Dora Maxwell

This activity is geared to achieve the following objectives:

- Learn about the credit union heroes who shaped the industry.
- Connect the personal and professional motives of these heroes to your own credit union career.
- Share what you learn about your credit union hero with the large group in a 2-3 minute presentation.

When sharing this story, your table group is encouraged to reflect on the following:

1. Who was this person, and what were their key achievements in credit unions?
2. What motivated them to action?
3. What's their superpower?
4. How does this Hero's story connect to the larger credit union purpose of helping the financial fortunes of poor and working people?



DORA MAXWELL

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Helped organize a community church credit union in 1920 at the age of 23.
- Attended the Estes Park meeting and signed the CUNA Constitution and bylaws.
- Organized hundreds of credit unions throughout her career.
- Worked for CUNA in Madison, WI as the director of CUNA Mutual's Education and Organization.
- Wrote a column for the *Bridge*, the national credit union magazine.

- CUNA created the *Dora Maxwell Award for Social Responsibility* in 1987.

PERSONAL STORY #1

Credit union organizers like Maxwell would travel across the country and spend lots of time living out of a suitcase. On one such trip, she was traveling with Charles Hyland and Thomas Doig. Often, the men would spend idle time playing pinball in lounges. Instead of playing, Dora would slip a nickel into her left pocket. The men noticed asked Dora what she was doing. Dora did not want to share immediately, but after some coaxing admitted, “Each time you put a nickel into the machine, I put mine into my pocket for a kids’ charity. Money I would be losing playing with you, might as well go to a charity for free.”

PERSONAL STORY #2

Maxwell possessed a sharp sense of humor. During her travels she made light of the ‘sticklers’ in the credit union movement. One joke often reprinted in the *Bridge* reflected her view of these individuals: “Did you ever hear the one about the ex-banker who opened a gas station after his bank failed? Every time a fellow drove in and asked for 10 gallons of gas, the banker would ask if five would do. The gas station failed too.” This reminded Dora of the people she knew on Credit Committees.

PERSONAL STORY #3

When it was time for CUNA to name an assistant to Thomas Doig who was the managing director for CUNA Mutual, the executive committee balked and rejected Dora for the position. The committee said it was due to her political and feminist views, but Dora knew it was because she was a woman. However, Thomas Doig was her friend, supporter and mentor. He battled the executive committee to the point of threatening to resign. Dora could not let her friend sacrifice his job and the movement’s greater goals, so she resigned and returned to doing credit union organizing.

INTERESTING TIDBITS

- Born in 1897 in New York City, she was one of six children of a peddler.
- Advocate of the Suffragette movement for women’s rights and a champion of Civil Rights.

NOTES: