

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

A column by Lee Lawyer with stories about geophysics and geophysicists

How does one describe a person like Bettye Athanasiou? I didn't know her well. I encountered her at conventions and other meetings. I have a copy of the many pictures she took. The paragraph below is taken from the obituary published in the *Houston Chronicle*.



Bettye Jo (Raiden) Athanasiou, 83, passed away on the 24th of October 2006 in Houston, Texas. She was born on the 15th of June 1923, in Dallas, Texas. After she graduated from high school, she moved to Houston, where she remained a life-long resident. For more than three decades, Bettye was a hard-working public-relations specialist in the field of exploration geophysics. Based in Houston, she edited three company magazines, *Party Line* (Robert H. Ray Inc.), *Time Break* (Geo Space Corporation), and *The Phone* (Walker-Hall-Sears). During these years, Bettye not only operated and oversaw innumerable conventions and exhibits for explorationists, but also made numerous visits to field offices, some of which took her far north of the Arctic Circle, where she documented the difficult lives of men in remote outposts. In 1980, at the Society of Exploration Geophysicists 50th anniversary celebration, NF Industries issued an 84-page album, *Doodlebuggin' with Bettye*, which contained 1500 photographs she had taken of the geophysical profession during the past quarter-century. For her outstanding and unique efforts, the Society of Exploration Geophysicists made her a Life Member in 1978. In 1978, the Houston Chapter of the SEG also presented her with a Life Member honor.

This is sort of the bare bones of a person's professional life. There are other memories illustrated by the note from Gene Womack followed by one from John Fuchs.

It seems I have been in the right place at the right time in my career. Early on, I was an "office boy" for the Rogers-Ray Co., in the late forties and early fifties while going to school. Bettye was working as a secretary and also printing the company newsletter on 8½ × 14 paper. I ran the ditto machine, got blue all over everything of course (for those that remember the ditto machine) collated and stapled sheets together and mailed them. Bettye made certain everything was correct before they went out. Sometimes at the last minute, some client would come in and Bettye would change things and have to redo everything. These went out all over the world, to both crews and clients (they like to see their names in print—but no pictures back in those days).

We used to go to Herman Park for lunch to seesaw and swing, (a bunch of adults along with a kid). Bettye jumped out of a swing one time and broke her ankle. Everyone debated if this was work related, but since some management types were there, the company sent her to their doctor. Bettye said she wasn't the swinging type!

Bettye left Ray, and I joined up with her in later years when I did a brief stint at GeoSpace, prior to returning to Ray Geophysical. She was in her element with the GeoSpace *Time Break*. Reading and looking at pictures of doodlebuggers from around the world, that she took, was like reading the *Geophysical Directory* with pictures. She would cry and laugh with the same intensity. She was the Pied Piper of our industry back in those days. Reid Carter and I tried several times to meet with Bettye, prior to SEG's 75th anniversary, but were unable to.

Our industry needs another Bettye. We will all miss her, and the memories will linger.



Bettye Athanasiou was given a Life Membership Award by SEG in 1978. She was a public-relations specialist and was known for the many photographs she took documenting the geophysical profession. Athanasiou died 24 October 2006.

John Fuchs' note emphasizes Bettye's skills and success in public relations.

What can I say about Bettye that most geophysical people don't know? Back in the early 1960s, Geo Space Corporation was doing real well and was enjoying a great expansion. I was asked to find a public relations person to help our new expansion.

I interviewed Bettye and was certain that Bettye was the right choice. Bettye began in 1963 with a small, four-page newsletter with a circulation of about 1000. Very soon it grew to a 56-page publication with distribution to more than 9400 called *Time Break*.

Bettye did such a great job with *Time Break* that it was one of the tools that made the company's expansion possible. The magazine documented in photos, articles, and information tidbits the world of geophysics. Employees, customers, competitors, and the companies in the industry were so well covered that it became a valuable wealth of information.

Bettye created and ran the hospitality rooms for all of the conventions and other events during her time with Geo Space. Because of her skills and wonderful personality, she was loved by everyone she met including companies and employees, CEOs, and board chairmen. At one time in her life she had surgery. My family loved her so much, we had

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her come to our home in Huntsville during her recuperation. I consider it a great honor to have known such a great and wonderful person.

Thanks, John, but I don't think that most geophysical people knew and remembered Bettye Athanasiou like we did. Remember that she was awarded Life Membership in 1978. That is 30 years ago. For people like you and me, that is just yesterday. But the first commercial 3D survey was just five years earlier and other major geophysical advances were in the future. I tried to find the age distribution of SEG members but couldn't come up with the data. I have a very extensive filing system, which is sort of like my memory. I never forget anything. I simply can't recall it when needed. Member Services performed some calculations for me and determined that 89% of the current members joined after 1978.

In any case, Bettye is remembered by many of us. Is there someone like her taking care of us, taking pictures, hosting receptions, and having a great personality? Maybe the field of sales is different these days.

There I was minding my own business at the Wednesday night bash in New Orleans when whom should I encounter but Lawrence Gochioco. Don't bother calling him Larry. He won't answer, and I am not sure how many syllables are in his last name. But it is of interest what one can discover by actually listening. I sometimes find this difficult but not in this case.

I found out that Lawrence often works underground in coal mines. I guarantee you that there is no way to get me to go down there and if you could, I would probably be a bowl of Jell-O by the time I resurfaced. I gently questioned his sanity but he countered with, "I guess some geophysicists go to



Lawrence Gochioco (left) holds a geophysics class in an odd place.

great heights to gather data, while a few fools go to great depths to gather the data." He also said that when going underground you have free time to tell yourself repeatedly that there's got to be a better way to make a living. Actually, he has carved out a niche in coal geophysics. Working conditions can be hazardous, but he provides a service to help keep U.S. mines safer and more productive.

I suggested that he invest some of his profits in canaries (yellow birds). Canaries are very sensitive to the presence of methane. If your canary dies, get out quick. I make jokes about this but the reality is very serious as was illustrated by the several mine accidents in the United States fairly recently. The picture of Lawrence at work illustrates why I would be reluctant to compete with him in his field. [TJE](#)