

## Testimonials Are Us

### Tributes to Two of Centenary's Own

Recently Centenary family lost two members who grew up in the church at Fifth & Main. Jane Anderson Blakemore Foster and Mary Ann Shipman Gravett both graduated from Shelbyville High School in the Class of '49. Both ladies were popular, exceptional students, who shared the bond of attending the same church. One left home for a career in education, one stayed home to also work in education. One was the city girl. One the country girl. Both were beautiful, admired young women. As children, they learned the Bible Stories that would be the seeds of their faith, nurtured by their parents and the families of Centenary to grow to be the foundation of their lives.

During the life celebration service, December 6<sup>th</sup>, for Jane Foster, it was stated, "You can take the small town girl out of the small town, but you can't take her away from the church she grew up in; she will always come home to it". Jane and Mary Ann's memorial services are

testaments to women who were examples for others. Both loved their families, served their communities and were faithful to their Lord. Both began their Christian walk in Centenary. Both came back to their home to the love and fellowship of their home church to complete it.



**Jane Blakemore (Foster) Class of '49 Senior Photo**

**Spokespersons for Jane Foster's memorial**, remembered her with adjectives including: "kind, fun, thoughtful, insightful, loyal, loving, mischievous, intelligent, compassionate, delightful, athletic, steadfast, beautiful, inspiring, talented, and conscientious". Jane's dear friends, fellow church members, former classmates, book club members, and bridge players, to a person, described Jane as someone unusually intelligent, delightfully fun and consistently the best at what she did. As book club friend, Diane Frakar, says, "Jane was the consummate example of a Woman, Wife, Mother, Grandmother, and Friend." Jane was an example to all.

Jane's family and friends also agreed, they "never heard Jane say a bad thing about anyone". One of Jane's book club friends, Diann Cook, admits, "She put all of us to shame. She always had a good word to say."

Diann Cook, who also knew Jane through their work in Arriba Niños, admires Jane for her commitment to help the Hispanic children she tutored. To the second graders Jane worked with, "she was everyone's Grandma (La Nana). Diann said of both the Fosters, Jane and John took their work seriously and loved those kids and the kids realized it. It was very difficult for Jane to step away from Arriba Niños when her health demanded it. Sydney Lawson, also a tutor and Jane's classmate in Centenary's Friendship Class, recognized Jane's dedication. "The Fosters served for 11 years and Jane came every time," her health would allow. Sydney also knew Jane as an "excellent bridge player". Sydney knew her as a wonderful, caring person, whom she admired very much.

A favorite outing for some of Jane's friends was to come to Shelbyville for the "Gallery Opening" in November and have lunch with Jane and John during the days of Centenary's Salad Luncheons. They recalled Jane and John working as the luncheon's cashiers when they arrived and then resigning their posts to another Methodist so they could eat with their friends. "The luncheons were so nice and they had so much fun working with their Centenary friends. It was an annual event we all looked forward to," said Matilda Walker.

When Jane bought into something, she owned it and could do whatever she set her mind to said Jane's cousin, Bette Blakemore Vaughan. Bette explained, "Jane was my hero all my life".

Jane's friends could not speak of her without adding their admiration for Jane's dear husband, John Fred. The Fosters' love, respect and caring for each other is an example for sweethearts everywhere.

One of Jane's friends captured what a relationship with Jane meant to all who knew her.

"Jane made us grow."

**Centenary Lay Servant, Clyde Tharp, gave this tribute to his friend of more than 45 years, Mary Ann Gravett, during her memorial service December 10<sup>th</sup>.** His tribute began with this scripture:

*Proverbs 31:25-31 New International Version (NIV)*

<sup>25</sup> *She is clothed with strength and dignity;  
she can laugh at the days to come.*

<sup>26</sup> *She speaks with wisdom,  
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.*

<sup>27</sup> *She watches over the affairs of her  
household*

*and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

<sup>28</sup> *Her children arise and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:*

<sup>29</sup> *"Many women do noble things,  
but you surpass them all."*

<sup>30</sup> *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be  
praised.*

<sup>31</sup> *Honor her for all that her hands have  
done,  
and let her works bring her praise at the  
city gate.*

Today we are at the "city gate". Let our praise begin.

*One thing I do know from this passage that is not quite her, Mary Ann's beauty from the high school charmer that men my age and older have described to me, transitioned with maturity so that her "in-beauty" also reflected externally in a most attractive way - simple, sincere, radiant, forever magnetic, and always without pretense.*

*In talking with her sons, Bob and Larry, I told them I was being drawn to speak about their beloved mother from four (4) perspectives - the farm, her faith, her family and her friends.*

*Mary Ann's love of the land on Antioch Rd. began two generations before she was born and is now succeeding her by at least two generations. That affinity for the land kept her actively engaged and learning from its many lessons found in the highs and lows of farming the Truth of the Creation story and the faithfulness of God in our lives. Her son, Bob, stated it best, "It molded her". She loved it as a child, wife, mother, and grandparent drawing strength from that land every day of her life.*

*It was during these days as a child, young woman, wife and mother that a faith and optimism was honed in her that said God was in charge. A beautiful story supporting this is best told by Larry. It involves the day she opened the door to the milking parlor and calmly said "Boys you need to go get my car out of the lake. Shut the door calmly and walked back toward the house." I don't think anyone would disagree this faith and belief all was well remained with her to the end. Less than two*



**Mary Ann Shipman Gravett Class of '49, Senior Photo**

days before her death, she told her good friend Bobby Simpson, "come on back tomorrow and help me fix my hair, we are going out to eat next week." They did go out to eat and shop quite often. Mary Ann and Bobby were members of what was originally the Red Hat Society but that group of 25-30 ladies wanted a more energetic name and changed their group's name to "The Lively Lunch Bunch."

To say that Mary Ann loved her family is an understatement. But we all know she is the perfect example of a mother hen trying to keep up with her chicks. Mary Ann to some degree did just that, both boys have homes on the farm and within eyesight of her home. But to her sons, Larry and Bob, her daughters-in-law, Carla and Theresa, her grandchildren Elizabeth, Erin and Dylan, her great grandchildren, Kristen, Lauren, McKenzie and Emery you may claim her as family because you have her DNA, I must tell you Mary Ann's family is far larger than the eleven (11) named. The way she interacted with people throughout her life's journey made all of us feel very much a part of "her family". She treated us as such.

I am sure Larry and Bob could have written as did Thomas Carlyle to his mother. **"Who is it that loves me and will love me forever with the affection which no chance, no misery, no crime of mine do away? It is you mother."** That is how many of us feel about Mary Ann Shipman Gravett. She loved us offering us grace making us feel worthy and important in all situations.

Henry Ward Beecher wrote **"The mother's heart is the child's school-room."** I think Mary Ann internalized that and it is one reason she was so drawn to being involved in the Shelby Co. school system, be it as a room mother, classroom aide or school secretary, always championing for the child.

Another value Mary Ann brought with her to school was that **"Children need models more than they need critics"**. On my way to talk with Bob Blair about Mary Ann, Rhonda Burnside, spoke to me and said, I hear you are to speak at Mary Ann Gravett's funeral. She said "my son, Clint, loved and idolized her. Just recently, he went to work on her furnace and after finishing his task, he just stayed to visit and enjoy her company. And came home talking about what a great time he had had. That is how much he loved her."