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Up Close: Quietly authoritative, endearingly direct

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UP CLOSE

Quietly authoritative, endearingly direct

Marguerite Hays guided university communications and edited *Furman Magazine* for 35 years

Marguerite Hays would likely not have been terribly pleased that a service was held in her memory at Furman's Daniel Chapel July 3.

Oh, she would have been delighted to see the many family members, friends, and colleagues who were there. It's just that she was never comfortable being the center of attention. Which meant, as her son Tommy said, she was

probably looking on, shaking her head, rolling her eyes, and muttering, in her characteristic fashion, "Good grief."

For those in attendance, however, the gathering provided an opportunity to celebrate a woman whose compassionate nature, gentle charm, and good humor touched them all—and whose influence, both direct and behind the scenes, was a major factor in Furman's rise in regional and national prominence.

It was fitting that the service for Marguerite, who died June 21 at the age of 84, was held on the campus. A 1954 graduate, she edited *Furman Magazine* for 35 years, from 1963 until her retirement in 1998. For most of that time she also served as director of university relations, with responsibility for all communications and public relations efforts. She was one of the first women, if not the first, to head a high-level administrative department at the university.

Her work in all areas was top notch, but the magazine was her passion, and it earned awards and recognition for its depth, integrity, and professionalism. Her early background in journalism (newspapers and television) no doubt helped develop the objectivity and perspective that she brought to her job.

Under her direction, the magazine struck a balance.

While it published the feel-good stories, it also frequently delved into more sensitive areas, offering insightful analyses of Furman's strengths and struggles, and exploring how the university was affected by and responded to world events—as any liberal arts school worth its mission teaches its students to do.

Marguerite believed the best way to promote the institution she loved was to tell its stories—all its stories—openly and truthfully, then trust the readers to draw their own conclusions. So her magazines examined the on-campus impact of such issues as the war in Vietnam, student activism, the women's movement, the concerns of African-American students, and the separation from the South Carolina Baptist Convention. When detractors who preferred a more sanitized publication occasionally questioned this approach, she responded respectfully and diplomatically, even if she was not always afforded the

same courtesy.

I am fortunate to be one of five people—with Vince Moore, Nell Smith, Terry Walters, and Gayle Warth—who have worked in the same office with Marguerite, and with each other, for a combined total of more than 100 years. She led by example, championing collaboration and insisting on the highest standards.

Totally lacking in pretense or self-importance, she was one of us. She encouraged a free exchange of ideas, and her trusting nature fostered an atmosphere of camaraderie and loyalty. Make no mistake; we knew who had the final word, and Marguerite always called it as she saw it. But her leadership style united us, both as a team and as friends.

When she retired in 1998, Furman lost an irreplaceable blend of civility, wisdom, talent, graciousness, and class. She remained a valued advisor and confidante for many years, but after dementia began to take its toll, she moved to Asheville, NC, to be near Tommy (Class of '77) and his family. For Tommy and his brother Chris, this was an especially cruel blow, as the same disease had claimed their father in 2000.

Still, in their remarks at the service, the brothers spoke of how their mother's personality—her intelligence, her sly wit, her love for and pride in her family—never completely disappeared. Tommy closed his talk with a story about her time at Brooks-Howell Home in Asheville, where she would often interrupt conversations to ask staffers if they knew how to spell the word they'd just used. When they responded yes, she would say, in her matter-of-fact way, "All right then, let's hear it." ●

— by **Jim Stewart '76**
(the writer served as editor of *Furman Magazine* from 1998 to 2013)