Carla Hay: “Living History”
Delivered at the initiation banquet of Alpha Delta Chapter, Phi Alpha Theta
March 5, 2010

This academic year, Marquette University is celebrating 100 years of co-education. PAT
Chapter President Caroline Corcos and Chapter advisor Dr. Irene Guenther asked me to share my perspective on this milestone from the vantage of my 43 year association with the University—first as faculty spouse and then as a member of the faculty. Biography and autobiography have come back into vogue in historical circles as genres for personalizing historical trends. So tonight I’d like to share some of my experiences “Living History.” Of course, everyone “lives history,” but usually as bystanders in relatively uneventful times. But in the past 100 years there were mind-boggling global changes that roiled even the ivory towers of academia. In particular, the women’s liberation movement that began in the late 1960s effected significant changes in the legal rights of women and the gender composition of the work force. Tonight I’d like to frame my remarks within a larger cultural context that speaks to the ferment within academia in the past 40 years occasioned by the drive for gender equity.

I am fairly confident that I would not be standing here tonight were it not for the 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, popularly known as the G.I. Bill. My father was one of the 7.8 million World War II veterans who took advantage of the educational opportunity provided by the legislation. He had been a policeman before the war, with no thought of pursuing a college degree. After the war he got his Bachelor and Law degrees from the University of Louisville. His three brothers (but not his three sisters) followed his example, as did I—but not because of his encouragement. That came from my mother. A good student, she was nonetheless forced to drop out of school at 16 so her younger, not so studious brother could remain in school. This experience was part of her repertoire of family stories that she shared with me over the years, impressing me early on with what today we would describe as a blatant instance of gender inequity. Unfair was the term she used. I didn’t fully understand it at the time, but I represented her second chance to succeed academically. She read to me and told me stories, nurturing my love for history and literature. Once I entered kindergarten, she walked me every week or two to the neighborhood library over one mile from our house. I got my own library card at the age of 6. After one disastrous attempt to instruct me in the fine art of washing dishes, my stay-at-home mom shouldered all of the household chores and let me devote my time to school and play.

I thrived in school, but even so, I’m not certain that I would be standing here tonight were it not for the fact that I attended an all-girls high school and college. In an era when girls were admonished not to appear too brainy or bookish around boys, my classmates were other girls, and we had no compunction about competing with each other and excelling in our studies. The May 1960 issue of my high school newspaper, The Eagle, told graduating seniors that we had a moral imperative to pursue a college education if we had “the ability and the means . . . The mother of a family needs a deep understanding of religion, a mature outlook on economy, an appreciation of culture, including a taste for reading and discussion . . . Moreover should circumstances make it necessary for her to earn the living for the family at any time, the college graduate would find many more types of opportunities . . than would the woman without a degree. . . .while higher education may seem imperative for the career girl, it is no less important
for the prospective bride, for it is she who will mold the hearts and minds of the citizens of tomorrow.”

In college, my fall-back position was pursuing certification in secondary education. But when I finally did my student teaching in the fall of my senior year, I quickly concluded I would never be successful in a high school classroom. I was at a loss for alternatives until my Education professor suggested that I go to Graduate School—something I had never thought of doing. Notwithstanding all of her previous support, neither my mother nor my father encouraged this option with words or, more importantly, money. Both thought it time for me to get a job and pay them room and board until I finally married and settled down to raise a family. As my father would not co-sign a loan to finance graduate schooling and I could not secure a loan on my own, a fellowship was my only option. Fortunately, I aced the GREs. My personal memorabilia includes a letter from William H. McNeil, an acclaimed pioneer in the field of World History and Chair of the History Department at the University of Chicago. He informed me that although the Department had recommended me for a University fellowship, regrettably the Graduate School declined to make the offer. Fortunately, the University of Kentucky did. I was later told that I was the first woman to be awarded a University-funded fellowship. The prevalent assumption was that funding would be wasted on a woman who would marry, rather than pursue a professional career.

I met my husband at UK. He was the President of the Phi Alpha Theta Chapter and had just passed his Ph.D. qualifying exams. We married between semesters during my third year at UK and 10 days later came to Milwaukee where he interviewed for a position in Marquette’s History Department. In the course of dinner with the Department Chair, I indicated that I also intended to have an academic career—the immediate rejoinder?—this would detract from my husband’s academic success. My role was to be supportive homemaker while he concentrated on teaching, research, and publishing. We thought this a strange comment since the Chair knew nothing about my academic credentials, but shrugged off the remark. Bob accepted the MU appointment. More immediately disconcerting was the shock we received when I opened my tuition bill for the spring semester. Because I had married a Tennessean, I had been reclassified as an out-of-state student and assessed out-of-state tuition. The dollar difference was significant, but more appalling to me was being stripped of my identity as a proud Kentuckian simply because I had married. I protested and eventually the bursar’s office backed down—not because I had legal standing in my own right but because my father was a tax paying Kentucky resident. And further evidence of my legal dependence as a wife came when the local Department store closed my charge account since, as a wife, I was no longer financially independent.

We moved to Milwaukee in late August 1967. My status in today’s parlance was that of “trailing spouse.” I just thought I was a wife and had no thought of staying in Lexington to take my Ph.D. qualifying exams (I did that via the United States Postal Service) or applying for one of the recently funded dissertation fellowships established to finance archival research. Although I had written to all of the colleges in the metropolitan Milwaukee area seeking a position, I had received no responses. But at the last minute I was contacted by Cardinal Stritch College and given the opportunity to teach a two-semester survey of British history, followed by two years as a full-time instructor. Financial exigency at Stritch meant I once more joined the ranks of part-time academics in 1970. But this set back coincided with a retirement in the History Department at Marquette and the opportunity to teach part-time there as well. A full time position at either institution seemed remote. But in 1972 MU’s British historian decided to
relocate to his native Ireland. Unable to fill the position at a senior level, the Department redefined it as a junior position. I applied. At the time, there were very few academic couples in universities, let alone in the same department. I could not have been a candidate at many public institutions because of nepotism laws which prevented public institutions from employing multiple members of a family. But Marquette had no such policy and, in fact, there was a couple teaching in the Sociology Department.

As faculty spouse and then part-time colleague, I was on good terms with Department faculty. Even so, several of them came to my husband and pressed him to dissuade me from pursuing my candidacy. They were concerned, so they said, that we’d block vote or that domestic tiffs would spill over into our professional lives. He refused, asserting that the decision was mine to make. In response to my candidacy, the Department for the first time required a formal interview as part of the hiring process, and when a contract was extended, it stipulated that the Department was free to reopen the search the next year. When I questioned this proviso, the Dean said it was standard language—it wasn’t.

So I joined the history faculty fall semester 1973—the first woman hired on a tenure track line. At the time there were 283 faculty in the College of Liberal Arts; only 24 were women. Of these only 8 were tenured. There were no women faculty in Business Administration, Engineering, or Law. Nine of the 186 faculty in Dentistry were women. The statistics were reversed in Nursing—only one man in a faculty of 43. Today there is still only one man on the nursing faculty. Interestingly, of the 10,929 students enrolled at Marquette that year, 46% were women. My status in the Department was not unusual. The University of Wisconsin-Madison hired its first tenure track woman in the mid-1970s only after Dr. Florence Robinson, a UW Ph. D who couldn’t find a collegiate position in history, endowed a Chair in the UW History Department with the proviso that it had to be held by a woman. Pauline Maier was the first Robinson-Edwards Chair.

Clearly my spouse and I allayed our colleagues’ concerns since he was elected Chair of the Department in 1975 and I was tenured in 1979. By that time, there were approximately 370 faculty in the College of Arts & Sciences, 39 of whom were women. Of these 13, including me, were tenured. It would be thirty years before another woman was tenured in the History Department.

The low number of women faculty at Marquette was replicated in professional associations. When I began attending the annual conventions of the American Historical Association (AHA) and the North American Conference on British Studies (NACBS), there were very few women at the meetings and most were older. The power structure reflected these statistics. Founded in 1884, only one woman (Nellie Neilson, a medievalist) had served as president of the AHA (1943) before Natalie Zemon Davis became the president in 1987. There have been nine women since then. Indeed the incumbent and her four immediate predecessors are women (2006-2010). In the NACBS, a similar story. Founded in 1950, two women served as president (Helen Taft Manning, Bryn Mawr, 1963-65 and Caroline Robbins, Bryn Mawr, 1971-73. There have been seven women presidents since, including the incumbent and her immediate predecessor. The history honor society, Phi Alpha Theta, had a similar history. At the recommendation of Dr. Frank Klement, past president of Phi Alpha Theta, I was appointed to the International Council of Phi Alpha Theta in 1979. I subsequently served on the International
Advisory Board and in 1985 became the first woman Vice President/President-Elect of the society, serving as President 1987-89. Since my tenure, several women have served as president.

Because there were so few women faculty at Marquette and most were isolated within their Departments, in spring 1982, Dr. Carolyn Asp, recently tenured in the Department of English, invited several of us to meet in her home. That was the beginning of a support group we named Alpha to signify a new beginning for women faculty at Marquette. Our initiative paralleled the impetus behind the founding in 1930 of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians by women who felt marginalized in the AHA old boy’’s club. Meant to provide networking opportunities, the Conference began meeting every 3 years starting in 1972 and now attracts thousands of participants from around the world.

Alpha’s history was considerably briefer but not without enduring consequence. When the Political Science Department voted not to tenure its only woman member, Alpha wrote a letter of protest to the Dean who reversed the Department’s decision. Of more consequence for the University community, Alpha also promoted Women’s Studies at Marquette.

The first Women’s Studies program was established at San Diego State College (now University) in May 1970. A survey in 2007 by the National Women’s Studies Association identified Women’s Studies programs at 576 institutions. When Alpha first began promoting Women’s Studies at Marquette, none of the faculty had been trained in the field and only 4 courses were offered on a regular basis in Arts & Sciences. My own introduction to the field came when my Department Chair asked me to give a lecture on women’s history in the first semester-long Arts & Sciences interdisciplinary colloquium, titled Women in Perspective. He apparently assumed that being a woman qualified me to speak on the topic. In fact, I knew virtually nothing about women’s history, but as a junior faculty member, I wasn’t about to refuse his request. Women’s history soon became one of my research and teaching interests.

In 1985 Alpha met with Dean John Schlegel, S.J. of Arts & Sciences to discuss increasing the number of women’s studies courses. He encouraged us to develop a minor in the field. With the assistance of a Mellon grant, library materials were acquired and Departments were lobbied to introduce women’s studies courses into their curriculum. A minor in Women’s Studies was introduced in 1986 and I served as the first Coordinator of the program (1986-1991). This semester there are 28 classes offered in the new Women and Gender Studies major.

Women’s athletics at Marquette also underwent extraordinary growth during the past 35 years as a consequence of Title IX, passed in 1972. The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was founded in 1971 to govern collegiate women’s athletics in the United States. The AIAW had almost 1000 member institutions in the late 1970s, including Marquette. But when the organization succeeded in televising the AIAW Women’s basketball championship, the NCAA decided to co-opt women’s athletics. At its 1981 meeting, Division I NCAA institutions voted to hold championships in women’s sports, including basketball. And Division I institutions, such as Marquette were required to affiliate their women’s programs with the NCAA in order to continue affiliating their men’s programs with the organization. The AIAW was doomed. Happenstance enabled me to represent Marquette at the last convention of the AIAW and thus begin a long-term association with intercollegiate athletics.

As Marquette became more sensitive to gender issues, the University worked to insure that women faculty were represented on the various University Committees. One of the plumb committee assignments was the Athletic Board–less because of its significant policy role than the perks for sitting on the Board–two very good tickets to the men’s basketball games (At the time
over one thousand persons were on a wait list for tickets). Since my spouse was an enthusiast of basketball, I indicated a willingness to serve on the Athletic Board and was appointed to the Board in fall 1981. The last AIAW convention was scheduled for January 1982. The senior women’s athletic administrator should have attended, but she was also the women’s basketball coach and had a game. Since MU’s representative at the convention had to be a woman, I was asked to attend. There I met an extraordinary group of women whose dedication to their sport and to their scholar athletes was truly impressive. I was hooked. And when the Chair of the Athletic Board decided not to serve another term, this uncoordinated, decidedly un-athletic woman jumped at the offer to succeed him, becoming the first (and only?) woman to chair the Board.

Chairing the Board meant that I served as the University’s faculty representative (FAR) at the annual NCAA convention where wheeling, dealing, and legislative maneuvering were commonplace. What quickly became apparent, however, was the second-class status of FARs who were frequently excluded from conference caucuses as Athletic Directors (overwhelmingly male) and academic administrators (also male) made decisions often to the detriment of the academic progress of student athletes. FARs had one meeting where they were talked at by NCAA personnel but otherwise had no meaningful opportunity to impact athletic decisions that had academic implications. So, as had happened when women were excluded from the AHA inner sanctum, some of us FARs initiated a not-so-quiet revolution. Closed out of conference meetings, we held our own caucus in the hall outside conference meeting rooms, much to the embarrassment of Conference leadership. To make a long story short, because of numerous media accounts of the exploitation of athletes, especially football and male basketball players, the NCAA supported enhancing the role of the FAR in intercollegiate athletics. I was on the task force which created the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association (FARA), serving as its first Secretary-Treasurer 1989-1991, Vice-Chair, 1991-93 and Chair 1993-95. I also served on the 1992-94 NCAA Gender Equity Task Force charged to assess gender discrimination in intercollegiate athletics, and chaired the Subcommittee on Institutional Standards. I’d like to say that FARA succeeded in cleaning up intercollegiate athletics, but the struggle continues to prioritize academics and to ensure that the student athlete can be a student. Marquette has an excellent record on this score— not so some members of our Big East Conference. Kudos to my colleague, Phil Naylor, who currently serves as MU’s FAR for his attention to our student athletes.

I’m sure you are familiar with the Chinese proverb: may you live in interesting times. I feel extremely fortunate that I’ve had the opportunity to both witness and participate in revolutionary shifts in gender roles that have remade the face of academia. Today, co-education is the norm. In the wake of the women’s movement, same-sex institutions including such prestigious schools as Radcliffe, Vassar, and Notre Dame went co-ed or merged with other institutions. Today at Marquette, women are 52% of the total student body. There are over ninety tenure-line women faculty in the College of Arts & Sciences. And within the Department of History there are six women faculty, three of whom are tenured. But there is still work to be done at Marquette and in the country at large in terms of pay equity, balancing work and family, and shattering the glass ceiling.

Given my socio-economic and cultural background, I should not be standing here tonight. But I am. In concluding, I would encourage this audience not to stand on the sidelines watching history being made. Opportunities to make a difference will come your way and the satisfaction
from doing so will more than make the effort worthwhile. We need not limit ourselves to recounting and analyzing the efforts of others—We can jump into the fray and make history. And if we don’t, who will?