



**Hubert H. Humphrey  
Institute of Public Affairs**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Hubert H. Humphrey 2006 Leadership Awards  
May 30, 2006**

**Remarks of Geri Joseph  
Recipient of the Public Leadership Award**

Thank you all very much, and thank you Keith for that very generous introduction. I can't help but think about a statement that Adlai Stevenson made. Some of you will remember; others of you are much to *recent*, shall we say. He was introduced lavishly and when he got up he said, "That was very good for my ego, but one shouldn't inhale that."

I would like to take a minute to congratulate all the award winners, who share this very special evening, particularly who are called the emerging leaders because we really depend on you. I also want to list Gary and Catherine in all their future endeavors.

I also want to express my appreciation to my family and to my friends who are here, not only to give me moral support, which I need, but much more important, to add to the coffers of the scholarship fund for Humphrey Institute students.

There is something about receiving a leadership award at this senior citizen stage of my life that stirs a lot of memories. We don't have time for me to go into them all with you, so be grateful for that, but I hope you won't mind if I take just these few minutes, the five minutes that I'm allotted, just to reminisce.

Several years ago, I attended a wonderful 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party. A group of us had gathered around the guest of honor as she spoke to family and friends about her long and very active life. She was interrupted by a youngster, about seven or eight years old, who had been staring at her intensely for some minutes thinking this question: Are you really 95 years old? She laughed and replied yes, I am.

There was silence for a moment, and then the boy asked, "and did you begin at the beginning?"

I understand that question very well and tonight am looking back at one of my beginnings. It was here at the University of Minnesota, which I must thank for so many of the good things in my life, including meeting my husband.

Picture late afternoon, a day in October 1945 in the untidy offices of the Minnesota Daily where I was managing editor. Unexpected and unannounced, Hubert H. Humphrey, candidate for major of Minneapolis, came bouncing in with an entourage of students and faculty. Within minutes, he launched into the issues of his campaign, the importance of political action, and why each of us should try to make a difference. It was serious talk, but laced with humor, and something else that I can only describe as good fellowship.



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He reminded us that WWII veterans were about to return, that under the GI Bill many would be seeking a university education, but lack of affordable housing, both on campus and off, would be a major obstacle. In seconds, and I do mean in seconds, he outlined an editorial campaign for the Minnesota Daily to undertake to bring housing to the campus. We took his ideas and ran the thing and had some success. The housing may have been lowly Quonset huts, but they were a start.

I am moved to remember that beginning tonight because this award comes from the institute that bears Humphrey's name and his legacy and it represents, more or less, a full circle for me. There have been many interests in my life other than the political, but I learned quickly that no matter what those interest were, care and treatment of the mentally ill, education, war and policy or the role of women, to name a few, the bottom line for change so often was informed, constructive political debate and action.

To this day I am amazed by individuals who say "I'm not interested in politics; that has nothing to do with my life," but little do they know. In recent years, I have been asked many times what there was about Humphrey that drew many of us to his leadership. There are still some in this audience whose community interests and various political journeys began with him, including my friend and very good citizen Fritz Mondale. For me, Humphrey was a passionate advocate for the common good, two words we use easily but often neglect to implement. He was not a perfect human being, as he frequently acknowledged, but he identified deeply with people, and for him each person mattered.

Even during the turbulent Viet Nam time of his run for the presidency, he did not believe that his strongest critics were enemies to be vilified or labeled unpatriotic. He was partisan, but his friends and colleagues crossed political lines because he was a true believer in the necessity of honorable compromise. He was proud of America's leadership, but without arrogance, and with awareness that we are in this complicated, diverse world together, and somewhere in some other country, there just might be a good idea for the betterment of all of us. Above all, Humphrey knew that our democracy can never be static, that we must always seek that more perfect union.

I am deeply indebted to that man and to the Humphrey Institute for the goals of public service they represent, and I am honored by this award.