

Reflections about the Juniata Class of 1971 and Our Years at Juniata College An Interview with Betty Ann Cherry

by Rev. G. Edward TED Corcelius



It was a mid-June morning – 10AM – I had just rushed to make a haircut appointment for my dog at Sara’s Bath and Biscuit on Washington Street in Huntingdon. My Charlie had not had a cut in months. I met Sara on the sidewalk in front of her store and as she was checking my Charlie in. I heard a voice I recognized, “I am not allowed to get out of my car, can you assist me?” Sara’s assistant finished helping me and Sara went to the car. After Sara picked up her dog, I moved toward the car and said hello. It was Betty Ann Cherry.

I had my mask on, my Covid beard and haircut and asked if she knew who I was. “Sure, I do!” came the response. We chatted for a while, she apologized for not getting out of the car, “Rules, I can go, I just am not to get out of my car until its green!” (Huntingdon county was one of the last counties to turn green in PA due to the tremendous outbreak of Covid at SCI Huntingdon – affecting prisoners and guards.) We chatted about Huntingdon and then it hit me. I asked

her if I could come and see her and interview her for a story for our Class newsletter. She smiled and she gave me her phone number and said, “Call me some time after we go green, and we will visit.”

In the meantime, I waited until we had a reunion committee meeting, and I shared my idea. It was accepted, and so in mid-July I called and left a message on Betty Ann’s answering machine asking to set up an appointment to chat with her. I stated my reason for calling in the message and my topic for conversation. It was a day or so before Betty Ann called me to set a time to visit, and she requested that the visit be by phone and for me to call.

On July 23, that visit took place. Before we got into the visit, we shared some small talk about where I was living in the Huntingdon Area. I told her that I now live east of Huntingdon. I am not in town. Just then her other phone rang – it was her daughter checking on her – I heard Betty Ann share, “I am busy on another long particularly important call.” I told her I was smiling. I do that too as I have kids that check on me too. I reminded Betty Ann of the questions that I left on her answering machine: “What do you remember about the class of 1971 and our years there? Do you have memories of us that you would like to share?”

Betty Ann shared, “You bet I do! Wow do I have vivid memories. It was a remarkably interesting time, much like today. You and your classmates were here in the middle of it all. There were changes in college life, and in our nation changes in cultural life, economic life, equality of life, and political life.” She went on to say that we had some very articulate and concerned students within the student body that were leaders. These of your class mates were not just class leaders but folks who stepped up to help organize and lead in different areas within the college life and class competitions like All Class Night and the Christmas decorations, but also they were the leadership that stepped up to take on and share the concerns of the day.

We talked about those concerns that were alive while we were on campus. The women's movement, the physical movement of the library – the change in location and then the sit-in at the new library to force the administration to take seriously the need to change the library hours. Then came the change in the hours of the residence halls – especially for the women's halls and the dress codes. We chatted about the various rallies that were held on campus and how leadership came from the class. The rally against the Viet Nam war and the huge Earth Day Rally that was held on the lawn in front of Oller Hall brought the student body together with some of the community from Huntingdon.



L.A. Beeghly Library - Site of Our Sit-in

Betty Ann shared that the Juniata College administration did not see this degree of student leadership until much later and seemed somewhat surprised when things happened. She shared that the number of student leaders at another time might not have been obvious. She said, "During your time here, so much changed and your class helped to cause a lot of that change."

Betty Ann shared that she is now 86 and that she taught Great Epochs from 1962 until 1971. I said, "You also taught Nature of Man and English Comp." She laughed, "I taught English – Ron taught Nature of Man." She shared that Ron Cherry came back to Juniata in 1968 to teach economics. I shared that I took his microeconomics course. I shared that he always told us that each question on the test could be answered in 25 words or less. Betty Ann laughed, and then shared, "Ron was teaching at a level way above college level."

Another change that we talked about was the change in curriculum. That change to move to a new system of education – away from major and comprehensives, which started with my father's Juniata Class of 1938 until our class finished. Beginning in the fall of 1971 Juniata began a new curriculum that continued with slight modification until now. This year Juniata is beginning to institute changes in the curriculum again.

It was a fun conversation, I told Betty Ann that I no longer had my Covid beard and hair, as I finally got to a haircut. I realized that as she remembered, she fired memories within me and, as I commented, I fired memories within her. I told her in the beginning of this visit by phone that I was not recording this and would be writing this from memory and from the few notes I took. I also shared with her that I would give her the opportunity to view what I wrote before I submitted it to be published in the class reunion newsletter.

I emailed Betty Ann I copy of this and waited to hear from her. I called her again on July 31st to ask if she had anything else that she wanted to share. She apologized for not getting back to me, she was busy with grandchildren. "No, I cannot think of anything." She shared that I had captured our conversation wonderfully and that she liked how I began the article. I said, "It is though writing about your English Prof and then having the Prof read it and check it." She laughed and chuckled quite hard and then shared, "Thank you for letting me read it first. Thank you for what you wrote. It is wonderful remembering that time."