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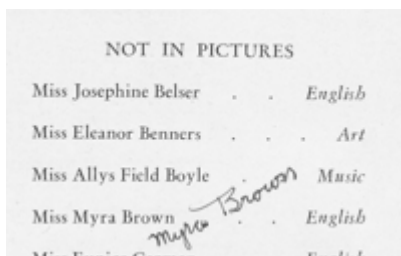
Myra Brown

Miss Brown hovered on my horizon for a year and a half, from my second semester in high school, when I first became aware of her formidable reputation, until the first day of my junior year when I had to decide which teacher I wanted for English.

At Woodrow Wilson High School in the thirties, the students "ran" to choose their classes on the hectic first day of each semester. At eight o'clock, all of us gathered in the school auditorium, each with a closely printed schedule sheet listing classes, times, and instructors and a blank blue card to be filled in with our choices for the six periods of the school day semester. Armed with the conventional wisdom gained the previous semesters concerning which teachers and classes were most desirable, each of us made out a tentative schedule of the classes we were to take that semester, based on our advisors' list of courses we needed for graduation.

At the beginning of my third year, I needed to take English 5, among other classes. I was faced with a dilemma: which of the three English 5 teachers should I try for? I knew Miss Baker, having taken her classes for the first two years. I felt it was time to change. Miss Roberts' reputation was that she was easy but not very interesting. That left Miss Brown. She was not especially well liked because she was deemed hard although nobody claimed she wasn't fair. Was I willing to gamble? The rest of my classes, including third year Spanish, offered only by Miss Turman whom I knew and admired, posed no problems of choice. I decided I'd take my chances on Miss Brown.

I'd seen Miss Brown around school. She was tiny, perhaps no more than five feet tall in her medium-heeled shoes. Like all teachers except Mr. Hargrave, the math teacher I continued to admire, she was *old*. Her springy iron gray hair always looked the same. She seemed always to wear gray and appeared as a gray blur as she went about her business.



I ran to register for her class during the fourth period. At the door, she reprimanded me for my "unseemly haste" (her words), strange words coming from one who always seemed to be in a hurry. Maybe I'd made a mistake, but it was too late to remake my schedule to take someone else's English 5 class.

Her instructions to the rather small class (no more than fifteen boys and girls) were very precise about what supplies we needed for her class, as well as her requirements for assignments. She certainly didn't sound easy, but no one could mistake her requirements.

She called each name, looking intently at the owner, and fixing him or her with a steady gaze. After she had looked at me, I felt sure she knew what I looked like and probably what went on in my mind. She issued our textbooks, gave us time to cover them securely with the book-covers provided by the local Mrs. Baird's Bakery, and made our first assignment, to read the first scene of *Macbeth*. When the bell rang, I felt liberated and doubtful that I would thrive in her class.

Needless to say, I read the first scene of *Macbeth* carefully that evening and reported to class the next day with some anxiety. The first day was a pleasant surprise, although I couldn't relax enough to recognize that fact. She gave us a thorough background for an intelligent reading of Shakespeare, pointing out the universal appeal of his works and suggesting that we consider each character as a special acquaintance to know as thoroughly as possible. She suggested that any of us with artistic talents might want to draw a picture of one of the minor characters; others should be alert for magazine pictures which might depict some aspect of a character. The picture was not due until the end of the six weeks we were going to devote to *Macbeth*.

She then began a controlled class discussion of the scene we'd read, calling on each person in class with a question about the material we'd read. I realize now that her questions helped each of us to think about what we'd read in a way we'd never considered before. I was terrified as she called on others in the class. One or two students were unable to answer because they had not read the assignment. She brooked no excuses; neither did she scold anyone for lack of preparation, but her classes always had an unusually high number of students who prepared each day as well as they could. I was startled into giving an answer she apparently wanted when she questioned me. The class hour passed slowly because of my apprehension, but by the end of the hour, I surprisingly felt good about Shakespeare, eager to read the next assignment. In fact, I frequently found myself reading the day's work, then going on to see what was happening next in the play. I was intrigued with the weird sisters and chose to draw a black ink portrait of one of them, oddly standing erect in a posture Shakespeare had not depicted. Miss Brown had no comment about my art except that the black ink did indicate the dark aspect of the witches. I was delighted with the Bard and looked forward to the next semester when we would read his *Julius Caesar*. But I never completely relaxed in her classes. By far, the worst days were those when she had each student come to her desk and recite the material he or she had memorized for the day. Memory work was difficult for me, and I was never really sure I'd get through the necessary recitation. Of course, we read other English and American literature, always with a similar analytical approach.

Despite the fact that I never felt entirely at ease with Miss Brown, I realized that she did cause me to read and consider literature in a more serious light than I ever had before. I had always read voraciously but uncritically. Now I was forced to add a new dimension - thought - to my reading.

I did have one quarrel with Miss Brown. In the class just ahead of mine there was a red headed girl named Mary Doris Heckman. I didn't know her, but I was appalled one day when Miss Brown called me Mary Doris instead of Mary Frances. Someone in the class

giggled and spoke out that my hair was brown, not red, and that my name was Hickman, not Heckman. Miss Brown stared down the miscreant, adding that the names were similar and she was sure that I was not permanently injured by her mistake. Actually, I was affronted, but I didn't say anything. I was affronted that she did not know my name and that she gave me an ugly name which belonged to an ugly girl.

I continued taking Miss Brown's English classes through my junior and senior years. One day in the first semester of my senior year, she asked me to come by her classroom after school for a few minutes. I was puzzled and apprehensive when I reported to her. She gave me applications for two scholarships being offered to high school graduates, one offered by the local American Association of University Women and one offered by A. Harris, one of the local department stores. The AAUW grant was for a thousand dollars for college, a handsome sum in those days; the A. Harris scholarship was for four years tuition and fees at Southern Methodist University. I wasn't the least bit hopeful of qualifying for either one and didn't really want to attend college in my home town, but I felt that I had to complete both applications because of her insistence and interest. Each was accompanied by sealed envelopes containing recommendations she had gathered from most of my teachers. I realized that I must have done a lot right in her classes for her to consider me so highly, and was flattered and happy about her interest. After I completed high school, however, I seldom thought about her except every now and then to acknowledge to myself the good foundation in literature she had coerced me into building for myself.



English Department

(Standing left to right: Dr. John W. Bowyer, Betty Ann Hicks, Mrs. Lee Schremmer. (Front row): Rene P. Manes, Laurence Perrine, Tom Gossett, Katherine Knight. (Second row): Mrs. Elizabeth Knight, Dr. Vincent E. Walsh, Mrs. Helen Claude Cooke, Mrs. Mary Frances Minton, Hortense Watkins. (Third row): Virginia Zelfel, Mrs. Ora Mae Wrigley, Dr. John Lee Brooks, Mrs. Barbara Lindsay, Eunice Kilpatrick.

(Front row) left to right: Jane Etheridge, Ann Harrison, Walter Rhea Smith, Morris Rodgers, Elmer Crittenden. (Second row): Hortense Watkins, Margaret Wasson, Nannie Fitzhugh, Mrs. Virginia Tillman, Mrs. Maysel Moore Jackson. (Third row): Mrs. Barbara Lindsay, Eunice Kilpatrick, Hazel Grace Boger, Anna Buchanan, Myra L. Brown, Dr. Ernest E. Leisy.

Then, a number of years later after I had used the Harris Scholarship to get my undergraduate degree at SMU, was married, and had returned to SMU as a graduate student and teaching assistant, Miss Brown again entered my life. Dr. Bowyer, the English department chairman, called me to his office. There sat tiny Miss Brown, looking not one whit different from the last time I'd seen her at least eight years before. Her hair was still iron gray and her face had the same wrinkles I remembered from her classes. Now she was beginning a new career as a college instructor, and Dr. Bowyer asked me to help her get acquainted with the routine and the faculty. At first, I found it difficult to think of her as anyone except my "old" high school English teacher. But we did become friends during the remaining two semesters of my stay at SMU before Paul and I went off to Chapel Hill for the next chapter in our lives. I finally had a chance to recognize and thank her for giving me a good foundation and for her "above and beyond" interest in that insecure little girl that I had been.

Myra Brown

Myra Brown! Three syllables that dominated my life in at least two incarnations (hers? mine? I'm not sure, but she was a potent presence in two periods of my life.)

The first one began in high school, when, with considerable doubt and angst, I enrolled in her junior English class. Her reputation as a formidable and to-be-avoided English teacher teased me into bearding the monster and entering her class.

She and I did not get off to a good start: When she called the roll the first day of class, she called me "Mary Doris Heckman!" Now, I was far from vain, but Mary Doris was a really ugly red-headed girl in the class ahead of me. I couldn't abide the idea of being confused with Mary Doris. When someone in the class (or maybe it was several) snorted - actually a kind of compliment that may have indicated that I was not as homely as freckle-faced Mary Doris - I, too, objected, saying in no uncertain terms that my name was Mary FRANCES HICKman, Miss Brown delivered a scathing lecture about names and vanity. Properly chastened and no doubt very red-faced, I was certain that I was in for a long, unhappy semester in a subject that I ordinarily liked very much: English literature. I presented a very low profile from then on. This was not a great sacrifice on my part.

Fortunately, Miss Brown did not harbor grudges. She was a tiny woman with an enormous presence. The fascination of the literature we were studying helped me put the introductory episode out of mind and I began to be a little more relaxed in her class - but never completely. At any rate, I took every English course Miss Brown offered after that first bad beginning. I can't say that I ever completely relaxed in her presence, but looking back, I can see that Miss Brown forgot our awkward beginning and, later, became, to my complete surprise, my formidable champion. It was Miss Brown who insisted that I apply for a scholarship and helped me garner the recommendations that led to my receiving it.

And now I realize that she did a great deal in helping me gain the self confidence necessary for progressing in my high school and subsequent college career.

Toward the end of my junior year, Miss Brown and a couple of other teachers encouraged, actually bullied, me into applying for college scholarships, notably the one offered by the A. Harris Co.

A. Harris and Company was one of several large, locally owned department stores in downtown Dallas at a time when there were no suburban stores or malls. The Harris family announced that they would give, every year, to one boy and one girl from among the seven Dallas public high schools, a scholarship to S.M.U., as a way to thank the city for its support of their business. The criteria included demonstration of leadership and scholarship. To my surprise, I was awarded the A. Harris scholarship, along with Ed Rowe, from Adamson High School; this was the second year that the award was given.

The announcement was made in large articles in the Dallas Morning News and in the afternoon paper, the Dallas Times Herald, as well as at the commencement exercises of the two schools. It would have been a heady experience at any time, but was especially so at a time when I had no reasonable financial prospect of a college education. Just imagine: four years' tuition, fees and all expenses!

Scholarship Students Entertained at Dinner



Special guests were Dr. Umphress, Lee, president of S. M. U., and Mrs. Lee; Mrs. Margaret Brown and the three members of the committee of judges for the award, Mrs. Alex W. Spence, Miss Eva Allen Freeman and Zellner Eldridge.

At the conclusion of the dinner, especially designed keys were presented to the award winners.

The 1940 award will be made during the June high school commencement exercises.

Annual Award

Each year the award is made to a boy and a girl graduate from the high schools of Dallas, University Park or Highland Park. Their need for financial assistance in acquiring further education is one of the first considerations. Mr. Eldridge said. Their capability as students, indicated by their standing in class, is another, but high grades do not form the sole basis for selection. Mr. Eldridge emphasized the time spent by the committee, first in eliminating the applications on basis of scholarship and reports from faculty members to a workable number and then to personal interviews with each student. Mr. Eldridge said much attention is given to emotional quality and stability of students interviewed, the main thought and purpose of the committee being to select students for the scholarship award who give best indication of ability to turn back to the community in worthwhile citizenship and contributions of merit and progress. Value received from expenditure on an education. The only obligation of these students is to do the caliber of work which will best enable them to fulfill their promise to the community.

"The continuity of this scholarship is the factor which makes it such a fine thing," Mr. Eldridge said. "The scholarship award pays full tuition for the student who receives it for the four school years. Thus the student may see ahead to the completion of his plan and may pursue the full course of his college education with complete assurance."

All the winners not only have maintained good scholastic averages but have been leaders in student activities, it was pointed out. Vincent Baker and Barbara Corkern, who received the first awards four years ago and will thus be the first to graduate, both are leaders in senior activities. Baker is president of the student association and has received a graduate scholarship from the university to continue his

Members of the committee of judges for the A. Harris & Company four-year scholarship awards to Southern Methodist University are pictured with the students who have received the awards at the first gathering of students and judges, at a dinner given by Arthur L. Krammer Friday night at the Hotel Adolphus. Top picture, left to right, are the committee members, Mrs. Alex W. Spence, Zellner Eldridge and Miss Eva Allen Freeman. Below are the students, left to right (front row), Mary Frances Hickman, Betty Wolfe, Jeannine Ruth Parker, Barbara Corkern; (back row), Ben N. Ranney, Ed Rowe, Percy D. Williams and Vincent Baker. Officers for a permanent organization, to be known as the A. Harris Scholarship Club, were elected.

In S. M. U. was held at a dinner given by Arthur L. Krammer, president of A. Harris & Co., Friday evening at the Hotel Adolphus, when officers for a permanent organization of the scholarship students, to be known as the A. Harris Scholarship Club, were elected. Officers are: President, Ben N. Ranney; vice president, Mary Frances Hickman; secretary-treasurer, Ed R. Rowe; and historian, Jeannine Ruth Parker.

Guests at the dinner, included Vincent Baker and Barbara Corkern, graduating from S. M. U. this year, who received the awards in 1936; Ed B. Rowe, Ben N. Ranney, Mary Frances Hickman, winners in 1937; Ben N. Ranney and Jeannine Ruth Parker, 1938 winners, and Percy D. Williams, Jr. and Betty Wolfe, 1939 winners.

studies next year. Miss Corkern has the lead in the senior class play, "As You Like It."

Ed B. Rowe, a junior, is a member of Alpha Phi Omega, honorary service fraternity; of Phi Eta Sigma and is president of the Biology Club. Miss Mary Frances Hickman has been elected to Monitor Board, top honorary organization for senior women.

Ben N. Ranney, sophomore, is unopposed in his race for editor of the Retunda, college annual. Miss Jeannine Ruth Parker is a member of the Y. W. C. A. and president of the League of Evangelical Students.

Percy D. Williams, Jr., was chosen president of the Ocean Frodoette, composed of the ten outstanding freshmen. Miss Betty Wolfe has been elected to the freshman honorary scholastic society.

Myra Brown was certainly not solely responsible for my receiving the scholarship, but she was a significant element in my being eligible and applying for it. And she was a potent influence in my laboriously accumulating the packet of material for my application. I had been reluctant to ask my teachers and advisors to write letters for me, but Miss Brown persisted in keeping me on course in actively acquiring the necessary supportive letters and filling out the fairly lengthy application. It was a great feeling for me to receive her congratulations.

Graduating from high school, completing my undergraduate degree, and launching myself in a master's program with the aid of a teaching assistantship in English at S.M.U., did not free me from Miss Brown's influence, as I discovered several years later when the chairman of the English Department called me in and asked me to show a new member of the faculty around the department. It was: who else? Myra Brown. Any uncomfortable feeling I might have harbored against her for the uncompromising effort she had demanded from me dissolved as I helped her get settled at one of the desks in our office. Myra Brown, colleague, was probably the same person as Myra Brown, instructor, but my feelings were certainly different. However, we became reasonably good friends as I helped her get oriented in her new job as college instructor, on the same level as I was - but with somewhat less experience in teaching in this type of setting!

Myra Brown and I never became bosom buddies, but I did soon relax in her presence and began to enjoy her considerable knowledge of English and American literature. When she realized that some of her high school teaching methods were not successful in college, she opened the subject with me and we discussed some of the discoveries I had made in my teaching experience. She was not the rigid, uncompromising person I had conjured in my mind in high school.

I treasure the relationship I was able to build with Miss Brown and feel that the two-level association we had is one of the great experiences I have been privileged to enjoy.