



Betti Poindexter-Blackshear

June 2, 1944 - September 22, 2020

Betti-Rachelle Poindexter-Blackshear

Betti-Rachelle Poindexter-Blackshear was an engineer with an artist's heart. And she was a visible—not a “Hidden Figure”—as she set out to blaze a new path in a field with few women and even fewer Black women. In fact, there were so few Black women in engineering when Betti enrolled at Prairie View A&M University as an engineering student in 1962 that it was a newsworthy event. Betti and four of her female classmates were featured in a newspaper article with the headline “Women in Engineering.”

A gifted artist, Betti was torn between pursuing her passion for art or a career in engineering where she would use math and science, two of her favorite subjects. By the time she graduated from Prairie View High School, officially called Prairie View Training School, in 1962 as the salutatorian, she had picked architectural engineering over art. According to an oral history interview that her sister Paula conducted with her in 1987, Betti said the financial security of engineering ultimately influenced her career path. But it was also important to Betti that she do something different. In fact, she said in the oral history that she wanted to do “something that wasn't ordinary.” And that's exactly what she did!

Engineering certainly wasn't ordinary for a woman of any color in the 1960s. And protesting for civil rights in Waller County while a student at Prairie View A&M and later at the University of Texas, also wasn't ordinary. And neither

was graduating from the School of Architecture at the University of Texas, where Betti transferred in 1964. When she received her Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1970, Betti was one of only two women to graduate that year in a class of 39.

And Betti was among the first cohorts of women engineers to work in the aerospace industry in California in the early 1970s. And having started her dream of doing something that wasn't ordinary at Prairie View A&M, Betti returned as an administrator in the College of Engineering in 1997, where she also mentored and taught future engineers.

No doubt, Betti's dream of blazing a new path was extraordinary considering the times in which she grew up. Born in Kansas City, Kansas in 1944, she was the second of five children of Alfred and Rachael Poindexter. In 1944, Betti's father was one year away from receiving his veterinary degree from Kansas State University and accepting a job at Prairie View A&M where he would teach animal science and start his large and small animal veterinary practice. With the new job, Alfred and Rachael and their two young children, Betti and Alfred III, whom everyone called Butch, moved to Prairie View, Texas, where they first lived in a campus cottage, down the street from the Veterinary Hospital.

Growing up in Prairie View, Betti was a Girl Scout, she played tennis, and she had many friends. All the Poindexter children played a musical instrument and Betti played classical piano. Being the child of a veterinarian also meant different pets, including dogs Pups and Traveler, a horse named Dart, a rabbit, and Dixie, the baby calf. Pups was Betti's favorite.

Betti excelled in school and was always on the honor roll. Plus, she was the May Queen, Miss New Homemaker, and at age 16, she was the First Runner-Up to Miss Texas High. For her talent in the Miss Texas High competition, Betti painted a portrait of a woman from a blank canvas.

Betti and her friends had lots of fun; they went to dances, picnics, and movies. She loved Halloween because she said it gave her the opportunity to dress up in a flamboyant costume. And the School of Agriculture's annual family Christmas party was one of her favorite events, especially because the kids received a bag filled with pecans, candy, and fruit.

Betti, like her mother, knew how to sew. She was most proud of the fully lined suit that she made during her Home Economics class. Betti was active in St. Francis Episcopal Church, where she was confirmed May 31, 1959. And she was very involved with the EYC, the Episcopal Young Churchmen.

Betti's school work, friends, piano, tennis, Girl Scouts and other organizations kept her busy but not so busy that she didn't keep up with her art. Betti was not just dedicated to her art—art was who she was. As she said in the oral history, she painted from the time she was a kid and there was no medium that she wasn't good at—crayons, pencil, oils, sketching, sculpting, etc.

As Betti was finishing high school and starting college, she was beginning to learn about civil rights activists who, through boycotts, marches, freedom rides, and sit-ins, were trying to dismantle the laws and traditions that segregated schools, restaurants, hotels, swimming pools, movie theaters, county fairs, etc., and prevented Black Americans from realizing their dreams. Learning about the Civil Rights Movement through Jet magazine and the Pittsburg Courier newspaper which her parents subscribed to, Betti was inspired to join this non-violent force to desegregate America. She started marching to desegregate nearby Hempstead, Texas and after she transferred to the University of Texas in 1964 to study architecture, she and fellow Black students marched to integrate the dormitories on campus which she wasn't allowed to live in. Plus, Betti and other Black students ventured beyond campus with a goal of desegregating the city of Austin.

In 2018, The Daily Texan, the student newspaper at the University of Texas, interviewed Betti and reported on the hostility that she experienced as the first Black female to enroll in the School of Architecture in the 1960s. The Feb. 23, 2018 article, "Black Alumna Details Racism" also revealed Betti's courage and leadership as she and other Black students protested on and off campus, including at football games where there were no Black players.

It was at the University of Texas where Betti became a Delta. Joining Delta Sigma Theta Sorority made being a Black student on the campus tolerable. Betti told the reporter that "for Black students at that time, Black Greek life was often their only outlet, because they were excluded from other aspects of campus and social life."

Before graduating from the University of Texas, Betti married Ed Harris. Their daughter Shelli Denise Harris was born in Houston where Betti worked for the architectural firm of John Chase, a renown Black architect. Now a single mother, Betti moved to Los Angeles where after working for black architectural firms, she switched back to her engineering roots and blazed a new path in the aerospace industry, working for Rockwell International. It was at Rockwell that Betti met and married her second husband Jim Blackshear, also an engineer.

After their February 26, 1977 marriage, their family increased to five with Jim's daughter, Toya Denean, Betti's daughter Shelli Denise, and Betti and Jim's son, Corey Nelson who was born August 23, 1977. In 1987, Jim adopted Shelli who became Shelli Harris-Blackshear. After earning her M.S. Degree in Administration at Cal State, Dominguez Hills, Betti joined McDonnell Douglas Corp., where she received the 1990 Woman of Achievement Award for Excellence and Professionalism.

A half decade later, Betti, Jim, and Corey moved to Texas and Shelli remained in Los Angeles where she worked in the insurance industry after graduating

from UCLA. Back in Texas, Betti returned to Prairie View A&M University as an administrator in the College of Engineering. She retired as Assistant Dean, September 1, 2007.

On September 22, 2020 after a brief illness, Betti died in Los Angeles while visiting her daughter, Shelli. She will be buried in Veteran's Memorial Cemetery in Houston, next to her husband Jim Blackshear, who died September 25, 2019.

The children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, and other family members and friends of Betti-Rachelle Poindexter-Blackshear remember her with love, respect, and gratitude:

Shelli Harris-Blackshear; Corey and Monique Blackshear; Toya and Isidro Ayala

Illiama Ayala, Ava Ayala and Isidro Ayala Jr

Alfred Poindexter III and Lisa; Bruce Poindexter and Hilda; Paula Poindexter; Yvette Poindexter and Wendy Parker

Nicole Poindexter; Alfred Poindexter IV, Silvania, Alfred V and Lilly; Nichelle Poindexter and Corey McCoy; William Stickney III, Christrina and Carmen; Alexandra Garrick, Jonn, Harper and Kennedy

Edward Tillmon and Barbara; Coni Nettles; Bobbi Tillmon and Cecil Brim
Peggy Engram

Cemetery Details

Houston National Cemetery

Veterans Memorial Drive
Houston, TX

Previous Events

Visitation

OCT 5. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Singleton & Sons Funeral Home
627 New Orleans
Hempstead, TX 77445
(979) 826-2425
info@singletonandsonsfh.com
<https://www.singletonandsonsfh.com>

Services Private

OCT 6 (CT)

Private

Tribute Wall



“ *Betti Poindexter-Blackshear*

January 28, 2023 at 11:58 AM



“ *Betti will forever be remembered by all of us who knew her. She was talented, smart, engaging and friendly. These qualities endeared her to all who knew her. The Poindexter family contributed so much to the Prairie View community. They left an indelible print that will forever be remembered. Our hearts and prayers go out to Betti's family. May she Rest In Peace. Drs. Janice and Danny Kelley*

Danny R. Kelley - October 08, 2020 at 12:09 PM



“ *Donna McCormick lit a candle in memory of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear*



Donna McCormick - October 08, 2020 at 10:09 AM



My sincerest condolences to the Poindexter-Blackshear family. I pray for God's eternal strength for the entire family. May all the pleasant memories of Betti provide the family with a bit of peace as they get through their loss. My Love and support to Yvette and the entire family.

Donna McCormick - October 08, 2020 at 10:12 AM

RG

“ Betti and I were fellow alums at the University of Texas. I came Fall ‘65 from Houston - Yates. We were at the forefront of the student movement for racial equality and equity. Affectionately called Betti P., I saw her as a renaissance woman. Betti P. met the unrelenting demands of the UT architecture curriculum, and the unrelenting demands of fighting campus and off campus systemic racism. With all that, “Betti P” found time, and a way to be the life/light of the party - “ah BP, ah BP!!!” were our rhythmic chants watching Betti, with some lucky partner, gracefully, and artfully moving around the Kappa House “dance “ floor on game nights . In the interest of full disclosure, As someone has already said, Betti P. was this activist’s North Star too. - Rest In Power Betti Poindexter Blackshear

Precursor Rodney Griffin

B.S. Mathematics University of Texas at Austin 1970.

Sent from I phone

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S8, an AT&T 5G Evolution capable smartphone

----- Original message -----

*From: soisage47@aol.com
Date: 10/5/20 4:54 PM (GMT-06:00)
To: pamiel.gaskin@att.net
Subject: Betti*

FINALLY !!!

<https://www.singletonandsonsfh.com/obituaries/Betti-Poindexter-Blackshear/#!/Obituary>

Rodney Griffin - October 05, 2020 at 11:56 PM

AM

“ *My condolences to the entire family. I had the pleasure of working with her in the College of Engineering at PVAMU. She was such a class act! May she Rest in Peace.*

Anita Williams Milton - October 05, 2020 at 08:39 PM

BW

“ *Beverly Walker lit a candle in memory of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear*



Beverly Walker - October 05, 2020 at 06:27 PM



“ *Enduring Grace was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.*



October 04, 2020 at 11:15 PM

CG

“ Chris, Sherita, Rudi and Adam Galvez purchased the Delightful Dieffenbachia for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.



Chris, Sherita, Rudi and Adam Galvez - October 04, 2020 at 01:39 PM



“ I admired Betty for her warmth and kindness toward a young girl new to Prairie View, Texas even though she was there only a short time before leaving for college. I even considered attending the Univ. of Texas because of her. She and her Mother were several of the North Stars in my life. I offer my condolences to her entire family.

Cynthia Adams - October 03, 2020 at 04:01 PM

RG

Betti and I were fellow alums at the University of Texas. I came Fall '65 from Houston. We were at the forefront of the student movement for racial equality and equity. Affectionate ly called Betti P., I saw her as a renaissance woman. BP met the unrelenting demands of the UT architecture curriculum, and the unrelenting demands of fighting campus and off campus systemic racism. With all that, “Betti P” found time, and a way to be the life/light of the party - “ah BP, ah BP”!!!, would be our rhythmic chants watching Betti, with a lucky partner, gracefully, and artfully move around the Kappa House “dance “ floor on Saturday nights. Truth be told BP was this activist's North Star too. - Rest In Power Betti Poindexter Blackshear

Precursor Rodney Griffin
B.S. Mathematics University of Texas at Austin 1970.

Rodney Griffin - October 05, 2020 at 10:13 PM

SH

“ Sonya Hill purchased the Tender Tribute for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.



Sonya Hill - October 02, 2020 at 04:35 PM



“ Pink Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.



October 01, 2020 at 09:07 PM



“ Sweet Sincerity was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.



September 30, 2020 at 10:31 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.



September 30, 2020 at 08:08 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.*



September 30, 2020 at 01:01 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.*



September 29, 2020 at 11:25 PM



“ *My heart is broken... but my soul rejoices in knowing how empty my life would have been had God not blessed me with the most beautiful friend I have ever known. I will carry her laughter, her wit, her wisdom and her amazingly generous spirit with me always... that was her gift to us all.
Sleep well my friend ...I will love and cherish you always..❤️*

Judy Brunning - September 29, 2020 at 09:08 PM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear.*



September 29, 2020 at 07:19 PM

WS

“ *Our family is keeping your family in our thoughts and prayers.
William H. Parker, Sr.*

William H. Parker, Sr. - September 29, 2020 at 04:03 PM

SH

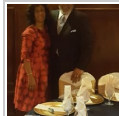
“ *I was greatly shocked to receive the sad news but I know that Cousin Betti is resting peacefully and is safe in his arms. To my family, I send you my deepest condolences and prayers as you go through yet another soldier gone home. Please know that God is with you always and remember to be absence from the body is to be present with the Lord.*



Love you cousins!

Shelia Hamm-Reid & Family

Shelia Hamm-Reid - September 29, 2020 at 02:36 PM



I admired her and will always remember her kindness toward me as a young girl in a new place called Prairie View. She was gifted in so many ways and I believe she is in the bosom of the One who gifted her. Condolences to her family. Sincerely, Cynthia Brooks Adams

Cynthia Adams - September 30, 2020 at 01:06 AM



Our condolences...

Cynthia Adams - September 30, 2020 at 01:07 AM

IC

“ I remember her when she worked at PVAMU. May her family find comfort and peace during this time.



ida Campbell - September 29, 2020 at 01:22 PM

WP

“ Wendy Parker sent a virtual gift in memory of Betti Poindexter-Blackshear



Wendy Parker - September 28, 2020 at 08:54 PM

NW

I visited Betti our junior year, me at Prairie View, she at U.T. We talked about our plans. I told her I was thinking of professional school, she said that I should consider U.T. A few years later, I did. She was a pioneer at UT, and she paved the way for me and others who followed in her footsteps. But, then, she was a great person, and a good classmate for eleven years at Prairie View Training School. She and Alva can talk now. They always did in class anyway, and they got away with it because they were among the best that ever were and ever will be.

Nolan F. Ward - September 29, 2020 at 01:34 AM