

Toni Saldivar, "League Looks at a History of Women's Rights: Struggle for right to vote took 72 years." *The Oxford Press*. 23 Nov. 2014: A3. ["Men, Madeleines, and the League of Women Voters"]

Whenever I bake a batch of madeleines, I think of the League of Women Voters. Why? Because the woman who taught me to make them years ago learned how from the French who hid and protected her and her husband during World War II. As German university students opposed to Hitler, they fled the Nazi regime. Disguised as French peasants, Rose and her husband aided the underground French resistance to Nazi occupation. When Rose and her husband immigrated to America in 1948, they became naturalized US citizens. They were active, informed voters in their adopted country for the rest of their lives.

Rose not only taught me to bake madeleines, she also taught me about the League of Women Voters, of which she was a member. No League existed where I lived most of my working life. However, when my husband and I retired to Oxford, Ohio, in 2007, a neighbor, Sondra Engel, came to call with cinnamon rolls and a brochure about the League of Women Voters of Oxford. I joined. Rose had died some years before, but not her influence. How I wished I could share my news with her, as well as with her husband, who surely would have joined the League if men had been allowed then. He and Rose were "Americans-by-choice" who believed in our country's promise of liberty, justice, and opportunity for all through the power of the vote.

It's hard to believe that American women's political struggle to win the Constitutional right to vote took seventy-two years. Men were part of that effort throughout the 19th century, not many men, but they were important. In 1848, the Quaker leader James Mott, husband of abolitionist Lucretia Mott, presided over the first women's rights convention which was organized by his wife and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls, New York. Mr. Mott presided, but Elizabeth Cady Stanton read publically the document the women had written, which included Stanton's demand that women have the right to vote. That resolution passed at the Seneca

Falls convention because of the eloquent argument in favor of woman suffrage by another man who was present: Frederick Douglass.

Stanton and others, principally her colleague Susan B. Anthony, would petition America's all-male government for the rest of their lives for that right and not live to see it granted. They knew that American culture would have to change before women had equal rights under the law. When in 1870, Stanton spoke at Miami University in Oxford, she urged "fathers, brothers, husbands" to support the women's rights movement, for the sake of their daughters, sisters, and wives, and for the common good. Only men could pass legislation for a constitutional amendment to give women the right to vote. Only men could vote to ratify the amendment. Resistance to woman suffrage was fierce even in the 20th century. For their cause, women such as Alice Paul petitioned, marched, protested, and suffered arrest, imprisonment, even torture. Finally, in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. A twenty-four year old representative in the Tennessee legislature, Harry Burn, cast the deciding vote. That year, Carrie Chapman Catt founded the League of Women Voters as a "nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy." The organization changed its charter in 1973 to open membership to men, but the mission and the name, League of Women Voters, have remained the same.

I began with madeleines, made famous by French author Marcel Proust in his novel *Remembrance of Things Past*. Savoring a madeleine dipped in tea leads his narrator to vivid involuntary memory. Madeleines also bring back the past for me: Rose teaching me how to bake them; Rose telling me about the League of Women Voters; Sondra with her cinnamon rolls inviting me to join the Oxford League. Our League encourages all voters--men and women--to support its principal goal: to empower citizens to work together in shaping better communities.

