

A Connecticut Music Major Becomes an Alabama Orchidophile

When Phyllis Yeamans'58 first met Earl Bailey at Western College in 1956, she never imagined that she would someday grow, breed, show and sell orchids all over the country, much less live on a farm in the backwoods of Alabama. It was a blind date. She was a music major and Earl was an engineer for the Air Force at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. Here is her story ...

How did we get to orchids? We began life together in Fort Worth, where both our children were born. Four years later we moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and from 1966 to 1968 we were in Boston, where Earl was on an NSF Faculty Fellowship in Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT. While in Boston, I earned my AGO Choirmaster degree, and we bought Earl's father a Lord and Burnham greenhouse when he retired. Earl's dad grew orchids, and each Easter all the Bailey women had beautiful orchids from his collection to wear to church. THAT may have been the beginning.

At the University of Alabama, Earl was a professor of aerospace engineering, and I taught music in a private school, played the organ and directed choirs, and did computer consulting. After we retired, we moved to a beautiful piece of land on the Little Cahaba River in Bibb County, Alabama. Our little town of Brierfield has no shopping center, but does have a tiny little U.S. Post Office and a couple of home industries. We have a new café that serves wonderful home-cooked meals and barbeque. When we bought the initial acreage of our farm in 1976, our son Jim and his father started building a simple, one-story log cabin on a spot overlooking a beautiful free-flowing spring-fed river, the Little Cahaba. I thought they were crazy. Jim worked several summers on the project, bringing friends from Indian Springs School in Birmingham and later St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, to work with him. Earl worked weekends with him whenever possible. By 1985, when Earl took a sabbatical to work at Boeing in Seattle, the cabin had a temporary roof, and we left for 15 months.

Our daughter, Susan, was a Georgia Tech engineer, married and working at Intel in Seattle at that time. In the



*Phyllis and Earl Bailey, proprietors,
ORCHIDbabies, LLC*

years after Earl's sabbatical, we returned to Seattle periodically for more consulting with Boeing. For a time, our son, Jim, lived with his wife and daughter in Seattle, where he did a residency in internal medicine at the University of Washington. How wonderful to be in the same place as your children!

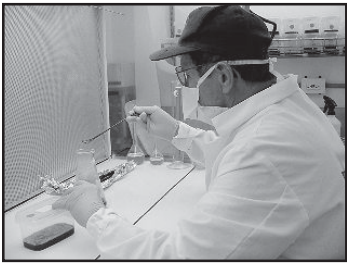
In that first fun-filled year in the Northwest, we stayed at a chalet near Sun Mountain, where there was a gorgeous log house with an A-frame over it. It was a prophetic visit. So in 1987, we began our next project — building an A-frame over the cabin.

For several years, we drove back and forth from Tuscaloosa. In 1992, we sold our house, moved to the land, and named our farm Baileywick (*bailiwick means a special place*). We built a second structure (now the guest house) for the shop and to live in while we finished the cabin, which my cousin from Austria has dubbed "The Chateau."

The Meily Society, named for distinguished alumna and benefactress **Olivia Meily Brice, Class of 1866**, was established in 2001 to honor our **Wise Able Vital Elder** alumnae who have celebrated their 50th reunion and to recognize and encourage the knowledge and energy they bring to the WCAA. "The Anchor" is a periodic newsletter published exclusively for its members.

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Orchid seed are sown in sterile flasks: Earl is transferring newly germinated seedlings from a mother flask to a larger flask.

We moved into The Chateau in 1997. Finishing the cabin/chateau entailed many side projects, and one of them included bringing Earl's dad's Lord and Burnham greenhouse to Baileywick. We soon began filling the small greenhouse with orchids. What happened next? The orchid "bug" got Earl Bailey. He was inspired to learn about and grow orchids. Soon his daily interest in the newest orchid blooming led him to start an orchid business. I protested, "This is your business, Earl. I will support you, but ..." Those words were soon lost and forgotten as we *both* embarked on a new career.

Over the next two years (2000-2002), we restored and rebuilt a second, much larger antique Lord and Burnham greenhouse and added an office and laboratory for ORCHIDbabies, LLC. The engineering on the greenhouse was quite a task, as every system must have a backup in case of failure or power loss during storms. Aerospace engineers believe in triple redundancy, and it paid off this winter when our boiler died for two weeks before it



The Baileys' Chateau, with the first Lord & Burnham greenhouse visible at the right rear. Inset: Base of the two-story spiral staircase which Earl made. The center piece is a red oak tree from their property.

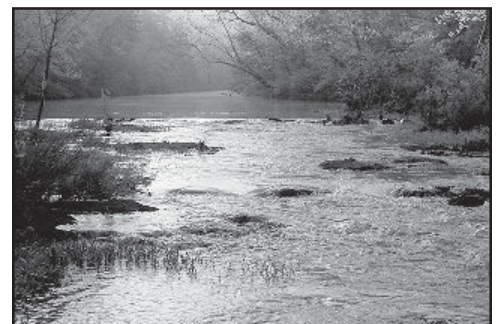
could be repaired. Our redundant outside and inside wood heaters had to be loaded with wood all times of the day and night. Imagine us in 20-degree weather, wearing coats and gloves over our pajamas, holding flashlights and loading a big outside furnace. We saved the orchids!

We have benefited from many friends who have helped us — and learned even more by doing ourselves. Earl tends the plants and the sterile lab, where he flasks orchid seed and makes "babies" that feed our supply of new orchids. I manage the website, computer work, orders, accounting, photos, and business management. As part of our plan to pick the best plants and growers, we visited some of the growers we admired that were doing the same kind of work Earl was interested in: hybridizing Lady Slipper orchids. One grower ran after us as we left his Madison, Wisconsin, greenhouse, calling out, "I forgot to tell you one important thing — orchids like sex in the morning!"

So far we have registered about 35 new hybrids with the Royal Horticultural Society in London and have more we hope to bloom and register. All have the preliminary name "Cahaba" (after our Little Cahaba River), so anyone acquiring a plant with that in the name will know it is an ORCHIDbabies, LLC hybrid. We have orchids named for all of our grandchildren, our children, and their spouses. Mine is Paphiopedilum Phyllis Bailey. Earl is waiting for one of his special hybridized Phragmipediums to bloom — it will be Phrag. Cahaba Earl Bailey.

Each day begins with a trip to the greenhouses, to see what new beauty is blooming. We take pictures for our website (www.orchidbabies.com) and for shows so people can see what their purchased plant will look like when it blooms. We are thankful to have a part-time assistant five days a week to help with watering, fertilizing and repotting.

We travel to orchid shows in fall and spring. These usually last for a long weekend. We set up on Thursday or Friday and close about 4 p.m. on Sundays. We set up three large sale tables of blooming and budding plants and seedlings, and prepare a display of our best bloom-



Little Cahaba River

ing orchids for public view and for judging. The plants in the display are always judged by a team of American Orchid Society judges. Official judges from the AOS have a minimum of eight years of training! The judging is highly technical. All types of prizes are awarded, including ribbons, special gifts, and AOS awards to the most exquisite representational species and hybrids. We have won a collection of awards and prizes, and one special one in particular called the Roy T. Fukumura Vandaceous Award that elucidates the most outstanding vandaceous orchid in the United States awarded by the AOS during the previous calendar year. We won this award in 2008.

We have found that some of the nicest people are orchid lovers and orchid hobbyists. Most of our customers are hobbyists who like to get the latest creations in species and hybrids. We do orders through the Internet and ship plants all over the country. Earl has been a featured speaker at orchid society meetings in Minneapolis, Kansas City, Chicago, Atlanta, Houston, and Seattle. It's always a pleasure to visit different cities and see new and old friends who are there because of orchids. We are particularly thrilled that our daughter, in Seattle, has started to follow in our footsteps: She has a small greenhouse overlooking Lake Washington and calls it "ORCHIDbabies West."

In 2007, we gifted the development rights for almost a mile of our Little Cahaba River frontage (over 100 acres) to The Nature Conservancy. Our riverfront easement will remain a protected natural area in perpetuity. Over 60 acres of it is a working forest of longleaf pine under natural stand management. Our children really encouraged this. They will still inherit the land, but they know it will always be protected under the arm of The Nature Conservancy.

As life proceeds, we continue to enjoy the next beautiful orchid blooming, the accomplishments of our children and grandchildren, and life on the farm in Alabama. For a former Connecticut Yankee this is hard to believe, but life is good.

—Phyllis Yeamans Bailey '58



From Scrapbook & Album

This '54 Sophomore Stunt program was contributed by **Sandy Franz Barnes**, by way of **Bar Drake MacConnell**. They both recall a malfunctioning special effect — the rotten garbage odor that overtook the entire room and “really, really stank” — that did *not* amuse Dean Hoyt. It was “an evening of culture,” after all, and the guests were attired in gowns and tuxes.

MARCH 15, 1952

The Sophomore Class of 1954
of
Western College

presents an evening of culture

LA PRODUCTION!

PROLOGUE:

Sophomores.....C. Bergman, W. Juenke, B. Leslie,
P. Nace, A. Pierson

Penelop.....X. Lindhorse

ACT I — NO TALENT — SYBIL'S CRISIS

Announcer.....D. Stubbins

Unscrupulous Wife Vivian.....R. Mathieson

Wholesome Sybil Lumpkin.....J. Bulla

Young Dr. Trueblue.....H. Ham

Two Sobbing Women.....Maternity Ward, I. Petrenko

Testimonial.....Johnston Biscuit Company

Singink Commercial.....J. Faustus, J. Gary Ind, K. Kablitz,
I. Korsmo, A. Leighton, K. Sexton,
J. Mirejohn, B. Raffle

ACT II — NO SCENERY — HE WHO LAUGHS LAST

Fortune Teller.....P. Williams

Bertram.....P. Moore and Moore

Calvin.....T. Lueamerunerung

Lady.....M. Mastered

Child.....D. Haze

Two Gangsters.....M. Gaston, M. Chessling

Egbert.....N. Blake

INTERMISSION

ACT III — NO LIGHTS — COON HUNTING ON SCOTTISH MOOR

Mrs. McDougall.....L. Brownie

Gentlemen.....G. Cottonham, P. Curry, L. DeLong,
Gee Flowers!, J&J Graybill, J. Kosis,
L. Lidgett

Refuse Collector.....B. Mallord

FINALE — NOTHING MUCH OF ANYTHING

Sophomore Class of 1954

Lobby Holders.....V. Zirovich, D. Randels

Director.....Bettie Renton

Stage Man and Assistant.....Sandy Franz, Lucy Liggett

Musikal Durector.....Pat Williams

Koreeografer.....Barbara Lesley

Script Co-ordinator.....Gladys Phloopdeedle

Dancers.....Elektrishkia Light, Alevandrovnia Howe,
Pavlovnia Hufeisen, Petrushkia Schmidt,
Constantinovnia Meyer, Dervishia Rembert

Scrapbook, cont.

I remember Western when ...

... Dr. Boyd was President and his daughter taught English. There was Dean Byrne, Miss Bishop taught Bible,



Winifred Steil Dibert '24

Miss Pepper taught mathematics, and she was the chaperone of the fraternity parties. To have the privilege of an afternoon or Saturday night date (until 10 p.m.), we had to have a grade average of B- to A and she would chaperone in our parlor. Of course we wore hat and gloves even walking through the woods to Oxford.

Living in Troy, Ohio, my parents came

to visit regularly. They drove a Franklin car with my Pomeranian sitting up on the dash and a basket full of goodie-bites, and we'd take my friends out. My father was not allowed in my room in the corner of McKee Hall.

The meals we had were pretty good, but I dreaded the Friday night "Macaroni and Cheese with Ginger Bread" and would always go looking for alternatives. We served the table correctly — remove everything, even to this day. The foreign students at Western — one from China, one from France — opened our eyes to their parts of the world's unusual customs and ways.

Speaking of unusual, there was the ritual of First night initiates, the freshmen were given pails to go down to our pond and carry water back and parade before the President's box. My parents were sitting there as well and when the serenade passed by — no Winifred! I must have had something else important to do (a sneak date). When my father found out he was so angry, but he was such a dear man.

Excitement was in the night air when a fraternity would serenade us, the lovely strings of "Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" wafting through the breeze accompanied by the odor of ... skunk!

For the most part, the students were reverent of the college, but we had a little motto we would sing: "We're in Western College, not for knowledge, but for college life!"

I was privileged to have my own car and my friends made good use of it — even when I was asleep! My roommates were Bethel Ehrenfeld, Mary Markey, Cass Dixon, and Sally Walker. Our social life was a tea dance. One time as I was enjoying myself, Dean Byrne sedately called me aside. I was toddling!

On looking back, I'm thankful for the high standards and morals practiced then. They have sustained me through my life — and it has been a beautiful and full life!

In 1999, Winifred Steil (Crawford) Dibert '24 shared these recollections in response to the "As I Knew Western" oral and written history project, now part of the permanent collection of the Western College Memorial Archives. The picture, taken on the occasion of a visit from WCAA Director Judy Waldron, appeared in the Spring '94 Bulletin, as her 70th class reunion was approaching. Winifred died September 13, 2005, at the age of 104.

Thanks to **Barbara Burklund Copenhaver '50**, who filled in the blank in this caption from last year's "Anchor." It's Betsy **Pierce**! She has no idea how she remembers it: "This was 62 years ago ... there are times when I forget what I had for breakfast. Go figure!"

Dorm mates on the stairs to McKee Hall smoker. Top: Pat Jerry, Betsy ____ (?), Marge Grahn; middle: Eunice Standish, Ginnie; bottom: Eleanor "Mac" McLaughlin, Glo Jerry. Dean Hoyt was their house-mother.



What's in YOUR scrapbook, album or diary? Nostalgic alums would like to know! Please share your mementoes ...

Here Comes the (Kumler) Bride

Elizabeth Brown Peelle '54 is well known to Westerners as one of our most distinguished alumnae. Following up her chemistry degree with a master's in sociology from the University of Tennessee, Liz went on to enjoy a long and fulfilling career as an environmental sociologist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, winning acclaim for professional achievements as well as community service at both local and national levels. She was honored by the WCAA in 1989 with an Alumnae Service Award; in 1990, Miami University conferred upon her the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Did you know Liz was also a Kumler bride?

According to Liz, naming a Kumler Chapel pew to commemorate their marriage was the idea of her husband, Bob. Having graduated early from both high school and college, he didn't identify with a particular class, so attended Western reunions with Liz and found "more interesting people" there. Both enjoyed Western in their post-graduate years, and while photographing the plaques during one Alumnae Weekend, Bob suggested, "We could do that!" Liz knew it would take a significant gift and began working with former WCAA Director Judy Waldron to tailor a plan to fit their goals.

On September 24, 1955, Elizabeth Brown, Class of '54, and Robert Peelle were married in Kumler Chapel. Undeniably romantic as Kumler weddings are to all Westerners, Liz and Bob chose the site because it was "neutral ground." They did not want to have a big wedding in either of their home towns (Milwaukee and Toledo), so settled on the intimate setting of the Western College campus. Nor had they sentimental memories of moments shared in the Chapel during Liz's four years at Western — they didn't meet until March 1955, when both were working in Oak Ridge, Tennessee — Liz with her chemistry degree, Bob, a nuclear physicist. A friend introduced them, they were "sympatico" (Liz's word), and six months later Western's Dean Pohlman married them in Kumler Chapel.



The wedding party consisted of (left to right): Richard I. Brown, brother of the bride; pianist Barbara Hill; maid of honor Willa B. Ward, Western Class of '54; bride Elizabeth Ann Brown; Dr. Edward W. Pohlman, Dean of Western College for Women; groom Robert Peelle; best man Rolla B. Hill; and Harold M. Peelle, brother of the groom.

Always an outstanding student and ever a devoted supporter of her alma mater, Liz is directing her gift to the Western College Professorship Fund. As a prelude to reunion, anniversary classes are asked to share what about their college days made the most lasting impression. In 1989, Liz cited the "high caliber of Western College professors and staff," writing that she especially appreciated their high standards of scholarship and personal conduct when, after graduating, she compared the character and depth of other people's educational experiences. She continued, "My gratitude and respect increases with time as I realize how unusual was the exceptional educational environment provided by these devoted and underpaid educators. Dean Phyllis Hoyt was outstanding as mentor, guide and friend during my term as Government Association president. Others who had a deep impact upon me included Dr. Beatrice Brooks, Dr. William Warren, Dr. Frank Esterquest, Dr. Helen Tappan, and Dr. Mary Etta Knapp."

A pew in Kumler Chapel may be "named" to honor an individual, family, group or class just as Liz and Bob Peelle's will be.

For more information about naming a pew or making a donation to the Western College Professorship (or any WCAA endowed account), contact the WCAA at 513-529-4400 or e-mail wcaa@muohio.edu.

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**“Wise Able Vital Elder” Meily Society members
at our Reunion Luncheon, June 19, 2010**

Join us June 18 for Reunion Luncheon 2011!