

**Hollins University
Alumnae Reunion 2010
June 5, 2010**

**50th Reunion Remarks
By Elizabeth Seydel Morgan
Class of 1960**

To our amazing President, Nancy Gray, and to Wyndham Robertson and all alumnae like her who are making this woman's college work.

In 1960 everything changed. Of course WE thought so.

And so did you. Every one of you who ever went to Hollins thought so. WE who walked across the green front quad, accepted our diplomas, hugged our parents and found ourselves within months married and/or looking for jobs. The brave ones (unlike us who went from daddy to hubby by August) – the brave ones struck off for New York or Atlanta and lived together. Or like Shannon, Edie and Jane and Tifi bunched up in Boston.

Gail Collins, *New York Times* editor and columnist, picked 1960 as the year everything changed. That's the title of her book, out last fall: "WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present."

In it, she talks about the ways things were for women in the fifties and the whirlwind that hit American society in the sixties. Two events stand out from May 1960 to 1963 – first, FDA approval of a pill which would become known as THE pill. And, second, the publication of Betty Friedan's book, "The Feminine Mystique," in 1963.

Whether we read it or not, we were affected by Friedan's pointing out to millions of readers that our society had constructed a mystique of the role of women in the late forties and fifties: the good, feminine, wife and mother and homemaker in front of her aquamarine oven who was so idealized she was put on a pedestal. (On which she was truly stuck in her role.)

Friedan wrote of: The jobs women couldn't have, the equal pay they couldn't have, the fun and adventures they couldn't have, the choices they seemingly would never have. (The writers of TV's "Mad Men" *studied* Betty Friedan's book.)

Our graduation year was the crux, the pivot point.

But our four years here in the fifties had prepared us for facing any challenge, being treated as equal with any man, looking at a life of many choices – and we were already having adventures and outrageous fun. (Well, maybe some were extra-virgin, but...)

Did we ever experience a professor here who put us on a pedestal? They pushed us to think, like Jesse Zeldin when I was 17, huffing his cigarette in class, looking down on me like a Marine sergeant, arguing with every concept he was teaching in our required humanities course. They taught us to reason, to experiment, to perform *as if we were* – as if we were the same as boys. So we entered the world of the feminine mystique without believing in it.

But the trouble was, some of us needed well-paying jobs beyond the ever-entry level for women, and few of us could find a female obstetrician, gynecologist, pediatrician, political leader, eye doctor, dentist, pharmacist, veterinarian, or divorce lawyer to go to when needed. Therapists, mental or physical, were men.

And once we did go to work out of necessity like Carol Hughes Jones and Mary Lou Congdon Price, in both cases because of a husband's long illness, or to pursue a longed-for career – then began the balancing act. My Hollins friends have used that same answer to the question of their biggest challenge: balancing the demands of family and career. (They don't even mention "self.") Class of '85, I'm sure you agree.

Different eye-opening experiences happened to all of us in those years between 1956 and 1960. Mary K. Ralph, much honored physics professor at Berkley, writes that her "aha!" moment happened at Brookhaven National Lab, where she was sent for summer work by Hollins professor Dorothy Montgomery.

Many of our Hollins Abroaders (among the first in the program) echoed Jane Fingar who says, “Hollins Abroad had the most impact on my life,” and Betsy Forsyth Hailey who writes, “Hollins Abroad was my first step toward accomplishing my goal [of becoming an authentic woman of the world].”

Woman of the world Margie Eubank has been posted in her career with the U.S. Foreign Service to the following assignments: Chile, Uruguay, Senegal, New Guinea. Her last post was Sydney, Australia. In her book, Gail Collins speaks of many women our age and lots younger who never once had a male professor. Margie Eubank's favorite professors were Hanchett, Jackson, McDonald, Niederer, Steinhardt, Talmadge. I note three great women and three great men. Not to mention Hollins sent her for a semester to Washington, D.C.

For most of us semi-centennials, though, we were not or not yet citizens of the world. You didn't have to go out of this little patch of beautiful ground in Virginia for life to change. It began with that first moment of understanding with an advisor, a mentor, a successful lab experiment with Ralph Steinhardt, an argument about the Cold War with Jake Wheeler, running rats (well, yes I knew a girl who loved it) with Allen Calvin, *Hamlet* with Lex Allen.

A moment of keen revelation about music, drama, religion, painting, learning the ways of finances from Kathleen Jackson, or the ways of artists from Frances Niederer, or how to write from Louis Rubin, and how to REALLY think hard from Herta Frietag and Barbara Zeldin.

But often your changes started with an eye-opening life lesson from a **new friend** – older, younger, from a different part of the country – when you two sat up talking late at night in the smoker – almost **all night** so that you slept through your 8:00 class. (Or dashed to it covered only by a raincoat. For those who don't know what the smokers are or where the smokers were, good for you.

Our lives have changed, all right, but over and over our classmates tell us or write for our memory book: “When it came time to learn what I needed to know (about antiques), I knew how to go about doing just that,” (Gray Friedburg).

Isn't it the truth? When you needed to know, you knew how to go about doing just that.

In 1970, Jane Nichols Cox found herself appointed to teach in a predominately black high school during the years of busing and integration in Richmond. Not only did she meet the challenge, but she met her husband who was reporting the volatile situation for the paper.

In 2010, Shannon Ravenel finds herself in Singapore, meeting the challenge of another culture, and hoping to meet her husband – for dinner.

CEO Caroline Arnold Davis writes: “quite simply, Hollins taught me to think and to believe in myself.” Another truth – wherever we are today, namely alive, it's due to a large part because we believed in ourselves.

And so did our Hollins friends. Our friends, for fifty plus years have called us to laugh with us, to support whatever we were doing (thanks Shannon and Betsy), to worry with us, to cry with us, to welcome new babies, and help us say goodbye to parents. Plus they invite us to their homes, cities, beaches, mountains, L.A. and Memphis...

Yes, we all feel that way about our Hollins friends. All through 50 years. One very good friend of mine, and yours, was our class president, the late Kate Sandridge. Don't you remember her bright red hair and Winston-Salem cheer? Now, we have all lost people we called our own. And we've cared for many others we love.

Gail Collins' book is subtitled “the Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present.” And we are the women who lived that amazing journey, with all its surprises and shocks, laughs and challenges. A friend told me, and I quote his words: Hollins **prepared you to be unprepared.**