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Winter 1973

# Yale University School of Nursing Alumnae Association Newsletter, Winter 1973 [Arnstein Memorial Issue]

Yale University School of Nursing

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DEAN MARGARET G. ARNSTEIN  
October 27, 1904 - October 8, 1972  
Dean Yale School of Nursing 1967-1972

Memorial Service for Miss Arnstein

On October 20, 1972, a memorial service commemorating Dean Margaret Arnstein was held in Dwight Chapel at Yale University. Miss Arnstein died at her home on Sunday, October 8, 1972. More than 250 friends, both personal and professional, gathered with family members for the service, which was conducted by The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Chaplain of Yale University. Speaking in memory of the former Dean were Mr. Walter E. Beer, Jr., lawyer, and a cousin; Mrs. Katherine B. Nuckolls, associate professor and chairman of Y.S.N.'s pediatric program; and Dr. Myron E. Wegman, Dean of the School of Public Health, University of Michigan. Their thoughtful and fond tributes are included in this supplement.

A reception was held following the service in the Dwight Common Room.

Walter E. Beer, Jr.

I am a cousin of Peggy's and for almost sixty years a close friend. It started with a bang when both of us were almost nine. Peggy had been sick for some time and missed school. I had been in France and could only write and read in French. Our parents decided that we should both be tutored together to catch up. At the end of some seven months of tutoring, Peggy went into the 6th grade, I into the 5th. Success came early to Peggy!

During the ensuing years, both before and after I was married, I saw a good deal of Peggy whenever geography would permit it. The family home at Dobbs Ferry used to be a frequent meeting ground. We both, or we three, shared many things we loved in common, hiking in the Adirondacks, tennis, skating, theatre and, when we were all very young and particularly when Peggy was in training as a nurse, dancing at Roseland and elsewhere. All work was never Peggy's style.

As time passed by, two things seemed to mark Peggy's life -- one, the great number of friends she developed and the intensity of their friendship, and the other her incredible but genuine modesty about her career. The two themes intertwined.

To illustrate -- the explanation she gave to me of why she received an honorary degree from Smith. The reason for her being honored, according to Peggy, was the frantic desire of the trustees to find someone in the twenty-fifth reunion class whom they could honor, and besides she had friends on the Board of Trustees who had, for that reason, heard of her undistinguished career and couldn't be objective.

Years passed and she was made Dean of the Yale School of Nursing. This, according to Peggy, was a terrible mistake. A much younger person, any younger person, would have been a better appointment. Obviously, it was her brother Bob and Bob's friends who had thought of her and were blind to her lack of qualification for the job. Unfortunately for Yale, Peggy continued, she was just too selfish not to take a job in New Haven and particularly one that allowed her to retire at 67 instead of the usual 65.

The last time Florence and I saw Peggy was about six weeks ago. She showed us the album that she had received about the fund raised recently in her honor, less with pride than with amazement. "Look at this donor and that", she said, pointing to mutual friends or acquaintances. "What made anyone think they had the slightest interest in honoring me? How did Bob have the nerve to approach them?"

Standing here I have tried to imagine what would have happened if Peggy herself had been in charge of the arrangements. She would have said, I am sure, that any place where twenty or twenty-five people could be seated would have been plenty large enough.

Peggy, we will all miss you.

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Mrs. Katherine Nuckolls

A meeting such as this is called to help us to somehow crystallize the meaning of a life -- to put it all together. So what can I say of all that Margaret meant to nursing, to this School and to her friends? Let me quote from a few of the many letters which came with contributions to the fund which we started in her name:

"A genuine and great human being"

"She dedicated her life to nursing and to health care in America and in other parts of the world"

"One of the finest role models in nursing and in health care I have ever known"

"She was the greatest nurse since Florence Nightingale in my estimation, and my interest in nursing research stemmed from the stimulation aroused by Margaret"

"Very few people have the capability and good fortune to make as great a contribution to their chosen field"

"One of the greats of Nursing"

We can all agree with these words of praise, but how did she do so much? I can't pretend to know, not really, but some things are evident.

Her honesty, her keen intelligence, her capacity for clear, logical thought made her esteemed and respected by the great men of her generation, and to some extent, all nurses and all women gained in stature as a result. She was a great facilitator for others. She made the impossible seem possible and the difficult easy. She gave us the courage to try.

Committed as she was to health care and to a passionate search for truth, she accepted no easy answers, no facile interpretations. She trained herself and her colleagues to get the facts and to use them. Perhaps her greatest contribution was that which she made to the growth and development of those of us who were privileged to call her teacher or boss. She was truly an expander of nursing leadership.

At Yale which she chose to be her last assignment so that she could be near her family, she led the School of Nursing through troubled times to the brink of a new era in nursing. Three new programs were added during her tenure as Dean and the student body increased fourfold. When she retired as Dean, she took on the chairmanship of the planning committee for the new combined basic-graduate program for which she had worked so hard. She did this knowing that she could not see it through, but eager and willing to give of her failing strength to help make a dream become reality. To her friends, and her friends were legion and all manner of men and women, young and old, she was a warm, sensitive human being who cared. She had grace, dignity, common sense and courage, together with an unflinching sense of humor and enthusiasm and delight in all of life. She was one of those rare persons who enriched the lives of all of those with whom she came in contact.

Last Sunday, just a week after her death, I climbed on the Sleeping Giant where we had so often gone together. There on a knoll in the lee of the hill, I tried to put what she had meant to me into words. This brought the full impact of loss but also a profound sense of the privilege we had had in knowing Margaret and of the obligation which such privilege confers. It is an obligation shared by all of us who worked and learned with her to continue the work she began.

These are not easy times for nursing, for health care or for our country. There is a tendency to be discouraged, to paint the picture blacker than it is. So, let me end by quoting from Margaret's own words from her acceptance speech for the Sedgewick Award which she received last year. Her philosophy was like Sedgewick's in many ways. Like him, she had a positive approach to life and to her work. She had high expectations of others and they seldom disappointed her. She assumed without question the fundamental honesty and unselfishness of every human being. So she said in her address: "Today when we see and hear so much discouragement, when one feels out of step, if one voices any confidence in the present or future, it might help all of us to emulate Sedgewick's approach and point of view. . . . I do not wish to give the impression that I think enthusiasm alone can change the world. However, I believe we could get further faster if we dwelt a little more on what has been accomplished and thus generated some enthusiasm about the possibilities of the future. 'Human life was probably never more interesting or more exciting than it is today.'"

Margaret has left us a legacy of truth, service and enthusiasm for life and for humanity. We are grateful that she was here.

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Dr. Myron Wegman

The memory I have of Peg Arnstein when I first knew her thirty years ago is the memory I have today. In all those years she never lost the curiosity, the drive, the dedication, the capacity for understanding, the openness to new ideas, the ability to think and act boldly but above all, I remember her integrity and courage. It was these characteristics, plus the loyalty and steadfastness of her friendship, that endeared her



to people all over the world. How many times I have basked unashamedly in reflected glory while watching faces light up in Saskatoon, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, in all sorts of places when Peg's name would come up. As I listened to the eager questions about her, I had great pride just being able to claim her as a friend. The influence of her personality as a real ambassador and her contribution to so many countries as well as our own simply cannot be over-estimated.

Her indefatigability was absolutely legendary to her friends. It seemed there never was a time when she wasn't ready on short notice for tennis, for the theatre, for just plain hard work and endless meetings. I remember so well long sessions at Executive Boards with Peg paying attention always, right up to the last minute, while supposedly strong men were wilting from fatigue. One of the things that hit me hardest and brought her illness really home to me was when she warned me that late night telephone calls didn't go anymore.

Just last spring when my counterpart at Johns Hopkins asked me about approaching Peg to consider, since she was stepping down as Dean, coming to Johns Hopkins as Visiting Professor to take the place of a retired professor actually younger than Peg, it seemed to both of us a perfectly natural and reasonable proposal. As a matter of fact, even though Peg thought the idea a huge joke, she didn't quite say no right off the reel.

I admit that I connived mightily to bring Peg Arnstein to Ann Arbor to head our Public Health Nursing Program. I wanted the best in the world and she was it. Actually, I've never quite forgiven Yale for stealing her from Michigan, although deep down and in my saner moments I knew the move was right. But even in the short year she spent in Ann Arbor, she had a tremendous and lasting influence.

Peg was honored in many ways, not enough by any manner of means but perhaps as good an illustration of her outlook and courage as one could ask for took place last year when unexpected hospitalization prevented her from coming to the University of Michigan to receive an honorary Doctor of Science degree. The University, breaking all precedent, offered to have me come to New Haven to present the degree to her here in a special ceremony but Peg would have nothing to do with it. She insisted that seeing her friends in Ann Arbor again meant as much to her as the degree. And she did come to the next commencement last May and she did receive the degree and she looked perfectly beautiful.

But what I like to remember most about her honors and about her were the words of our own Ira Hiscock when he presented Peg with the Sedgewick Medal just a year ago this month, as he turned to her saying, "And Peg, this medal is all gold - just like you".