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**ALUMNI**

## At Gardner-Webb, Seven Friends Formed an Unbreakable Bond Lasting Six Decades

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JULY 30, 2021



▲ From left, Linda Query Ramseur, Carolyn Bentley Lindsley, Bette Howell Edwards, Lynora Greene Essic and Betsy Thompson Robinson, have been best friends since graduating from Gardner-Webb junior college in 1964. Two of the group couldn't attend the friends' gathering at Gardner-Webb: Carolyn Pruitt Harris and Gwen Johnson McCormick.

### On International Friendship Day (July 30), We Celebrate These Alumnae Who Inspire Us With Their Loyalty and Dedication

In 1962, seven young women came to Gardner-Webb, then a junior college, from six towns scattered across the Mountains, Piedmont and Coastal Plains of North Carolina. Two knew nothing about the school before arriving to campus on move-in day. The others were drawn to GW because of family, friends, and an energetic representative of the college.

They were strangers who ended up next door to each other on the third floor of Stroup Dormitory. Four of them became roommates. When they graduated two years later, these seven friends had forged a bond that has lasted nearly six decades. They've celebrated marriages, the births of children and grandchildren, and carried each other through sickness and times of sorrow.

"The first thing you do when you get some bad news, is you let them know," said Lynora Greene Essic, who grew up on a farm in Alleghany County, N.C., and now lives in Winston-Salem. "Letting them know is just like contacting the rest of the family."

"It's automatic," added Linda Query Ramseur, a native and current resident of Concord, N.C.



- Recently, five of the women spent the afternoon at Gardner-Webb. For Bette Howell Edwards, it was the first time she had been back since 1964, and it was the first time the five had been back as a group. They visited their dorm and found their dorm rooms.



- The friends pose with their photos from the 1964 yearbook. From left, are, Carolyn Bentley Lindsley, Lindy Query Ramseur, Betsy Thompson Robinson, Lynora Greene Essic and Bette Howell Edwards. Two of the group couldn't attend the friends' gathering at Gardner-Webb: Carolyn Pruitt Harris and Gwen Johnson McCormick.

Recently Essic and Ramseur met Carolyn Bentley Lindsley of Raleigh, N.C., Bette Howell Edwards, of Nashville, Tenn., and Betsy Thompson Robinson, of Stanley, N.C., at Gardner-Webb to have lunch, reminisce and tour the campus. Essic commemorated the special day by presenting her friends lapel pins with the GW seal and the words, "Friends since 1962." Two of their friends, Carolyn Pruitt Harris, of Canton, Ga., and Gwen Johnson McCormick, of Sanford, N.C., were unable to attend.

It was the first time Edwards had been back to campus since graduating and the first time the five of them had visited as a group in 57 years. Essic and Ramseur came for the Class of 1964 Half-Century celebration and couldn't believe all the changes to the campus and growth in Boiling Springs. "We thought we had landed in a different world," Essic commented, telling a story about asking for directions and being shocked to learn there was a fast food restaurant in town. In 1962, the last building on campus was the Bost Gymnasium.

The women attended Gardner-Webb for different reasons. Lindsley was from Asheville, N.C., and her family expected her to go to Mars Hill, but she wanted to go to a Christian school closer to Davidson, where her boyfriend was in college. “So I found Gardner-Webb,” she said. “We’ve been married 56 years, have two sons, two grandsons and one granddaughter.”

Essic grew up in the shadow of an older sister who always seemed to do everything right. “I said, ‘I’m going somewhere where nobody knows me.’ I’m not going to be known as so and so’s daughter or sister,” she related. “I found Gardner-Webb. Nobody in Alleghany County had ever been to Gardner-Webb before, so I thought that’s where I am going. The day I showed up here was the first day I ever saw the campus.”



▲ Betsy Thompson Robinson and her husband, Bones, are in the photo at left, and Betsy poses with Lynora Greene Essic in the photo on the right. The photos were made when they came to GW Homecoming in 1972.

Edwards, originally from Waynesville, N.C., was the youngest of five children and looked up to her older brother who had played football for Gardner-Webb. “I thought he knew everything,” she said. “Whatever he did, I did.”

For Robinson, who grew up in Stanley, Gardner-Webb was her second choice. “I didn’t want to be a secretary and I had high hopes to go to Carolina to be in the dental assistant school,” she stated. “I didn’t get in. I was an alternate and time was running out. I knew I had to find somewhere to go, because it was understood in my family that you would go to college. I knew two girls who were going to school here, so I applied and got in. I had a different roommate the first year, and lived with Lynora the second year. I was a cheerleader for two years and met my husband here. He was a basketball player – it’s the all-American story.”

Ramseur, who also had a boyfriend at home, discovered Gardner-Webb when a representative of the college came to her school. “Several of us went by and got information,” she said. “He was a good salesperson. He sold me on Gardner-Webb. Several times that day I went back by his booth, and I got all the information and the little book and took it home and showed my mother and daddy. We came for a visit, and he met us and we had lunch with him. My daddy learned it was Baptist and a Christian school and that was all he needed.”





▲ “Dean (Ruth) Kiser would stand there and look you up and down,” Bette Howell Edwards said.

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One of the things they didn’t know about Gardner-Webb beforehand were the strict rules, and the Dean of Women, Miss Ruth Kiser, who enforced them. In the evenings, students stayed in their rooms from 7 to 9 p.m. At 9:30, they could take a study break to walk to the bookstore and get a snack. They were expected to be back before lights out, which was 11 on weeknights and 11:30 on Saturday night—if you had a C average. A hall proctor went around making sure all the lights were out and also inspected their rooms every morning.

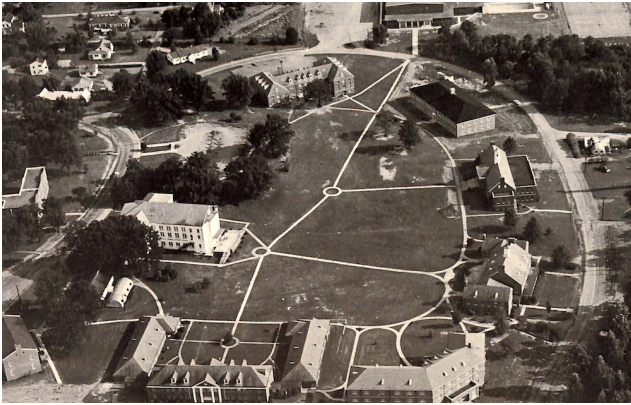
“We had to sign in and sign out and be back by 11,” Edwards said. “When you walked in that door, Dean Kiser would stand there and look you up and down. If it was 5 minutes after 11, your parents were called.”

As the group toured the campus, they laughed and shared more stories about their time at Gardner-Webb. After graduation they went their separate ways: Lindsley and Edwards got an apartment in Charlotte with Edwards’ sister and went to work; Ramseur got married and went to work in Concord; Essic went to Appalachian State; and Robinson moved back to Stanley, got a job as a secretary and was married the next year.

Although separated by distance, they kept in touch, writing letters and attending each other’s weddings. When children came, they celebrated and continued to share the joys and sorrows of life. The first time they all got together for a reunion was in 1979. Since then, they have met yearly.

The women say “divine intervention” brought them together in Stroup Dorm to form a sisterhood that’s sustained them through the years. “We had some good times,” Robinson reflected after seeing

their old dorm rooms. “I wouldn’t take anything for the experience we had.”



▲ The Gardner-Webb Campus in 1964

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▲ In 1972, when Betsy Thompson Robinson and Lynora Greene Essic came to homecoming, they posed at the fountain area that used to be in front of Webb Hall.

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▲ Bette Howell Edwards, left, and Lynora Greene Essic recreate the photo on the left, which was made at graduation in 1964.

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- ▶ To commemorate the special day and their nearly 60-year friendship, Lynora Greene Essic, presented her friends with a pin.
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