

Introducing our new series: The Maine Trust Project

“We need people in our lives with whom we can be as open as possible. To have real conversations with people may seem like such a simple, obvious suggestion, but it involves courage and risk,” wrote 18th-century Irish poet, singer and songwriter Thomas Moore.

In this mistrust-filled world full of political contention and both fake and devastating news, mustering such courage is challenging. Finding common ground and engaging in civil conversations about important issues facing our communities, our state, our country and our world can seem elusive, if not sadly impossible.

This concerning state of affairs prompted Pine Tree Watch to examine the concept of trust. And thus, we’re launching a new series called “The Maine Trust Project.” Each month, we’ll sit down with a Maine resident to discuss this precious commodity. We’ll see which people and institutions Mainers trust and how the concept of trust drives their thought processes and actions.

<https://pinetreewatch.org/the-maine-trust-project-mary-betterley-of-damariscotta/>

Get to know Mary Betterley

Age: 83

Hometown: Damariscotta

Religious affiliation: Raised Roman Catholic but no longer participates in formal religion. Considers herself a deeply spiritual person who believes in God.

Political affiliation: Was a registered Republican until George W. Bush’s presidency, then became a registered Democrat.

How she describes herself: Trustworthy! I try to treat everyone with respect. I am never impressed by someone because he or she has a lot of money or has a beautiful home. I try to be genuine. I love people and I love life. I have a huge zest for life.

How she defines trust: Trust means that I can have comfort in the honesty and integrity of the person I’m dealing with, whether in business or personally. Trust gives me a sense of comfort and relaxation. I can be myself and know that the person I’m interacting with is going to respect me and give me breaks if I need it – after all, we all goof up once in a while.

At 83, she still prefers to trust first ... and see what happens

By Stephanie Bouchard

Every day, 83-year-old Mary Betterley and her border terrier Raymond, aka, The Mayor, walk down the hill from their condo in Damariscotta to Main Street. Having lived in town for 40 years, Mary is greeting or greeted all along her way by most of those who are out and about.

“Everybody stops and gets a treat from me to give to Raymond. We go in the bookstore and Reny’s every day. Everyone who works in the bookstore and in Reny’s puts out a hand for a treat from me – and only from me – to give to my boy. It’s the highlight of his life. And they are always so cheerful and happy to do it. ‘Oh, Raymond! It’s so good to see you!’”

And when Mary dares to venture downtown without her canine companion, oh boy, does she hear about it. Everyone wants to know where The Mayor is.

Trust, for Mary, is a default position – she trusts unless given a reason not to. This attitude extends even to taking a risk with her life, as she did at age 65, when she found herself placing her toes on the edge of Kawarau Gorge Suspension Bridge at A.J. Hackett’s Bungy Centre outside Queenstown, New Zealand.

She, her husband George, her brother Walter, and Walter’s wife were spending a month traveling through Australia and New Zealand. The bungy idea was all her brother’s fault.

Mary and Walter grew up in central Massachusetts. Although older than her by eight years, the competition between them “is sick,” she says. He had already goaded her into climbing 440 feet to the top of Sydney Harbour Bridge.

At Kawarau Gorge Suspension Bridge, tape wrapped around her ankles and a bungy line secured to her, she had just watched Walter jump without hesitation, yelling “Geronimo!” on his way down.

But when Mary looked down to the Kawarau River 141 feet below her, the breath sucked right out of her.

She asked the jump assistant to push her. He said he wasn’t allowed to. She turned back to the edge – she was on her own.

“Once I got off – oh, it was like flying!” she remembers. “I did a somersault on the end of the line. I had my arms out – just swinging and flying – and it was so faaabulous.”

After the jump, their near-death (or life affirming?) experience caught up to the two couples at lunch. “We were trying to toast ourselves and the glasses were going clinkclinkclinkclink,” she said.

Mary’s husband, who had spent his entire career as a risk management consultant to corporations, put his glass down and turned to her in shock, saying, “Mare, I never even examined the equipment!”

“That was trust,” she said.

Q&A:

Pine Tree Watch: Who meets your definition of trust and how?

Mary: I could trust my husband George (who died in 2001) totally and completely in every single manner, shape and form. He was highly successful at what he did, but he was always

down to earth, so sincere, and with him, what you saw was what you got. He didn't have a phony cell in his being. He was a perfect example of someone who could be trusted by anyone.

I've had a few friends – they just weren't my closest friends – that I wouldn't have trusted, but they still were my friends. My friends say what they mean and keep their word unless there's a good reason not to. I can tell my close friends the most intimate details of my life, and I know that they will never repeat it to anybody.

I expect the same level of honesty and integrity from businesses and state, local and national government officials as I would from my friends. My expectations are the same. I'm very black and white about it.

PTW: How trustworthy do you think your local leaders are?

Mary: I feel some are excellent at what they do and some leave a lot to be desired just because of their inexperience or entrenched ideas. I don't think that we have people who are dishonest in our local government. I think they just aren't knowledgeable and don't know how to be.

PTW: Who doesn't meet your definition of trust and how do they fail to meet it?

Mary: People who betray my trust. For instance, if I've told a friend something very personal and it comes back to me from a third party. I would still be friends with that person. I might not even call them on it, and I would just be as friendly and warm to them as always, but they aren't going to get on the inside of my life again.

If I've been mistreated by an unethical person, I won't give them my business anymore. There are very, very few business people in this town who are dishonest, but I did have a seriously bad experience with one store owner.

I think Governor LePage and President Trump aren't trustworthy. Gov. LePage is a bully. Whether he will sign a bill depends on whether he gets what he wants. It's not about the worthiness of the bill. And as for the president, I believe he's extremely manipulative. He makes a statement one week and then says exactly the opposite the next. I think all he cares about is his ego. He is cruel to other people. And he appointed his daughter and son-in-law – with no experience whatsoever – as 'senior advisors'? He consistently demonstrates he is not trustworthy, in my opinion.

PTW: What would heal broken trust?

Mary: It can be healed by changed behavior or a sincere apology. You have to prove your sincerity with actions.

PTW: How has your definition of trust changed over the years?

Mary: It's changed with experience. I couldn't even have given you a definition when I was in my 20s. As I've gotten older, I've gotten more severe about expecting honesty and integrity. I don't want to be abused, and I don't want to be disrespected.