

FAVORITE TEACHERS

Marnie Clark, April 2014

Mrs. Dawkins was my English teacher junior and senior years at Knox School for girls in St. James, Long Island, New York. By the time I had her, her body was quite crippled with arthritis, especially her hands which looked knobby and twisted like twigs on a gnarly tree. But her mind wasn't crippled. She only taught honors English and her assignments were inspired. I remember once we did a color chart of the emotions running through all five acts of *Macbeth*.

She would often perch on a stool in an upstairs classroom with all the windows to our backs. The room seemed filled with light even on the dullest day. Somehow she brought out the best in all of us.

She was also faculty advisor for the Scribblers' Club, a poetry writing club held on Sunday evenings in the Headmistress's living room. She could be critical but was also encouraging even of fledgling talent. Most of us loved her.

Mrs. Dawkins once recommended that girls not major in the sciences in college because it was too hard to keep up and almost impossible to re-enter the field after being away bearing and raising young children. She herself had been a psychology major. Nowadays young women hardly stop working or can continue in the sciences part time, so this is no longer a problem.

Mrs. Dawkins is one reason I majored in English at Mount Holyoke.

Another favorite teacher of mine was my honors advisor in college, Dargan Jones. Though some students called her "Dragon" and she did expect a great deal, I loved her. She was tall and dark-haired even though she was quite advanced in age by the time I knew her. She taught courses about the Arthurian legends and medieval poetry. She also taught Latin. She, too, had an amazing mind. We worked together on Spenser's *Fairie Queene*. Even though it wasn't one of her specialties, she helped me explore the work in great depth.

Dargan was a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and expected all of her students to equal her high expectations. Yet she had great sensitivity and love for beauty. One of her great friends was the wife of one of the famous art professors at the school. She was a potter and made some lovely pieces, some of which Dargan gave me as a present; one is a bud vase glazed in a lovely green with little white flashes that remind me of fireflies in a garden at evening; women in darker green drift around the circumference of the vase. The piece reminds me of Dargan every time I see it.

I have been fortunate to have so many good teachers. These are just a few.