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HALL OF DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI LUNCHEON AND INDUCTION CEREMONY

October 13, 1995

Response: Dr. Alva Matherly Clutts

My first visit to Western Kentucky State Teachers College was with a friend from my high school Senior class when we were guests of Western for a weekend. Mr. Will B. Hill, Field Representative for Western (Uncle Billy to those who knew him and his association with Western), had made arrangements for our visit and had actually driven us to Western. Both Helen and I "signed on"-- we became Westerners from that time on.

Eventually we would hear the wonderful story about Uncle Billy Hill and his momentary brush with fame. It seems that Madame Schumann-Heink, renowned contralto and member of the Metropolitan Opera Company-- as she exited the stage after a concert in Bowling Green-- had bestowed a kiss on Uncle Billy's bald head in full view of the audience.

Those Wonderful People

Fifty years later, I still hold dear the truly special environment in which I was privileged to spend my undergraduate years and those special persons who made it possible. The names are easy to recall: Robertson---Anderson---Egbert----Poteet----Denman---Wilson---Cornette---Moore---Richards. The list continues:

*** McChesney and Stonecipher

*** Billings and Guy

*** Taft and McKinney

*** Lemons
These wonderful people, faculty and staff, took the initiative and the time to become our friends, our mentors as well as our professors and staff advisors. They introduced us to a larger world, advised us on possible careers, and helped open doors to further studies.

I remember and appreciate each one.

One Special Person

One person in particular became, and continued to be, a quiet and ever-present influence during my time at Western--Frances Richards. One of my special memories is of having an occasional lunch with "Miss Richards" (at her invitation) at one of the Hilltop spots.

Even when her students left the campus, she stayed in touch. My husband and I were able to visit with her in her family home one summer on our trip to Kentucky.

She also visited us briefly in Dallas one year as she made her way to California. While in our home, we asked--with our youthful enthusiasm--if she would like to see the slides from our first and very recent trip to Europe. In her gracious and genteel manner, she assured us that she was really excited about seeing and sharing our "travelogue". We began our slide show in the early evening and reported in detail--endless detail--on each and every photo. In the early portion of the evening, she asked interested questions and smiled and nodded in response to our commentary.
When it was time for the "lights" and "intermission", we discovered that even this lovely lady could not hold back the sandman. Exhausted from her long bus ride from Kentucky to Dallas, she had fallen asleep.

Memories

One of the fall-outs of this wonderful time has been the many memories which have surfaced:

***  Walking in the spring rains across the old Ogden campus in the early evenings.

***  My younger brother, now deceased, as my escort for one of the Talisman dances.

***  Being introduced to the "Old Masters" by Mary Ruth Lemons and to the human brain by Dr. Billings.

***  Frances Anderson's ongoing references to the Spicy Stories of history--which of course she never shared with us.

***  Our first political experiences as we elected class officers each year.

***  The camaraderie and commitment we felt as we, the staff, prepared each edition of the College Heights Herald.

***  Sitting forlornly in an empty football stadium after graduation.

I remember the remoteness of the WAR initially--YET its ultimate intrusion into our lives:

We coeds learned to write an occasional sports story for the Herald, covering the most recent basketball game and Coach Diddle as he waved his ever-present towel. (Most of the male sports reporters were unavailable, the military having intervened.)
I remember the kindness of a Scottsville businessman who made his printing establishment available for publication of the Herald when for some wartime related reason it was not possible, temporarily, to continue its publication in Bowling Green.

I remember returning from class to find a distraught classmate. She had just received notification that her fiance had been killed on Iwo Jima.

I remember seeing the notice of FDR's death come over the wires as I worked on the upcoming edition of the Herald (April 1945) at the Bowling Green newspaper office and finally

I remember our belief and acceptance of the idea that the responsibility of the world would be ours, confident that our lives would count and that we could and would make a difference.

I am most appreciative and humbled to be a part of this truly distinguished group of persons, the Western Kentucky University Hall of Distinguished Alumni, persons of achievement whose lives clearly demonstrate the importance and success of this university.

I choose to believe that you have accorded me this honor and recognition not because of any particular achievement but in a way that acknowledges the legitimacy of effort, you have recognized the significance of the Journey. Thank you for your kindness and approval.