

Martha Miller Palmer

Martha (Miller '31) Palmer's time at Abilene Christian spanned two campuses – the original one on North First Street and the current one on the Hill. Now a 101-year-old resident of Houston, she lives on her own with family nearby. She was a favorite of students on campus because of her quick smile.

What is your family's history?

My mother's father was a captain in the Confederate Army, and my father's father was a private in the Confederate Army. Both of my parents went to college, so education has been a long tradition in my family.

What were you parents' professions?

My father went to medical school and was a country doctor for many years but later became a farmer. My mother started teaching school when she was 17 years old. Then, anyone could be a teacher who took the time to go to the courthouse and take an exam.

What brought you to ACC?

My parents believed in a Christian education. We lived in Waxahachie, and my older sister decided to go to ACC to experience a big school, so I went after she did.

What do you remember about your years at ACC?

I lived one year in Daisy Hall on the original campus with my sister, Louise, then in Zellner Hall for two years on the new campus. Jessie P. Sewell was president when I first came to ACC in 1925. I was a home economics major. By the time I finished school in 1931, we were in the midst of the Depression, but even though ACC diminished in size, it kept going and never closed its doors.

What memories do you have from living in the dorm?

I remember when some girls snuck out of the dorm by sliding down a sheet out the window. They were going across the street ... to get food and drinks. I also remember one Easter morning some of the boys gathered out in front of the dorm and sang, "Up From the Grave He Arose." It was so beautiful.

What professor stands out in your memory?

Eddie Weems taught my freshman English class. He was such a good teacher. When a student would ask a question, instead of just answering right away, he would ask questions back to encourage you to find the answer for yourself. He was very funny, and I remember him saying something at the end of class one day

that we all thought was a bit risqué: "Like the bear who sat down on the block of ice, my tale is told."

What did you do after graduation?

I worked for Houston ISD for about 14 years as a dietician. I would help plan cafeteria menus. This was before the government took on that role, which happened during my years at Houston ISD.

How is moving into ACU different today than it was when you were moving in?

We took the train from Waxahachie to Abilene, and everything we wanted to have at school had to fit in one suitcase. We didn't bring televisions and radios like the students do now.

So you did not arrive in Abilene by car, but did you drive as a teenager?

Yes, we learned to drive very young then. When I was 13 years old, and my sister was 14, we would drive to school. We had a Chevrolet, and the gas tank was under the front seat. Every morning before school, we would have to crank-start it.

Do you still drive?

I quit recently to give my daughter peace of mind, but I have had two men tell me I am a good driver. I have been driving for so long, it is as natural for me as breathing.

What has changed since you were a student at ACC?

Lots of things have changed. We've gone from horse and buggy to having a man on the moon. We used to use the expression "you might as well go to the moon," and now we have.

What is life like for you now?

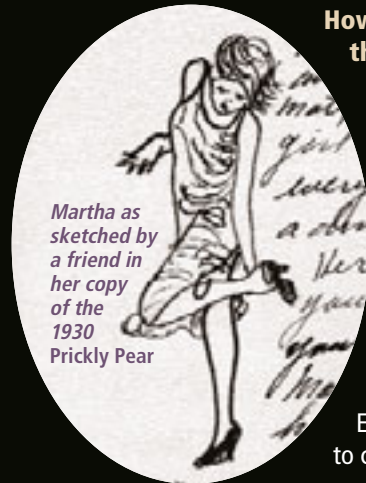
I love my congregation at Memorial Church of Christ in Houston. They threw me a 100th birthday party and I have a stack of about 80 cards they gave me. They say I inspire them, but I say it is just because I have been breathing for a long time.

What advice would you give to students who are just starting their college careers?

Take your school seriously. Learn everything you can. This is a golden opportunity for you. And don't forget that accumulating things on this earth is pretty futile unless you use those things for good.

If you are a centenarian or know a former student who is, contact the Alumni Office at alumni@acu.edu or 800-373-4220.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL BRYAN



Martha as sketched by a friend in her copy of the 1930 Prickly Pear



Martha was born in Corsicana, and her family moved later to Waxahachie. Her sister, Louise, was a nurse who lived to age 93. Martha will turn 102 on July 16.



Martha has enjoyed gardening as a hobby since retiring.