

# HOW IT WAS . . .

## Reminiscences of The Depression Years

by Helen Hochfelder Taffel '35

Everything takes on a rosy hue in retrospect and we now view the early thirties with fond nostalgia. As the first class to attend the Bronx buildings in the autumn of 1931, we vividly recall the long trek to college from the Kingsbridge Road station of the IRT (the one to the Bedford Park station was not then in existence) through snow and sleet, with an icy wind blowing from the west over the reservoir. It was often difficult to open the door to Gillet or Davis Hall, and it took some of us a good half-hour to thaw out in class.

Risky, also, was reaching Gillet Hall past the gaping hole, now the site of the administration building, which we euphemistically called our "rock garden." We dashed to class under the watchful and amused glances of the W.P.A. workers leaning on their shovels during their many extended coffee breaks. And we were often lost as we threaded our way cautiously through the underground passages to the gym or the social hall.

The spring semester meant SING with all its intrigue and fun. How proud we '35'ers were to march to the stage in our West Point uniforms and later capture first place in our sophomore year.

Then, after two years of discovery and adjustment in the Bronx, we were shunted down to the old Park Avenue building at 68th Street with its odors of tradition and chemistry labs. But even here were little excitements—an explosion in the lab, the dangerous swaying of the balcony in Chapel.

Life had its rigors, but now as we look back it seems good and the

memories will remain with us as the class of '35 continues to make its contribution to the fields of science, art, literature and education.

by Margaret Herbst '37

We were part of the depression generation. We spent the first semester at a loft building at 32nd Street, three terms in the Bronx buildings, and our junior and senior years at 68th Street.

Some of my more vivid personal memories:

- The rivalry with two of my closest friends to maintain either second or third place in the Classics Department.
- The Latin and Greek plays, in which we willingly took part despite after-hours rehearsals. My toga would never stay on, no matter how securely pinned.
- At the Bronx buildings I learned to skate again—to get from one building to the next. I remember lunches there on the lawn in good weather, either lunch brought from home, or a chocolate graham cracker for a penny and milk for a nickel. We played bridge regularly, something I haven't done since.
- The only employment available was at Macy's for Thursday evening and all day Saturday. My family could have used the extra money, but my father insisted that I concentrate on studies.
- Sororities were popular, but were not for my budget.
- The library fee was 50 cents per term, and books were free.
- One Valentine's Day fire broke out at 68th Street. It was no joke to us. We stood on the corner in shock. Our only chance for a good education was going up in smoke. The fire reached the second locker from mine.
- Our teachers were a great influence on our lives. Devotion to Professor Lawler

made me consider archeology seriously as a profession for a time. When Dr. Riess who taught us Greek retired, we were desolate. And E. Adelaide Hahn—when I read her obituary in the New York Times—I dropped everything to pay my respects to a wonderful woman and a scholar.

- SING was something we looked forward to every year. One of my friends even quoted a line to me recently: "Afraid to dream, afraid to find that Freud's a fraud."

Friends who shared their reminiscences with me recalled:

- The French Department's play productions with elaborate costumes. One hilarious performance was a French version of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."
- Tutoring, the one way to earn money even if it meant traveling to Queens.
- Majors cliquing together.
- Extra-curricular activities after school, Saturdays and Sundays, and loving every minute.
- Chapel attendance and one daring girl standing up and agreeing with the Dean that Hunter prepared a girl well for a career but not to get a man.
- Subways so crowded that often it was impossible to get off at the 68th Street stop so we rode to Grand Central and came back on the uptown side.
- In the Bronx the long, cold walk, no slacks permitted, from the subway station. We wore blouses and skirts, little makeup, and our hair-dos did not warrant the name.
- The inauguration of Dr. Colligan and the impressive academic procession seen by us for the first time.
- Political activity on the campus and even demonstrations, but so unaggressive that little attention was paid.

The 30s were difficult years, but most Hunter students met the challenges of the day and went on to build sturdy futures.