

WHAT HUNTER HAS MEANT TO ME

It is difficult for me to find words to describe my appreciation of the great honor that has been bestowed on me by the invitation to be your speaker today, and my joy at the opportunity to proclaim to the world what Hunter has meant to me. Those of you who knew me when, will recall that I was not noted for oratory or writing. I trust the sincerity of this will make up for any weaknesses in either.

My coming to Hunter was an accident — one that really deserves the word “felix” to describe it. When I started school in up-state New York, school principals had never heard of “enriching the curriculum”, for I moved from the second reader to the third as fast as I could. My parents moved to Staten Island so that their five daughters could be better educated; and I, the oldest, had always wanted to be a teacher. When I made application to the Brooklyn Training School for Teachers, I was turned down and told to apply a year later, as I was too young. My mother, the most wonderful person who ever lived, considered that advice silly, and somehow discovered that I could go to college instead! Hence, this immature child was registered for an A.B. degree, an opportunity I had never permitted myself to dream of. Perhaps even the immaturity was fortunate, for the need for growth was painfully evident even to me — and I am still aware of it almost half a century later.

As I thought over what I should like to say today, memories came rushing into my mind with such speed that I could not sort them out. Our first day in what is now the high school auditorium, when we found out that we had to register in the courses ourselves instead of copying a program someone had given us; chapel, a high-brow word for assembly, with Dean Hickenbottom dispensing good advice in her cheery way, and E. Adelaide Hahn selling the *Bulletin*; our own Samuella Pepys (my introduction to the famous diary) in that distinguished paper; making paper tulips for the Varsity Play; riding on the Third Avenue “L” with the rest of the Staten Island girls; Student Exchange; walking through the Park and arguing on politics, religion — or anything else; coffee and Danish pastry (10 cents) at 59th Street, and still arguing; practice teaching; 42nd Street Library; the Irish lilt for License No. 1; dances for service men; knitting sweaters for them; woman suffrage parade; Newman Club Retreat; the Sing; working for the Draft Board; and finally, our senior activities, including Helen Hayes in “Dear Brutus”, and the solemn commencement exercises at which we really needed no speaker to tell us of the seriousness of our responsibilities in a world at war.

All of you here have similar pictures floating around in your memories. In some ways, 1918 seems like ancient history, and it is if we judge by the developments of our atomic age.

Yet, the meaning of my four years at Hunter is not found in the fact that we had no Lexington Avenue subway; no radio; no TV; no

home freezers or frozen foods; no balloon tires or automatic shifts — it is found in the basic and fundamental emphases I learned there and the inspiration to continue to learn.

I can remember vividly my first contact with scholarship on the college level. At first, it was new subject matter and new techniques. I carried my Greek book home as if it were made of gold — I could not wait to learn what was in it. When Professor Earle taught us how to take notes in the Geology lecture course, I felt like a Ph.D. Professor Whicher’s class in Philology is still my idea of an intellectual experience. Then I found out that the Latin translation had to be more than the literal meanings of the words — one must attempt to interpret the meaning and the beauty of the Horatian odes if one wished to contribute more than the average. Trigonometry was sheer joy for me, and sines and cosines brought me out of my bashfulness. Our compositions in English had to be rewritten until they conformed to proper usage as laid down by Woolley. This emphasis on scholarship, as I would call it today, made such an impression on me that I still have qualms of conscience when I turn out an unpolished piece of work.

I had come from a coeducational high school in which we all took the same courses, and no one ever mentioned any special responsibilities for women. It was different at Hunter — Professor Dutting’s “Young ladies who are about to have an academic degree conferred on you”, which we heard in our senior year, was a summing up of the four-year demand on us to face up to our responsibilities as women. We were never permitted to take refuge in mid-Victorian feminine weaknesses — the best in scholarship, behavior, and character was the only acceptable offering. I can recall choking back a cough in Professor Tonks’ class because she said we could control ourselves; Dean Hickenbottom’s rules about gloves and hats when we left the building, and our rising when a teacher addressed us or the President walked by, are very vivid in my memory. Even at Commencement, we were told to start up the stairs with our right foot, and not show any sign of surprise or amusement at Dr. Fagnani’s high-pitched voice. We were educated as women, and trained in the fields in which women can make the best contribution. We enjoyed it, and looked forward to taking up the responsibilities that were ours with a feeling of security in our future success. It was before the days of “psychoses” and explanations of them that I would not mention to this audience even though we are emancipated enough to make *By Love Possessed* a best seller. When I graduated, I was fully aware of my duties as a woman.

Since my vocation is the education of youth, and certainly Hunter made that possible, you will not be surprised that teacher training is my third point. Yes, Hunter is responsible for my career; but it would not have been so successful if the first two emphases, those on scholarship and the education of women, had

not been present. I am grateful that I had such a good background in subject matter, and that pedagogy was an *extra* major. I am grateful that all the education courses were full of meat, and not rehashings of earlier ones. I must admit that I did not have to take more courses in pedagogy, as I taught — not until I had to fulfill new requirements. I had passed the promotion examinations on the basis of the pedagogy courses I had taken at Hunter. We respected the courses — who will forget Professor Kieran's telling us that we would come back to him years later to say that the material he gave us on the techniques of questioning was helpful? And it was.

More important than the logical fallacies or the five formal steps was the inculcation in us of a feeling of reverence for the profession of teaching. I do not recall speeches on the subject, but, somehow, we were all impressed with the great responsibility the training of the young put upon us. We were certainly starry-eyed, and willing to take any and all assignments that we could get.

It may sound to you as if nothing else played a part in my life but Hunter. That is not true, for my home and my religion are the dominant forces in my life, as in most people's. But — Hunter gave the intellectual stimulus, so that I was able to make full use of my opportunities. Hunter gave me a chance to question, and to get the right answers so that I had few doubts. The security that comes from this certainty of knowledge is a great bulwark in my life.

Yes, Hunter has meant much to me — and still does. In these days of cold war, sputnik, criticism of our educational system, and political uncertainty, it is well for us to turn back in our memories to the Hunter that we knew, moving away from free election of courses, and self-directed curricula. Let us raise our voices in favor of a program in which a schedule providing for a real body of knowledge in a given field will be completed. Our present system was criticized by Dr. Dietler Bronk, President of the National Academy of Science recently — "There is inadequate leadership of American youth into the habit of thinking. There is an urgent need to develop a greater respect for learning within the homes, schools, and local communities." Judge Donlon, in the January issue of the *A.A.U.W. Bulletin*, calls upon women to stress culture and to lead our young people to an apprecia-

tion of it. We, Hunter graduates, should find this an easy assignment.

Let us realize that the education of women should be more than just a copy of the men's program. We women have the responsibility of the bearing and the rearing of children. Every article on juvenile delinquency blames the home — and when one probes into that cause, the lack of a good mother is the one deficiency common to all. In the girls' school in which I had the great privilege of serving as principal for 13 years, we epitomized the situation in Dr. McIver's quotation, "Educate a boy, and you educate a man; educate a girl, and you educate a family." If we are to restore family life to its proper form, we must educate our girls, and that means more than teaching them to type or to cook or to buy wisely. It means imbuing them with their responsibilities as women and inspiring them to make the sacrifices facing these demands. I'd like to add another topic to their curriculum — a prudent choice of mate, and training young people to crush the egotism that threatens happy marriages, as Alexis Carrel describes it. Can this be done under our present system of education? Here again, we women must take the lead.

Finally — and here I should really get up on a soap-box — we need dedicated teachers today more than ever before. The world in which we live almost sneers at dedication, self-sacrifice, and unselfishness. The current questions, "What is in it for me?" or "Why should I?", dominate so many activities, and our pupils in school have never known any other world. The teacher must be much better prepared, know many more techniques, have complete understanding of child psychology, and be more patient and tolerant today. We cannot survive as a democracy unless we train our youth better. We must have teachers with vision, and dedicated to their profession.

As I travel around the high schools of this City, as I look around this room, I am impressed by the continuing contributions to the welfare of New York City youth being made by Hunter graduates. Every time I hear of their successes, I think back with gratitude to my Hunter teachers who took literally the words from Ecclesiasticus, "Consider that I labored not for myself only but for all them that seek learning."

MARY E. MEADE,
Assistant Superintendent

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