

Tribute to Ruth Hubbard Cousins
Psi Chi Executive Director, 1958 – 1991
Given by Virginia Andreoli Mathie
Psi Chi Executive Director
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I am Virginia Andreoli Mathie, the current Executive Director of Psi Chi, The National Honor Society in Psychology. I have the honor of representing Psi Chi to mourn the loss and celebrate the life of a gracious lady, an exemplary leader, and a dear friend. As most of you know, Ruth served as the Psi Chi Executive Director for 33 years. Although Ruth retired from Psi Chi on October 1, 1991, she remained in the hearts and minds of all Psi Chi members to this day.

From the time she started working for Psi Chi in 1958, while still a graduate student in psychology at George Washington University, until she retired, Ruth was more than just the Executive Director of Psi Chi—Ruth WAS Psi Chi. She ran every aspect of our society and did so with exceptional competence, uncommon dedication, unfailing good humor, unconditional love, and a unique ability to anticipate the needs of our society and our members and ensure that we had what we needed before we even knew we needed it. Psi Chi was a family affair for Ruth. Before his untimely death in 1959, Ruth's husband Jim helped Psi Chi get on solid financial footing and after her decision to stay with Psi Chi after her husband's death (a decision for which we are forever grateful) she even recruited Carol and Joan to help with typing, filing, stuffing envelopes, and putting stamps on the envelopes.

Ruth's distinguished, visionary leadership of our society is unparalleled in Psi Chi's history and I suspect in the history of any honor society or psychological association—or any professional association for that matter. Edwin Newman, a co-founder of Psi Chi, said in a letter to Ruth in 1989, "We all owe you a great deal for the competence and devotion that generations of students must thank you for. Far more than most people realize, Psi Chi is not what we founded, it is what you have made it" (E. Newman, letter dated August 13, 1989). And indeed, it was due to Ruth's vision, commitment, perseverance, and skill that in 1965 Psi Chi was admitted to the Association of College Honor Societies and made the transition from an honorary fraternity to one of the largest disciplinary honor societies in the world. She quite literally made Psi Chi the national honor society in psychology. Not content to have this enormous impact on students at 4-year colleges and

universities, Ruth worked with her daughter Carol to co-found Psi Beta, the National Honor Society in Psychology for Community and Junior Colleges and was instrumental in persuading the Association of College Honor Societies to admit 2-year honor societies like Psi Beta to the organization.

As you can see, Ruth's contributions and influence on generations of psychology students are immeasurable. Ruth's leadership was recognized by many professional associations. For example, in 1991 the American Psychological Association made Ruth the first lifetime Honorary Full Member of the APA (Wilson, 1991). In 2001 the APA presented Ruth with a prestigious APA Presidential Citation. Included in the citation are the following statements: "Due to your devotion and effort, thousands of students of psychology have been honored for their achievements and inspired to continue to study and work in their chosen field. Your efforts have inspired and positively influenced the lives and careers of many thousands of psychologists, past, present, and future. You are an inspiration for all who study and teach in the field of psychology."

On a more personal note, I had the honor and pleasure of meeting Ruth for the first time in 2004 shortly after I took my position with Psi Chi. Carol took me to visit her Mom and we had delightful afternoon talking about Ruth's experiences in Psi Chi and looking through the Memory Book that Psi Chi had presented to Ruth when she retired. Ruth was as gracious and enchanting as everyone told me she was. Even at that point she still had that mischievous twinkle in her eye when she pointed out the "handsome beau" who was in several pictures and who wanted to marry her! She talked with pride about how Carol and Joan, and even her son-in-law and a grandchild, had helped her with Psi Chi. There were many pictures of Ruth and the most famous psychologists of the time. It was clear that she held a special place in their hearts. By the time I left that day, Ruth had a special place in my heart as well.

Carol and Joan, your Mother's legacy will live on not only in her wonderful family but also in the Psi Chi family she led and nurtured for so many years. We are indebted to Ruth for making Psi Chi the organization it is today. Because of her vision, dedication, perseverance, and stalwart commitment to academic excellence, scientific scholarship, honor, honesty, and integrity, Psi Chi continues to grow and prosper; we continue to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship in all fields, particularly in psychology; we continue to help students engage in the field of psychology and develop their own leadership skills; and we continue to recognize and honor the

achievements of all Psi Chi members through awards such as the Ruth Hubbard Cousins National Chapter Award. But the success Psi Chi and its members have achieved and will continue to achieve would not be possible without the leadership and guiding hand that Ruth provided for so many years. She has been and will continue be Psi Chi's angel who sits on the shoulder of every Psi Chi Executive Director and Executive Officer and gently, wisely, lovingly whispers in our ear and guides us along the path that she forged so that we can try to live up to the remarkable standards she set for all of us. The Psi Chi community mourns the loss of Ruth Hubbard Cousins even as we celebrate the invaluable, profound, and enduring contributions she has made to Psi Chi. We will miss her very much. On behalf of Psi Chi, I extend to Ruth's family our deepest sympathy at the loss of such a remarkable woman.

Wilson, K. (1991). A tribute to Ruth Cousins from the incoming Psi Chi executive officer. *Psi Chi Newsletter*, 17(5), 4-5.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENTIAL CITATION
PRESENTED TO
RUTH HUBBARD COUSINS

On the occasion of the August 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA), this Presidential Citation is awarded to recognize your outstanding contributions to the growth and development of students and faculty in the field of psychology. Your outstanding service as Executive Director of Psi Chi from 1958 to 1991 contributed to the tremendous growth and success of that great honor society. When you began in 1958, Psi Chi had 25,000 life members in 130 chapters. When you retired in 1991, Psi Chi had grown more than 500%, numbering 221,573 life members in 734 chapters. In addition, you enabled Psi Chi to change from "an honorary society" to an "honor society" by facilitating its acceptance into the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS). You, along with your daughter, Carol Tracy, were instrumental in the birth and growth of Psi Beta, the national honor society for students of Psychology in two year and community colleges. Due to your devotion and effort, thousands of students of psychology have been honored for their achievements and inspired to continue to study and work in their chosen field. Your efforts have inspired and positively influenced the lives and careers of many thousands of psychologists, past, present, and future. You are an inspiration for all who study and teach in the field of psychology.

August 2001