



WINCHESTER'S GOLDEN GRADUATES

JANE COCKERILL HUNT – FROM CLASSMATE TO CLASS ACT!

By Pat Knasinski

Chicago Lights at Fourth Presbyterian Church on the Magnificent Mile, provides programs that strengthen individuals, families, and communities, serving over 7,000 people each year, changing lives, one life at a time. For nearly 30 years, Jane Cockerill Hunt, a graduate of Winchester High School Class of 1959, has volunteered her teaching skills there, enriching the lives of her over-50-year-old students. Jane Hunt believes that lifelong learning revitalizes life for older adults and that thinking together is not only essential in community life, but also the very basis for a rewarding life.

Jane Cockerill grew up on Richmond Street, along with her brothers Ed and Tom, only blocks away from their father's law office. Meeks Cockerill practiced law, and his wife Emogene worked as his office manager. Jane had great love and respect for her parents. She remembers, as a preschooler, giving away *imaginary* popsicles on the sidewalk in front of their home; her Dad was her best customer, especially of the orange ones. In the summer of 1946, she had a lemonade stand where she earned \$22.22, which she dutifully deposited in the Randolph County Bank. As for the odd change, she readily admits that she wasn't much of a math student. In fact, when she sold Girl Scout Cookies and cherries (fresh-picked off their trees at home) door-to-door, she remembers opening her sales pitch with a riddle: "Why was the Math book so sad?" (Answer: because it had so many problems.)

As a second grader, during the polio epidemic, Jane contracted the fearful disease, and her arms and legs were paralyzed. She remembers that she had been teeter-tottering with her special friend Rita Sue Bunsold (Replogle) at the school playground and couldn't move her legs. As friends and neighbors learned of her paralysis, many brought her comic books, and she proudly boasted of having the best comic book collection in Winchester.

Jane's parents were proactive in searching for a cure. Her mother, after extensive research, took Jane and her younger brother Tom to Florida for a year, where they lived in a

one-room cottage. Every day her mother carried Jane into the ocean and said, “Swim,” and one day she did. She knows that her mother, convinced that this plan would work, “willed her better.” Upon returning to Winchester, Jane walked up the front steps of their home, where her dad met her, kneeled down, and they cried together. That hug became their signature hug for the rest of his life.

During this time, Meeks Cockerill’s law partner, Bob Oliver, Sr., was running Harry Truman’s presidential campaign in the state of Indiana. Bob told him about Jane and her illness, and the president-to-be responded with a hand-written note to her:

October 12, 1948

My dear Janie,

Mr. Oliver has just informed me about your misfortune. I sincerely hope that you are on the road to recovery and that you will have a long, happy, and useful life.

Sincerely,

Harry Truman
To Miss Janie Cockerill
By Hand

Jane has always treasured Truman’s personal note to her, and it is truly the story of her life—“long, happy, and useful.”

After high school Jane completed a bachelor’s degree in English at DePauw University and a master’s degree at Indiana University, where she met her future husband, Don Hunt. They moved to the Chicago suburbs where Don began his career as a highly successful Chicago banker. Jane taught English, first in a local high school, then for over 20 years, English and Humanities at College of DuPage, a community college. In the mid-1980’s Jane was one of the founders of the Older Adult Institute at College of DuPage, where she transitioned from teacher of young college students to instructor of older adult students. Upon her retirement in 2007, the Institute program had grown from 50 to over 7,000 older adults.

In 1992 Jane Hunt was invited to be on the Great Books Foundation Board where she served for nearly 25 years and as Board Chair from 2000 to 2006. The Foundation works with teachers across the country and offers training programs to over 15,000 teachers of reading annually. During her tenure, her specific mission was to “have every third grader reading *with understanding* at the third-grade level because this ability is a strong indicator of success in school.”

Jane also served on the Rhodes Scholar Selection Committee from 2001 to 2007. From an annual field of 12 outstanding Midwestern young people, the committee narrowed the group to only four, a nearly impossible assignment, as all 12 had prominent scholastic achievements, outstanding characters, and unsurpassed leadership qualification. Jane describes it as a “Herculean task.”

The culmination of her life work, however, occurred when she and her husband decided to abandon the suburbs for downtown Chicago after their children, Brad and Marcia, left for college. There she discovered the Center for Older Adults which became the Center for Life and Learning, part of the Chicago Lights nonprofit organization. This wonderful educational outreach became Jane's "center for life" as well. She continues to volunteer there to this day, teaches a class called *Explorations*, and rarely repeats the same topic. Among her various subjects are the following: Utopian Visionaries; Do Politicians Really Believe Their Promises?; Edith Wharton; The Vegetarian Diet: Is it for Everyone?; Television—the Good, the Bad, and the Mostly Terrible; Education, Any Progress Out There?; Generation Z; and The Incomparable Cole Porter. In conjunction with her teaching, Jane has also led a number of older-adult travel/study trips. Some of her favorites include: England in search of Romanticism; Canada to study Canadian Culture; Ireland to understand "The Troubles" (the conflict with Northern Ireland); and Georgia, following in Sherman's footsteps.

In addition, Jane describes herself as a "Janeite," an enthusiastic member of the Jane Austen Society of North America. Each year she reads one of Austen's 6 novels, then repeats the cycle. She describes *Emma* as Austen's best novel, *Pride and Prejudice* as her most popular, and *Persuasion* as her own personal favorite. "Captain Wentworth's proposal in *Persuasion* is almost as perfect as my husband's in 1964."

Jane is an active member of the Fortnightly of Chicago, the oldest women's literary society in the country. She gives presentations to organizations and for charity benefits, facilitates book groups, walks daily, collects Chicago artists, needlepoints "potential" family heirlooms — and, of course, living in Chicago, she is a "die-hard" Cubs Fan!

Jane has wonderful memories of her high school years in Winchester. She describes them as "50's style fun!" She attended Methodist Youth Fellowship on Sunday evenings and often played hymn number 302 from the Methodist Hymnal, "Sweet Hour of Prayer." Jane quips that it was the only hymn she could play after 7 years of piano lessons. She remembers sewing pajamas and baking chocolate cake in 4-H, watching American Bandstand, and playing *first* cello in the Winchester High School Orchestra (of course, after Sandra Walker graduated, she was the *only* cellist in the orchestra). She remembers being in the front row and jumping up and down, cheering wildly, when Sandy Lumpkin was crowned the coveted honor of Pumpkin Queen of the Randolph County Mardi Gras. Each day after school, Jane recalls going home, helping with the housecleaning, setting the table and starting supper for the busy Cockerill family. She adds that she was well-paid for her work, saved it all for college, and proudly paid for a year of her college education. Jane loved basketball and was in the Winchester Cheer Block. Her favorite cheer was "Pass the butter; they are toast!"—well, until the school faculty squelched it.

From the Winchester teachers and adults in her life, she recalls many maxims. Mr. Glen Myers, her high school history teacher, taught her the roller coaster philosophy: "Life is a roller coaster—ups and downs. Sometimes you are at the top and that is exhilarating, but sometimes you are at the bottom, and then you say to yourself, the next direction is up." You always want to be able to say to yourself in life, "Yes, the next direction is up." Her father's favorite sayings were often thoughtful as well: "It's not what happens to you in life, but how you cope with it."

She can also hear him say as she and her husband were heading off to Chicago after their wedding: “Just remember. It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

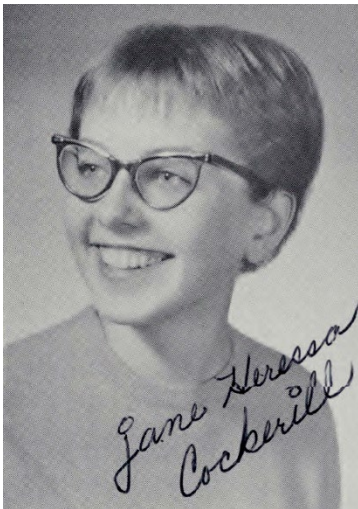
Jane is proud of her two brothers and is close to both. Her older brother Ed became an *emeritus* professor of radiology at Indiana University, and her younger brother Tom returned to Winchester, joined their father’s law firm, and currently practices law with his son Meeks.

Jane’s mother, Emogene Cockerill, always called Winchester “the center of the universe” where you could “cook on the front burner.” Growing up here, Jane could drive her grandfather’s tractor, milk a cow, can tomatoes, and keep charts at a basketball game. But even more, she learned to recognize integrity, compassion, common sense, and spirituality. “That’s what makes a quality education.”

Jane Cockerill Hunt is an educator who has spent her life improving herself and teaching others to do the same—from high school and community college students to “over-50 adults” to her children--and now to her four grandchildren, Sam, Chloe, KK, and Matthew. She affirms, “The most important thing we do is raise the next generation, and it takes all of us to do that. Passing on values, such as caring and thoughtfulness, is something I observed growing up. I had spectacular family, church, school, and neighbor role models in Winchester.”

Jane Cockerill Hunt is a Winchester Golden Graduate, who has gone from Classmate to Class Act!

Jane Cockerill in 1959



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