



## What Does a Ward-Belmont Belle Remember After School Is Over?

• WHAT DOES the belle of Ward-Belmont remember about her alma mater once her diploma is tucked safely away in a drawer? She remembers all the big things like May Day and Senior-Senior Middle Day, but she remembers, too, the little things.

All the strangeness and the unfamiliar warm aroma of the South during her first week at school. She can picture distinctly her shyness in Rush Week, the friendliness of old girls when friendliness meant so much, the club houses, each one more attractive than the last, and her own amazing popularity as clubs vied for her favor.

She recalls her vivid impressions of the dining room and her stupid blunders before she adjusted herself to its routine. The hushed splendor of Acklen Hall, and the ivy clad tower

from The Hyphen, July 6, 1940 which associated itself from the first in her mind with tales of ladies in gray and grief-stricken heiresses. She still sniffs occasionally the fragrance of birthday dinner flowers, of thick-petaled magnolias, and warm bread in the kitchens. Her senses are tuned to remember the peal of the bell, stepsinging, and the chimes ringing at sunset.

Her mind's eyes pattern once more the satin state of Washington's Birthday, the lush serenity of May Queen, and the endearing absurdity of marble Mercury, his Grecian features flattened by over exposure.

So the graduate reminisces. And quite without warning, she feels a lump in her throat and a longing in her heart to turn back the clock to school days, and friendships, and Ward-Belmont.

Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon ('32) is in very poor health, but would love to hear from any of you. Her address is:

Mrs. Henry Cannon  
Richland Place Health Center  
504 Elmington Ave.  
Nashville, TN 37205

Distinguished English professor, Dr. Ivar Lou Duncan, has recently moved to a retirement home. She is in very fragile health (as she nears age 90), but is alert. She loves to hear from her friends. Her address is:

Dr. Ivar Lou Duncan  
The Meadows  
8044 Coley Davis Rd., Rm. A-9  
Nashville, TN 37221

ALUMNAE EDITION

## WARD-BELMONT HYPHEN

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## A Trip Down Nostalgia Lane with Patty Johnson Cormany, Class of 1941

(As noted in her article, the author wrote back-page features for The Hyphen while a student.)

My mother, Bernice McClain Johnson, was there when the uniform was brown and blue stripes to honor the merger of Ward Seminary and Belmont College. I graduated in 1941 before going on to the University of Iowa and a writing career. My sister, Sonya Johnson Holmes, was sitting in the chapel in 1951 when Dr. Robert Provine told a stunned faculty that Ward-Belmont had been sold to the Southern Baptists.

My first newspaper boss described me as "the sort of girl things happen to." This was true. But it was never more true than at Ward-Belmont when I found myself going out with the Governor and being nominated as "Quaint" for the "alphabetized" yearbook. I may have been querulous on occasion and quirky as well. I may also have been quaint, but I know I just couldn't accept the Q word and cried myself to sleep in Fidelity Hall.

Everybody cried in those days. We cried at concerts, at broken hearts, at the grand

opening of *Gone With the Wind* where we northern girls crouched in our seats while the Civil War rose again.

I loved almost everything about Ward-Belmont, even its strict rules and the manners I was taught. People back home in Iowa were astounded to be yes ma'am-ed and yes sir-ed. And I wore my hat and little white gloves all over town and rose when anyone entered the room. The teachers were some of the best I was ever to have. The food was incredible. I can still "call up" fried chicken and biscuits, hush puppies and broiled hot peaches for Sunday dinner. The sweet rolls and potato salad were culinary gems.

I'd never been away from my home in Cedar Falls, Iowa, a night in my life when I arrived at Ward-Belmont. It was so beautiful; but I was so homesick, the school nurse put me in the infirmary and gave me paregoric to settle my stomach. To add to my homesickness, the new clothes in my trunk were all ruined because I'd stuck in a bottle of

cologne at the last minute. So, when I finally went to meet the Governor of Tennessee, I had to borrow clothes all up and down Fidelity Hall.

I didn't follow politics in those days, but I did know that I had a big hole to fill on the back page of The Hyphen, where I wrote features. So I decided to trot off to the statehouse and interview Governor Prentice Cooper. I have no idea in the world how I was allowed to do that without a chaperone at my heels. I do remember that Ms. Charlton, who ran what the school called the Home Office, was the Governor's cousin.

Of course, I couldn't get past the Governor's secretary but I had to write something so I wrote a feature about how I didn't meet the Governor. He saw the article and that's how I, an 18-year-old bobby soxer, met Governor Cooper, a 45-year-old bachelor. He invited me to attend a dance with him at Vanderbilt University. I was thrilled. The rules at Ward-Belmont were so strict that he

wasn't even allowed to call for me in his limo. I had to ride in a taxi in my best \$25 formal with a chaperone pasted to my side. Governor Cooper was slightly shorter than I was but kind and considerate. We danced every dance until intermission and then the Governor invited me out for something to eat. The chaperone announced that we weren't permitted to leave so we had to sit on hard chairs along the wall until everyone else returned. I don't know why Governor Cooper didn't end it all right there; but he was kind enough, knowing my parents were coming from Iowa for Spring Break, to invite them to tea at the Governor's Mansion and to meet his parents. My mother and father told everybody they knew and some they didn't, I'm sure. By the time they got there, however, the governor and I were no longer "an item."

At Ward-Belmont, there wasn't really time for much other than studying and making friendships that have lasted a lifetime. I didn't realize at the time that my work on the Hyphen and the yearbook were laying the groundwork for a career as a writer and columnist for a number of national publications. In one column for my "I Was Just Thinking..." piece in *Family Weekly*, I wrote about "The Lost Ladies" based on my

years at Ward-Belmont. I remember the legend of the Gray Lady who walked the tower at midnight; but my ghosts still rise from the memories of the beauty of Acklen Hall and the historical old campus and the beautiful May Queens. I dream still of tough, beautiful Camilla Nance, the riding instructor; my beloved Miss Scruggs, who taught English; my wonderful Miss Olive White and Miss Myrrh. But I was closest to Mai Flournoy Van Deren because she was in charge of publications and made me love writing and editing so much that I never gave them up. Yes, I knew Miss Cayce and even Miss Morrison who had been there when my Mother was.

My career took me many places across America but I couldn't bear to see Ward-Belmont again until one rainy morning years later while I was traveling with my husband through Nashville. We came suddenly past the front and I thought it looked familiar. So we stopped and wandered about peering through windows at construction underway. Everything and nothing were the same. The rain and the tears ran down my face and I was consumed with nostalgia for the dream years that will never come again. \*