

Tribute to Nancy Overcash Blackwell

June 16, 2007

By: John Kuykendall '59

Nancy, there are so many people here today who want to say so many things to you, which, knowing you, would surely make you so embarrassed; and I realize that I can't begin to find some words adequate to speak for all these other dear friends. So let me begin by speaking for myself, then hope to find the words which can speak for us all.

Forty-seven years ago this August, I came to my first paying job in a big partitioned room on the first floor of Chambers, South end (in what we now can happily call the Vagt Wing). I had a little desk over in the corner, behind a partition that separated the Alumni Office from the faculty mailboxes, and Professor Beaty's rocking chair, where he carried on his *platonic* flirtations with women on the staff—"play' for them, 'tonic' for me," he said. One of the first people I met that first day was you, Nancy, and I shall never the generous spirit with which you welcomed *yet another* new boy, likely to interrupt and complicate the routines of the job you knew and did so well.

That day was the beginning of a happy and treasured friendship for me—with you, Herbert, Vic and Debbie, and I can never say thanks sufficient for that gift.

That's the personal tribute I need to express, but a really need to try to talk about what Davidson College needs to say to you today. I may not have been the brightest bulb on the string, but it didn't take me long, even in 1960, to realize that the 'go-to' person for information about Davidson alums is always Nancy Blackwell. Here's a telephone call, simulated but real, that I have made dozens of times over the years, often *before* office hours began:

Ring. Ring. Ri...

NB: "Alumni office!"

JK: "Good morning, Mrs. B. This is John."

NB: "Hello, Dr. K. How are you this morning?"

JK: "Fine. Hope you are, too. But I need some help. Do you know an alumnus named John Jones?"

NB: "Do you mean the one in the class of '37, the one in the class of '47, or the one in the class of '51?"

JK: "Gosh, I don't know. Where are they from?"

NB: Well, '37 grew up in Thomasville or Lexington, I think; used to live in Winston,

but moved to Presbyterian Home in High Point. I hear he's not doing too well."

JK: Sorry to hear that. How about the other two?

NB: The one in the class of '47 grew up in Concord, but he's lived all around. I think he's outside of New York now; and '51 grew up in Charlotte, but I think he lives on the other side of the lake now.

JK: I think '47 is the one I want. Do you happen to know his wife's name?

NB: Do you want his first wife, his second wife, or the woman he brought to reunion last year?

And so it goes, time after time. She knows us all. And mark this well: the only computer involved, most of the time, was the incomparable computer between Nancy's ears. And if ever it came down to a difference of opinion with the one on her desk, most of us would know to go with Nancy rather than IBM every time!

Now that's been my experience; others here surely have different and better ones.

But, Nancy, the real point of this celebration for all of us is not, and never has been, that you *know* so much about the men—and now women—who have gone to Davidson; nor even that you *do* so much to be helpful to so many Davidsons. The real point is that you naturally and obviously *care* so much about each and all. And it shows.

It shows not only to those of us who've been privileged to work along side of you from time to time for over three-fifths of a century. It shows also to literally hundreds of those Davidson people for whom you have become the smiling face and voice of *alma mater* over their alumni years. You have helped us stay in touch with this place, and with one another; and you have nurtured those good ties of commitment to a place and an ideal bigger than any individual experience of it. You have been the personification of the fact that Davidson genuinely cares for its off-spring, and appreciates how much they care for Davidson.

And in so doing, you have also been for those of us privileged to work here the personification of the way in which we can best do our jobs. So today is our happy opportunity to say, "Thanks, Nancy." And so we have, and do, and will continue to do.

There's an old saying, Nancy, that asserts that "all good things must come to an end." And doubtless that is mostly true. But in this case, I think, there's a real distinction between the "good" and the "great." And though greatness was absolutely the farthest thing from your mind as you have gone about the daily round on this campus for sixty-plus years, greatness is what you've come to represent for the rest of us. And that sort of example, just like the friendship you have give to each of us, is something that will last.

Nancy Blackwell, thank you and God bless you as your life has blessed us.