

Ward-Belmont 2004 Alumnae Survey

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Joan Diver McCoy (my sister) attended Ward-Belmont as a college freshman.

I attended Ward-Belmont Preparatory School as a boarder from the 1947-48 year through the final year, graduating in the last Prep School graduating class of 1951.

Fond Memories of Ward-Belmont

In 1947 I was thirteen years old when I arrived on the Ward-Belmont campus as a boarding student, a boarder, from Coffeyville, KS. I had visited the campus once before when my sister attended as a college freshman. A chaperone (I believe her name was Miss Oglesby) accompanied me and other new Ward-Belmont girls on the train trip. We, *of course*, were wearing hats, heels, hose, and gloves. Heels and hose were pretty new to me, so I felt quite grown up. Because I was a freshman boarder – and there weren't very many of us (I believe Carolyn Mignon Emerson was the only other freshman boarder who came from quite a distance away) – my room was on the first floor of Heron Hall, near the housemother's room. I suspect Mama Hey, the housemother, thought I would be homesick, but truthfully I was so busy that I never remember feeling homesick; there was simply too much to see and do. Helping to paint the mural in the Heron smoker made me feel a part of things. I later learned to play bridge in that smoker, where a hotly-contested bridge game was a constant feature.

The school operated its own bank for boarding students, where my parents had deposited money upon which I could draw, so I now had my own W.B. checks and checkbook. The bookstore, along with the post office, was in the basement of Acklen Hall. It seems to me that most of my money went to the bookstore (where we purchased gym clothes as well as all books and other school supplies) and the Tea Hole – the hang-out in the basement of Heron. The Tea Hole had a snack bar, a piano, a jukebox, tables and chairs, and a dance floor where I learned to jitterbug. It may not have been in the Tea Hole that I heard her, but I certainly remember one day student's piano expertise (was it Delia Craig?) as she played "Near You" (a popular song written by her dad.)

We had "rush" early in the fall. At the end of rush every girl was invited to join one of the ten clubs. All had clubhouses located in a big semi-circle south of the bell tower. (The day students had four different clubs which met in a building on the east side of campus.) I became a member of F.F., where I had a big sister who helped me feel at home at W.B. (The meaning of the F.F. initials – a secret we were never to reveal, but a secret that can hardly matter 53 years after F.F. ceased to exist – was *Friendship and Fidelity*.) The clubs had intramural competition in field hockey and basketball. Our club mascot was the giraffe, and our pep song's first line was "We're the F.F. Club giraffe –ees. . . ." Really! In the clubs, the prep school girls were all mixed in with the college girls, which made a good balance. It's a shame

the day students weren't mixed in with us too, as then we probably would have gotten better acquainted. All the clubs took part in a club sing and various other activities, so there were lots of opportunities to get acquainted with everyone on campus. While I was there, W. B. had about 700 students; I believe that number included the day students too. Anyway, I had a "Hi, how are you" acquaintance with everyone on campus. (Properly enunciated, the expression was /Hi, how yawl/).

The /yawl/ expression reminds me of one particular regional expression that was new to me. Someone who spoke of riding with someone else to church would say "she carried me . . . to church." It took me several months to get my mind to automatically translate that expression.

One thing I KNOW about my Ward-Belmont days: I really learned to study. I now have many years of experience both as a student and as an instructor, and I can say truthfully – and with an educated assessment – that I had excellent teachers at W.B. One of my math teachers was Miss Mann, who taught math the way it should be taught, but – sadly – not the way it is usually taught today. We had homework *every* night and went over *every* homework problem the next class period. With my excellent W.B. math background, I had no trouble with math at the University of Kansas (K.U.), even though I found sitting in my trig class – in which I was the only female – a bit overwhelming after four years at a girls' school.

Another class I remember with fondness was Ancient History. It truly gave me the Western Civilization foundation necessary for a good liberal arts education. When I – many years later, as a college instructor – led a group of adults to Italy, I reread *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and found to my surprise that I remembered it quite well.

I had my first experience with a foreign language in my freshman Latin class. I didn't have any trouble memorizing the vocabulary, but I was certainly lost otherwise for about the first six weeks. Then I finally figured out that we weren't translating exact sentences; we were translating *ideas*. After that I liked Latin; I took it both my freshman and sophomore years – and in my sophomore year added French class to my schedule. My three years with Madame Fountain allowed me to quiz out of *beaucoup* French hours when I started in as a freshman at K.U. in the fall of 1951. The French Department there welcomed me with open arms, and I rather fell into a French major. (Much later I switched to English, but did end up with a French minor and qualified to teach high school French.)

I took piano lessons all four years from Mrs. Irwin who taught just across the street west of the campus; her husband was the head of the music department. At one point Mrs. Irwin paired me with a day student for a two-person recital. The other student's mother took us shopping together, and we found matching dresses of different colors. We played several two piano numbers as well as our solo pieces. I remember working hard to memorize Schumann's "Papillons." I can still play part of it – though certainly not very well.

I faithfully signed in each time I went to the music practice hall behind Heron. There were about eight small rooms, each with a piano, so as I was practicing *my* pieces I could hear up to seven other students playing at the same time. It certainly made me concentrate on my own piece. (Maybe that's when I started developing the ability to concentrate totally on what I'm doing in spite of distractions. At times that's a very useful talent; at other times it is almost dangerous. Lots of funny stories could be inserted here, but they don't involve W.B.)

One other teacher who certainly affected my life was Miss Morrison. My freshman year my respect for her was mingled with fear. She made clear *exactly* what she expected and would tolerate nothing less. Through my years there, love became mixed with the tremendous respect I felt for her. I believe her influence positively affected my own success as a teacher in later life.

Dressing for dinner each evening was new to me. At first I religiously donned my hose and heels. Before long I realized that we really dressed up only on special occasions; I could usually get by with just changing to some dress flats – as long as I already had on a skirt and sweater. There were NO gym clothes or gym shoes in the dining room in the basement at the east end of Acklen hall.

We prep boarders were not allowed to go downtown without a chaperone except to church. (And, of course, when we took a chaperone, we had to pay for her cab fare and any meals.) We could not ride in cars with local people except with special permission, so I often took advantage of such special permission to go to whatever church not only had a Sunday evening youth meeting but also would send someone to pick up the Ward-Belmont girls. As was true any other time I left campus, I had to sign out – listing the time, where I was going and with whom, and then had to sign back in when I returned.

Because we were allowed to take a cab to church on Sunday, we took advantage of that privilege almost every week. If we were *really* feeling daring, we skipped the church part and treated ourselves to brunch at Cross Keys or some other restaurant open on Sunday mornings.

Junior-Senior Prep Day was a big occasion in the spring. I remember that our 1951 theme was Adventures in Senior English. Girls marched in the parade dressed to represent the various pieces of literature we had studied. I was in the forefront of the group representing Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, costumed – *somewhat* – as a 15th century poet, reciting the first 12 lines of the "Prologue" (which we all had been required to memorize) as we marched around the circle. "Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote/The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote. . . ." (Years later, when I took a graduate class in Chaucer, I wowed some of my classmates by still being able to recite most of those 12 lines!)

During Senior Prep Week we were responsible for a chapel program during which we outlined our ideals. We used a passage from Philippians. "Whatsoever things are true, . . . honorable, . . . just, . . . pure, . . . lovely, . . . of good report, think on **these** things." I still cherish that scripture as central to my faith. I also have no trouble recalling the words of our Senior Prep song, which we sang at the conclusion of that chapel program and many other times throughout the year:

As Senior Preps, today we stand before thee,
Proudly, with our colors white and blue.
Our loyalty we pledge to thee forever;
To Ward-Belmont, we'll be true.

Looking back through my annual while preparing these memories, I note that our Senior Class Theme was "action rather than passive acceptance." My family would agree that I still live by that theme. If it's within my power to act, I am convinced that action is better than passive acceptance – even if the action turns out to be wrong. (And, I don't believe anyone who knows me would ever use the word *passive* to describe me.)

The 1951 *Milestones* is dedicated to Ward-Belmont and to her Belles. Ward-Belmont is described as

a small, rich world of its own. And from this world she has selflessly sent her Belles, each into her individual path, a little wiser, a little finer for the brief period of time in which she has known life as a *Ward-Belmont Belle*.

I hope I emerged from my four years at W.B. a little finer, but I know I emerged a great deal wiser – not only about my school subjects but also about dealing with a wide variety of personalities – having gained valuable people skills which I still employ. I remain deeply grateful to my parents for making such a valuable preparatory school education possible for me. In my heart I will **always** be "a Ward-Belmont Girl."