

Dan Waters to Cynthia Riggs:

Introducing Cynthia Riggs feels like one of the more pointless things you could ever try to do. If there's anybody on Martha's Vineyard who needs no introduction it's Cynthia. You've probably read her books and if you haven't you've seen them in bookstores. I'm sure you've read about her in the newspaper. You may have been one of millions and millions of listeners to the Moth radio hour when she captivated audiences in 2013 with her story about meeting a college friend after a long, long lifetime and falling in love again. The episode was called "Falling in Love at 81." Today, Cynthia is married to Howard, Howie as we call him, Attebery, and he's here tonight filming the whole thing.

If you know Cynthia the way I do, you think of her as inseparable from West Tisbury. She's really as much a part of the town as the Mill Pond or the Grange Hall. It's hard to think of West Tisbury without her. She's just a part of the landscape. Cynthia hosted tv shows on MVTV produced by Cynthia and her longtime friend Jonathan Revere, who's now departed, but was himself a part of our landscape. And together they put together hundreds of shows that really captured a snapshot of our community the way it was and is. They're very valuable in and of themselves. The more time passes, the more that you realize what we've lost, so it was a very important thing that they did.

The Cleveland House, Cynthia's bed and breakfast, has been a gathering place for poets and fiction writers for as long as I can remember. It's also been a place where several political plots have been hatched. Every February Cynthia invites the entire town in to her Groundhog Day Party. It's a great place to get your nomination papers signed, and it's a wonderful alternative to standing outside the Post Office with a clipboard in February. It's the kickoff to the town's political season, and it's really a great way to encourage people to get involved. And Cynthia is always about encouraging people to get involved. She's always been the champion of the underdog. I really appreciate that about her.

She ran for town office several times. It was never about winning the election. It was always about making a point. Although one point she made very well, and it was a vote she did win, was in 2006 when she convinced the West Tisbury voters at town meeting to create the position of poet laureate. That was entirely Cynthia's doing, and again it wasn't really about people, it was about making a point. Cynthia's mother Dionis Coffin Riggs was often called the poet laureate of West Tisbury. She was a well-known poet, well loved in the community, but there was no such position, and she had to remind people of that all the time; that a laureate position is something that has been recognized and established by the authorities. Cynthia made sure that happened.

Well, I could go on and on about her many deeds, kindness and generosity and all she's done to make us a better community. Cynthia has really made the most out of her 80 something years. She just keeps on going. To me she's a symbol of the difference you can make, even in a small place, just by being yourself and being ready to do the right thing. And it's in this spirit, on behalf of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, that I present the Martha's Vineyard Medal to Cynthia Riggs.