

## **Our 25<sup>th</sup> Reunion – Terry Marotta**

Published in 1995 in the Alumnae Quarterly

When, in the weeks before our 25<sup>th</sup> Reunion, I took out the diary I have kept since 1958 and began to read the volumes pertaining to my Smith years, I immediately thought of what Boston Brahmin Charles Francis Adams wrote in 1912 about his own early journals: “The revelation of myself to myself was positively shocking,” he reported with dismay - as he built a fire and burned every one.

“Why did I come to this school, where everyone’s a Valedictorian?” I whined one bright autumn day Freshman year. “In a bad mood,” I sulked the following March. And, in May of that year, I penned this remark, altogether oblivious to its implication: “Went on a date with Howie Mills, who is childish and self-centered. We get along.”

By the time I closed that volume, I was ready to reach for the matches myself.

And I’ll admit, I was worrying some: What would it be like coming back from my 25<sup>th</sup> reunion with the shade of this young woman beside me? Who would I meet, in meeting others? Who would I bring, in bringing myself? I confessed to a certain reticence, and, imagining that others felt the same way, I did some checking. Sure enough, many of my housemates said they would attend Reunion only if they could get commitments from others and thus surround themselves with friends, since the majority had not been back since leaving in June of ‘70.

I myself started coming back in 1980 for our 10<sup>th</sup>, which I had attended together with my funny, strong, single-parent mom who, as a member of the class of 1930, was coming back for her 50<sup>th</sup>. It was the first reunion for us both.

On Ivy Day, we wore our class ribbons - red in each case - and marched in our first parade, and I was struck by the look in her eyes that morning as she described the meaningful evening she had just spent with women first met in 1926 and not seen again until that weekend.

It was almost on the strength of that look alone that I came to my 15<sup>th</sup>, and purposely sat with people I had never met before; came to my 20<sup>th</sup>, my jaunty mom now gone, and served on a panel where classmates rose and spoke about their lives. I talked about the bleak territory I was just then exploring as an ‘orphan’. Others spoke of careers and children; of the strange transforming grace flowing from an unexpected disability; of the need to feed the inner fire.

I knew that, like both of those reunions, this one would be special.

As always, women of all ages came to it and here were courage and sass, compassion - and mirth. ("Same damn china!" someone cried, picking up a familiar blue-flowered plate.) Here too were the same lilac blossoms swooning fragrantly, here the same broad leaves of the chestnut, each cradling a fat white candle of bloom.

Friday night at the Class Dinner, I followed my own rule and sat with people I did not know in the Smith years. Later, I brushed my teeth at a row of sinks with six other women and curled up in my single room and thought, *I am home.*

The next morning, I put on my red ribbon - not the new one handed out at Reunion headquarters but my mother's old one carefully rolled and labeled and saved all this time, and went, just before the parade began, to stand for a few minutes in tribute alongside the members of the class of 1930.

It's a powerful thing, passing between the rows of Ivy-draped Juniors in their long corsage-colored hues; and then between the Seniors themselves in their whites, looking much as we had looked in our own rebellious era: here a virtual Gone-With-the-Wind-style gown, there a simple shift, here a haltered number exposing a smooth expanse of muscled back.

Assembled 3,000 strong in the Quad, we sang the Alma Mater and all three verses of "*Gaudeamus Igitur.*" We cheered like crazy for the graduating Seniors, who in turn cheered like crazy for us. We looked at them and saw fresh graduates, minds honed sharp and spirits high. They looked at us and saw... the Alumnae, who one speaker told us, "individual by individual, constitute the single strongest factor in influencing young women to come to Smith in the first place." Saying goodbye to us all, President Dunn reminded us that farewell was not forever.

We alumnae, at least, knew that to be so.

That afternoon, I attended a workshop on health issues and heard class members, many healthcare providers and all healthcare consumers, talk together candidly and thoughtfully. I spoke of having learned what potent enemies denial and stress are to health. Another observed that healing takes place in the body, the mind, the emotions, and the spirit. And one, an Ob-Gyn, said she thanked God she had a Smith education to help her understand things like the hard fact that most medical research is done by people intimately involved with the drug companies. They will do their best, she said, to try to convince this outsized Baby Boom generation of ours that Menopause is a pressing health care issue. "Menopause is not a pressing healthcare issue," she told us. "What is? Teen pregnancy. Drugs. The inadequate nurturing of our new mothers." It was our responsibility to remember this.

Later, after a walk to Lamont bridge and the Lyman Plant House and drinks at Wiggins Tavern, I thought of something this year's Commencement speaker and graduate of the class of '56 wrote in her book *Doing 60*. There, its author Gloria Steinem talked about how, in this callow age-denying culture, many women attempting to envision the decades beyond midlife can picture "only a blank screen, or one on which they project fear of disease and dependency."

This isn't so for the women who attend a Smith Reunion. "Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?" the young revelers in "Gaudeamus Igitur" first asked in song nearly a thousand years ago, even as these young women collecting their diplomas that day might have wondered the same: "Where are they who, before us, have gone out into the world?"

"We are all around you," we might have answered them. You are our younger sisters, even as we are sisters to others who went before us, and those sisters to others yet, each of whom has, in her time here, felt strength, and joy, and powers of discernment rise within her. What more fortifying sight on any life journey than to look up and find oneself thus accompanied?