

Dorothy Soderlund

1916–1974

The news of the death of Dorothy Soderlund on December 11, 1974 came as a shock to the hundreds of persons who knew her during a career of well over two decades devoted to the administration of fellowship aid. For thirteen years she served as Deputy Director of the Foreign Area Fellowship Program. She brought unique qualities to these duties. The most vivid means of conveying her special contribution is to offer excerpts from among the letters of appreciation that have come to hand. All bespeak the discerning and profound sense of commitment that characterized her relationship to all involved in the Program.

She gave the Program a real 'humanism' in that she understood the problems of young research scholars and related to each of them personally. I know from my own experience as a fellow in the first year of the Program in 1952 that I tended to equate the Program with Dorothy because she expressed personal concern for my difficulties and was there to offer encouragement when I made some progress in my work. She helped institutionalize this personal concern by bringing more and more former fellows into the screening process. I doubt whether anyone that I have met in the foundation world and its adjunct institutions has had such a profound effect on such a large number of young scholars. (Dean George M. Beckmann, University of Washington)

As a former Fellow (1957–58), I can testify that the change from the inevitable tensions and apprehensions of a contestant for the fellowship to the warm hospitality of the family of Fellows once the award was granted, was due largely to the personality and hard work of Dorothy Soderlund. Her patience in working through the maze of procedures for us, her diligence in solving any problem we could invent, these were impressive; nevertheless, that was secondary to her ineffable ability to make us feel that we, the Fellows, were the center of attraction in the program, giving us a pride and self-confidence that contributed as much as anything else to the success of our projects. As a three time member of the screening committee for the Asia programs, I can testify to her skill and patience (and sense of even-handed justice) in conducting the screening procedures. Especially given her considerable experience and knowledge, she could maintain, seemingly without effort, the distinction between her administrative role and our academic judgments, always subordinating the convenience of the former to the requirements of the latter. She contributed immeasurably to the maintenance of the high standards so impressively a part of the Foreign Area Fellowship Program. Finally, I think I can testify to the depth of her knowledge and understanding of the subject matter at the heart of foreign area scholarship—knowledge and appreciation of cultures and societies other than our own, based on the highest canons of scholarship and the humane consideration of the diversity of the human experience. She would say that she learned from us, the formally designated scholars, but her accomplishment was far too great for that. She was in her way as original and professional a scholar of foreign areas as any of us. (Professor Gerald S. Maryanov, Northern Illinois University)

Dorothy Soderlund had a deep personal commitment to the success of the Foreign Area Fellowship Program. This meant that during the process of selection she was stern in demanding from the selection committees that they practice the most exact and objec-

tive standards in their decisions. She was sensitive to questions of justice and fair play. Once the candidates were selected, however, she immediately sought to know them as unique individuals. With infallible accuracy she could judge who needed letters of encouragement and support as they sought to adjust to a foreign environment and which were the Fellows who needed reminders of their research and professional obligations. Always working with a budget which made it necessary for her to be more stringent than was her nature, she always made an effort to take care of the greatest number of needs in the most just manner. Dorothy Soderlund was thus the human link between the selection committee and the Fellows in the field, and when it came to decisions about the renewal of grants she always knew who were the ones who had lived up to their potential and who were the ones with special personal problems. (Professor Lucian W. Pye, Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Upon graduation from a business college in Seattle, Dorothy Soderlund joined the Department of State in 1937. After serving for five years in Washington she was assigned to duties in Algeria, Italy, and Germany over the next four years. She then served with the World Bank in Colombia, and later with the Colombian government on an economic development project. Her career with the Ford Foundation began in 1951, and over the decade she gave full attention to fellowship administration. Her visits to Fellows while overseas kept her in touch with the conditions and some of the problems encountered in field research. In 1962, when the Foreign Area Fellowship Program was placed under the joint auspices of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, her skill and experience helped both to maintain continuity and to adjust to new conditions. Her sense of humor often smoothed the way in handling office chores. She was responsible for the three editions of the Directory of Foreign Area Fellows, a work not only useful for reference purposes but also indicative of the concrete achievement of the many able men and women whose careers were furthered by appointment as Fellows.

Dorothy Soderlund gave of herself with devotion and with a deep sense of conviction. She found happy reward in the loyalty and gratitude the fellowship award brought to so many scholars in their aspiring years.

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