

**PEMBROKE STATE UNIVERSITY**

By  
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Director of  
Public Information



**THIS SENIOR CITIZENS WILL TURN 66 YEARS OLD AND RECEIVE HER COLLEGE DEGREE SAME DAY**

Come next May 11, and Helen Caswell Skeens, a resident of Lumberton, will celebrate her 66th birthday and on the same day receive her bachelor's degree at PSU with a double major in psychology and political science.

She then plans to enter law school, fully realizing that by the time she gets her law degree, she will be 69 years old.

"I feel I'll be able to practice law actively for at least 15 years," Mrs. Skeens, full of vim and vigor, says. "My mother is 88 and still going strong. The longevity in my family is good."

For 28 years, the feisty Mrs. Skeens was a civilian serving with the military with assignments in such places as Germany and Korea. When she retired in '85, she was a GS-14, which she said was equivalent to a full colonel.

As a logistics management specialist, Mrs. Skeens was director of the defense Inventory Management Course at the Army Logistics College in Ft. Lee, Va., when she retired.

In her positions with the military, Mrs. Skeens has had 83 people under her and 28 nationalities. She has had to take members of the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force and "weld them together," she says, along with America's international allies in order to teach her courses.

In 1971-72, Mrs. Skeens was the first woman, she said, to be selected on an Army Logistics and Instruction Team to go to Korea. "I think I paved the way for women in the military," she said.

In Korea, she was presented a citation signed by four generals. "They soon forgot I was a female," smiled the native of Belleville, Ill.

She achieved all of this without ever earning a college degree and also while rearing four children. She and her husband were divorced in '63 when she was 38 years old and with children ages 18, 17, 11 and 6.

Her only college work came in 1943-44 when she spent one semester each attending Washington University at St. Louis, Mo., and the University of Illinois.

The remainder of her schooling she received in the service, taking advantage of the opportunities to attend as many schools as possible. She demonstrated her academic skills by repeatedly passing the College Entrance Examination.

"During those days, there was discrimination against women in the military, and the only job I could get was one of clerk typist. This was despite the fact that 87 1/2 percent of those taking the examinations failed it and only 10 percent of the ones passing it were hired--and they were men," she said.

In August '67, this discrimination ended because of an executive order, and in two months, Mrs. Skeens was "called for a job as an intern and went to school in the logistics area."

Her positions have included: 1967-71-- supply management specialist, Aviation Systems Command, St. Louis, Mo.; 1971-72--logistics management specialist, Army Logistics and Instruction Team, Korea; 1972-75--supply management specialist, Aviation Systems Command, St. Louis, Mo.; 1975-79--logistics officer, 5th Signal Command, Worms, Germany; 1979-81--accountable officer, Bad Wertenberg Area, VII Corps, Germany; 1981-82--project manager, Trooper Support Command, St. Louis, Mo.; and 1982-85--director, Defense Inventory Management Course, Army Logistics College, Ft. Lee, Va.

Why in these retirement years, which so many dreams about when they are young, does Mrs. Skeens want to earn a degree and go to law school?



Helen Skeens

"In the three years I was retired from 1985-88, I was bored," she says frankly. "My mind has always been active. I knew I couldn't continue for the rest of my life the way I had spent those three years."

And so, having moved to Lumberton where three of her children were living at the time (the oldest child, Michael, died in a drowning accident at the age of 38), Mrs. Skeens decided to enter psu. She has since made the Dean's List for two semesters. "I have enjoyed going to school with the young people, I think I'm the oldest person on the campus," said Mrs. Skeens, who admitted she is "sometimes exhausted" after heavy class loads on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Sable Purvis, 37, is the only one of her children still living in Lumberton, Rebecca Sue Seib-Traup, 44, is an anthropologist who worked in this area with the Lumbee Indians assisting with tribal enrollment before moving to Maryland. David Skeens, 33, is employed in steel work in Hickory.

Of the deceased Michael Skeens, Mrs. Skeens recalled that as a satellite communications expert, he sang to Sally Ride, the first woman astronaut in space, when she took her space ride in June of '83. "He sang 'Good Night, Sally' to her over the communications system," said Mrs. Skeens.

As a senior citizen, Mrs. Skeens is this year taking advantage of the UNC system's tuition waiver for persons at least 65 years old. "All I'm having to pay for are my books and fees," she smiled.

In law school, she wants to pursue the fields of Discrimination Law and Family Law. "The most discriminated-against people in the U.S. are the poor--economic ally, legally, socially, etc. Most poor people can't afford \$5 for a lawyer. So they go to court and take their knocks and get a record," she says. "I've had a good life and feel I owe something to society."

Mrs. Skeens considers her age an asset--not a detriment-- as she pursues further knowledge. "In adult development, some shut down in their 20s, some shut down in their 30s and 40s. Some are not psychologically mature until they reach 45 or 55. At that stage, psychologically you are just learning to do metacognitive thinking--that is, taking complex problems together and coming up with solutions. The older you become, the easier metacognitive thinking becomes and the better you are at resolving your personal problems--to make your life richer and therefore enriching the lives of other people along the way."

Of her own life, which has been spent so much in the learning process, Mrs. Skeens concluded with a smile: "I think I'll die with my shoes on in the classroom."

**Fire Dept. visits Piney Grove**

In observance of Fire Prevention Week, the Saddletree Fire Department did a demonstration from their fire truck on Wednesday, October 10, 1990 for students at Piney Grove Elementary School.

The firemen explained the use of each tool carried by the fire truck. They also gave advice on how to escape a home fire and how to check for fire hazards. Students were given helpful literature on "Fire Prevention." At the end of this presentation the Saddletree Firemen were called from their truck to an actual fire in the community. They left Piney Grove with flashing red lights.



**Scholarships Available**

High School students who are interested in applying for \$1,000 college scholarships should request applications by December 14, 1990 from Educational Communications Scholarship Foundation, 721 N. McKinley Road, P.O. Box 5002, Lake Forest, IL 60045-5002. To receive an application, students should send a note stating their name, address, city, state, zip code, approximate gradepoint average and year of graduation. All requests for applications will be fulfilled on or about January 15, 1991. Seventy-five winners will be selected on the basis of academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities and need for financial aid.

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