

# A Remembrance of Dr. Marion Fay

by

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The first person who greeted me at the College – that lovely spring day in 1953 – was a woman of soft Southern speech who said, “Welcome to the College! I’m Marion Fay. I’m the dean.” We shook hands, and so began a friendship which was to last for 37 years. Her presence there that day as the dean was an important factor in my decision to accept a Charter Membership on the National Board of a college then unknown to me.

At that date, Dr. Fay already had established an exemplary career at the college as a scientist, an educator, author, and administrator.

A native of New Orleans, she had come first to the college in 1935 from a teaching position at the University of Texas. Her academic preparation included a bachelor’s degree from Newcomb College of Tulane University in 1915, a master’s from the University of Colorado in 1922, and finally a Ph.D. from Yale University in the field of physiologic chemistry.

It was as a professor of physiologic chemistry that she began her tenure at what was then the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania and in 1943 became its acting dean. Three years later, she was named dean, and thereby became the only woman dean of a medical school in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1959 she was named to the dual post of president and dean, and in the words of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “Dr. Marion Spencer Fay, only woman dean . . . received another distinguished honor when she was named president of the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania . . . . In her new post, . . . [she] will be the first woman president of a medical college in the Western Hemisphere” [April 26, 1959]. The article continued with a listing of her memberships in scientific and learned societies and her many publications in their journals.

It was as president and dean that she came to my home state of California in 1962 to be honored at a luncheon. The hostess was a member of the National Board. Her name was Mary Pickford. The place was Pickfair in Beverly Hills; the date was October 29, 1962. I see it now. I still remember the lovely setting and seeing Dr. Fay’s gracious dignity as she chatted with “America’s Sweetheart” [as Mary Pickford was known].

In 1963 the National Board initiated its Award Committee and the annual selection of a medical woman scientist. It was Dr. Fay who served as our consultant on medical questions, and Dr. Fay who wrote the citations which would be handed to our honorees. Through the many years in which I served on that committee, I remember her unfailing helpfulness and her own expressed appreciation for our efforts.

At the beginning of 1964, after five years in her dual post, Dr. Fay retired but continued to serve the college on its Board of Corporators. In June of that year, the National Board achieved a major goal at a major event: the dedication of our Biochemistry Floor at the college. The plaque which was unveiled read:

This floor was given by the National Board of the Woman's Medical College to honor a Distinguished Woman Scientist and Medical Educator who served this College as Professor of Biochemistry – Dean – President.

By acclamation at our National Board meeting that day, she was named Life Member of the National Board.

Her years on the Board of Corporators proved very useful when she was asked to serve as acting president during the year of 1970, and again in 1977 when she chaired the college's Annual Giving Campaign.

In 1980 our friendship took on a new dimension with my term as president of the National Board. Because of certain changes at the college, there was no one to give the usual support services that were customary before and again after my tenure in 1982. Dr. Fay became my right hand and my right arm. Her friendship and her support made a difficult time productive. The hospitality of her home was generous. We talked in the way that can only happen in the late hours of the night at bedtime, at a breakfast, and in the hours over dinner or lunch.

Then in 1981, special ceremonies were scheduled at the college to honor Dr. Fay by the dedication of the Marion Spencer Fay Research Building, and of course, I came east again to be present for my great and good friend. As part of the ceremonies, Dr. Fay's portrait was hung in the Research Building lobby with a plaque bearing her words: "The foundation stones are important and lasting, and can never be forgotten, but you must build on them a structure of your own." The ceremonies were to conclude with a dinner at the Germantown Cricket Club, at which time official tributes would be made from the MCP family. Dr. Fay honored the National Board by placing their speaker first on the program of the MCP family.

I had arrived a day early, and after breakfast, we went shopping for a possible new dress for the dinner, and she decided I also ought to shop. There is a special bond that is formed when two ladies share a dressing room, helping each other on with dresses that look appealing. We finally selected a lovely lavender dress for her, and I ended up with the dress I was wearing.

My many memories of Dr. Fay would not be complete without mentioning the simple beauty of the invocations she was asked to give over those many years. Though each one was different, they all began with the same words: "Father of us all . . ." It was a reflection of her own view of humanity.

Through our years together (and no trip to Philadelphia was complete without being with Dr. Fay to the last), there was one running battle between us that went like this: "My dear, you must start calling me Marion." By reflex, my reply always came out, "Well of course, Dr. Fay!"

In 1983, the National Board celebrated its 30th Anniversary, here in Washington. Our honoree was Dr. Fay. Unfortunately, she was unable to travel for reasons of health. It was my privilege to pay tribute to her on that occasion.

And so – Marion – I close by repeating the last lines of that tribute:

She has honored us with her friendship, and we are proud and grateful to receive this gift.

She has honored us with her presence, through nearly half a century of service to this college.

Marion Fay is, and will remain, the crowning jewel of the Medical College of Pennsylvania.