

## **A Woman Worth Knowing: Part 2**

Interview of Edith Renfrow Smith '37 by Jackie Hartling Stolze

Web extra for *The Grinnell Magazine*, Summer 2007, Volume 39, Number 4

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Did you take a look at campus when you were back?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, my yes.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

You should see it now. It's probably changed a lot since then.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

I bet it doesn't even look like the same place, because ... do you know where the Matlack House is?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I'm not sure. Is it on Broad?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No, no. It's on East Street and 10th. East and 10th.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Okay. Yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

See that's up in that corner.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

It was just like going into an estate because there was a long wall going up to their house and they had all the trees and the grapevines, everything and lots and lots of land.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

So it was nice.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, it was lovely. That's where the Matlacks lived.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I wonder if that house is still there?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

I don't know. I really don't know if it's still there.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It was on 10th, right?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

It was on 10th and East.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It was right at the corner. Here's 10th and here's East, so the house would be up here?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Right, right, across on the-

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It might be.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

North side of East and East of East Avenue. I mean East Street not East Avenue.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yes.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Did you know Laura? Laura Wieman?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I didn't.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Yeah. Well, Laura Wieman lived there the last. She was the last of her family. Although, her sister moved back and lived in Fanny Buchanan's house. But I think her sister died before she did. So all the Matlacks are gone.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

They were a wonderful family from what I hear.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

My, yes. And their mother was a weaver and so was Laura. Oh, they made beautiful things on their looms. And of course, the mother did a lot of social work in the city.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Right. Right. Well, there are still things on campus that I know you would recognize because Herrick is still there. And ...

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Now what did they do about the quadrangle? No, the quadrangle was where the boys lived, was where the girls lived?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It's still there.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

And, that dining room that had the vaulted ceiling? It's still there?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It's still there. It's not student dining anymore. It's more like special dining room. Like if the trustees come-

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, I see.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Sometimes they'll have a wedding reception in there.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Now where do the students eat?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Excuse me. There's a new student center, the Joe Rosenfield Center.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

The forum? No, no, that was where the Stoops House was, I think, where they built the new thing.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

That he gave them the money for.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yeah. And that's where they eat now.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, really?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

They all eat together at the Rosenfield Center.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, they do? The boys do?

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

The boys and the girls eat together, yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Because the boys ate in the dorm and the girls ate in the quadrangle.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

When I came back to our 60-something reunion, we stayed in Reed ...

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Your old?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No, we stayed in the part where they had the elevator. And that was not too far from the dining room. It's where the elevator is, and it went out the door onto Sixth Avenue. Yeah. I don't know how many of our class is still living.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Well, I wonder.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Because when I went back, there was seven of us and that was the year that they honored Bayer and he died right after. I think we got it the early part of June or last of May and he died about the 29th of that month.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Really? Yeah.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

I don't know if his wife is still living.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I don't either. So do you have another reunion this year?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Yeah. This is our reunion. This'll be our seventy year.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Do you think you might come?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No, because I need help. See, old people forget and I forget something and I don't know where it was. I wouldn't come back unless ...

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Maybe you could get your friend, Alphanette, to come with you?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

When I came here in 1937, she was just a little girl.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Is that right?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Yeah. Her mother was a girl reserve secretary at the YWCA where they gave me a job, because that's what the seniors did. That year, 1937, we were just coming out of the Depression and there were no jobs. So they brought a group of us to Chicago to see if we could get jobs. Well, I got a job at the YWCA and that secretarial job is certainly not like the secretarial jobs now.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Oh really?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No, I had to be a desk clerk. I had to be a stenographer. I had to do the telephone operator and we had to duplicate all the programs. So you see, it's not like that not like I said. And for when we had lectures, I had to take the lectures and type up the lecture. So we had all of that to do at the YWCA.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

So you practically ran the place, it sounds like.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No, but all of us. See, they were open 24 hours and we had three shifts.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

So there were three secretaries?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh no, there were at least three ... \$25 of that, I had to send back to Grinnell because the Ladies Aid Society had paid for my graduation. So you see, they were very good to me at Grinnell.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I'm glad.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

They were. They were very good.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

I think they still do that. I think they do it every year, the Ladies Aid Society.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Do they? To anyone who can't. You see how helpful the college and encouraging they are to their students.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Well, that's good. They should be.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Yeah, they should be, but everyone and that was long before they had co-ed dorms. And, I tell you, the people who had children in college when they started that, they really were upset.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Yeah. It was a big change.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, yes, a co-ed dorm? Because they first started out with the floors and then they went to you can be having one right next door.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

It's wild, isn't it?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, they thought, ooh, we thought that was just too much. So it was. Another reason why Grinnell was so important to me, my uncle was a chef in the girls' dorm and his friend and his wife were chef and salad cook at the boys' dorm. Grinnell was really closely intertwined with our lives, monetarily and physically.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Did either of your kids go to Grinnell?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

No.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Did you want them to?

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

I had two daughters. That's my oldest daughter and there's my youngest daughter on that other wall. I wanted the youngest daughter to go, but she went to Aurora instead. Grinnell was too far away.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Well, I guess-

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

And my oldest daughter, she wanted to go to Chicago University, so that's where she went.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

Well, that's nice and close too.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh yeah, yeah. So neither of them wanted to go. And none of my family wanted to go to Grinnell. I'm the only one.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

But you really wanted to go.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

I really wanted to go. And that's the only place I had ever wanted to go. And because my oldest sister went to Fisk. My next oldest sister went to Hampton and the sister next to me, went to Iowa State and she got her Master's from the University of Iowa. And then my oldest sister came to live in Iowa City. My oldest brother, he finished at Hampton. My youngest brother, he didn't go to college there, he went to Washington DC and went to school there because my sister who finished Hampton was in Washington DC, and she worked for the Library of Congress.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

So you're really a very well educated, accomplished family. That's just [crosstalk 00:10:07].

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

You know what mother said, "Get an education."

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

And everybody listened, it sounds like.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Well, one of the things is she didn't let us do a lot of things that other kids did: no movies on Sunday, no movies period, no card playing, no alcohol.

**Jackie Hartling Stolze:**

She's a tough lady, too.

**Edith Renfrow Smith:**

Oh, she was. She was a tough task master. That was it. To go through all the things that we did, and we went to church every Sunday and one day during the week. So she saw to it that we were-