

# THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGACY IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF FRANCES HESSELBEIN

*James K. Dittmar*

**E**arly in my relationship with Frances Hesselbein, I discovered that the concept of legacy was especially important to her. In this case, legacy was much more than fond reminiscing or trips down memory lane. For Frances, it was a direct connection to her past: a past that played a significant role in her maturity as a person and servant leader.

Frances was born in a small mining town, South Fork, Pennsylvania, near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. While an infant, her family moved from South Fork to Johnstown where she spent her growing up years, graduating from Johnstown High School.

Frances treasured her life in Johnstown. “As I look back, everything I learned in Johnstown prepared me for my life in leadership,” she once told me. She learned about inclusion and diversity from growing up and going to school with children whose fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had come to Johnstown, from all over the world, to work in the area's mines and mills. In addition, Frances and her husband John confronted several incidents of discrimination that led to positive changes in the racial/social environments in Johnstown. All of this shaped her commitment to inclusion, diversity, and servant

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†This article is part of a Special Issue commemorating the life and leadership of Frances Hesselbein.

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leadership, qualities that defined her transformational role as CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA.

The influence of Frances' legacy, however, was not limited to her life in Johnstown. In fact, the impact of her legacy goes all the way back to the 1700s when her descendants came from Eastern Pennsylvania, in covered wagons, to a place near Johnstown.

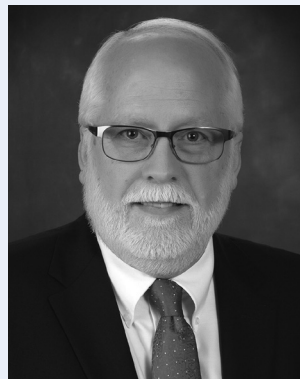
I learned about these ancestors, last name "Pringle," some years ago, when my wife Becky and I met with Frances, along with her sister Trudy and brother-in-law Capt. Walter D. Chadwick, USN (Ret.) in Johnstown, to spend a memorable day touring various places that were special to Frances. We started this tour by visiting the Pringle Cemetery in a nearby town. Frances proudly shared the stories of her Pringle relatives as we walked among the many weathered headstones that bore the family name.

One of these stories concerned the seven Pringle brothers, all buried in the cemetery who served in the Civil War. One of them, Martin, was killed at the age of 19. To honor their legacy, Frances commissioned her cousin from Maine, Frank Wicks, to write a play based on the many surviving letters that the Pringle brothers and their wives wrote to each other during the War. A few years after he finished the play, I attended a performance in a theater outside of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. It was a telling and moving story of what each of these seven brothers experienced and what their families had to endure while they were away at war.

My friendship with Frances began during our first conversation. I mentioned that I lived in South Fork

during my teenage years, not knowing she was born there. For me, that commonality made our relationship unique. We shared stories about Johnstown and South Fork throughout the time I knew her. She showed us the house in which she was born, one that I passed many times while living there. This connection caused me to appreciate, perhaps in a special way, why legacy was so important to Frances.

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