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Q & A With Eleanor Beardsley

Furman University

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Q & A WITH ELEANOR BEARDSLEY



Eleanor Beardsley '86 is an international correspondent for National Public Radio and is based in Paris. She was the principal speaker at Furman's 193rd commencement this past May.

Who was your favorite Furman professor?

EB: Dr. John Block. He made 19th and 20th century Europe come alive. Some of the historical characters still come back to my mind all these years later. In Dr. Block's voice, of course.

What's one of your fondest memories of Furman?

EB: They're all different. Falling in love for the first time, going to football games with my friends, freshman year hall life on Haynesworth 300, eating dinner in the dining hall — I loved the food!

If you could do your Furman experience all over again, what would you do?

EB: I would maybe take advantage of more cultural opportunities — plays, talks, Cultural Life Programs. I guess when you're young, you don't realize that you

aren't necessarily surrounded by all of these wonderful "opening" opportunities your whole life.

What was your hardest class at Furman?

EB: Math, which I'm no good at. But aside from that, it was Marriage and the Family. This was a sociology class that I took to get an easy credit. But I would come out of that class steaming and fighting with my boyfriend (who also took it) almost every day. The teacher was a wonderfully nice older man (I can't recall his name), but he was old-fashioned, and he would say things like, "Young men, when you come home from work, give your wife a kiss because she's been doing housework all day and she needs your attention." Well, I was a total feminist (still am), and things like that made me crazy. My boyfriend just loved to tease me because he knew how much it got under my skin.

What's something you never leave on an assignment without?

EB: Silicone earplugs. Assignments can be grueling, and you have to be able to sleep when you need to!

What have you learned from your travels and reporting?

EB: That people are kind of the same the world over. And there are many different ways of looking at an issue. Our way isn't necessarily the right way, it's just the American way. And there are definitely other angles. Every country thinks they're the ones who see things the right way.

What would you recommend students explore?

EB: Foreign travel to help ground them as they seek to

understand today's societal tensions. There is nothing like traveling to or living in a foreign country to give you a better idea of what's right and wrong with your own country. It also gives you more perspectives on things and some fresh ideas for dealing with your own problems.

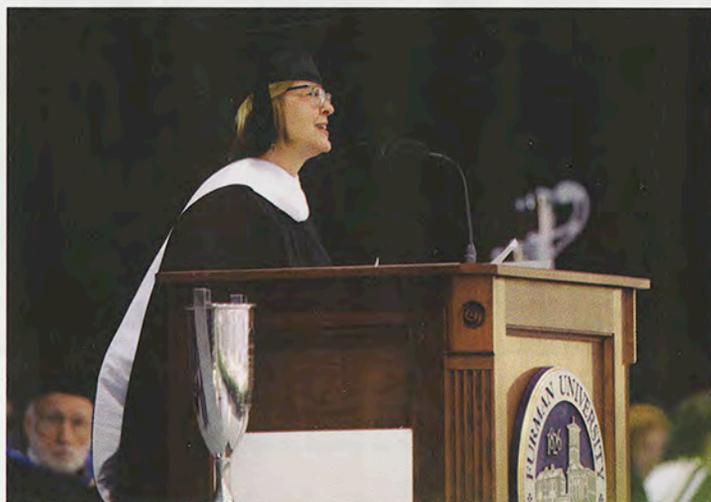
What is the best advice you've ever received?

EB: To seek out friends and people who have a totally different outlook and perspective than your own.

What's one thing Americans might be surprised to learn about the French?

EB: They love us! And are immensely fascinated by our country. ♦

Beardsley, in her commencement address, shares experiences from her career, from the United Nations to Capitol Hill to Paris.



THEN



MARY JENNINGS '04

As the only child of a single mom, a small college like Furman that was only two hours away seemed like a great fit.

It was far enough to give me some independence, but not so far that I couldn't head home to Mom if the need ever arose. Little did I know then that by the middle of my freshman year, the rest of my Furman experience would be shaped by the reality that I would no longer have the same reasons to pop home to Georgia.

That year, I lost my mother tragically and suddenly on March 11. Given the circumstance, it would have been completely understandable to withdraw from Furman. But that's not what happened.

I went home for just over a week for the funeral, and when I returned to Furman, it was to a brand-new family. My roommate and childhood friend was there by my side. My teachers were understanding and accommodating of my absence. I met with a counselor who connected me with a fellow student who had lost her father that year; I still think so fondly of her today. The housing department bent over backward to ensure that my three best friends and I could continue living together by giving us a basement apartment our sophomore year, which was near the piano practice

rooms where I wrote many of my early songs.

There were many other defining moments that shaped my time at Furman: my first political science class that began the day of the 9/11 attacks and my decision to major in political science; meeting Professor of Philosophy Carmela Epright through her gender philosophy course, which completely redefined my understanding of what it means to be a strong woman and human being; and taking Education Professor Scott Henderson's intro to education course, which led to earning my Master of Education at Vanderbilt University.

All of this evolved when many in my family weren't sure if I would recover from the loss of my mother — and I don't know that I could have, had I been amid the masses at a large school.

It amazes me still that at a time when I had lost the person who mattered most, I was still able to find myself. Furman, and the people with whom I connected during my time there, had a lot to do with that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Jennings '04 is a singer, songwriter and pianist who makes *bolo ties* for her company, *No Sass Creations*. ♦