

Eloise Lynch



While campaigning for a seat in the Kansas House of Representatives in her early 60s, Eloise Lynch knocked on the door of a man who owned a salvage yard in her hometown of Salina, Kansas. “Are you Owen Hodgson’s daughter?” he asked. She nodded and he told her of how her father, a high school principal, always watched out for the poor kids from north of the tracks, including securing suits for any of them who wanted to go to the prom but couldn’t afford to buy their own.

Eloise has shared her father’s commitment to helping those less fortunate and fought tirelessly for causes that would improve the lives of children and families in her community. A high school social studies and English teacher for 31 years, Eloise was a lifelong advocate of education as a pathway to opportunity and success.

In addition to teaching, she coached Salina South High schoolgirls in tennis and swimming. In 1987, she was named a Kansas Master Teacher for her exemplary teaching and “zeal in promoting the advancement of education.” This marked the first time in the 33-year history of the award that two generations of the same family had been so honored; her father had received the award in 1961.

And about that Kansas statehouse campaign? She won handily, stunning the community by unseating a veteran legislator. She went on to serve three terms, no small feat for a Democrat in a heavily Republican district in Kansas. Her platforms were simple and straightforward, focusing on education, safe water, fiscal transparency, women’s rights and helping families and children who were battling poverty, neglect, disease and abuse.

After a hiatus from the legislature, she ran one final time at age 75 against a high school classmate, but lost. Eloise also served on the board of the Kansas Committee on Aging and Guardianship, which helps protect the rights of the elderly and those with disabilities.

One of three daughters of Owen and Ella Hodgson, Eloise was smart and studious. She played the harp as a child and later as an adult and was named “representative girl” of her Salina High School class of 1945, where she was also a debater.

She attended the University of Kansas for two years where she met her husband John Lynch, an Army war veteran who had landed in Normandy on D-Day. They married and bought a farm near Salina where they grew wheat and raised sheep. Eloise later graduated from Kansas Wesleyan University with a bachelor’s degree in education.

Eloise and John raised three boys: Jack, Matt and Will. They moved into Salina in 1967 where John practiced real estate and Eloise continued teaching, while they both continued farming. Eloise returned to school during the summers to earn her master’s in education from Kansas State University and a doctorate degree from the University of Kansas.

John passed away in 1987. Always “Hodi” to her friends, Eloise today is also “Gram” to seven grandchildren: Jack, Annie, Joe, Tom, Danny, Erin and Jeff.