

Remembering Julia Williams

Collegiate lost a good friend with the passing of Julia A. Williams on Nov. 23, 2011. Aside from her professional involvement with the School, her children, **David Williams '74** and the late **Julie Williams Layfield '70**, her grandchildren **Virginia Layfield '07**, **Elizabeth Layfield '09**, and **Preston Williams '11**, and her son-in-law **Gaylon Layfield '69** are all Collegiate graduates. She will be greatly missed as a loyal attendee at School events. The following comments were compiled by Weldon Bradshaw and posted in his Reflections column on our website (www.collegiate-va.org/reflections).

The Collegiate School of the 21st century is an exhilarating blend of time-honored values and traditions and cutting-edge ideas and technology. Truth be told, however, the latter would have little relevance and even less meaning without the former. We've arrived at today, you see, thanks to the diligence, ingenuity, commitment to excellence, and steadfast adherence to principle of those who preceded us, set the tone, and served as role models and mentors. In her 29 years on North Mooreland Road, Julia Williams was the epitome of dedication, a true professional educator who always kept the best interests of her students, her colleagues, and the institution in the forefront.

She arrived in 1964 at the behest of Catharine Flippen, the Girls School head, as a reluctant substitute teacher, quickly fell in love with the profession, and found her life's work. She came on board full time as an English teacher in September 1965, became Mrs. Flippen's assistant in 1970, succeeded her in 1972, and served in a variety of

She was regal and elegant. She dearly loved Collegiate. What I admired about her was the way she was a defender of the Girls School and all that it stood for, but once the changeover (to a co-ed Upper School) occurred (in 1986), she wholeheartedly supported the new configuration. She did a wonderful job of preserving what was old but supporting the new. She was a strong, strong proponent for young women, yet she loved a good football game. She navigated the two worlds very well.

— Alex Smith '65, Collegiate's Vice-President for Development, 1969 – present



capacities (Upper School head, interim president, academic vice-president) until her retirement in 1993. In the years hence, she volunteered in the community, enjoyed family time, traveled, and supported Collegiate loyally and unequivocally.

Mrs. Williams died Nov. 23, 2011 from injuries she sustained in an automobile accident while spending Thanksgiving in Maine with good friends. As her family and those who knew her mourn her passing, they can rest assured that her legacy will endure through those whose lives she touched. What follows are thoughts, reminiscences, and reflections of several of her long-time colleagues and friends.

As far as I know, I was the first person Julia hired when she became head of the Girls School. I've always been grateful to her for her confidence in me. In my early years at Collegiate, my mother-in-law was ill, and I remember Julia's compassion. Her kindness and the fact that she accepted me as a new teacher are what I value the most.

— Ann Griffin, AP biology, 1972 – 2011

She was a real Renaissance woman. She was a great reader. She loved art. She volunteered at the Virginia Museum. She loved music. She went to the symphony and musical performances at Westminster Canterbury (where she lived for several years) and at the Carpenter Center. She loved theater and went to plays at the Barksdale Theater. She had wide, wide interests and was open to new ideas. She was a good conversationalist and had a grand sense of humor.

– Helen Tanner '49, French teacher, 1956 – 2006

Julie was the perfect traveling companion for me, a novice traveler at the time. She knew so much about where we were going (on three shared trips to Europe) and what we were seeing, but she never insisted on overloading me with her knowledge or experiences unless I asked specific questions. She was always willing to share and to guide, but what she said was never about her. This was typical of Julie in all aspects of her life. Always a lady and gracious in whatever she did, Julie also had a fun-loving streak about her. Being with her and learning from her was always a treat.

– Anita Grymes Towell, English teacher (1962–1967, 1979–2004)

I greatly admired Julia's integrity and keen intellect, but mostly I respected her deep commitment to fairness. I will be eternally gratefully for the guidance and support she gave me during my years of teaching at Collegiate.

– Nancy Pace Goodykoontz, math teacher, 1967–2011

When I first met Julia in the early '70s when I was the rector at Chatham Hall, I immediately recognized her administrative ability and style. Julia knew and appreciated my commitment to women's education and supported and trusted me when I came to Collegiate. When she served as interim head, we in the Middle School appreciated her active and positive support for the curriculum, faculty and program.

– Bill Reeves, Head of Boys School, then Middle School and teacher, 1976–2007

Mrs. Williams was an amazing English teacher because she made literature characters come alive. I'll never forget her lecture on John Donne's "No Man is an Island," A Tale of Two Cities, and Simon and Garfunkel's "I Am a Rock." It was awesome, and I became hooked on trying to take something from every book I read and make it relevant to whatever was currently happening in the world or in my life.

As a teacher and administrator, Mrs. Williams influenced by example and subtle nudging and gave back to the profession by helping others along the way. It wasn't about reaching the top of the ladder at any cost but taking others with you, supporting those who wanted to learn, and modeling the concept of grace under pressure.

My favorite memories of Mrs. Williams involve the Christmas Pageant. As a student I helped with the lights and sat on the floor in front of the first pew. Mrs. Flippen always stood in the center aisle a few feet behind me. I can remember Mrs. Flippen teaching Julie about the nuances of every scene, why the lights were always a certain way, and the symbolism of the various scenes and actions of the characters.

Later as a teacher, it was such an honor to work with Julie on the Pageant. I learned so much from her and admired the way she always stayed true to Mrs. Flippen's ideals.

– Missy Herod '72, Director of Student Activities, 1982–present

Whether you were a student or a teacher, Julia wanted each of us to reach for the stars while at the same time keep our feet on the ground. She successfully encouraged hundreds of young women to be their best and to excel.

– Peggy Bothwell '59, history teacher/administrator, 1963 – 2004

Much of Julia's legacy is embodied in the excellent faculty and staff she hired, nurtured and mentored and who continue to serve as the backbone of the School today. To a person, they point to Julia's influence on their careers and the way that she inspired them to achieve more than they would have otherwise.

As I ran into Julia at countless events over the years, she always offered a word of encouragement and some variation of "Carry on!" She believed in the purpose and values of Collegiate and her determination to support the School only grew stronger in retirement.

I especially appreciated the clarity of her convictions and could easily imagine why so many of our faculty and staff pledged allegiance to her and all that she stood for.

– Keith Evans, Head of School, 1999 – present