

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/one-final-lesson-wku-professor-remembers-pres-carters-legacy/article_0059ff12-9778-5d4b-85e3-f945c130c512.html

One final lesson: WKU professor remembers Pres. Carter's legacy

By JAKE MOORE jake.moore@bgdailynews.com

Feb 28, 2023



Ronda Talley, pictured with former President Jimmy Carter, taught at Western Kentucky University for 11 years and served as the executive director of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers from 2000 to 2005.

Submitted

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, 98, entered hospice care at his home recently. A retired Western Kentucky University professor who knew him says he is leaving the country with one last lesson.

“When I heard that he was entering hospice, I thought, ‘this is his final lesson he’s leaving for the nation – how to die,’” Ronda Talley said. “He showed us how to live a good life. Now he’s showing us how to have a good death.”

Talley taught psychology at WKU for 11 years and went on to serve as the executive director of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers from 2000 to 2005.

“It was the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Human Development then, but it probably needed to be more focused,” Talley said. “It was really focused on caregiving.”

Talley said she was able to expand the institute “from a smaller entity to a larger one that had a more powerful presence nationally.”

She said some people may look upon the Carter presidency as a time when “not much was accomplished,” but Talley shared that the former president took those jabs in stride.

Talley was an elementary school teacher during President Carter’s term, a time when thermostats were kept low due to the 1979 Oil Crisis.

“I said ‘when you were president I had to wear my coat to teach every day,’” Talley recalled. “He laughed and shrugged, he always took that with such good humor.”

Talley gave credit to Carter, a native of tiny Plains, Georgia, for never forgetting his roots.

“He never forgot where he came from. He valued it,” she said. “He never said, ‘I’m in the White House, I’m a big-time guy now, no need to go back to Plains.’ His heart was always with the people and families he was raised with, and I think that says a lot about his integrity and his friendships.”



She said she can still envision the force of Jimmy’s personality, his “piercing blue eyes” and can picture him sitting down with world leaders at Camp David. But along with these details, Talley remembers the lessons the Carters imparted to her.

“I came away from them admiring the way they were able to handle what they had before them,” she said. “They had a lot of challenges, not just the fact of what to do in life after the White House – which they handled excellently.”

Talley holds up the Carter Center, established in 1982, as an “extraordinarily powerful” example for the nation’s leaders to follow.

The center was founded in partnership with Emory University and works to “prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy and improve health,” according to its website.

“The ultimate lesson, as I look at the Carters, is how do you treat people,” Talley said. “How you live your life so at the end of your life you can look back and say, ‘this is a life well-lived.’ ”

Talley knows how difficult the hospice process can be due to personal experience.

“When I heard that he was in hospice, my first thought was I remember when my mother was in hospice and the parallels to that here in Bowling Green,” she said. “A lot of people don’t even know what hospice is.”

Now that the former president has entered hospice himself, he has Rosalynn by his side – who Talley called the “caregiver-in-chief.”

“He’s got nothing to worry about.”

Privacy - Terms