

Inside Washington

Faith Whittlesey

May 22, 2018

American diplomat, pioneer, mentor, mother, grandmother, and friend, Ambassador Faith Ryan Whittlesey passed away, Monday morning, at her home in Washington, DC.

The American Swiss Foundation, of which Whittlesey served as chairman and chairman emeritus, hails the much beloved 79 year old who served two tours as President Ronald Reagan's ambassador to Switzerland: "the Grande Dame of American-Swiss relations."

I first met Faith in November of 2014. I had flown in to Zurich, Saturday morning from New York, for the weeklong Young Leader's Conference which Faith founded 28 years ago and boasts 1,200 alumni, including the current U.S. ambassador Switzerland, Ed McMullen.

Exhausted from the overnight flight, I skipped the afternoon orientation for a quick nap. When I emerged downstairs at the Swiss Re Center for the opening dinner, Faith quickly found me, took me by the arm, and gently scolded me. That's when I knew it was going to be an intense and invigorating week — one, that like for so many, both Swiss and American, changed my life.

Faith was a passionate political advocate and pioneer for women. Between her two stints in Bern, the University of Pennsylvania law graduate and single mother of three served in Reagan's White House as the only woman on his 18-member senior staff.

I once asked her how she did it: raise a family while pursuing a high pressure, international political career. Her simple answer: "Because I had to."

Faith is survived by two children, ten grandchildren, and countless admirers. She will be deeply missed.