

Holly Smith
College of Arts & Sciences, '72 (English)

Former reporter for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Wallasey News* in Merseyside, England, and the New Jersey *Bergen Record*, currently editor and publisher of *Garden Square News*, a local news magazine for the communal gardens of central London, England.

I was in the class of 1972 at UVA, the first class of women to graduate from the College of Arts & Sciences.

I had completed two years at Sweet Briar College when I was accepted at UVA as a third year student.

My dad was in the Army while I grew up so I was used to changing schools and being in new environments. I wasn't too surprised that some teachers and fellow students were uncomfortable having women around. After all, they had signed up to an all-male College, and then, in 1970, that changed radically.

What further armed me for being in the vanguard of the arrival of women was something that happened to me the summer before I arrived in Charlottesville. During my lunch break at my summer job I read a book called "Our Bodies, Ourselves." It was the first women's liberation literature I had ever read, and it was a complete revelation to me. It explained that women were not second-rate people, and that they deserved every opportunity that men had.

When you look at the world through those lenses you become angry when you see women being held back, so I arrived at UVA determined to bring equal opportunity to as many aspects of the University as I could. I was on a crusade.

Luckily I was able to work as a reporter on the *Cavalier Daily*, so that gave me a platform to further my campaign. For example, I wrote stories which put the spotlight on the lack of equal access to sports at the University (including the fact that the girl's basketball team was being physically pushed off the court by the boy's team when the boys wanted to practice) and the lack of equal access to appropriate medical care. And I tried to help UVA women visualize what the future could hold – I arranged for a *CD* photographer to photograph me wearing my terry cloth bathrobe (over my clothes) and standing at the open door of a room on the Lawn holding my toothbrush. No women had previously lived on the Lawn, but the photo gave female students a picture of what the future could, and should, look like.

My fellow male students were usually friendly and helpful, although when they asked me about Sweet Briar College, and I explained that it was academically tougher than UVA, they really, really did not want to hear that.

In parallel with the gender upheaval at the College was the drama of the Vietnam War and male students having to face the possibility they might be drafted and sent to fight. Some of my fellow male students, determined not to go, decided to check into the hospital's mental ward and try to have themselves declared unstable. One even wrote his own obituary and had it published in the *Cavalier Daily* so he could send it to the Draft Board and be erased from the list of available men.

Another vivid memory is of a drunken pass made at me by blind date. He picked me up in his arms and carried me up the stairs to his bedroom. I wasn't going to fight with him on a stairway but once he put me on his bed I sprang up to get away and he tried to pull me back down, twisting my knee in the process. Luckily he then passed out and I was able to escape, but had to get medical help the next day for a sprained knee. As I limped around the Grounds for a couple of weeks afterwards I overheard one boy say to his friend, "She's pretty, but she walks funny."

Another more potentially serious hazard happened to me at student health, where gynaecologist Dr. Turner was fitting a new contraceptive, the Dalkon Shield, in female students seeking birth control. I felt unwell from the moment it was inserted, and after a couple of weeks asked him to remove it. He was annoyed, but did as I asked. My cry of pain as he extracted it could be heard throughout the waiting room, I feel sure. But I was so glad I'd made that decision because the badly-designed Dalkon Shield turned out to be a major medical disaster. Across the US it was fitted in millions of women but for some users it led to pelvic disease, infertility, birth defects, even death. It was taken off the market in 1974, and massive lawsuits bankrupted the company that made it. These problems weren't known when Dr. Turner treated me, and, judging by the applause his name provoked during the 40th reunion of the women who enrolled in UVA in 1970, he was a very popular doctor.

So I survived UVA, and with my *Cavalier Daily* training (we called it "teach yourself journalism") as a very useful start, I became a professional journalist, a job I have enjoyed immensely and continue to practice today.

For the record, I'd like to see the class of 1972 better recognized as the first class of women to graduate from the College of Arts & Sciences. The class of '74 tries to claim this distinction, but we 51 women in the class of '72 took it on the chin and helped to smooth the path for the women in the classes behind us.