

GAYL FORD WERME – Tribute by Carol Parker Beatty

December 31, 1938 ~ December 3, 2002

It has always been amazing to me that out of all the people whom you meet really very few become close, lifelong friends. You may not see some of the special people very often but a strong bond continues nevertheless. This is how I remember the tall (5'12"), attractive, friendly and confident classmate in our years at Mount Holyoke. Gayl Ford was a true New Englander, hailing from Keene, New Hampshire. She was always willing to share her home with a Pennsylvanian when brief college breaks prevented the longer trip home. There were other bonds such as Glee Club, being a part of her house president group, and an unforgettable European trip between our junior and senior years. I was fortunate to be an attendant in her wedding to her longtime sweetheart, Don Werme. Then, our paths diverged. Over the intervening years I learned, as no surprise, that Gayl's significant talent as a leader and musician were recognized through achievements causing her to become a well-known and respected member of her community. At the time of her death in December 2002, the local Kalamazoo, Michigan, newspaper honored her on the front page stating "Civic leader's gift was in giving."

To say that she was well-known and definitely displayed great talent in many endeavors in the community is an understatement. Her background as a political science major led to several positions such as Kalamazoo County Road Commissioner (first female to serve) and campaign manager and Portage district office manager for Paul Warter who was a state representative and then a senator. In the area of education, she served on the Portage Board of Education, on the board of the Kalamazoo Valley Intermediate School District, and as a trustee for Western Michigan University. These positions resulted in numerous community service awards throughout the years.

Music was a great love of Gayl's. She was an accomplished pianist and organist, serving as her church organist for thirty-two years. She loved the symphony and was on the Kalamazoo Symphony Society board. Gayl was pleased to serve as the first chairman of the Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard Festival.

Even with her participation in numerous civic activities, Gayl allowed nothing to take precedence over her family. Her husband and children were the center of her life. The children, Christopher, Jonathon, and Katherine, always knew their mother was there for support and guidance. When the children married,

the grandchildren simply provided more family for Gayl to embrace. Several grandchildren inherited Gayl's musical talents which pleased her greatly. Her necklace, laden with nine charms, one for each grandchild, testified to her pride in being "Nana."

During twenty of the years of activities with seemingly endless energy, Gayl battled cancer. She informed me of this when we were reminiscing about Ceci Crary, her roommate who had died from cancer several years before. It seemed with her many treatments that she was doing well. After not attending MHC class reunions for years, she agreed that we should attend the fortieth. It was at that time she told me that the cancer had returned and that she probably would not attend another reunion. I dismissed that as not true. Sadly, after all the years, I should have learned that Gayl, still tall, strong-willed and formidable, was rarely wrong.

Gayl Werme was truly a close, lifelong friend.