Cedarville Then and Now

Julie (Stackhouse) Moore
Cedarville University, moorej@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/alumni_publications
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/alumni_publications/105

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Alumni Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.
“Cedarville College was founded in prayer, has been maintained in faith, and supported by sacrifice; and long after this generation shall have run its race, Cedarville College will live to enrich the nation, gladden the church, and bless the world.”
—Wilbert Renwick/McChesney, Second President
In September of 1983, around 3 o’clock in the afternoon, I sat on the side of Interstate 70 in Columbus, plucking single strands of grass from the ground like petals from a daisy. I love Ohio. I hate Ohio. Cedarville is the place for me. I should go back to New Jersey. I know what I’m doing. I don’t know what I’m doing.

As I watched my dad change the tire on our Buick Electra, I wondered whether God was sending me a sign: Flat tire = Go back. Or whether Satan was just toying with me: Flat tire = Trick to make you think you should go back. But once my dad tightened the last lug nut and we hopped into the car, only the last hour of our trip stood between me and the start of my college education.

Deciding to attend school 10 hours away wasn’t easy. My public high school counselor thought I was crazy to go to a small Baptist college she’d never heard of. “Go to Wake Forest if you want a religious school,” she’d insisted. But I had my mind made up.

In hindsight, of course, I can honestly say now that following my best friend to college wasn’t exactly the best reason on which to base a college decision. I didn’t really know what I was doing. And I certainly never dreamed Cedarville would be the place I’d eventually call home.

Gathering for my 20th reunion in the Dixon Ministry Center (DMC) last fall, my husband John ’87 and I explained how long we’ve lived here to many friends who hadn’t returned to campus since we’d all graduated in 1987. “What? You never left?” “You live here? In the cornfields?”

I had to admit the truth: The rural landscape has grown on me. I no longer think of Les Nessman on WKRP in Cincinnati when I hear hog reports in the news; I think instead of my friend Doug whose swine each year yield the pearls his family must live on. And dry spells in July yield prayers for him and others whose pockets will empty if the seeds of corn and soybean can’t sprout the green they need to pay their bills. I even write poetry about this idiosyncratic, Ohio life.

So I have to admit the other truth, too: I love this place. Most days, anyway.

I can remember working with Andy Wilson ’87, then-president of the Student Government Association (SGA), in the SGA office near the end of our senior year. We were reminiscing, as seniors tend to do, when Andy said to me, “I’ve loved every minute of my time here. Every minute.” And I agreed. We loved basketball games, Cedar What?, and Young’s. We loved our friends and classes and the ways both challenged our thinking. We loved Dr. Dixon and Mrs. Dixon, Dean (Don) Rickard ’58 and Mrs. Knauff, Jim Phipps ’68 and Deb (Bush) Haffey ’68, Mr. Spencer and Chuck McKinney. I must admit, we loved DeGarmo and Key, Petra, and Keith Green, too. And we loved chapel. To this day, we can still recite Dr. Dixon’s oft-repeated nuggets of advice: “Take ‘quit’ out of your vocabulary.” “Life is 10 percent what happens to you, 90 percent how you respond to what happens to you.” “Don’t trade a moment of pleasure for a lifetime of regret.” We viewed graduation as a truly bittersweet venture, one that would allow us to pursue our dreams yet one that would close a chapter of our lives that had been everything, and nothing, we’d ever expected.

As a resident of Cedarville and eventual professor in the Department of Language and Literature, I’ve seen the school’s changes up close, even as I spent the decade of the ‘90s teaching at nearby Wilberforce University.

Yet, my fellow alumni couldn’t believe their eyes. Some of what they saw was quite dramatic — a different president in the soft-spoken yet witty person of Dr. Bill Brown; a greater number of women in positions of leadership, like Dr. Pam Diehl Johnson, Cedarville’s first female dean; and the huge brick buildings housing the new chapel, dining hall, theatre, fitness center, and field house, not to mention the Center for Biblical and Theological Studies currently under construction.

And some of what they noticed was quite humorous — students in shorts in buildings around campus, music with
a discernible beat and electric guitars blaring from speakers outside the DMC, and male students with shaggy beards, even shaggier hair. “Spoiled,” we all agreed, our voices thick with envy. “That’s what students are these days.”

Indeed, the school has come a long way since the years when three female freshmen had to squeeze into one room in Maddox, or when guys wore socks with sandals, or even when female students on campus hovered around their radios in January to hear if the temperature was cold enough to wear slacks to class.

We’d graduated from Cedarville College as the “Centennial Class.” When we were juniors, we were constantly reminded that the school was “almost 100,” the mantra that became our Homecoming theme in the fall of my senior year. And when the school eventually hit the century mark, the year filled with firsts: The “Follicle Folly” became the campus’ first beard-growing contest that professors participated in as eagerly as students did; the Centennial Library’s completion begat a moving day where hundreds of students transferred books from the old structure (now Milner) to the new building; and I was serving my stint as SGA’s first female vice president.

It was also a year of looking back, remembering the school’s roots that were as relevant in 1987 as they are now — and as they were in 1915 when the second president of the college, Wilbert Renwick McChesney, said at his inauguration, “Cedarville College was founded in prayer, has been maintained in faith, and supported by sacrifice; and long after this generation shall have run its race, Cedarville College will live to enrich the nation, gladden the church, and bless the world.”

I suppose that’s why I ended up here — to participate in work with such noble goals. As a professor in the Department of Language and Literature, I strive to teach students to “live deliberately,” as Thoreau called it. My colleagues and I want students to see God at work amid the ordinary aspects of their lives. In a culture where productivity is praised more than contemplation; where means get justified by their profitable, or efficient, ends; where thinking quickly — or cleverly — is valued more than thinking reflectively and deeply; where prayer and Sabbath-keeping, indeed, just quiet reading and meditating, are therefore not practiced, we hope not only to teach students the skills of writing and thinking critically, but also to model for them the benefits of such a radical, alternative lifestyle. This is what the study of the liberal arts entails: reflecting the beauty of Christ in a life lived with intention.

Thus, the University’s commitment to the liberal arts core continues to be important; for studying literature, music, art, communication, and history teaches us how to reflect the image of the Creator in beautiful and imaginative ways. Of course, this commitment supports the general education curriculum here. And it’s so good to see that this philosophy still, after all these years, likewise strengthens the required Bible minor. Earning a college degree is more than just getting a good job. It is the pursuit of truth. It is sacrifice. It is the recognition, as one educator put it, that “seated at the monitor screen of every computer is ... a person.”

Despite these constants, I can’t imagine that President McChesney, or even Dr. Jeremiah, could have predicted how much this school would grow. “Controlled growth” — that’s what Dr. Dixon used to call it in the ’80s whenever he compared Cedarville’s enrollment to the explosive numbers at Liberty. At the rate of 30 more students a year, we argyle-clad Reaganites were convinced Cedarville would really be something if it ever hit 2,000 students.

Some days, it’s still hard to fathom that the college has matured into a 3,100-student university. I have to confess that after returning to teach here in 1999, I, too, was overwhelmed by the number of faculty and staff I didn’t know. And after eight years, that hasn’t changed much: I’m still meeting colleagues for the first time, even unearthing names for the first time. Big isn’t necessarily better, at least not as far as relationships go.

And so, seeing a familiar face is always welcome. When I joined Cedarville’s faculty, for example, it was wonderful to walk into the University dining hall, officially called “Chuck’s” now, and spot Chuck McKinney looking exactly — and I mean exactly — like he did a decade and a half earlier. Not even a gray hair. Same wise cracks. Only one thing was different: The food was better! No longer do students have to choose between shepherd’s pie or chocolate chip ice cream for dinner (the choice was not a bad one at all). My generation had steak-and-shrimp on Wednesdays. Now, on any given day, any given kid can choose among several different dinners, including soft-serve ice cream! Stir-fried vegetables, pizza and pasta, grilled sandwiches, wraps, home-cooked meals (read: meat and potatoes), Italian and Mexican fare, American fare (read: hamburgers and fries), eggs, bagels … You name it, Chuck’s got it!

On a more serious note, it’s been nice to see the familiar face of prayer here, too. And I don’t just mean days of prayer either. I mean daily prayer, lifting up the hurting and needy every day in chapel and in classes, including mine. And in prayer groups, residence hall meetings, and middle-of-
the-night vigils. Big might be better when it comes to prayer. More of God's people can, and do, approach the throne with sincerity every day.

The size also matters when it comes to ministries both local and global — so many students willing to get their hands dirty and no shortage of opportunities. They helped clean up Xenia after an F4 tornado hit in 2000 and traveled to New Orleans to gut and rebuild houses in the Katrina aftermath (not to mention the jaw-dropping $100,000 they donated to that cause). And they participate in dozens of unsung weekly ministries locally.

Some changes are refreshing, too. Though Cedarville doesn’t yet fully reflect the kingdom of God socioeconomically or racially, our campus is more diverse and strives to develop further in this area. In addition, the Division of Student Life works hard to emphasize biblical principles of holiness, à la Romans 12, rather than just lay down the law. In general, the campus culture now concentrates on real-world godliness rather than codes of conduct. And that focus allows for deeper, more honest dialogue about significant theological, political, and social issues whether in Cedars or in chapel, at the lunch table or in classes. All this happens within the framework of an unchanging doctrinal statement.

These are the good things, both profound and humorous, that keep me here. Then and now, Cedarville wasn’t — and isn’t — perfect. I know full well that some students, staff, and faculty, to quote Thoreau again, “lead lives of quiet desperation” here. I also know that some students actually find, or leave, the faith after they graduate. Some pursue that moment of pleasure, reaping regret, while others may live moral lives but not godly ones. Indeed, this place is no panacea.

But I also know that for me and many others, Cedarville University has often been a place of hope, a place that can, at its best, spur spiritual growth. Iron sharpens iron here as we challenge one another to reject the lazy faith that values comfort more than questions, safety more than sacrifice, and appearance more than authenticity. The process is far from clean. But at the core, then and now, is a heart as welcoming as home.