

Winchester's Golden Graduates From Classmate to Class Act!

By Pat Knasinski, Winchester Alumni Association

Sandra Walker Kelly graduated from Winchester High School with the class of 1957, just before the era of school consolidation began. Her story is one of remarkable achievement along with many difficulties that life has a way of handing each of us. But "perseverant" is the word that best characterizes her. In 2015 she was named Indiana Woman of Achievement, after serving in a professional position where she met the likes of President Jimmie Carter, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and then Senator Joe Biden. It is the Winchester Alumni Association's pleasure to introduce you to Sandra Walker Kelly, a "Winchester Golden Graduate" who has gone from Classmate to Class Act!

Born in Winchester, the daughter of Garl and Betty Walker, owners of Walker Funeral Home, she is the older sister to Daly Walker who was born the following year. When asked to reflect on her life, Sandra responded that "it is almost overwhelming to contemplate what one learns and the advantages one has growing up in a small town like Winchester."

Children of that era did not have sophisticated arts and entertainment, but they did have the advantage of receiving much attention. She recalls her kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Simmons, who happened to also be her grandmother's dear friend. How Sandra loved going to Kindergarten and taking a nap on her special rug! Unfortunately, Mrs. Simmons passed away during that year and was replaced by Mrs. Monroe, an equally nice teacher who also made learning interesting and fun. Sandra recalls that they put on a play for the PTA that year which Mrs. Monroe had written, based on a book that Sandra took to school for "Show and Tell." What a wonderful learning experience for an impressionable five-year old!

Elementary school brought solid, no-nonsense teachers into Sandra's life: Miss Virginia (Crew), Marie Canada, Mildred Wolf and Rachel Smith. "They laid the foundations of hard work, diligence, and a love for learning, especially reading with the Scott Foresman Series, *Dick and Jane*." During her middle school years, the students were challenged by Miss Nora Ford, Mrs. Lucille Stocksdale, Mr. Blake and Mr. Yarling, the former, seasoned teachers, and the latter, novices armed with fresh diplomas. Proceeding to high school, Sandra recalls the discipline and math learned from Mr. Glen Myers, Latin taught by Mrs. Violet Myers, orchestra under the batons of Mr. Charles VanNatta and Mr. Donald Traub, dimensions to her education that would serve her well later in life. Sandra learned leadership in high school by serving on the Student Council; she also was elected President of the Senior Class. But her most memorable and painful experience was volunteering to participate in the annual oratory contest. Four students agreed to write orations and present them, memorized, in front of the entire student body. The judges awarded 3 prizes, and you guessed it! Sandra didn't place. So, what to do? Learn to accept defeat, pull yourself up, and move on! And that's what Sandra did!

Like many young girls in Winchester, she enjoyed a multitude of extra-curricular activities, and because there were no sports teams for girls, continued involvement until graduation from high school.

Libby Gardner taught baking and sewing to the girls' 4-H Club. Esther Baker hired teenagers to assist her in teaching swimming at the Winchester Pool. Many, like Sandra, sang in the church choir and attended church youth group meetings, became members of Job's Daughters, and participated in Girl Scout Troops.

Sandra relates a very serious lesson she learned one summer while teaching swimming lessons at the Winchester Pool. "The pool did not allow blacks, but some black parents approached Mrs. Baker about lessons for their daughter. The park board was insistent that this could not be done. But Esther Baker held her ground and eventually prevailed so that the little girl could take swimming lessons." Sandra notes that this incident was one of the first lessons in her life when she learned what it means to stand up for what is right and to be inclusive. "Growing up in Winchester was a liberal education in life."

However, challenges began early in life for Sandra. She and her brother Daly both contracted and survived Polio in 1949 at the ages of 8 and 9. But what we come to understand as typical of Sandra is that she always saw the good that would come from a difficult life experience. As children, she and brother Daly learned to entertain themselves since no friends could come play with them. They also enjoyed the great adventures of Louisa Mae Alcott's characters, stories read to them by their mother during their recuperation.

In the fall of 1957, Sandra left Winchester for Ohio Wesleyan University where she earned an A.B. Degree in English. She began teaching at Deer Park High School in Cincinnati, when tragedy struck again: Sandra was in a serious automobile accident, requiring multiple surgeries, and forcing her to give up her teaching job. However, once again moving ahead, she eventually returned to Ball State University Graduate School, where she received a graduate assistantship. This led to a two-year teaching position at Ball State University. Family life interrupted her career, but she returned to Ball State later to a position in Ball State's Bureau of Business Research. She began as a researcher, then, with her Master's Degree in English, she became a writer and eventually the editor for the Bureau. Her career continued to expand when she was selected to become Ball State's first College Development Officer. In addition she became the editor of the *Ball State Business Review* and assisted the BSU College of Business to head-up a Mid-American Business Review that included all of the MAC schools.

John Worthen was hired as President of Ball State University soon thereafter, and Sandra Walker Kelly became Ball State's first Special Assistant to the President. She describes this position as a "cover-all-bases job," where she arranged major events for Dr. Worthen, wrote many of his letters and speeches, represented him on committees, or established and chaired committees at his direction. It was during this time that she hosted major campus guests including President Jimmie Carter, Secretary Henry Kissinger, Senator Joe Biden, governors, legislators, congressmen and other senators who visited campus. Sandra held this job for 16 years, when tragedy struck again. This time it was a serious liver disease, forcing her retirement.

Eventually the disease went into remission. How did Sandra respond? By enjoying her retirement? Of course not! Sandra once again persevered and realized that she still had more to contribute to the Muncie community. She accepted the position of Executive Director with the Muncie Symphony Orchestra. Never could she have imagined that learning to play the cello in the orchestra at Winchester High School would lead to another career 50 years later. As Sandra says, she certainly went out on a "high note!"

Sandra Walker Kelly was named an Indiana Woman of Achievement for her service to her community and state in October, 2015. She attributes her success to her family, her parents Betty and Garl Walker, and to her brother Daly Walker, as well as to the solid foundation of being a responsible and giving citizen, learned in Winchester and its schools.”

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