

Mary K. Tachau was involved in her field and in the public and professional realm and she did not stop excelling throughout her career. She pursued all opportunities presented in front of her and believed herself to be equally worthy and qualified, regardless of her gender. As a social scientist I understand the dynamic implications societal assumptions have on whole generations of women. To be honest, I come from a very “traditional, conservative Christian background” and all of the women in the preceding generations of my family were homemakers and mothers and wives. They kept very tidy homes and raised respectful, intelligent children, but being a scientist or a politician or an activist was not appropriate and essentially not an option. Inevitably, the historical, societal mentality that women belong in the home was instilled in the next generation of children, and while things have progressed since Tachau's time, it is still the responsibility of women living today to stop the cycle. I think the most meaningful way in which those of us living today can preserve the accomplishments of Mary K. Tachau is by setting the right examples for our children, and promoting liberty and equality between not just genders but human beings more generally.

Growing up I was told that “when you grow up you want to marry a husband who is kind and works hard.” Likewise, I still often hear from family members “you want to have children and you can’t imagine how much you will love those children, they will be your whole life.” I still to this day, as a single, unmarried, childless woman in my 30’s, get this advice from my mother. I don’t take it as an insult to what I am currently doing with my life, but I recognize the traditional, patriarchal mentality at the heart of advice and guidance from my mother, and women of her generation. I do not believe that motherhood and a professional career have to be exclusive and I think Mrs. Tachau is a prime example of the way in which a woman can lead a life, not limited by societal boundaries, and consequently change the perception of those women whose paths intercept her own. Mrs. Tachau was a perfect example of the woman I strive to be; she was simultaneously a caring, nurturing mother, an activist, and an academic. These are goals I have set for myself. Like Mary Tachau, I have made considerable efforts to join committees on campus and to be involved in volunteering with school-children to share my experiences in science. Just this summer I volunteered for STEM Girls in Science week, presented at the Kentucky Science Center, and spent days talking to elementary girls about being a scientist. I shared some of my research and showed them pictures of skeletons and they were engaged and it felt really worthwhile to take those couple days out of my time. As a child I do not remember any female visitors to my school or after school programs that included female scientists or professionals, and I think this is important. I know from my personal experiences that people, especially young adults, do not believe all opportunities are presented equally, particularly if you come from a family that is less fortunate. I will continue to pursue all opportunities to share with others, my success story as a woman in science, in hopes of creating a mentality of equality for future generations. I will teach my children the value of education and never let them grow up thinking societal perceptions will be boundaries that limit their future potential and abilities to make a difference in this world.

What I think is a very valuable and important point to make about the groundbreaking, ceiling-shattering appointments and achievements of Dr. Tachau is that she was a very involved activist, but first she was a deeply engaged academic. As a History professor at the University of Louisville Dr. Tachau, built her life's work on a firm foundation, laid carefully over time with a sincere commitment to education. Dr. Tachau was a specialist in her field which means she sacrificed countless hours to reading and studying. By knowing as much or more than some of the men in her field, Tachau demanded to be heard and respected. Undoubtedly, she made multiple sacrifices. I know this to be the case because I am currently striving to become a specialist in my chosen field. As a graduate student conducting self-directed research and collaborating with some of the most prestigious institutions in my realm, I know the challenges that being a woman in academia and the professional world present. Women are not always given the benefit of the doubt, they have to work harder and argue longer in order to express their views and "hope they are heard."

In order to preserve and build on the achievements of women like Mary K. Tachau, I think it is the responsibility of female scientists, politicians, and activists to offer up their expertise in an exciting manner that introduces children (and the public more generally) to different areas of interest and potential career avenues. I know from my own experience that you don't have to come from a family of scientists to become a scientist; you have to come from a family that is hard-working and displays integrity and respect for others and humility in the face of critique. These are characteristics and traits I strive to uphold in my personal and professional life. Mrs. Tachau believed in her own capabilities to "work as hard as anyone else" "reach as far as anyone else" or to simply be content with "not going down without a struggle" and in her lifetime these mentalities were very uncommon for women. Societal boundaries often ended at the mailbox to the house for women and their place in everyday comings and goings. Women were not out making decisions and stating their opinion in the face of opposition, they were at home.

As a woman growing up in the 1940's, Mary K. Bonsteel Tachau excelled and surmounted obstacles historically reserved for men, especially in the realm of politics and academia. Dr. Tachau was more than just a good teacher, she was a Constitutional expert, a leader in institutions, agencies and social spheres where women had never been permitted to lead and were only just beginning to be allowed to participate, albeit at a lower level of respect. Not only for her time, but in general, the life and accomplishments of Mary K. Bonsteel Tachau were nothing short of remarkable. Her legacy should be carried on by bringing awareness to her bold stance against injustices and reminding young women how they are capable of anything they set their mind to; this essay contest is a wonderful way to share her story and inspire others to follow in her footsteps. Equality will always be a challenge in societies, and like Tachau, we can never stop fighting for what is right and for a better future for our children.