

I WAS JUST THINKING---

We are the vanishing Americans.

We are the quaint survivors of an era passed. We are the graduates of the girls' schools.

Sometimes they have been labeled boarding schools or finishing schools, but few survive in this new age of rock 'n' roll and the fast buck.

My school was Ward-Belmont, now as defunct as its way of life. My mother was a Ward-Belmont girl in a day of prim uniforms and cotillions. My sister was a Ward-Belmont girl when the end came.

At Ward-Belmont, freedom was an intangible. We went sedately in groups into Nashville, we received telephone calls with written permission and, when young gentlemen from Vanderbilt came to call in the Red Room, a chaperon was within earshot. And some of us rebelled and ran away beyond the stone lions where the world turned, but it was another world.

We dutifully heard concerts in the auditorium and never went forth without white gloves nor the burden of being Ward-Belmont girls regardless of time and tide.

When some of us transferred to coeducational schools, we discovered independence. We relinquished with joy the cradle of our confinement. It was not until long afterward that we remembered the subtle formation of our minds and manners.

The W-B girl is a ghost now, as much a wraith as the gray lady who walked the tower at midnight. And Ward-Belmont has crumbled like the noses of its statues which had been shot away in the Civil War. The closeness among us, the sweet scent of magnolia, the tradition, the charm and the ivy are all gone.

Perhaps it's true that some of us mistook courtesy for class-consciousness. And some mistook good breeding for superiority. And others found a prison within the pillars.

But I mourn the passing of learning with love. And of the fostering within us of other loves. Tradition, gracious living, beauty, gentleness, poise and propriety.

It was another world. In it and from it came neither girls nor women. Only ladies.

And ladies are long out of fashion.

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