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Reflection



A Long Life Gives the Treasure of Reflection

BY PANSY RIDGEWAY '53

A life of experience is exactly that. I am a Furman graduate who has had the wonderful honor of a long life and the treasure of reflection.

What did I learn? Well, I must say that the guidance and actions of my humble and remarkable parents were my insurance to becoming a person who is ever-present yet responsive to choices in life's paths. My father was a farmer. As he and I leaned on our fence and looked out toward his fields, he told me how proud he was that I was graduating from high school.

"See that cow over there?" he asked. "She is how I am going to get your class ring."

This will ground you like no other remark. I had eight siblings who chose military

or business courses, and I was the one who chose to go to college. This was not a right—it was an honor. I guess I soaked in so very much at an early age. Dad had me drive him to local political meetings at the age of 14. I sat in the back of the room, as his chauffeur, and listened to all the adults assess the large and the small. I could not have known as a teen that this would be the true foundation for my life's work.

Furman was still in my state, but the old campus in downtown Greenville seemed like a country unto itself to me. The women were on one campus, and the men were on the other end of downtown. The war years were over, and we were headed into the 1950s. We wore "proper

clothes" and perhaps gloves. We women were bonding and finding out what matters while Furman studies filled in all the blanks on our canvas of knowledge. Today, as then, I firmly believe that Furman's contributions made my life and career what it became, and I see it most clearly today.

I hold my four years at Furman quite tightly in my hands. It has been more than six decades, and I am indeed startled by that number. You are reading this as a current student or a graduate, a parent or grandparent, and we can all say that there are regrets intertwined with our accomplishments. Yet, Furman has adapted to each decade.

Students do not wear dresses or gloves on the "new" campus today. T-shirts may now become passé, but the constant will be what we are given through respectful knowledge mixed with the opportunity for deep reflection. That is what has and will provide growth and flexibility to a seasoned life. Today's national politics can test our core values as no other time. My decades have created a person with a moral center, and this makes me fearless and calm against the shifting winds and bellicose rhetoric.

I left Furman with no finite plan, but my love of country steered me into local politics. I do recognize that Furman made me understand that it is my duty as a person and citizen to make a difference. I am confident I have done so, and I see those contributions within my community even now. Local efforts do provide that important interaction and learning

curve about what needs will reflect the community as a whole. This is critical even if you enter a wider arena.

As citizens, we have the duty to provide support and action. The act of volunteering could be just that. I have a firm belief in the rights of each person in the United States and the strength created by our diversity. We are unique in the world because we welcome all who come to our shores, and we are tolerant to different skins and religions. The entire world looks to see if we have succeeded in our quest, and they hold our country to be their beacon of joy and also peace. If each small community follows this creed—then nothing will break us. Our enemies wish us to flounder and turn on ourselves. They wish us to cull the herd and separate anyone who is different, but our education and compass will never let this happen.

Thank you, Furman.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pansy Ridgeway '53 was the first female mayor of Manning, South Carolina, and held this office for 26 years after serving eight years as its first councilwoman. She was the first female president of the South Carolina Municipal Association, chair of the Santee-Lynches Council, and received the state's Governor's Order of the Palmetto. She is a recipient of the Farlow Award of the Municipal Association and received Furman's MM Sullivan Award.