

Traditional Meredith students return as reentry

By Barbara Watts

To look at Betty Garrison, Mary Esther Martin and Suzan Tripp, you would be hard pressed to know what special characteristic they share. True, they are all reentry students at Meredith; two will graduate in May of '96 and one in December '96. While their majors are different and their personal goals unique, their reason for being at Meredith is the same... unfinished business. All of these women attended Meredith as traditional students. Interviewing these three was like being at a comedy club. Their recollections of times gone by and of current campus life were insightful and delightful.

You may have your own thoughts as to which department is the toughest at Meredith, but each of these students said the English Department *was and is* the most demanding. In fact, the name of Dr. Ione Kemp Knight was mentioned by several. Though Dr. Knight is retired, she continues to teach in the Meredith enrichment program for those who learn for pleasure. These former students in the English department are quick to point out that pleasure had little to do with their experiences. Yet while some things remain the same, others have slowly changed. Rules and regulations have come and gone - some have remained. As these students reminisced about days gone by, their voices became excited, their eyes sparkled, and laughter was always just a breath away. Hearing their stories gives a clue as to why they returned to Meredith.

Mary Esther Martin originally attended Meredith in the late '60's. Her reason for leaving Meredith at the end of her sophomore year was... MARRIAGE to a State man! According to Martin, her decision was not unlike that of many others at that time; finding Mr. Right was a common goal! None of her fellow students even tried to talk her out of leaving. She still feels that her decision to leave was the right one at the time. She now has three grown children and memories of a wonderful marriage. Returning to school was always at the back of her mind, and she started taking classes four years ago at a local community



Mary Esther Martin

Photo by Carolyn Chandley

college after her husband died.

During her traditional days at Meredith, Martin lived on 2nd String. At that time, chapel attendance was required. How did she feel about this? "I resented having to go to chapel so I would sit in the balcony and do homework." Convocations were also required; only 2 cuts were allowed. She remembers signing in and out for dates. Curfew was 11 pm on weeknights, 12 pm on Friday, and 1 AM on Saturday night. If students were 15 minutes late, they went to Johnson Hall to check in. As Martin puts it, "You got the third degree if you were late!" Men were required to check in at Johnson Hall; someone there would call up on one of the two phones on the hall to announce their arrivals. The real killer at the time was the drinking rule. No one could drink within 35 miles of campus, which effectively excluded State, Duke and Carolina. No dances were sponsored by Meredith because dancing was considered sinful.

Since pants could not be worn on campus, the students would roll up their pajama legs, throw on a raincoat, and barely make it to 8 am classes! Saturday classes were a reality so students would "dress up" for football games and leave right after class. Church attendance was required, and many students went to

First Presbyterian to hear Dr. Edwards. Only seniors had cars on campus. Students ate family style in the cafeteria; and as Martin puts it, "No one ever likes cafeteria food." The president of Meredith was Bruce Heilman; and there was one new building on the campus, Carlyle Campbell Library. Cate Center did not exist.

Martin has fond memories of Fraternity Row which was newly built at the time. She dated at Sigma Nu, Lambda Chi, and PiKA. Her favorite at Carolina was Sigma Nu. Formal dances were held, and students wore "formals." Other than Fraternity Row, students hung out at the Villa Capri in Ridgewood Shopping Center. Another favorite was the Frog and Nightgown, a club located close to Dixie Trail. Historically significant events were happening at the time: students participated in a Viet Nam war protest on campus; when Martin Luther King was assassinated, the campus was closed (no one could leave). Martin particularly remembers this because she was supposed to go to a formal pledge dance at Chapel Hill!

Though Martin was quite active in civic life, she was ready to make some changes. "I always felt that something was missing." Having a degree meant being taken seriously. The knowledge she has acquired at Meredith validates her as a person and gives her necessary credentials. Though she still does not know how she will use her degree in political science, the personal satisfaction has been worth the effort.



Betty Garrison



Suzan Tripp

Has she felt like a stranger on campus? Martin admits that it was hard for the first 3 weeks, but after that she felt accepted. Her face lights up when she tells about the way a traditional student introduced her to a friend, "This is that cool reentry student I told you about." Because of the support she has received, Meredith has been a good place to be - both times!

Betty Garrison is a blue-eyed, blond who first came to Meredith in the late 70's. She is now an English major with a business minor, and she has been quite busy since her return. When asked why she left, she scoffed, "Oh, I was in love with a home town boy and couldn't stand not seeing him!" She also admits that she needed to "grow up."

It took almost 20 years for Garrison to come back. She had been working with VEPCo in Richmond for 9 years when she was offered a health insurance/financial package that would enable her to return to school.

When Garrison lived on campus, she resided in Faircloth and Stringfield. The drinking rule had changed: no alcohol was allowed on campus. She fondly remembers leisure time spent at Edwards Grocery on Hillsborough Street, but would not elaborate other than to say, "A good time was had by all!?" Other hangouts included

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