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May 1, 1987

Mrs. Barbara Lightsey
19 Margarita Crescent
Austin, Texas 78703

Dear Mrs. Lightsey;

Here is a copy of my article titled, "Those Days at Kirby Hall--
In anticipation of the former dorm's first reunion, two women of
different eras recall what life was like at the top of the hill."

I must thank you for your help in creating this article. It was the
most fun I've had all semester! Good-luck in your planning. As a
note, I have submitted it to Ernestine Wheelock for consideration in
Alcalde. I also sent a copy to Mrs. Base for use in her newsletter.
I hope you find it entertaining. Perhaps you may want to copy it
for the tea, feel free to.

I certainly enjoyed meeting you. I know one day I will look back
at U.T. the same way you have. Right now though, my one goal is
graduation!!

Very sincerely,

Andrea Heiler

Andrea Heiler

Andrea Catherine Meier

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"Those days at Kirby Hall"

In anticipation of the former dorm's first reunion, two women of different eras recall what life was like at the top of the hill.

by Andrea Meier

"I think college maybe was a little different then. It wasn't quite as competitive as it is now. As I look back--but maybe everyone thinks of their youth as simple and joyous," said Ruth Evans, a resident of Kirby Hall dormitory from 1937-1939.

"I have to say they were four of the happiest years of my life. I guess its sort of that period, you know you're really not out on your own yet and you know you will be in a few years. But you're still having fun," said Barbara Daigle Lightsey, a Kirby Hall resident from 1956-1961.

Remembrances such as these will sure to be served up at the Kirby Hall tea being planned for fall of 1987. November 15 is the date for the first reunion honoring all women who lived at the dorm, while attending The University of Texas at Austin. It will be held, where else but at Kirby Hall.

The 62-year-old building sits stately atop a hill, six blocks from and looking to the north side of campus. Located at 306 W. 29th St., on a site once owned by Mirabeau M. Lamar, it now houses a college preparatory school. Open windows surrounded by Virginia Creeper reveal students bent over in concentration. College girls once hung curtains in these windows. They studied here too, from 1925 until 1970.

The Hall was named for the first dean of women at The University of Texas, Mrs. Helen Marr Swearingen Kirby. She held this office from 1884 until her death in 1921. It was erected by the educational department of the conference of Southern Methodist Churches, at a total cost of \$125,000 according to the original report.

Evans recalls the 30's with a mist in her eye, "My room was the center one that overlooks the balcony, it used to be very nice at night. In those days, young men from the fraternity and other young men would come over and serenade us. They would sing lovey songs and it was very romantic. The girls would come

through our room and go out on the porch and listen to them.

"It was very lovely in those days. Our house mother, a Mrs. Smith, was from Memphis, Tennessee--a grand dame of the old South if I've ever seen one--with her white hair piled on top of her head, and she always wore navy blue. She had some little glasses, a pince nez, they fitted as just a nose piece. When she wasn't wearing those glasses the chain would come up into a fleur de lis gold pin that she wore," she laughed.

Operations for 50 women ran smoothly due to the work of a small staff.

"They had a maid, I believe for each floor. Then they had one dietician, a Mrs. Carlson. She was a Swedish lady. What food they used to turn out! Every meal you were assigned a place in the dining room. You sat with white tablecloths and silver at every meal--flowers on every table. You were served by girls who were working their way through college. Sometimes they were even residents of our hall. They had one lady who ran the business office, and that was the staff," Evans remembers.

"Accommodations for fifty girls are provided on each of the two upper floors," describes the facility in 1925 by a publication of the day, Womens Viewpoint. "These rooms," adds the article "like the remainder of the building, are finished in cream color plaster with walnut trim and hardwood floors. Besides a pair of single beds, each room is furnished with a walnut dresser and study table, two brown wicker chairs, and two small velvet rugs. A full length mirror backs the door to each room. On both floors are located two bath units and several linen closets."

"We had as I recall, on the second floor, on each of those

the very wealthiest ones. And so you mostly did things here on campus," said Evans.

"But we had two dances a year, a Christmas cotillion and a spring cotillion, and we could be out until two in the morning. Yes, so that was a big deal! The Christmas dance was always held at the dormitory. They would roll up the rugs in the living room, and the dining room would be used for the party. It was very nice. Then our spring dance, we had at The Driskill Hotel."

A system of upper-class advisors helped plan the dances. Evans recalls how every girl was the belle of the ball. Each girl invited a date and two stags, creating a stag line. Pairs traded dances with their friends and had a wonderful time meeting others this way. Programs were made that hung by a ribbon from the wrist.

The dining room and kitchen occupy the west wing of the first floor. Sunday dinner was a highlight of the week.

"It was quite an event. You always invited your boyfriend because it would be special. You would get dressed up in your church clothes. Everyone was encouraged to go to church. I went to University Methodist but there were girls of every denomination. A lot of times we would slip out and go to All Saints because they had the best parties."

Evans vividly remembers how things looked during the late 90's. "The trees had not covered that wall beside S.R.D. We used to want to save our shoes. That street that comes down in a valley and connects to 27th Street was gravel and it would ruin your shoes. We got up on that wall and walked, then when we met the pavement, we'd walk to campus.

"Those houses were single family houses. A lot of ladies made extra money by letting young men board and room with them. The Figi house was there--and the Scarbrough house. The Kinsolving home was on the corner where the Bishop lived. Our lawn was lush green with pretty shrubs.

"There was a little garage apartment and two young nice men who were taking their graduate degrees lived there. They were sort of our handy-men, and very nice. One of them, Wilson Richards, had a green Model A Ford. He was so nice and he would give us the keys and let us go to Barton Springs to swim. We had a good time.

Each woman had an assigned seat for meals in 1938. "It was just like a family--you knew everybody. The older girls kind of looked out for the younger ones. On that first floor they used to have a glassed in place with long tables and chairs. When you closed the door it was almost sound proof. That was where we could go to study if we had some really serious studying or if you had company.

"I remember that I was no great shakes at math, there was a nice older girl who used to tutor me free--just as a friend. She helped me get through my math! We were a lovely family and Mrs. Smith was a wonderful, wonderful woman. She just nurtured all of us. We were all happy girls then. I always tell the youngsters I work with now, 'Enjoy, don't wait until you're old because you never know what life holds.'

Evans still keeps up with her best friend and her roommate from Kirby Hall. She and her husband chose to retire in Austin because of their fond memories of the city. She currently works

in the Housing department at The University of Texas.

"Tall white columns supporting a small balcony above the long front porch give a colonial appearance to the three story, brick structure. In the east wing of the first floor is situated the spacious and luxuriously furnished social room together with a small library. The dining room and kitchen occupy the west wing of the same floor while the central portion of the building contains two private parlors, two director suites, and the necessary business offices." --Women's Viewpoint, 1925

This description could have been written today. An eloquence has been maintained even though walls were knocked out to allow for classrooms. As you enter the building the parlor situated on the right captures the charm of days-gone-by. Dark antique furniture and patterned rugs adorn the room. A place setting of the original, pink flowered china used at meals, is on display here. It was given by Mrs. Barbara Daigle Lightsey.

Lightsey is the chairman of the Kirby Hall reunion. She was a resident from 1957-1961. The two other committee members are Lucille Bridgers Wilson, whose mother was a dorm mother the opening year until 1926, and Reba Green, the parent of one of Kirby Hall School's first graduates. Wilson has written an unpublished account of her experience at Kirby Hall.

Lightsey has gathered by word-of-mouth, names and addresses of about 20 former residents. She has sent letters to these women ~~with directions for them to xerox the letter and send it on to any~~ former resident they might know. Cherishing the friendships she

made at Kirby Hall, Lightsey remembers fondly her experiences there.

"Kirby Hall was a little more strict than other dorms, she remembers. "There were two rooms on the lower floor. One you could go in with jeans on and your hair rolled up to study. But the other room, if you were studying with a gentleman, you had to be fully clothed. No jeans or pants could be worn. If we went down in the foyer to meet someone as they came in, we had to be pretty spiffed up or get right out of there. You were encouraged to be ladies."

During her time at The University of Texas, twenty years later than Evans', almost all women wore dresses or skirts to classes. The sign out policy was also maintained at the dorm.

"It was controlled in that I had to sign out where I was going, who with, what time we left and then we'd sign back in. At the beginning of the year, you had to have written permission from your parents that you could go places. It was just that kind of philosophy there at the dorm. Of course you could lie, my best friend did the night she eloped!"

Rules changed only slightly through the years at Kirby Hall. Meal time, in particular, was still a time to be shared with friends and to catch up on the day's events.

"The dining room had beautiful oak tables and I believe they each sat eight. Breakfast was buffet style, and you had to be dressed. At lunch they opened the doors and after everyone was in, you had the blessing, then sat down. It wasn't very formal. Dinner though, was a different matter. The doors opened at around six. The waiter brought the food to the table. Whoever ended up

at the place where the plates were stacked, she was the hostess for the meal. No one left until the whole table was ready to leave. So if you had an early lab you requested from the dorm mother to sit at the head table.

"My dorm mother (1956-1961) was Mrs. Irene T. Powers--we called her "I.T.P." She had been a missionary at a girls school in Hawaii. I think that affected how she felt young ladies ought to be."

The "Kirby Hall special" was a favorite dessert among the residents. It is now featured in the cookbook, "Cook-Em Horns." This treat consisted of a graham cracker crust with a custard filling. Another treat came during finals week when Mrs. Heaton, the dietician, served hot spiced tea and chex party mix in Mrs. Power's office.

Lively escapades are nothing new to dorm living.

"We did all kinds of funny things when I was there. We christened my roommate's new car with a bottle of champagne. We sunbathed on the back slope and played ping-pong on the front porch. During the late afternoon, right before dinner, a lot of us would walk in the neighborhood. The houses back there were so pretty and we would just get a sense of home. One thing we did--and we thought we were so risque--we would put heavy raincoats on, over our pajamas, and go down to 7-11 to buy a sherbert or ice cream."

Fudge kitchens prepared with a gas jet and sink were on each floor. They have since been turned into storage for art supplies.

~~"They were for the convenience of girls with a sweet tooth, who~~
like to make their own candy or prepare college spreads."

according to Viewpoint.

"We weren't supposed to have electrical appliances in our rooms. Occasionally a girl would be brave and sneak popcorn but you could smell that everywhere. Of course, that was before the day of microwave ovens and mini-refrigerators," said Lightsey.

In 1987 the red brick building looks from the outside, much as it did during its reign as a dorm. It still surrounds a lush green lawn, kept that way by Joe Board, the maintenance man since 1981. In spring, China Berry trees blooming in purple may still be viewed in neighboring Adams Park. Board keeps daisies and roses in the side beds amongst ferns and blue bonnets. He consults with Beverly Rase, director of Kirby Hall School, about what to plant.

Board keeps the red brick clean and washes the front porch twice weekly. He cuts the ivy away from the windows each year to prevent it taking over the building. He has shown over 40 women their old rooms; many come by to reminisce.

"This building is extremely well built. The walls are all mortar and wire mesh--very little wood has been used. It's virtually impossible to hang things unless you have a special drill," he says.

He claims the building has a personality of its own and that sometimes inexplicable things happen. Fuses have come unscrewed in locked boxes and light fixtures have come loose for no apparent reason.

"I hear lots of loud sounds when I'm working here alone.

They're loud enough that you know you're not imagining things," he says.

Known to be very friendly he says, "My title is 'big brother' to the kids here." He is able to inform a person about any room in the building. A very unique room is the 'penguin room.' This is an old dorm mother's room that now contains two large display cases filled with various collected penguins--all shapes and sizes. The valuable collection was given by a benefactor to the school.

One of his favorite stories is that of finding the original hardwood floor in the dining room, beneath a layer of carpet, linoleum and plywood. Samantha is Board's eight-year-old cat who follows him around as he works. She seems to know every crack as well as he does.

When the water pipes in the original kitchen-turned chemistry lab broke during a 1980 freeze, he found the problem quickly and prevented the building from flooding. Board has learned to deal with old locks and skeleton keys and says, "Some of these keys will unlock the doors but won't lock them again, and vice-versa."

Rase, the director finds great pride in the building. The philosophy at the school (grades 3-12) is stated as, "though we have offered no regular formal worship or religious instruction, Kirby Hall School is a Christian school with requirements which derive from the basic Christian principals of respect for others, personal integrity and responsible conduct."

Fourth grader, Alexis Goertz says, "I like the building but the only thing is walking up and down the stairs gets very, very

tiring--especially when you're carrying a book bag that weighs 50 pounds!" Her third grade friend, Elizabeth Bowman says, "I like the building because its decorated nice and feels more like home than a public school."

David "Pop" Barrow purchased the building in 1973 and saved it from probable destruction--due to the closing of the dorm. He leased it to The Environmental Institute until 1976, when it then turned into a school. Lightsy supposes the dorm closed in 1970 due to society's changing mores, the distance of the dorm from campus and the new apartment lifestyle that began to catch on during the late 60's.

As a dorm, Kirby M. Hall was home to many cherished memories. As a school, memories are still in the making there. The reunion this fall may clear out some cobwebbs or spark something new. All you "Kirby girls" get prepared for the best!