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# Lafayette's First-Class Women

*Fifteen years after their graduation, members of the first coed class reflect on the College's influence on their lives*

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“Lafayette will never be the same. After a year's study, the board of trustees decided last spring that it was time to reverse more than 135 years of tradition by letting the girls in.”

That's how the October 1969 edition of the *Lafayette Alumnus News* announced the College's plans for coeducation. It was a move that eventually was accepted by all college constituencies, but not without much soul-searching and internal squabbles.

According to *The Biography of a College* by Archivist and Professor Emeritus Albert W. Gendebien, coeducation first became an issue in May 1967 when the faculty instructed the president to appoint a special committee to investigate the possibility of admitting females to degree programs. That committee recommended to the faculty in March 1968 that women be admitted. The faculty approved the recommendation by voice vote.

Thereafter followed a series of meetings with and questionnaires to the College's constituencies, and the establishment of a special committee on coeducation. The committee recommended to the Board of Trustees that women be admitted, and the Board—rejecting an alternate proposal to become a “coordinate college” with nearby Cedar Crest College for women—voted to do so at its September 1969 meeting. One year later, “the girls” matriculated at Lafayette.

The decision had many ramifications for the College:

what would happen to the fraternity system; how would women be accommodated in intercollegiate athletic programs; how would the traditionally male-dominated, technical majors like engineering be affected; where would the girls live; how would an increase in number of students with no corresponding increase in campus facilities and number of faculty affect the College's social and academic environment.

And, how would the girls fit in?

That's the question that was posed to selected members of Lafayette's first coeducational class, the Class of 1974. They were asked to reflect back on their years at the College, to describe what it was like to be one of the first, how they were treated by their male counterparts, the faculty and administration, and how they survived being, ultimately, strangers in a strange land. And, they were asked to comment on how their Lafayette experience—social, extracurricular, and academic—has influenced them in their lives today. In other words, was being one of Lafayette's first women worth it?

On the following pages, seven Lafayette women answer those aforementioned questions, and address their relationship with the College today. In many respects, they really have come a long way from their first walk across the Quad.

*The editor thanks Traci McGrail '90 and Rebecca Schultheis '90 for their research assistance for this story.*

I remember walking across the Quad at dusk and having men I'd never seen before calling me by name. With only 90 some female faces in the *Freshman Directory*, it was pretty easy to be recognized. Classes were called to order with the word "gentlemen." I don't think I realized how odd the whole situation was until a "History of Rome" class when I discovered I was the only woman in the classroom. I never felt any hostility or animosity directed towards me for invading the male sanctum that was Lafayette, but I did at times experience a sense of alienation.

The legacy with which my four years at Lafayette left me is an odd one. Lafayette's ratio forced me to be aware of myself as a member of a minority, a perception which would not have occurred in another environment. Being the only woman in a classroom of men, while novel at first, quickly became lonely. Having so many male professors left me with few role models. I'm convinced to this day the sole reason I ended up as an anthropology major was because my only female professor freshman year taught this subject. She was a very "liberated" woman whom I much admired.

How I ended up in a career in nursing has some indirect connection with my Lafayette education. I now work on a medical floor in a hospital and at a women's health center. I believe I would not have

**Jacqueline Krieger Doyle is a registered nurse and mother of two daughters.**



been as aware of the need for improved women's health care if I had not been so conscious of my own feminine identity during my college career. The fact that my profession is a "traditional woman's occupation" does not bother me. If anything, my years at Lafayette have taught me to take great pride in the strength, courage, and wisdom women have. And, it's ironic that my profession is the mirror image of my experience at Lafayette. A few men are now entering the field of nursing. I truly empathize with them, having gone through such a similar experience myself.

Being one of the first women admitted to Lafayette came with it a responsibility. We were breaking

every new ground and setting up new parameters for the institution. In retrospect, I believe the personal growth I experienced at Lafayette was far more valuable to me than what I learned academically. I am grateful for the four years and the direction my life took because of the experience. □

*Jacqueline Krieger Doyle graduated with a degree in Psychology, and was a member of the Ecology and History Clubs. She is a registered nurse for Planned Parenthood at the Hunterdon County Medical Center. She and her husband, John, are parents of two daughters, 14-year-old Molly and 7-year-old Sarah.*

**In February 1969, about 750 Lafayette men and 30 women from nearby Cedar Crest and Centenary Colleges rallied to support coeducation. Just over a year and a half later, members of Lafayette's first coed class arrived on campus.**



**P**eople in New Frosh, Soles Hall, and some over on Cattell Street always knew when the weekend was near. I would be rapping on doors across the campus to borrow records for my Friday afternoon radio show on WJRH-FM. I learned a lot about radio at Lafayette, not from reading or attending lectures, but from listening and experimenting and having friends with very good ears.

Today I host a classical program at a public radio station and find that some of the questions we were asking instinctively at Lafayette are being raised directly at this time throughout the public radio system. In order to build a base large enough to allow public stations to survive financially, they are being forced to ask: what is radio and what does it do well?

The answers I have formulated seem rooted in my experience of the power of radio as learned in the basement of Hogg Hall. I remember playing some music by Bessie Smith one afternoon and talking a bit about her life and death. I simply could not have anticipated the response — on the phone, at Pops' shop, and in the halls of Pardee. All kinds of people were excited by what they heard, and wanted to know more and listen further. It was a revelation for me.

Depending upon where your room was on campus, you could always pull in WNEW-FM from New York or WMMR-FM from Philadelphia, so announcers at WJRH were challenged to play what people wanted, but also to surprise and delight them. The music mix was all-important, and, 19 years later, I still am using principles I learned at Lafayette in planning my musical shows. There were considerations of texture and instrumentation, balance of tempos and rhythms. We wanted to juxtapose pieces in such a way that we could hear each in a different light and notice something that we had not heard before.

And there was no better discipline for us as radio announcers than knowing we would have to face our listeners as soon as we queued up at the cafeteria or walked into class on



Erika Funke is a radio producer at WVIA-FM in Pittston, PA.

Monday. You never forgot that people who felt a personal connection with you and the music you chose were listening very carefully out there. It was through those early experiences at Lafayette that I became convinced that such links with listeners are significant, and they have spurred me to try to learn more about ways to use the medium creatively and not to lose touch with the vitality of those free-wheeling days at WJRH-FM. □

*Erika Funke, who entered Lafayette as an International Affairs major and switched to English her sophomore year, is a radio producer for WVIA-FM in Pittston, PA. She transferred to the University of Chicago and finished her course work there in 1974.*

**A**s a freshman, I intended to pursue a B.S. in Mathematics. I graduated in spring 1974 with an A.B. in Psychology, a teaching certificate, and a sense of purpose. My Lafayette experience had inspired me to study for a master's degree in education with emphasis on working with emotionally disturbed children.

I have a clear recollection of one Lafayette experience which influenced my career choice. One day one of my psychology classes visited a school for emotionally disturbed children. I recall seeing a cute little girl standing at an easel painting a very realistic picture of a dog. But for the exceptional realism of her work, she appeared to be an average first-



Nancy McKittrick Stark and (from left) Douglas, Michael, Emily, and Brian.

grader. Then her teacher told us that since the death of the girl's pet, the only picture that she could produce was the remarkable rendering of this dog.

That experience moved me to enroll in the education semester at Lafayette. I was convinced that I *could* make a difference to some emotionally disturbed child.

After graduate school I worked with emotionally disturbed adolescents in a partial hospitalization program, and later in a residential treatment facility. In all, I spent about four years teaching and working with these special children. In that time there were some real positive experiences, but they were few and far between. In the end, I left this field to raise a family. I have no thought of returning to a teaching career.

Overall, my college experience was critical in many ways. It was a time of growing up, learning to make decisions, and living independently. However, I have no doubt that one singular experience influenced me to pursue a particular career—a career I hardly could have recognized when I enrolled at Lafayette. □

*Nancy McKittrick Stark, the daughter of Alexander J. McKittrick '50, is a watercolor artist in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She and her husband, Douglas '74, are parents of Brian, 9; Emily, 7; and Michael, 6.*

Being a member of Lafayette's first co-ed class prepared me for the world of business. In entering the manufacturing world, there were no women managers before I started. Yet I was somewhat comfortable with that type of situation, speaking up, and coping with the innuendo of this world.

Because of the small size of the College, I had opportunities for leadership and involvement. I became involved with the Alumni Association in its long-range planning process through Director of Alumni Affairs Bill Greenip. Through this early work with the Association, I learned about the opportunities for alumni to stay involved with the College—and this has led to various participation and leadership roles as a volunteer, including trusteeship.

The difference I note today between women in 1974 and 1989 is that women are more readily accepted in leadership positions than in my early days at Lafayette. I was ill at ease as the first woman running for vice president of Student Government in a campus of 1600 men and 200 women. As I look back, I was never as comfortable with my peer group as I was with faculty and administration. It seemed they valued breaking the barrier more than the students.

There is special recognition afforded to being a member of La-

fayette's first coed class. My class, 1974, is always significant in the College's history—and that distinction makes seeing friends and re-unioning much more special.

Some of my professors, Mickey Glantz and Donald Borak in particular, had a great influence on me in their seminars because of their caring and interest in getting students to think and not just to regurgitate answers. Much of my work today involves trying to get traditional organizations to think and behave differently by changing what the work is. Much of my time is spent in a seminar form, creating the possibility to think differently. Oftentimes, I think back on how my professors at Lafayette, and other institutions, brought me to understanding, and this enables me to do better. □

*A member of the Board of Trustees and a past president of the Maroon Club, Deidre Bradbury Keenan graduated with degrees in Philosophy and Government. At Lafayette she was a resident adviser, a student member of several trustee committees, and editor in chief of the literary magazine. The 1983 recipient of the Clifton Mayfield '09 Outstanding Young Alumni Award, she is a public affairs manager for Procter and Gamble.*

Deidre Bradbury Keenan is a public affairs manager for Procter & Gamble.



I came to Lafayette having been rejected by my first choice school. Coming from an all-female high school, I didn't immediately perceive that there would be a "down-side" to being in a minority. The fact that Lafayette was just going co-ed didn't have a major impact on my decision to attend. I was asked to apply, liked the looks of the campus, and was aware of its solid academic reputation.

Once enrolled, I found that being a big fish in the small pond (of women) was an advantage. I made the varsity basketball team, earned a slot on the College radio station schedule, and became a resident adviser, all of which might not have happened if there had been more competition.

Conversely, I did not find the small group of women a cohesive one: the friendships made at Lafayette have for the most part not survived the test of time. I have more and closer links with my high school classmates, and would be more inclined to make an effort to attend a high school reunion than a college one.

Although I enjoyed my time at Lafayette, I regret to say I have been back only once in 15 years, and it was not for a specific college event. So, my views on the status of women now are formed by the Lafayette publications I read, rather than from first-hand experience. I regretted to learn, though, of the prevalence of sororities at Lafayette. It seems to me that such a small school shouldn't need to encourage exclusive social groups. Sororities, in my view, work better to personalize a large campus where sheer numbers of students inhibit the sort of interaction that should occur naturally at Lafayette. □

*Jean Christoff Nietzsche is a Foreign Service Officer stationed in London. She graduated with degrees in International Affairs and French, and was a member of the International Relations Society, the Long-Range Planning Committee, and the Martial Arts Club. She and her husband, Ronald, are parents of three-year-old Matthew and one-year-old Daniel.*



Jean Christoff Nietzsche and one-year-old son, Daniel.

I came to Lafayette a very immature and inexperienced young person. Even then, as timid and unfocused as I was, I was following a drive: to do things someone else hasn't done; to discover something; to go somewhere uncommon, fresh, and uncluttered. It is an instinct that I followed, like a baby bird clumsily getting herself out of the nest even though it is difficult and she doesn't really know why she is doing it and she must be a little scared.

That's what brought me to Lafayette. I wanted to be challenged. I wanted an education with substance. I didn't want courses full of air. And the idea of being in the first class of women was very appealing to me. It was different.

But I had no idea what college could do for me. I had no idea of what I wanted to be. I remember always yearning for a baby of my own to nurse and cuddle. But I did not like the idea of babysitting children, forever doing housework, growing older, and being an unhappy middle-aged woman whose work is done. That prospect looked dreary. It wasn't enough.

My education at Lafayette influenced me in the sense that some of the books I read changed me. I learned how to read critically, to recognize subtle braces. Although I now sometimes feel unappreciated, over-

worked, and exhausted, like no one sees that there is an intelligent, communicative person in here, I don't feel lost to the world. I feel isolated but I know it is temporary. Without my education, I might feel a lot more desperate.

I am following a traditional woman's career not because I was confined or led here. It is that little, silent, rebellious, adventurous, curious, creative spirit that is pushing more out of its hiding — thanks to my husband's energy and patience, my parents' love and good sense, and my education — that makes me do this and do it the only way I believe is right.

But as I became the mother of one, then two, then three children, it came as a revelation to me that I actually could not be a mother and be whatever else I dreamed of. I finally accepted that I couldn't do both unless I give up the care of my children, and that I refuse to do. I'm proud to do what women have always done, what female animals of all species do.

Yet I usually react negatively when people question why I chose motherhood as my career. They are labeling me as someone who goes along with what is expected, is afraid to be different, is not creative or imaginative. Of course that makes me angry. I do what I think is right, traditional or non-traditional. I am stubbornly following my own beliefs against the very strong current of fashion: stay-at-home mothers are pretty much alone now. I am rebelling against that.

I do a lot of things women don't usually do. I had my babies my own way, one at home, delivered by a midwife who respected birth and the mother/child bond. I nursed my children until they weaned themselves. I take my children places and do things with them. I take care of them myself because I refuse to relinquish my rights as a parent to someone else. That belief goes way beyond my own ambitions and dreams.

I am involved now in starting a small company. I work at home and I take my children with me on business outings if I have to. I am lucky enough to have a partner who also



The Cunningham family (left to right) Max, Stephen '73, Karen, Jake, and Tobey on an outing in the Sierras.

feels that there is no reason children can't be around. My dream for this enterprise is that it will evolve into a business that lets women work, create, have financial independence, and still be with or near their children. □

*Karen Gorman Cunningham and her husband, Stephen '73, are parents of two sons, Max and Jake, and a daughter, Tobey. She majored in English and took quite a few French courses at Lafayette, but left in 1973 to marry and complete her coursework at the University of San Francisco. She has not seen Lafayette since.*

**I** remember so vividly the September morning in 1970 when my classmates and I made history as the first "ladies" to enroll at Lafayette. As my parents and I drove onto College Hill and pulled up in the ever-so-long line to unload the car, you could instantly see the change "we girls" would make. The most obvious difference was the "stuff." Young men's parents pulled up, unloaded two suitcases, and off they went. For me and my soon-to-be girlfriends,

unpacking was a long, tedious process—unloading kitchenware, curtains, matching bedspreads, etc. The fraternity houses were decorated with welcome banners, eager upperclassmen literally hung out of windows asking for names, the *Freshman Directory* was the most thumbed through document since the first printing of the Bible! And it was fun!



Ann Huntington Barnett works for IBM in Paris.

The men welcomed us, so, socially at least, the transition was easy. As time went on, however, the "maleness" did show. There really was no well-orchestrated sports program, although it developed over the four years. The course selection was, for a math major like me, terrific; but many of my friends who were inter-

ested in liberal arts found it necessary to transfer to other schools that had broader selections of courses in the humanities. The food was to be judged on quantity: all you can eat (men), all you could stand (women).

Was it weird? Yes, it was strange. I think the ratio of men to women my first year was more than 10 to 1. In many of my classes, there would be only one or two other women.

Would I do it again? In a minute! My education was terrific. In fact, in 1978 a series of events prompted me to return to graduate school. I found that several of my classes at Wharton were just "re-runs" of classes I had taken at Lafayette. In addition, my best friends on earth are those I met at Lafayette. Many of us married Lafayette men and remain, 15 years later, loyal (if negligent) alumni. □

*Ann Huntington Barnett is manager of product pricing for IBM in Paris. At Lafayette, she was a Dana Scholar, math major, class fund manager, tutor for underprivileged children, and "other than that, enjoyed herself." She earned her M.B.A. from the Wharton School in 1980.*