she presented to then-Dean Jerry Strawser and campus administration. This needs assessment led to Charles T. “Ted” Bauer’s \$40 million endowment of the College of Business Administration in 2000. Now known as the C. T. Bauer College of Business, the school offers the range of resources and facilities that Stead outlined in her initial document.

“It’s been magnificent,” she said, describing the transformation of the college over the last decade.

Stead retired from teaching in 2001, but she remains a vocal supporter of Bauer College and UH. She has endowed three scholarships in the college honoring her aunt, paternal grandparents and parents — the result of a lesson she learned early in life about the importance of giving back. Eloise Milam, the director of the Melody Maids women’s chorus, helped Stead earn a scholarship that allowed her to pursue her undergraduate education.

“That’s where I learned how important scholarships are, so I’ve tried to repay that,” she said.

Retirement is hardly a quiet life for Stead, who has gone on to chair the task force for a \$27 million affordable housing project for The Women’s Home, a 52-year-old Houston nonprofit. In 2010, she married Carter Eugene (Gene) Carlton, Jr., MD, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Urology, Baylor College of Medicine. When they’re not volunteering their time for organizations in the Houston area, they travel and spend time fishing in Brazoria County.

“It’s the best five-and-a-half years of my life, and I’ve had a very happy life, so that’s saying something,” Stead said. “I have my fishing buddy, and it’s just been wonderful.”

As she reflects on her journey, Stead remembers a piece of advice from her dear Aunt Lucy that likely helped her push past adversity.

“All of our lives go up and down,” she said. “When I would hit a bump in the road, my aunt would say, ‘Tie another knot in the rope, and hold on.’”