

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Family memories of Galesburg and Knox College

by Caroline Andrews Porter

My grandparents came to Galesburg in 1897, just after they were married. My grandfather, Herbert E. Griffith, had just been hired to organize the first Chemistry department at Knox College, and according to the 1912 "Gale" was chosen over 100 other applicants. It was unusual, because his background was as a high school teacher, but at one of the best high schools in the State, Oak Park High. My grandmother, Caroline Porter Adams, taught Latin there, and that's where they met.

My mother, Alice Griffith, was born in Galesburg in 1908. She lived in a little house on North Cherry St., which during her childhood was the only house for miles around. We used to call it "the little brown house." My mother attended Silas Willard school and graduated from Galesburg High School. She remembers she used to love to go with her father to the laboratory on Saturdays, where she met one of grandfather's assistants, Ira Neifert.

After nearly a quarter of a century at Knox and when my mother was 12 years old, my grandfather died an untimely death in 1920, after falling down a ladder while picking cherries. He died after back surgery.

He had red hair and a mustache and thought it was important for Knox people to get out into the community. He often ate lunch at the Galesburg Club, an elegant place across from the Presbyterian Church, where there is now a vacant lot. Grandfather was too old to get into World War I so he gave speeches about buying bonds and patriotism at the Orpheum Theater. He taught Sunday school to Knox students.

My grandfather was not only a beloved professor, but was an expert administrator who took responsibility on more than one occasion during periods of emergency and strife at the college. He succeeded Professor Churchill as head of the Knox Academy and thoroughly reorganized the curriculum and initiated plans for keeping Knox College in touch with elementary schools of the State. He was involved in the administration of the athletic program. He was an advisor to the Illinois Superintendent of Public Instruction and the first professor to ever be elected president of the Illinois Federation of Colleges. He served as acting dean and registrar of the College.

In those days there were no benefits, such as Social Security or pensions, but Knox College must have taken care of my widowed grandmother and her three children. My mother doesn't remember ever thinking they were poor. She was able to attend Knox tuition free and lived at home. My grandmother worked in the Knox College library until she was 70 years old and then moved to Kewanee to live with us for seventeen years.

It was at Knox College that mother met my father, Harper Andrews. He was editor of the "Student" newspaper and appointed her to be assistant editor. They graduated in 1929, were married in 1932, and settled in my father's hometown of Kewanee. They have been married for nearly 69 years.

So, I grew up in Kewanee, but heard a lot of discussion about Galesburg and Knox



College and we visited Galesburg often. We visited Dean and Jean Trevor and their son Lee. All three are deceased. Trevor was athletic director at Knox for years and Trevor field is named for him. We also visited Ira and Martha Neifert. Ira Neifert was a protégé of my grandfather and he, too, became a Chemistry professor at Knox. They had no children and were complete opposites. I remember him as a stern, quiet man and she had the prettiest round, jolly face with pure white hair. She was always smiling and talkative. Mrs. Neifert died the spring before I arrived at Knox in 1954 and the professor died a year or so later.

We also visited Rebecca Felt Nash, one of my mother's best friends. Growing up, I attended many Knox College reunions. I remember hearing Jim Powell, of Galesburg, sing at some of these gatherings, and how enthralled I was with his good voice and handsome looks!

When I arrived at Knox in 1954 I discovered a number of professors knew my parents or my grandmother, such as Professor Alfred Newcombe, History; Arthur Walton, Biology; Proctor Sherwin and Elizabeth Wilson, English; Ira Neifert, Chemistry; Charles Adamec, Classics; Lilly Lindahl, German.

I lived in Whiting Hall for three years. My junior year I lived in one of the "outhouses," which were homes on Tompkins street transformed into girls dorms. That year my roommate was Louise Bost Wolf, of Knoxville. When I was at Knox, the girls had "hours" but the boys had none. As freshmen, we had to be in the dorm by 9 pm on week nights and 11 on week-ends, with one 10 o'clock a month. Later we could stay out until 10 pm. during the week, but we had to sign out and sign in and we were watched like hawks.

I am amused at the thought that I might live again in Whiting Hall, which is now housing for the elderly.

(Next week: Caroline finds it hard to live up to her family predecessors).

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Family memories of Galesburg and Knox College

by Caroline Andrews Porter
part II

Oops, I left out one important Knox professor, Hermann Muelder, who knew three generations of my family. He was a quiet man, who looked at me with a twinkle in his eye. It was clear to both of us that I was not the serious student my family reputation had promised.

Whiting Hall was still the only women's dormitory at Knox while I was there in the late 1950s, aside from the "out houses", which were private homes on Tompkins Street converted to women's quarters. The Whiting Hall basement contained the dining room and a "smoker" room. All the women students ate every meal but Sunday nights in the dining room, served by waitresses, with the Dean of Women and other dignitaries seated at a head table. Like every institution of higher learning, we had our share of "mystery meat."

I've been hooked on pizza since the opening of the Pizza House then and Paulings restaurant on Simmons St. started to serve pizza. A Knox student, Art Carlson, became an expert pizza cook and cooked for Paulings. I still get a little sick thinking about some of my so-called friends who bet that I couldn't eat a large pizza by myself. Of course I had to do it.

Just because Knox women had "hours" in the 1950's doesn't mean I didn't sneak out a couple of times. It was easier at the "out houses." We would sign out, wander in and sign in, then turn right around and walk back out. I can remember spending one evening at the glorious home of Sarah and Dick Koons at the "shacks", the former Army barracks and Knox quarters for married students. A friend and I once crawled out of a window of the room under the elevator in Whiting Hall, while our trusty security man looked the other way.

Two couples went to the Three Pigs in East Galesburg, an all-night dive. When we got back to the dorm about two in the morning, the elevator room door was

locked. Fortunately, my roommate was waiting for us on the other side of the door and she suggested we get a ladder from the tool shed behind Whiting Hall, put it up to the flat roof outside the library window and she would open the window. I'll never forget our hysterics as we slammed that ladder up against the wall while Nina waited for us at that huge open window. How we ever got away with our escapade I'll never know. We left the ladder propped up against the building.

My freshman year Boone's Alley was still booming, but I didn't get to "Ollies on the Alley" like some of my friends. It wasn't that I was such a prude, it's just that I had lived away from home before, including the entire summer before I got to school, so drinking and partying weren't much of a novelty. Before women achieved "equality" we were able to drink at the age of 18 and the men had to wait until they were 21. That's because we were supposed to be so much more mature than those wild and crazy guys.

In the spring and fall of 1954 there were two horrible automobile accidents involving Knox men and alcohol. One of the men killed was Burke Elliot, from my hometown of Kewanee. He was a brilliant student. After these tragic incidents, serving minors in Galesburg became a serious issue and cars were banned from Knox. The only students who could have cars were "townies," and Seniors in their spring semester. In those days nobody demonstrated about much of anything but there were demonstrations and speeches by students about the car ban. Some of the hard core partiers transferred to other schools. The rest of us just stayed and walked, and walked and walked. Actually, nothing in Galesburg was so far away from campus we couldn't get there on foot, although Harbor Lights and Club 19 were way, way out in the country, (now a car wash and Sirloin Stockade, respectively.) Our thrill of the year was getting out to Lake Storey on "flunk day."

During my sophomore year I started to date John Goltermann, to whom I was later married for 17 years and is the father of my three children. I mention this because aside from summer jobs, he worked his way through Knox by doing janitorial work at the college and working at the Hotel Custer. His boss was the famous Bernie Schimmel. Those were the great days at the hotel when the coffee shop, the Homestead Room and Three Crown Room were the places to be. Since he worked at the hotel, we could drink free beer at the Three Crown Room.

Next to Whiting Hall was Galesburg High School, where the public safety building is now, and high school students were entertained by our fire drills, when we were instructed to wear rain coats and shoes, (if nothing else) and trapse down the fire escape on the West side of the dorm towards the high school. It was always an embarrassing spectacle accompanied by cat-calls from the male high school students.

Standish Park was important to us because we walked through it to get to campus. There were always stories about men standing in the park watching the windows of Whiting Hall and we had several incidences of women being accosted in the park, usually verbally. One was a friend of mine who was a minister's daughter who was entirely too thrilled about her incident in the park.

We had mandatory Chapel once a week at Central Congregational Church. We could miss only three times a quarter (later semesters) and the school was so small (800) in those days Miss Helen Humphries, the president's secretary, knew exactly who had missed. I was skipping my third time and she spotted me in the Gizmo - told me in front of everyone that I'd better get myself over to the church.

The Gizmo was in the basement of Adelphi Hall and was dark, smoky and contained a good, greasy lunch counter. Everyone smoked in those days — it was

the cool thing to do and sample cigarettes were regularly left in our mail boxes. I don't think I ever bought any. We played bridge and philosophized and socialized in there. The atmosphere was wonderfully decadent.

Professor Alan White was carrying on his campaign against the Water Street brothels and liquor. He terrorized the city fathers. The reputation of Galesburg city government then was that it was wide open. The police supposedly protected houses of prostitution and gambling establishments. In the 1970's I told some Galesburg reporters that Water Street closed down the year I came to Knox. They laughed uncontrollably while I lamely tried to explain there was no connection between the two events.

My Senior year the beautiful Galesburg Carnegie Library caught fire. If there had been any wind at all half the town would have burned down. We had just been warned not to use much water when the fire started. The fire trucks pulled up to the library, but hoses aimed at the library produced only a trickle of water. Hundreds of residents and students watched in horror as the flames shot high in the sky with nothing to control the fire. Some of us tried to take music materials out of Beecher Chapel, which was just South of the library and all that was between the library and Whiting Hall, which was an old building even then. To make things worse, the Knox College library was being remodeled and many Knox Seniors were using the city library for final semester research and study. Some had taken a supper break and left all their notes and materials on the library tables. It was a double crisis.

I managed to graduate in 1958, having become a part of Galesburg through my family and college education. For 13 years I lived away from the area, but returned to Galesburg with my husband and children in 1971.

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