

MCB Birthday Tribute
August 8, 2015
John Craddock

Ladies and Gentlemen, President Fennes, President Emeritus & Mrs. Flawn, Vice President Paine, Professor Emeritus McKetta (who turns 100 in October), Distinguished Guests, Fellow Longhorns, and Centennial Guest of Honor, a very special welcome to each of you gathered to celebrate Margaret Berry's first 100 years. I am John Craddock. I will be leading you on a memorable and entertaining journey as we celebrate the party of the century!

We originally planned this celebration for the Legends Room where living legends ought to be honored, but your magnanimous response led us to find an even bigger space, the Connally Ballroom. Governor Connally himself would be thrilled to know many of his friends and former student leaders are toasting his UT classmate, Margaret Berry. Yes, Margaret was in school with Gov. Connally and former regent Tom Law whose daughter, Debra, is with us today. "John was very popular and so was Tom. We were all here at the same time," Margaret recently observed. "John and Tom represented different groups—John the Independents and Tom the fraternities. That was in the 1930s".

Well, now it's 2015 and Margaret is still going strong. Friends of Margaret have travelled from across Texas and the United States to celebrate and witness this historic event. Before leaving, I hope each of you has a chance to visit with this remarkable lady.

Today we are honoring a woman who has lived the past 100 years with grace, wisdom, patience, elegance, modesty, humility, and love—love for the people in her storied life and love for this great institution, The University of Texas. I first met Margaret 41 years ago as a UT freshman being placed in alphabetical order for initiation into Phi Eta Sigma. I was just 18, very impressionable, and decided Margaret was clearly ancient. Looking back now, I know better. In fact, I am the same age Margaret was in 1974.

Before putting the spotlight on Margaret, there are some very special individuals in this room.

The Orange Jackets are here in their traditional role as the University's official hostesses since 1923. Today is no exception as these student leaders sacrificed a day of summer vacation to "work" this event. Margaret was their beloved faculty advisor for more than two decades, and in 1982, the OJs created a scholarship named after Margaret Berry. I know it is an honor and privilege for the Orange Jackets to stand at her side today. Thank you, Chrystle Nwora and fellow Orange Jackets, for being Margaret Berry's official hostesses today.

Several individuals among you helped plan this celebration from the very beginning—our Steering Committee: Kathy Tally Schweiger, Rick Potter, Cal & Clare Buie Chaney, Kevin Brown, Tom Rhea, Caroline Meyerson, and Carol Barrett. Each has given thoughtful advice on how to honor somebody appropriately who just doesn't want a big fuss. As Margaret repeatedly tells us, "it's just another birthday." But we know better, don't we.

Literally none of this would be possible without the masterful support and encouragement from the staff of our own Ex-Students' Association. Starting at the very top with Leslie Cedar, her staff has assisted in the planning of this wonderful party. I particularly want to thank Carol Barrett who embodies the spirit of the Texas Exes with her unflagging energy, enthusiasm, charm, unselfishness, and genuine love for Margaret and countless other alumni. Carol worked with me almost daily, at odd hours before and after work, and on the weekends. Carol does this and so much more for the Texas Exes. I know we all say "Thank you, Carol" and wonder what our lives would be like without her! In addition, a huge thank you goes to Tim Taliaferro and his creative team, especially Megan Clifton, and the staff of the business office which provided remarkable support. Simply put, this celebration could not have taken place without their direct, personal involvement and contributions of time, expertise, and love.

A big thanks to Innes International Images for taking the photos and to Kahnal Parkash for taking video clips today. Kahnal is studying media arts film at Austin High School and hopes to attend UT next year. Both Jim Innes and Kahnal are providing these services for free as their way of saying happy birthday to Margaret.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all 205 members of the Host Committee for underwriting this grand celebration. Members of the Host Committee are identified by their

nametags. Let's give them a round of applause for throwing such a nice party for Margaret!

Once word got out that you were turning 100, the most interesting people stepped forward to join the fun. We began to hear from friends from as far away as Korea. Many here today travelled from different points on the globe to see you. It is no coincidence our Host Committee boasts a member of Congress, a US ambassador, UT regents (past and present), all five past living presidents of UT Austin, many past presidents of the Texas Exes, distinguished alumni, inventors, billionaires, corporate giants, former Ombudsmen, Abbots, Xinises, Seers, Foremen, student body presidents, and even the Director of the CIA! Gathered in this room today are many of these people and alumni from the Friar Society, Alpha Phi Omega, Orange Jackets, Tejas Club, the Eyes of Texas, and Mortar Board. We have Questors, members of Delta Kappa Gamma, Austin Women's Club, P.E.O., UT Retired Staff & Faculty, and former students. And we have your lifelong friends from your former neighborhood, your cousins, and many, many friends from Westminster Manor.

Margaret, as you gaze upon this audience, we want you to know that WE are your family and that we love you. We have adopted you as one of our own—a collective group of individuals who have felt your touch, your gentleness, your encouragement, your love for us. There are many others who love you beyond words but simply could not be here today. This group represents the decades of influence you have had upon each of us in the setting of The University of Texas and other educational institutions where you served.

As your birthday drew near, we received cards and letters from your admirers. These excerpts characterize the sentiments each of us feels:

Appearing on newsstands now, 91 year old Carl Matthews penned this front page article for the *Hubbard City News* about his early years with Margaret in their hometown of Dawson, "When my family moved to Dawson, Texas [in] 1926, we lived next door to the Berry Family. Their daughter, Margaret, nine years my senior, often served as my babysitter. She and Ralph Akers helped make my fourth birthday party a success. Her family was the first to visit my new baby sister in 1929. I have treasured the relationship with Margaret and her parents throughout my life. Every ex-student of

Dawson High School can be justly proud of “Our Margaret,” and for the honors and achievements she has accumulated in her.....ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF LIVING.”

Carol Rogers McKenzie reminisces, “In 1953 I saw Dean Berry at the Homecoming Dance. As we spoke she told me her secretary was moving away and asked me if I would like to be her new secretary. Would I? I would! I loved working for her. The next summer as Dean Berry and I were walking down the stairs after work, she turned her ankle. Then she told me I would go to the ice cream supper on the lawn of the Student Union Building in her place. “Oh, no,” I said. “I have to study.” “Yes, you will,” Dean Berry told me. At the ice cream supper I saw Bob McKenzie. At 8 o’clock the next morning he called Dean Berry’s office and asked me to go to a movie. That began a 61-year romance. We were married the next February and have been married sixty years.”

Tissa Baker recalls being impressed with the number of worthy P.E.O. Scholar Award nominees for whom Margaret served as a tireless advocate: “It would be interesting to know where those young women who were awarded our P.E.O. financial assistance are in the world today and what mark they have made—and to think that our Margaret was so helpful in securing aid for their future.”

And in a proclamation from Margaret’s P.E.O. chapter, I quote, “Education combined with a deep faith in God, the perspective of years well lived, and an overflowing love for others becomes something even higher and finer—wisdom. Thank you, Margaret C. Berry, for showing us what true wisdom looks like.” And, thank you, Nancy Kocurek, for saying it so well.

Colby Hanks’ simple message resonates with me and certain others in this room, “Margaret Berry, Beautiful soul....I’m forever inspired by your joy, your zest, and your legacy!”

Paying it forward with a special gift, Kevin Swisher provides this perspective: “I sat across from you at a scholarship interview, and I still remember how kind you were. Thanks to you and many others, I was able to pay for school, and—best of all—I met my lovely wife of 26 years [Marie] waiting in the Financial Aid line!”

This letter-to-the-editor comes from Marilyn White after she read the recent feature article on Margaret in the *Alcalde*: “Old age is a gift to Dr. Margaret Berry and

she is a gift to the University. My guess is that she has more UT friends than anyone else in the world. I treasure the hours we spent working on scholarship together. When she comes to an event, the room is a brighter, happier place. Thanks for being my friend and a true friend to UT. Hook 'em."

Before Margaret became UT's Associate Dean of Women in 1962, she was the Dean of Women at ETSU in Commerce. This 1955 news clipping reveals Margaret's involvement in a heated debate about whether to allow coeds to wear Bermuda shorts on their campus: "Miss Margaret Berry, dean of women, has announced that her office will observe the wishes of the majority of women students. 'If they vote to make Bermuda shorts accepted attire, then my office will approve them', Miss Berry says. 'Twenty-five years from now, you will think this is funny,'" Miss Berry told the group in opening the discussion on the wearing of Bermuda shorts on campus.

But Bermuda shorts weren't really central to her agenda. Margaret was already hard at work helping young students become productive members of society. Just as she has done with many of us, Margaret would tap an individual's potential to help them realize their intrinsic value, unique gifts, talents, and worth as a human being. Coleen Grissom says it best:

Margaret Berry at 100

In the fall of 1952, having received a full tuition scholarship of \$100 from President Gee of East Texas State Teachers' College because I was valedictorian of the Carthage High School that year, and he was our commencement speaker, my parents delivered me to Commerce, Texas to begin my collegiate experience.

Though my memories of those formative years are fading, I always remember the dean of women who had such a significant impact on my life...Miss Margaret Berry. Because of her stature and position of authority, I (and my peers) thought she was about 100 years old. She must have been 37!

I was a redneck hick from east Texas, and my highest aspiration was to become a high school English teacher, marry another redneck, and live happily ever after.

But "Miss Berry" had other plans for me. When I assumed some roles of leadership at ETSC, including president of the Association of Women Students, she, unbeknownst to me, began to groom me for a different life. She convinced me to apply for a fellowship in the Student Dean program at Syracuse University, and she even helped me pass something revoltingly called "the social usage test," by giving me a little pamphlet on "manners and proper attire."

Thanks mostly to Margaret, I entered that distinguished program, was mightily influenced by its leader, Eunice Hilton, and began my long career as a student life administrator and university professor.

I am now—as I approach my 82nd birthday—still teaching full-time at Trinity University where, having retired from my position of vice president for student affairs, I continue as an active professor- the senior member of the faculty.

My life and my career have been filled with rewarding work, and Margaret Berry deserves much of the credit for guiding me into a rich, full life even though I eschewed much of the social usage rules then and now.

With much gratitude, love, and every good wish as you celebrate 100!

*Coleen Grissom, Ph.D
Professor of English
Trinity University"*

Margaret had a similar impact on me. Much of what I learned as a student came from Margaret who taught me life lessons about bold leadership, fairness, loyalty, responsibility, and compassion during my formative and impressionable years. She did this through her undergraduate leadership class aptly named "Self and the Campus Society" and through her role as advisor to many student organizations. Just like you, we became lifelong friends.

Margaret has touched each of our lives in a loving and profound way. What is NOT amazing is that we would travel to Austin from faraway places to acknowledge a woman who showed us she believed in us, cared about us, and imparted to each of us a deep and abiding love for The University of Texas. We have the rare privilege of thanking her

for immersing herself in our lives and for doing the same with the generations that preceded and followed us.

Typical of any birthday party are cards, presents, and birthday cake. This is no different. But we are going to make it easy on you, Margaret. Instead of asking you to blow out 100 candles, we will give you a smaller birthday cake with just one candle to blow out. But before that, no birthday party would be complete without birthday presents!

We want to give you a present that began with the dedication of the Margaret Berry Atrium in the new Student Activities Center. At that time a fund was created and named after you to support the efforts of student organizations. Today I am proud to announce that we have collected enough funds to complete the \$25,000 endowment of the Margaret C. Berry Student Activities Fund. Many of the original contributors to this fund are among us today and can now rest assured this investment was definitely worth making. I would like to recognize Vice President for Student Affairs Gage Paine to accept this gift in your honor.

[Gage Paine comments]

Margaret, that was actually just a warm-up—a little stocking stuffer, you might say—before we give you your real birthday present. You see, we actually collected more than the amount required to complete the endowment for the Margaret C. Berry Student Activities Fund. In fact, we collected over \$100,000 to create the Lillian & Winfred Berry Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Religious Studies in the College of Liberal Arts. We knew that you always planned to create such a scholarship from the proceeds of your estate, but we decided to get the ball rolling now so you could enjoy knowing the future Berry Presidential Scholars.

At this time, I would like to ask the Orange Jackets to unveil the placard announcing the scholarship and its contributors, many of whom are in this room with you today.

I would like to invite President Greg Fenves to come to the stage to accept this gift in your honor.

[President Fenves comments]

Thank you President Fenves. We are very proud you could join us today. We salute you as you assume the role of President of The University of Texas at Austin. We look forward to hearing about the Berry Presidential Scholars, and we are so very proud to help make Margaret's dream a reality!

Margaret, we would like to present this certificate to you which is signed by Liberal Arts Dean Randy Diehl affirming the creation of the scholarship. It reads "In recognition and appreciation of Margaret Berry's 100th birthday and her longstanding commitment to the College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Religious Studies, friends have made possible the establishment of the Lillian and Winfred Berry Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Religious Studies in memory of her beloved parents, Lillian and Winfred Berry." We also present you with a framed list of the donors who contributed to the fund. These two symbols will commemorate this day and the love we feel for you.

Now, it's your turn, Margaret. We are giving you the microphone to make some comments if you would like. After you speak, I will invite President Fenves and Leslie Cedar to present your birthday cake so you can make a wish and blow out the candle on your birthday cake. Then we will ask everybody to rise and sing "The Eyes of Texas".

[Margaret Berry comments]

Would Clare Chaney, Kathy Berlinsky, Cyndy Powell come forward to lead us in singing "Happy Birthday" while President Fenves and Leslie Cedar light the candle and present the birthday cake to Margaret?

"Happy birthday to you...."

As we conclude this program, please rise so we may sing "The Eyes of Texas"

"The eyes of Texas are upon you...."

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