

## Reunion 2009

*The following reflections were offered by **Marie DeSando McFarlin** on behalf of the Class of 1959, our Golden Jubilarians, during Reunion 2009. This Class had the distinction of graduating during the sesquicentennial or 150th anniversary of Elizabeth Seton's arrival in Emmitsburg and the beginning of SJC.*



When Barbara Quinn “Sag” called to ask me to speak for our class tonight, we had a wonderful conversation about the weekend plans, including the tribute to our deceased classmates. Three weeks later I received the news that she died suddenly. Her words and her voice have echoed over and over again in my mind and have truly impacted what is said tonight.

We came together from 13 states and Puerto Rico. The reasons for attending this small rural Catholic college for women were as varied as the personalities gathered. It was a beautiful campus with its majestic tree-lined avenue, meticulously maintained grounds and buildings, with a meandering creek flowing through its lush valley. Its history was unique as was the story of its remarkable and courageous founder.

It was an institution noted for its insistence on quality and a true dedication to its mission . . . the expectations were high . . . mediocre was not acceptable. The atmosphere was protective. There is no doubt, however, that the women who graduated were equipped with the inner strength, confidence and skills that would keep them grounded and equipped to succeed when following whatever path they chose.

We were the first class to occupy the second and third floors of Rosary, and enjoyed the new Student Center and the “Pines.” Also we experienced the change from formal dining to the cafeteria, which provided a much different atmosphere. We were spirited . . . demerits . . . we had a few! Let’s not dwell too long on what was really the attire under the academic gowns, the special signals to our Mount friends, the dorm experience where a whole world existed after “Lights Out.” There were so many creative ways to circumvent some rules . . . not all successfully. We excelled in swimming . . . came in second in most contests, but laughed a lot and developed friendships that are “priceless.”

As the “Sesqui Class” we had quite a senior year . . . Laura’s pageant . . . the convocation where Mamie Eisenhower accepted her honorary degree and her husband spoke to us of his fond memories of the College. On June 3, 1959, we accepted our diplomas, said our farewells tearfully, rode down the “A,” and turned left or right onto Route 15, and knew in our hearts that “nothing would be the same.”

We entered a world where the life expectancy was 69 years, a TV hit was “Father Knows Best” and the microchip was not a household word. There were signs that changes were coming. Yet who could possibly foresee what was on the horizon? Woodstock, the Civil Rights Movement, assassinations, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Viet Nam, and 9-11?

We were women with marketable skills . . . getting a job was not a serious issue. As teachers, nuns, nurses, psychologists, social workers, wives, mothers, daughters, cousins, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, granddaughters, colleagues, neighbors, friends, and even, in some cases, single “moms,” we worked hard and responsibly.

We traveled extensively over the years and have settled all over the country. We have advanced degrees in a myriad of areas, four PhDs, and are truly lifelong learners.

We faced incredible challenges and heartaches and, there is no doubt, have met them with courage, determination and no self-pity.

This would all seem enough for 50 years, wouldn't it? Yet, unbelievably, it is not the end of the story.

Today, at our Book Club meeting, which is usually hosted at Marcella Wilding's home twice a year for anyone in our class, we discussed *Three Cups of Tea*. Greg Mortenson, with his crusade to build schools for girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, truly believes the African proverb:

***“If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. If you educate a girl, you educate a community.”***

The Class of '59 is the perfect example. The story began when six members of the class devoted the year after graduation to lay apostolate work in New Mexico and Alabama, and it hasn't stopped. We have worked tirelessly to help improve the lives of others in our towns, cities, country and world. We held the hands of the blind, the mentally handicapped, the sick, the dying, the poor, the addicts, the unwed mothers, the hurting parishioners, our students, the men and women in prison and, always the children who are, so often, innocent victims. We have walked and marched for causes, from peace in our world to the fight to eradicate so many horrible diseases. We have raised money with innumerable volunteer hours.

One of our classmates served as a missionary in Africa for 31 years, helping to develop a health district that would serve over 600,000 people. She often got around in a small motorboat . . . our own African Queen.

Others were in Ethiopia, the Philippines, Taipei, Haiti, Moldavia or Morocco at various times in their lives to use their talents and skills to help. One even joined the Peace Corps after she was widowed later in life, and spent some time in a Romanian orphanage to help abandoned toddlers with sensory deprivation.

The commitment extended to the VA, VNA, UN, Meals on Wheels, Doctors without Borders, senior centers, parishes, schools, libraries, museums, hospitals, historic buildings, parks and clinics. The range of help is everywhere . . . getting scholarships for needy students, helping Harlem teens fill out applications for college, helping women with math phobia, designing exemplary rehab programs for drug and alcohol addicts, helping prisoners gain the skills to organize hospice programs for inmates, using consumer science knowledge to work on a national program to improve nutrition among our youth, design and create a park for the community in the DC area, develop programs for at-risk high school and college students, mentor student teachers, work with the elderly and poor to find decent housing, become an advocate for the dying and the elderly to help them live with dignity, work with the National Institute of the Blind, use counseling skills to help adults in crisis. And there is so much more!

This band of women, who once lived, prayed, laughed, cried and studied together, left SJC with a spirit of hope and commitment that they would make a difference. They would give back.

This is their legacy . . . hand in hand . . . all together . . . all together.

God bless you, Class of '59, Sesqui Class, and BRAVO!