

WINCHESTER'S GOLDEN GRADUATES

Lettie Teague

FROM CLASSMATE TO CLASS ACT!

By Pat Knasinski

Winchester Alumni Association

Today, we present Lettie Teague, graduate of Winchester Community High School with the Class of '79, who is the wine columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and the author of three books as well.

Lettie was born in Indiana, but grew up in a variety of places in Ohio and North Carolina, due to her father's successful career in the glass industry. Edward Teague was employed by Indiana Glass in 1976, bringing his family to Ridgeville, IN, where they bought a 12-acre "farm." Having spent her early years in larger cities, it was indeed a "farm" to the Teague Family, and Lettie was thrilled when she acquired a horse, and then another horse, a pony, two dogs, and a number of barn cats. Lettie describes her life on that farm as a "kind of wonderland."

At Winchester Community High School, Lettie excelled in English under the instruction of Margo Varner. Varner recognized her talent and passion for writing and gave her writing assignments of her very own, exactly what a great teacher does! Lettie remembers Varner's assignment for her to write her own version of *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser—pretty heady stuff for a high school student.

Lettie headed off to Kenyon College in northeast Ohio, where she graduated with a degree in English with Departmental Honors. During her college years, she made a decision that would dramatically affect her future: she opted to study her junior year abroad in Dublin, Ireland and lived with an Irish family whose father was a wine merchant who introduced her to the wine industry.

After graduation from college she worked many wine-related jobs in retail, restaurants, wholesale sales and marketing, eventually becoming a public relations executive, specializing in wine. During her early years a friend referred to her as "Lettie of a Thousand Jobs." But as she says, "That's what your 20's are for, to find out what you should be doing and where." Her perseverance and earlier preparation in English and writing led her into a career in journalism in the mid 90's. She published her first book *Fear of Wine, An Introductory Guide to the Grape* in 1995. That book contains cartoon illustrations, and yes, Lettie drew her own cartoons, another of her many talents. At that time she became the food, wine and books editor for the Hearst Travel Magazine, *DIVERSION*. Soon after she became the wine editor and later the executive wine editor of *FOOD AND WINE*, where she worked from 1997 to 2009. She joined the *Wall Street Journal* in 2010 as the Journal's wine columnist and staff writer.

Lettie has won three James Beard Foundation Awards for her writing. These awards are described as the "Oscars" of the food publishing world and include the 2003 MFK Fisher Distinguished Writing Award, the 2005 Best Magazine Columns, and the 2012 Best Food-Related Columns for her work at the *Wall Street Journal*. Additionally, she has published three books that have been well received and she is

currently working on a fourth. Her books include *Fear of Wine* (Bantam Press), *Educating Peter* (Scribner's) and *Wine in Words* (Rizzoli), available on Amazon and in bookstores.

Lettie's advice to current Winchester high school students: "Find someone who believes in you, listens to you, and find something, or many somethings, that inspire you." For Lettie, one great source of inspiration were books. She spent hours at the Winchester Public Library and checked out books that the librarian once told her hadn't been checked out in 30 years! Her passions were (and still are) writing and riding horses although she noted sadly she no longer has a horse of her own as they are much more expensive in New York." Lettie reports that her family left Randolph County in 1988 to take care of her grandmother in North Carolina and later moved to be closer to Lettie's sister in Texas. Both her parents have passed away, her father only recently.

Margo Varner, WCHS English teacher and inspiration for Lettie Teague's pursuit of a career in writing was delighted to learn of the outstanding success of her former student. Varner said recently, "Lettie was one of those students I knew would go places. I would read her essays and just think, 'Wow, this is so good.' To know she is working at the *Wall Street Journal* makes me smile. She was an outstanding high school English student, and it is obvious she continues to excel. Way to go, Lettie, and I wish you all the best!"

Lettie Teague is a Winchester Golden Graduate who will always fondly remember her family's happy years spent on their "farm" in Randolph County.

Lettie Teague as a WCHS Senior in 1979



Lettie Teague today



Editor's Note: Pat Knasinski is a life-long resident of Winchester, graduate of Driver High School, Indiana University Bloomington and Ball State University. She retired as WCHS Spanish teacher in 2005 and now serves on the Winchester Alumni Association Board of Directors. If you have comments about this series of articles or know of other Winchester graduates who should be included in this series, please email her at winchesteralumni@yahoo.com