

Ward-Belmont The Golden Years 1942-44

by Martha Baird Green

They say that by the age of five a child is pretty well molded into the kind of person he or she will be. Maybe so. As for I, I am concerned, the single greatest influence on my life other than my parents was the atmosphere at Ward-Belmont.

I can't remember when I didn't know about the school. My grandmother had gone to Ward's; my mother, aunts and sister to Ward-Belmont. I don't remember that I was ever expected to go. I simply always wanted to.

I began ninth grade at Hillsboro High School for some reason, probably because I was terrible in arithmetic and could take something called "General Math" for one year only and still graduate. It wasn't too bad and many of my friends were there but I knew I belonged at Ward-Belmont, so eventually went. As I said, I was terrible in math and it has continued to be a personal ogre, but with the advent of the pocket calculator the ogre has retreated somewhat into the background.

Anyway, I shall be everlastingly grateful to Mrs. Shackelford who taught freshman Algebra. There was the stumbling block again! I had to take it in order to graduate. I never understood one thing that went on in that class but she knew that if there ever breathed a soul who gave it her all, it was Martha Baird. I, a lofty Junior sat among the fledgelings and literally sweated. At the end of the year I "passed", and my mother presented Mrs. Shackelford with a lovely nightgown for all her efforts.

That was the only dark cloud during my days there. I loved everything about that school. Talk about roots! I knew where mine were, and it was a good feeling.

My friends and I frequently ate lunch at the Toddle House down on Twenty First Avenue or at Candyland on West End. (Seniors were allowed the privilege of going off-campus to lunch.) We walked a lot or rode the bus in those days of gas rationing, but our mothers were awfully good about letting us have the family car when they could spare it. So we'd all pile in and tear off; waving, cheering, literally hanging out the windows as we passed the Vanderbilt fraternity houses where the boys could generally be found lounging on the porch. On one occasion, I distinctly remember that we slowed down long enough to push one of our group out the door when we spotted her current heart-throb standing on the walk. Naturally we sped off leaving her stranded there. What wild fun that was! After we'd driven around the block awhile and eventually came back for her she was as dissolved in laughter as we were.

Anyway, we consumed hamburgers and milkshakes by the ton and I never gained an ounce. I, the chronic calorie counter of the present, moon just to think about it.

I can still see Mrs. Armstrong, to whom we reported every morning. Bless her heart, she was a sweet old lady who always wore a black hat all day long. Miss Hall kept our studyhall. She was a darling and we had lots of fun with her. Cayce taught us tennis and I vaguely remember bowling, but that was the extent of my physical activities. Miss Morrison, our beloved athletic direc-

tor, was horrified that I should refuse to play hockey. I think I have the distinction of being the only president of the Angkor Club (or probably of any other club on campus, for that matter) who never played hockey. Physical activity or shall we say "Sports" was not and is still not my cup of tea. I am a reader. I was born a reader and will die one unless I go blind, heaven forbid. Then I'll have to learn braille in order to survive.

The bread of life for me during those school days was English Literature. Especially poetry. "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner," "Invictus," "The Sonnets of the Portuguese." I would still like to have "Crossing the Bar" read at my funeral. Because of this, the Lord was good to me when he gave me Mrs. Souby. That wonderful lady, excellent teacher and later, fine headmistress. She was a woman with strong qualities and taught us so much more than just our English lessons. Most of our teachers were like that. How fortunate we were to be under the influence of such women who gently (sometimes not so gently) helped mold our young minds and more importantly, our characters. For that was the essence of Ward-Belmont. True, it was irritating to not be able to wear make-up, to have to abide by what seemed, even then, foolish regulations. But didn't it make us better wives, mothers, citizens? I think so. We needed discipline and guidance and they were always there to be absorbed in varying degrees, sometimes only by the process of osmosis. But they were there.

I am remembering: I remember the beautiful campus with the lacy summer houses. The iron dogs and deer, the stone lions and statues, all imported from Italy—our legacy from Adelia Acklen. Beautiful Acklen Hall, the epitome of the ante-bellum South. The tall water tower covered with ivy, which had served as a watch-post during the Civil War. The club houses dotting the campus. Lunch down in the tea room with the nickelodeon playing Harry James' rendition of "I Don't Want To Walk Without You." Miss Wickle, better known as "Ro", who sat behind her desk in the day student club house and knitted while she watched over all our antics and smiled at our gossip, and Miss Annie. Beloved Miss Annie, our headmistress, who was exactly as our headmistress should have been. Small, fragile, radiating kindness and gentility from every pore. A true lady of the old school. How in the world did she put up with us? She did it with gentleness, love, and understanding. When I became engaged to marry she wrote a note to me which I still have and will always treasure.

May Day. All the May poles with their bright ribbons, the flowers, the girls in their bouffant dresses which billowed like clouds. The band playing "The Blue Danube" from one of the summer houses while we danced in the spring sunshine, our families, friends, and current beau, admiring us from the stands. The May queen and her attendants slowly winding around the drive in an open carriage pulled by matched horses and driven by a dignified colored man in livery, complete with top hat. The queen of England was never more elegant nor was she carried in more style.

We studied, we day-dreamed, we fell in and out of love. We wor-

ried a little and laughed a lot. It was the age of innocence for most of us, especially for me. The school itself is gone forever, yet it will remain forever just as long as there is a Ward-Belmont girl still around to recall the memories.

1941-1944

Jane Elam Hianers

1941-'44. War years but still our dear years. Even gas and shoe rationing didn't hold us down or get us down. Ours was the era of wearing backward cardigans with a string of pearls and Fraternity pins on our bras. It was the time of dirty saddle shoes with turned down white anklets. That was how we told the good guys from the bad at W-B. The Yankees wore bobby socks. Most of us had pompadours and pimples. We all loved Snooky.

We were the "jitterbug" and "dip" generation. We sustained the Coca Cola Company by consuming gallons at Hettie Ray's and then coasting down Nine Mile Hill to save gas. I think I remember having a steady date on Friday night and playing the field on Saturday. I KNOW I remember in our freshman year being petrified that we would double date with an "older" couple and I would be too scared to talk. However, our group always did manage to converge on the Ladies Room to "Brush our teeth", and hash things over.

We were a bunch of innocents who thought we were pretty groovy. A smooch in the back seat was naughty, but a "French kiss" might get one pregnant! Most of us had a "rec" room in the basement. Mine happened to have a camera dark room at one end with my father in it most of the time. And somehow shoes dropped overhead at the time to go home. We had to be home at 11:30 on date nights unless we could blame gas rationing and having to take someone home first. Sometimes we could come in and raid the ice box. Mother's wasn't the worst to raid. Some saintly souls, namely parents, were brave enough to have parties for us AFTER the dances. Removing our starched petticoats was routine. "Spin the Bottle" was the name of the game. Actually our parents were pretty smart. They probably reckoned a chaperoned kiss was better than the car keys.

Good old Ward Belmont! Do you remember training for TOPS while our mothers were rolling bandages? We all made good grades so that we could spend our study halls in the day student clubhouse learning to play Bridge. We could go to lunch with proper grades. Elaine Kirkpatrick Bobo didn't make hers. However, she had a BIG car, with an even bigger trunk, and we used to put her in it and head for Candyland. We all devoured a crop of tomatoes filled with chicken salad combined with those lethal thick milk shakes. We weren't worried about waistlines then—just acne.

Others are writing about some of my favorite memories. We all remember a magic time. Having lived so far away for so long, I have a very special feeling about our group. It is a most unique experience. When I do get to come HOME, we just continue the conversation. Mary is right. One of God's blessings was putting us all together.

P.S. I have been persuaded to elaborate briefly on the signs and grins we had in the green convertible. Dear 1941 Dodge, how sweet you were!

Being all of 14 years old, I had to have a restricted license allowing three exciting destinations. This took careful consideration to cover the most territory.

School—Ward Belmont

Church—First Presbyterian downtown

Drugstore—West End

I don't know how we managed the Franklin swimming pool on this itinerary but we did commute almost every day. Remember those divine hamburgers consumed while Bing Crosby crooned, "Blue Skies"? Remember the cold side and the warm side? Remember Mary summoning the courage to jump off the high board wearing her brand new swimming suit daintily held together by a big cork? When she came up cork and suit were floating ten feet away. Some of us remember hiding to change clothes because we wore padded bras. Remember getting fried to a crisp the first day and then going to the movies at night and squirming on those scratchy seats when the burn set in? About the worst thing our generation did at the movies was to hold hands and eat Milk Duds. We would have been good girls even

if the Drive In had been invented.

I know I volunteered for every book-up available. Mother was lucky to have enough gas to get to the grocery store. She must have coped somehow as we did have our share of afternoon tea parties. I think we lived in our white gloves and little hats. We always put our calling cards on the silver plate in the entrance hall. We could have "Miss" engraved on them when we reached sixteen. We wore silk stockings and those horrible garter belts. White margarine came into being. Chess pie and ham and beaten butter biscuits were staples. And there is still nothing so good as a Nashville little round tomato sandwich.

By our senior year we were allowed to go to a few Vandy Tea Dances. In retrospect, I don't think those boys were drinking tea. And by then so many of the older boys were off to war that we were spending more time writing V-mail than English essays. I don't think many of us truly realized the sacrifices our parents made of their creature comforts so that we could have ours. Let's give a prayerful "Thank you" to them all, and never forget.

Music, Music, Music

by Mary Louise Flautt

Our lives were filled with music in the 40's of high school times. Much dancing with sororities and fraternities or just rolling back the rug in someone's living room.

I lived in a remodeled barn which was very informal and centered by a huge living room (former hay loft) with a baby grand piano. My family always received the gang warmly and so many afternoons and evenings were spent around this piano laughing and singing.

Nelson Bryan was our chief musician. He said he could play anything as long as it was in the Key of C. He was never without his bass fiddle and I can still see him driving down the Boulevard in his "open air taxi" with the fiddle ensconced in the back seat.

Songs still remind us of happy

and sad times. "As time goes by" we still think of Charlie Moss and his tragic death in V-12 at Sewanee when he fell off the mountain. The war had finally touched us but not until our senior year. Before that we joked about gas rationing and just piled more people in the few cars.

We were always busy and mostly just having fun. We were thoughtful of each other girls and boys alike and seemed to plan so none of the gang was left out. We pretty much all dated around and dances were very much the break-in kind where you didn't even dance one whole song with the same boy. Waltz, fox trot and jitterbug gave us much variety and later when the Tenn. Dew Drops were organized, the square dance gave us some fun nights.

