

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

Faculty/Staff Personal Papers

WKU Archives Records

12-24-1969

UA37/44 Diary to Kelly

Gordon Wilson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/fac_staff_papers



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty/Staff Personal Papers by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

December 24, 1969

Every Christmas Lancaster and I compare notes on the former students from whom we have heard, then or recently. It is amazing how nearly unanimous the messages from our students are in praising us for being friendly and interested in their problems when they were students. Some of the notes and letters are positively sacred, for they unveil depths in our former students that we hardly suspected. Notes and letters like these reassure us that our years of talking with our students really paid off, for us and, they say, for them. When I was at Indiana University once when Winifred was a student there, I went down the hall where were the offices of some of the teachers I had known in my day, ten years earlier. On the door of one of the best teachers I ever had was the schedule for conferences, "open house," if you like. There were four fifteen-minute periods for a week!!! My, how strange I felt, with my twenty hours, many times, at my desk in one week for the sole purpose of seeing needy students. An occasional student would refuse to come to a conference that he had already set up; rarely did any such student stay through a semester in my class. He usually found out that he was in the wrong pew. One arrogant lad refused to come to discuss his term paper or any part of it. Then he turned in a paper that had obviously been prepared by someone who had never been in my class, a paper that failed to follow any direction that I had given the class. But such happenings were rare, and maybe that is why I remember this immature lad's arrogant attitude. For most of the students I did not have enough time; they wanted to talk to me about everything, whether they were even in my classes or not; and they would often come in and remain a whole period, sometimes two or three together. I count as clear gain these conferences, whether they were scheduled or not. At the conclusion of a fifteen-minute conference with a very bright girl freshman, she said, "Well, this is the first time I have ever had a chance to

talk to a teacher in his office." You can bet she never missed an opportunity to return for a conference or just to chat. And she made a fine contribution to the school by being an outstanding student.

The recent letter to the editor of the COLLEGE HEIGHTS HERALD on this very subject certainly expressed well the feeling of its writer about how necessary it is to have proper communications between teacher and student. She implied that there is, in certain departments, a positive hostility to there being friendliness or companionship of teacher and student. I have told you before that I was scolded by several of the older faculty because I fraternized with my students, that I took them on walks with me, that I worked in my garden or even on my sewer line with them. Why not? Who am I, or was I, to feel superior and to build a hedge about my conception of a dignified teacher? Some of the soldings I got still rankle, for they were given by teachers who acted as if their being college professors placed them in a sort of semi-deified position. Having a good memory has often made me wince when some old-timer from away back when praised the fine democracy of the older days; frankly, as I have said maybe too often, there was little democracy in evidence in the first four or five years I was here. It took my own generation to help break down some of this staid, stilted attitude. It is difficult for younger students to understand how stiff things used to be. I would say that Miss Frances Richards, in any five years of her dedicated service at Western, showed more democracy and understanding of students than did all the women from 1907 to 1915. And very few people who have had any connection with Western were reared in such genuine aristocracy than she; the respect given her by hosts of our ablest students through the years is, to me, the finest tribute to genuine democracy. There has never been anything of the spirit of worship in this love for her; it is a feeling of Big Sister or of a real Professor, not a figurehead. If we lose the best of this relationship, Western will be just another college.