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UA77/1 Cherry's Eye in the Chapel

Carol Cummings
Western Kentucky University

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Cherry’s Eye in the Chapel

Grace Overby had a career at Western that spanned a total of 46 years. During that time, she served under the administration of Western’s first four presidents: Dr. Henry Hardin Cherry, Dr. Paul L. Garrett, Dr. Kelly Thompson, and Dr. Dero Downing. She also saw the University grow and flourish under three different names, from Western Kentucky State Teachers College, to Western Kentucky State College, to Western Kentucky University.

Mrs. Overby, a ’29 BU graduate who is 96 years old, fondly recalls her years in the Office of Alumni Affairs and Placement Services and as secretary to the WKU Alumni Association. Before moving to this position, however, Mrs. Overby worked for Miss Mattie McLean, assistant to Dr. Cherry.

“Back in those days, Dr. Cherry required assigned seats in chapel services for freshman,” she said. “One of my first responsibilities was to go in and check to see if any of the seats were empty. ‘Course they could have recruited another student to sit in their seats and I would have never known,” she laughed.

Dr. Cherry had a reputation for his gruffness, she said, and his booming voice could bring tears of fright to a person. “He would call the students in and talk to them if they missed chapel,” she said. “It was a bit frightening, and I didn’t like to talk to him myself.”

In the early ’30’s, Mrs. Overby went to work for Uncle Billy Craig in the reorganized Alumni Association. She served the Office of Alumni Affairs and Placement Services until her retirement in 1976. “I really enjoyed my time at Western,” she said. “It is a wonderful school.”

She fondly recalls many of her experiences at Western, from the annual KEA conferences in Louisville, to holiday parties, to working with students to help them find jobs, to organizing alumni luncheons.

Lee Robertson, former executive director of the WKU Alumni Association, calls Mrs. Overby “the most loyal person in the world.”

“She wasn’t loyal only when you were watching,” he said. “She was loyal when you weren’t watching. She was dedicated to her job and to the University. It came first. She disregarded ugliness in people, and worked hard to get jobs done, no matter how long it took.”

Sue Miller served with Mrs. Overby in the alumni office for a number of years. “Mrs. Overby was always just very good at what she did,” she said. “She taught me everything I know.”

Robertson and his wife, Joyce, remain good friends with Mrs. Overby today. Robertson marvels at Mrs. Overby’s good health and strong spirit, as well as her loyalty in driving those whom she calls “old ladies” around to the grocery and to church. “These ‘old ladies’ are women who are in their 70s,” he says with amazement. “They are a good 20 years younger than she is!”

Miller said that upon Mrs. Overby’s retirement, there was never any talk of “replacing” her, because no one ever could. “She is a good one.”
Additional information regarding Grace Overby:

*College Heights Herald*

Feb. 11, 1955, p. 5  
May 6, 1965, p. 5

UA1D - [Personnel File for Grace Overby](#)

These and other sources are available in the Harrison-Baird Reading Room in the Kentucky Building.