

K. Patricia Cross: Obituary

(5.8.2023)

The world bids a heartfelt farewell to a national treasure. K. Patricia Cross - or Pat, as she is known by her friends – passed away peacefully in her beloved Oakland, California apartment on May 8, 2023. A 20th century thought leader, Pat had a formidable career, dedicating her life to improving higher education through scholarship and philanthropy. One colleague observed that she had a genius for making a difference, spotting trends and then framing them as concrete choices that pointed the way to policy changes.

Author of 8 books and more than 200 publications, she was the recipient of numerous awards, received 15 honorary degrees, and was twice voted one of “the most influential voices” in higher education in *Change Magazine*. Her accomplishments in the academy are legendary, but few know that earlier in her working world, she was also a soda jerk, salad chef, Radar Engineer aide, and high school math teacher.

Pat was born in the college town of Normal, Illinois on St. Patrick’s Day in 1926 and named in St. Patrick’s honor. The daughter of a physics professor at the local university, Pat recalls being raised in a “loving, close, and supportive family” that she described as “high socio/low economic.” While Pat’s parents and two siblings have predeceased her, she is survived by her niece, Tina LeBreton and Tina’s two children as well as her nephew, Bob LeBreton, and his two children.

As a young woman, Pat enjoyed the attention of multiple suitors. Although many men wooed her, she remained loyal to the love of her life to whom she was engaged while she was completing her doctorate. Tragically, he became ill and died from what Pat believes was unprotected exposure to radium while conducting research in the nascent years of nuclear physics.

Now lacking ties to Illinois, Pat accepted a position at Cornell as Dean of Students. She followed this by working as a Distinguished Research Scientist at the Educational Testing Service. Then, in 1980, she accepted a position at the Harvard Graduate School and in the late 1980s moved to Berkeley as the UCB David Pierpont Gardner Endowed Chair to teach as a professor of higher education until her retirement in 1995. Pat also lectured widely in the U.S. and abroad, giving more than 250 speeches about critical developments in higher education. These speeches are available in digital format by the SFSU Library in the Cross Archive (<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/kpcross>).

Throughout Pat’s career, she saved and invested wisely, giving her the means in retirement to turn her attention from scholarship to philanthropy. Pat gave widely and generously to multiple causes. Much of her charitable work reflected her interest in investing in the future through identifying and nurturing human potential. Pat’s powerful legacy continues through and is celebrated by the K. Patricia Cross Academy (<https://kpcrossacademy.org>) and her generous bequest to the East Bay Community Foundation. In lieu of flowers, and in the spirit of Pat’s inspiring philanthropy, please donate to the charity of your choice.