

Green and Gold Memories from the Class of 1932

In spring 2007, as the class of 1932 approached its 75th reunion, Catherine Sears Towers e-mailed Class Letters Editor Marsha Stevens '92 with an intriguing proposal.

Towers reported that her mother, Catherine "Kit" Witschen Sears '32, was not going to be able to attend her class reunion. But she added that her mother had always enjoyed reminiscing about her Hollins days.

"I thought that it would be of interest, as 'oral history,' to get information at this time from those left in the class of '32," Towers wrote. "Mom would do it, I feel sure."

The alumnae relations office mailed each of the 14 members of the class a list of questions to spark their memories. Among them: "Why did you choose to go to Hollins?" "Who was your favorite professor?"

We received six written responses, either from the women themselves or family members. The sampling for our history may have been small, but it provided a lot of detail, both funny and poignant. This class entered Hollins in the fall of 1928, and in the subsequent four years the country's economic problems often became their family's trials. But Tinker Day continued, students crammed for exams, and the girls forged lifetime friendships.

—*Ann Atkins Hackworth '82, M.A.L.S. '95*

Mildred McIntyre Carmichael

From Sally Carmichael Matejka: I am the daughter of Mildred McIntyre Carmichael, Class of 1932. Forgive my taking so long to reply. I kept thinking that my Mother might recall more answers to your questions if I gave her more time. Her vision, hearing and memory are all declining. She has been in a personal care home for about six months and will not be able to make the reunion. She really enjoyed the 2002 reunion and visiting with her old friend Ted Ellett. She would be pleased to see Ted being honored. We also got to meet Dr. Nora Bell both at Hollins and during her visit to Pittsburgh. I pulled out my Mother's memoir that she wrote, with a little professional help, around 2000. In it she has three pages about Hollins that will answer most of your questions. Please feel free to edit and use any parts of this that you like. Please give a copy to Ted Ellett with our love.

Attending Hollins College: Most of my friends were planning on college after high school even though that was rare for the general population in 1920's Arkansas. I wanted to go to a good academic school where I could study music. I had little idea then of my family's (J.F. McIntyre and Sons – World's Finest Oak Flooring) growing financial difficulties because we kept our heads held high, and we continued to live our lives as before (before the working bankruptcy of the family lumber business because of the famous 1927 flood of the Mississippi River). With their encouragement I applied to Hollins College and was accepted. I had never visited the college, but two older girls from Pine Bluff that I knew --- Elizabeth Simmons and Elizabeth Tripplet ---were freshmen at Hollins and

recommended it. In September 1928, my parents sent me off, but they probably knew that there would be no money for me to finish.

I traveled by train with Loraine McGlone, another girl from my Pine Bluff High School class.

The two Elizabeths, whom we called “Simmons” and “Trip,” were starting their sophomore year. Loraine’s mother accompanied us as far as Memphis to help us change trains for the overnight trip across Tennessee to Roanoke, Virginia. All along the way the train stopped for more Hollins students to get on. When we arrived the next morning, we were met at the station, and our trunks were delivered to the East Building, a dormitory for freshmen. There were not enough rooms to go around, so Loraine and I shared a room for a month at one of the professor’s houses. Then the college managed to convert some of their meeting rooms on the first floor of the West Building, a senior dormitory, into freshmen rooms, so Loraine and I shared a room there. Because our floor was not originally designed as a dorm, we had an unusually large walk-in closet. After “lights out” we would sneak in there, use a trunk as a desk and study into the night. I was never homesick at Hollins, a beautiful, friendly campus with fine, old trees that I longed to climb. The dining hall and the chapel flanked the Main Building, and, together with the large library and the East and West dormitories, the buildings formed a lovely quadrangle.

I studied French, English Literature, Piano, and Harmony at Hollins. I did all right with English Literature and managed to make A’s in French because I learned the rules, but when we had to start speaking it, I didn’t do as well. We hadn’t had to do oral presentations in my four years of high school Latin. A piano practice room was reserved for me to use in the large music building called Presser Hall. If my friends couldn’t find me – that’s where I’d be. My music theory teacher, Miss Carpenter, had absolute pitch and could immediately correct us if we hit a wrong note. I liked my music studies and was the only freshman selected to give a recital at a concert at the end of the term (after Christmas). I spent a lot of time practicing and didn’t go home during Thanksgiving break. Just before the break, I got a letter from my parents telling me that the family was really bankrupt, and I would not be able to complete college. I cried when I knew we had lost everything. Shortly afterward, I was called to the President’s office and awarded a Theodore Presser music scholarship so that I could finish my freshman year. In December, I came down with influenza and was sent to the college infirmary, but I managed to get better in time to go home for the Christmas break. Somehow, I managed to scrape up enough money for the train fare, and Loraine shared her Pullman berth with me. I learned at home that there wasn’t anything to be done about our financial problems, so when I returned to college on the scholarship, I tried to put on a brave front and decided to work hard while I still had the chance. I practiced hard every day for the concert. I remember that I wore my high school graduation dress and played Reinhold’s “The Impromptu.” I was encouraged when I got a curtain call and had my name mentioned in a college newspaper article about the concert.

The scholarship allowed me to continue learning harmony and attending concerts for another term. Besides music, I also enjoyed physical education and

dance at Hollins. We had to fill out a physical education card telling how much exercise we did each week. Lorraine thought we should be able to include the required chapel services on the exercise card because they were Episcopal services that required us to stand up and sit down, a lot. I had never played field hockey before and another athletic freshman we called "Tim" tried to teach me. I don't know where she got that nickname. The world knew her as the famous author Margaret Wise Brown. Later one of her nom de plumes was Timothy Hay. I wonder... I especially liked gymnastics and swimming. In the spring I made the top team in gymnastics with a running dive over six crouched students. I could always cartwheel all the way around the gym without stopping. I passed my lifeguard tests in the lovely indoor swimming pool. We celebrated May Day in 1929 with classic dancing, and I was chosen to be one of the dancers for the following year. Then, still hoping to come back in the fall, I took my final exams. I didn't spend much time that summer in Pine Bluff. With my parents' encouragement, I signed on to be a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the YWCA Camp Ouachita in Saline County, Arkansas. When camp was over for the summer, friends of my parents asked me to stay with them for a week at their fishing camp. They had another guest, a young man who was older (by 20 years) than I was and was an Olympic swimmer from Hawaii. We swam together in the Saline River, and he gave me a few swimming pointers. Decades later on one trip to Hawaii I saw his statue at Waikiki beach and realized how famous my summer friend really was. Duke Kahanamoku is generally regarded as the inventor of the modern sport of surfing, as well as having been the world's fastest swimmer.

Then I went to see my first cousin Frances. She had moved from Willetts, Louisiana (the McIntyre's Louisiana lumber mill town that was flooded) across the river to an antebellum house in Natchez, Mississippi. Aunt Lillian no longer had "help," but she had always done a lot of her own housework and cooking, so it was not as much of a hardship for her as for my mother. Even Frances could cook. I remember being amazed that she could bake a cake. It never entered my mind to cook something. During that visit to Natchez, I remember I had to wash and iron my own clothes. They were a fun-loving family and managed all right. Uncle Roscoe had a wonderful sense of humor. The family called him "Squilly." Later, Uncle Roscoe took a job in Memphis and moved his family there, and Aunt Lillian went to work for an insurance company.

I knew after I left Hollins that I had no money to come back, but I thought somehow I would earn enough over the summer. My scholarship allowed for two terms, so I had enough to cover the first term of my sophomore year but nothing beyond that. On September 1, 1929, I went down to the newspaper office, and Mr. Adams, who was a good friend of the family, gave me a job at The Graphic selling ads. I can't remember applying for the job. I think it was just sort of arranged. I couldn't believe things had changed so quickly and that I was not going back to Hollins. When you go so suddenly from a "have" to a "have-not," it isn't easy. I don't think anything can prepare you for a complete reversal of your status. I had been a college girl like all my friends, and suddenly I was a working woman in Pine Bluff. It was probably a good thing that I got a job then instead of

returning to college. The next month, with the big stock market crash of 1929, a lot more people suffered a reversal of fortunes and were looking for any job that they could get. Having a job during the Depression was a blessing.

Ted Ellett (responses to the questionnaire):

1) Why did you choose Hollins?

It just seemed to be the kind of college I wanted. Lila Blich (1924) taught school in my hometown and I thought she was a wonderful person. I was a freshman or a sophomore in high school. She did not teach me but she lived in my [deceased] grandfather's home next door.

2) What was your favorite campus activity? What clubs did you join?

Most sports, especially swimming and basketball. The Athletic Board. The Cotillion Board. Sororities voted themselves "out" before my class pledged.

3) How did the Great Depression affect your time at Hollins? Did the food change? Did you buy fewer clothes? Did you go home less often?

The Depression began during my freshman year. Seems like 50 percent of our class did not return. Food and service remained top quality. We were served the evening meal by waiters wearing coats and gloves. Train (railroad) was my only transportation (there were no commercial airlines). Christmas was the only time I went home. Spring vacation I was fortunate to have friends who lived near enough for travel who invited me to join them.

4) Who was your favorite professor, and why?

Ida Sitler, head of zoology. She was a great teacher and friend.

5) What was your major and why did you choose it?

Zoology. I had not taken any science in high school, and I just loved zoology.

6) Did you have a steady beau?

Yes, but he was at LSU and never got to Hollins! A 36-hour trip one-way!

7) At graduation, had your plans for your future changed from your first year?

Yes, I started with idea of majoring in history or French. By decision time -- junior year -- it was definitely zoology, hopefully pre-med, but with the Depression I could not ask my parents for 5 more years.

8) How did your classmates describe you then?

Goodness knows! But there were lots of friends.

9) Any other special memories?

More than space allows! The Rath family. Tinker Day. Grace Chevraux, or "Chev."

Raising money (nickels and dimes) for "The Cabin."

Camille Dawson Sullivan sent back questionnaire with a note: "Best wishes to Ted and all who attend reunion. Poor eyesight due to macular degeneration. Can't write much." No return address.

Marian Cundiff Tarter: Child (handwriting hard to read, maybe C. Bruce Tarter?) returned letter with note saying, "My mother has not been able to respond to questions for a couple of years because of cognitive impairment. Wish it were otherwise since there can't be many alumnae left from her era. No return address.

May MacClaire Mooklar Arlt. Daughter Ronay Menschel provided these responses to the questionnaire: "Regrettably, she has suffered several strokes and so she is not able to write and she has very limited vision because of macular degeneration."

My cousin, Elizabeth Owens, had gone to Hollins and so it was the only college I thought about – and I received a scholarship.
Can't remember any favorite activities, although I was in a theatre club for which I received a key.
Because of the Depression, I did not complete my senior year. I had to find a job. I felt that completing college would only enable me to teach, which I did not want to do. I found a job as a lab technician.
An English poetry professor, believe his name was Mr. Lamar Janney – made me love poetry.
Chemistry – interested in science. A member of the Curie Chemical Society.
Had expected to finish college – I was looking for a liberal arts education. I was a serious student – one of 7 honor students listed in the yearbook of the sophomore class.
My mother died in my junior year – another factor in deciding not to return for my senior year. Met Clare Whitfield '30 – later Clare Coleman – and became lifelong friends.

Catherine Witschen Sears

"Memories of Hollins College, 1928-1932"

I, Catherine (Kit) Witschen, left Jacksonville, Florida the fall of 1928 at age 17, heading off by train to Hollins College. I skipped a grade in junior high school, so I was a year younger than my college classmates.

I had a packed steamer trunk, which was used during the year for as an extra dresser, placed outside in the hall by my door. I arrived without a winter coat, and borrowed one for all 4 years from classmates. I remember the first time I saw SNOW. I was taking a French exam. I signed out and went outside to play in the snow. For all 4 years, I only went home for Christmas and the end of the year, always riding the train. For spring break of my junior year, my father sent me \$20 to ride the bus to New York City to join my roommate!

I really do not know how I attended Hollins College. There were about 5 good fellow friends at home, who headed to Washington and Lee. Perhaps that is how I heard about Hollins College.

Dress code was always for dresses or skirts. In our years we did not own slacks.

Freshman year, 1928, Hollins disbanded sororities. Bids were always given out in the sophomore year, so many of my classmates transferred after the first year. This resulted in a very small class, graduating 49 classmates. With classmates leaving after their freshman year, due to no sororities, 3 of us joined together to be the first triple roommate situation. We called it "Happy Home" which we kept until graduation.

My favorite teacher was Mr. Janney, probably because I was an English major.

There was no smoking on campus, until my junior year. As class president, we did get smoking allowed, but only in Keller Hall.

When we went to see fellows at their schools, we rode on a bus to the men's campus and always had a chaperone!

If you made honor council, you had unlimited cuts to classes. Once I so enjoyed cutting that I had to drop the course instead of failing it.

At the end of my junior year, my father said that I had to come home, due to the depression times and no money. Dean of Women Mary Williamson said not to worry. We could pay by small installments. I also got a job in downtown Roanoke at Kimberly's florist.

There was a dance club, which existed of members dressing up as the men, and invited dates to their dance. The first dance at Hollins with men was during my senior year.

In our class was Margaret Wise Brown, author of "Goodnight Moon," most loved children's book. In our class her nickname was "Tim," and was part of our senior year beauty section.

While at Hollins I was involved in all activities, and president of my class for sophomore- senior years. Heading back to Jacksonville, I continued to be active with Hollins. I wrote our class news forever; served on the alumnae board; and was the winner of the prestigious Rath award for service at my 50th reunion. Even today at 96 years, the memories, laughs, and experiences are cherished memories.

From the university archives:

According to the academic catalog for 1933-34, tuition was \$300 and board was \$500. Board included "Furnished room, table board, heat, light, servants' attention, laundry, physicians attendance, infirmary attention."