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... AND SO I CAME TO BROCKPORT

STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE - BROCKPORT, N. Y.
So I Came to Brockport

Last year at this time I was in the very same quandary you are in today. Would I or wouldn’t I? . . . Get married? Hardly! I had a boyfriend who had just been shipped to Britain (he’s well on his way to Berlin at this moment), and there won’t be any question of marriage for me until he comes back, and who knows just when that will be. Who knows, either, just how we’ll both feel when he does get back? Anyhow, it wasn’t the to-be-or-not-to-be of M-Day that preoccupied me when I was in your shoes. It was the inevitable to-be of J-Day—the fast approaching day when I would have to decide what job I was going to train for when my high school career was over. And it all boiled down to this: Would I or wouldn’t I go to college?

The summer of my junior year I had spent in a war plant. The money was good, and the knowledge that I was helping out made me feel good, too. But as a long-term proposition, factory work definitely didn’t appeal to me. Besides, it was fairly obvious that in a year or two well paid war jobs wouldn’t go begging any more.

I thought about a business course. There was sure to be a boom right after the war. But how long would it last? Reading the newspapers, I found the experts failing to get together on that point. Anyhow, the dreary office routine which most business girls’ lives add up to, didn’t make my breath come any faster.

In teaching, however, I felt I was standing on safer ground. I didn’t need either posters or newspaper editorials to convince me that the nation was facing a serious teacher shortage. I came up against evidences of it right in my own school, where the opening of the last two years had seen our Principal frantically scouring the state to recruit an adequate faculty. And education, I realized, was a commodity that was going to be in demand when the cry for more tanks and planes was nothing more than a nasty memory. If I qualified as a teacher, I felt certain of getting a job and of holding it as long as I wanted. Besides, I’d always liked children, and most of them had returned the compliment; so, although I didn’t know a thing about teaching methods, I felt I had what it takes to make good in front of a class. Anyhow, I soon found out that if I lost my fancy for elementary teaching, I could take the B.Ed. degree I would earn at a State Teachers College to Columbia or any other university, and apply it towards an M.A. which would open up all sorts of vistas.
What decided me to investigate Brockport was an assembly one windy morning in March when two members of the Brockport faculty, Mrs. De Lancey and Dr. Gale, came to speak to us about their college. It wasn't so much what they said that impressed me, although it was a pleasant surprise to learn that tuition at Brockport was absolutely free, and reassuring to know that Brockport's faculty had a larger proportion of Ph. D.'s than most colleges throughout the nation. No, I guess what attracted me was their warm friendliness, their keen sense of humor, and their obvious sincerity. Of course, they wanted us to come to Brockport. They made no bones about that. But they did not want us to come on false pretenses. Some of my classmates who expressed a desire to teach music they recommended to try Fredonia or Potsdam. Others who said they wanted to become Science teachers they advised to get in touch with Buffalo or Albany. And they made it quite clear that they could guarantee complete satisfaction only to those who wanted a General Course in Education, plus, if they so wished, sufficiently intensive work in English and Social Science to make it possible to teach these subjects in high school after the usual spell of post-graduate study. Well, that group included me, and before we said good-bye that morning, we had made a date with Brockport. . . Yes, as I look back at that assembly, I'm still certain that it wasn't so much what they said about the College, as how they said it. Their enthusiasm for the place was infectious, . . . and intriguing as well. They left us with the feeling that there was lots to Brockport which they hadn't even mentioned. And we were determined to find out for ourselves!

So that is why Friday, May 7, Spring Day at the State Teachers College, found me bound for Brockport, along with three or four hundred other high school seniors from all over western New York.

Now Brockport, with its avenues of stately elms and maples, and its substantial homes, is as attractive a village as you are likely to encounter between Albany and Buffalo. But since most of its homes are of pre-depression vintage, Brockport isn't exactly my idea of the Village of Tomorrow.

You can imagine, then, why I rubbed my eyes when at the end of College Street I was greeted by the sight of a magnificent modern building towering above its spacious lawns, fresh and spotless as if it had sprouted there after the previous night's rain. This definitely was my idea of the College of Tomorrow!

We were welcomed in the massive foyer by a group of students, two of whom introduced themselves to our little party as Grace and Betty, and told us they were going to make it their business to see that we got to know Brockport as thoroughly as was possible in a single day.
Since the idea of Spring Day was to show us high school seniors the College in action, most of the classes scheduled for that morning were running as usual. I listened in to a course on Shakespeare's comedies, which both Betty and Grace agreed was a moral "must" at Brockport, and it didn't take me long to find out why!

Science has never been my favorite subject, but from what I saw of the college classes in that field, I feel I might become more than just resigned to it. The war, of course, has got me interested in world geography, but when geography begins at home, right here in western New York, I am sure I will find it fascinating.

And although nobody apparently manages to look fascinating while peering through a microscope, it must be thrilling to be able to prowl around thus in the world of tiny, invisible things.
Although I had been told that Brockport was admirably equipped for Physical Education, the dimensions of the gymnasium took me completely by surprise. This vast expanse of honey-colored floor was certainly the athletic girl's dream. "What a place for a Junior Prom!" murmured my friend Stephanie wistfully.

"Long before you girls graduate, male partners won't be rationed anymore," said Betty. "As it is, we've managed to hang on to quite a few, and they've all promised to attend the tea dance we've planned for you this afternoon."

As I passed by Mr. Tuttle's office on my way down to the swimming pool, I caught sight of one of them who had dropped in for a conference with the Dean of Men. I made up my mind I wouldn't miss that dance!
“So far there has always been plenty of room on the stage for the Orchestra,” chimed in Betty. “But it has a future ahead of it. So if you play an instrument, don’t forget to bring it along. When your class begins planning an assembly program, you’ll find yourselves as much in demand as violinists Sally Neidert and Florence Wiedrick.”

“Or the Fisher sisters with their trombones,” Grace added. “I never was quite sure what the expression “doubling in brass” meant till I saw them perform!”

By this time we were almost late for lunch; so we rushed down stairs to the cafeteria, picnicked on the spotless floor, joined in an old-fashioned sing, and listened to a few local boogie-woogie experts and crooners.

The biggest surprise of the day for me was the entrance of four faculty members who had done strange things to their hair and their shirt collars, and who carried us back to the good old days when the barber-shop quartet flourished. It’s curious how trivial little things influence even our most momentous decisions. I knew nothing about Dr. Anselm (the gentleman with the flamboyant waistcoat) or about his reputation as a Professor of Education, but I made a mental note that I’d rather study under a man who could indulge in a little folly now and then than under one who was always worried whether he might rate only an A— in dignity.
We spent part of the interval between lunch and tea in the lounge, where, but for the laughter and the liveliness of the conversation, I might have imagined myself in a first-class hotel.

"I don't think I've said anything that would give you the impression our college life is a howling desert," said Betty as we relaxed in our comfortable arm chairs. "It most certainly is not. Yet I can't give you a better idea of what the lounge means to me than by calling it an oasis. It would take a pretty stubborn case of fatigue or the blues to stand up under a half-hour here. A chat and a cigarette, if you feel like it, a rubber of bridge or a chess game—and you're all set to face the stern realities once again! A conference with a faculty member in his office is no ordeal, to be sure; but down in the lounge it's an object lesson in liberty, equality, fraternity. Stephen Leacock certainly knew what he was about when he said that if he were building a college, he'd start off with a smoking room!"
It was time now for assembly; so we trooped into the auditorium to the strains of the Pomp and Circumstance March played by a student organist. I had sat in bigger auditoriums than this, but never in one so intimate and well-appointed. As the President and one of the Seniors delivered their speeches of welcome, once again I felt that indescribable something being wafted from the stage until it enveloped all of us. The spirit of Brockport—I must let it go at that—the spirit I had first sensed in my conversation with my two faculty friends.

Today I can still remember snatches of that Senior's speech: "We love Brockport. In this our last year here, we are proud and glad of this opportunity to repay a tiny part of the debt we owe it, by urging you to come and carry on its glorious tradition. Four years from now one of you will be standing where I stand today and will be addressing a new group of high school seniors as I am addressing you today. All of you who decide to make Brockport your college will be feeling as I feel today."

Then followed an entertaining program of song and dance and humorous sketches presented by Freshmen and Sophomores. Some of the lighting effects, I had noticed, were so ingenious that, as we left the auditorium, I suggested to Betty and Grace that with such elaborate backstage equipment, the play must be quite the thing at Brockport.
As I watched the graceful performance of the girls whom Miss Ball had trained for the Aquacade, I found it hard to believe that this year I would be one of the swimmers in that group.

The pool was the sort of place where you’d expect to be met at the door by a sign stating: “Reserved for Miss Dietrich and her guests.” Grace had some difficulty convincing me that I wouldn’t have to wait for the privilege of swimming in it until I was at least a Sophomore.
We still had time for a tour of the Campus School where students learn by doing, everything about elementary teaching from child psychology to doctoring stomachaches. As I watched one of the seniors hold her little audience entranced with a fireside story, this, I said to myself, is something that every girl should be able to make a success of, whether she plans to be a teacher or not!

Tea was served in the luxurious reception room reserved for red-letter days in the college year, and afterwards we went back to the gymnasium to try our fortunes on the dance floor. As Betty had promised, all the men were on deck, and they were even reinforced by several members of the faculty. So we girls didn't have to dance very many numbers with each other. (By the way, before it was all over, I did have a foxtrot—the second last one—with you know whom!)
My bus was due to leave in half-an-hour now; so I knew that what remained for me to do I would have to do quickly. Ever since 9:30 that morning I had been busy storing up data on life at Brockport, and the accumulated weight of these had finally tipped over the scales in Brockport’s favor. But before committing myself, I wanted that extra bit of assurance that comes from having your own opinion corroborated by that of others. So I drew Grace and Betty aside and addressed them in my most direct, business-like manner. “Now, look here, girls,” I said, “I can think of lots of reasons why I should come to Brockport. You who have been here long enough to know the place from A to Z, can you, frankly, tell me any reasons why I shouldn’t?”

“Well,” said Betty after a moment’s reflection, “we haven’t been to any other college; so we can hardly make comparisons. There are a couple of girls here, though, who have gone to school elsewhere—one in California and the other in Ohio, and both of them are for Brockport every time. Classes are more fun here, they say, and there’s something about the place—its friendliness—its informality . . .”

“Of course,” Grace interrupted, “you’ll find you have to work here. You’ll have to put in more time in study than you do in high school, and to begin with, at any rate, your grades probably won’t be so good as they were in high school.”

“You still haven’t answered my question,” I persisted.

“Well,” Betty replied, “I guess that’s probably because I can’t think offhand of any good reason why any girl who wants that mixture of work and play which the ideal college life means to me shouldn’t come to Brockport.”

My mind quite made up now, I hurried along to the office of the Director of Admissions, and asked him for an application blank.

“Be sure you’re not doing anything rash,” he said with a grin.

“Don’t worry! I’m not,” I replied. “I’ll be seeing you in September— or perhaps in June, if I decide to accelerate!”

So that is why I came to Brockport!

And today, now that I am half way through my Freshman year, I still can’t discover a single reason why I shouldn’t have done so. I have a cheerful, airy room in a big home on South Main, where seven of us girls live together and basket-board. That is, we do all our own housekeeping, taking turns at marketing, cooking, and washing up. To me this is not only the jolliest way to live at Brockport; it is also a very inexpensive way. If once in a while we all feel like a change, we fall back on the College Cafeteria, where three square meals are served daily at absurdly low prices.
Early in the year Dr. Edwards made a recording of my voice. After analyzing it, he told me that my speech, like that of the great majority of Americans, including Mr. Dewey and Lowell Thomas, was General American. He detected a trace of nasal twang, but assured me that would disappear after a few lessons; so I am planning to take his Speech Course in my Sophomore or Junior year.

As my class assignments make me a regular visitor at the Library, I'm glad it's such a pleasant place to study in. Mrs. McCrory, who cheerfully presides over its 20,000 volumes, is never too busy to help us find just the material we need for that term paper.
Without a doubt the Art class is one of my favorites.

A riotous display of Indian women with papooses, sinuous green snakes slithering through flaming jungles, tawny buffaloes stampeding over purple pampas, makes it clear that we are striking out for ourselves in the realm of color and design.

Our advertising posters and our schemes for interior decoration are similarly uninhibited. We certainly are expressing ourselves; and that, Mr. Skelton keeps assuring us, is the object of the whole business.

By special arrangement with Mr. Nihiser, whose domain is Industrial Arts, I was able to beat out a couple of brass ashtrays for Christmas presents this year.

We Freshmen won't have open season in the shop till our Junior year, but by that time I'll have a long enough list of projects in ceramics, metal- and wood-working to keep me busy all semester and fill the Home of Tomorrow with objets d'art into the bargain.

Right at the start I decided that I wouldn't let my studies crowd out my extra-curricular activities. I never miss a meeting of the Dramatics Club,
I attend most of the weekly debates sponsored by Forensics, and so far I have had a feature article and a piece of humorous verse accepted by the editors of the Stylus.

Already I have so many memories to treasure.

I shan't forget that first all-college Banquet, graced by the President and the Board of Directors, where I got to know so many of the upper classmen. I was quite dazzled by the resourcefulness of the student Master of Ceremonies and by the wit of the student after-dinner speakers!

Then there were those two parties at the Gun Club, where a benevolent-looking deer and a wise old owl (both stuffed and mounted) beamed down at us from the walls as we danced, sang, ate doughnuts and drank sweet cider!

Perhaps the greatest thrill of all so far was the Reception (formal) early in October. Maybe we do look spruce in our sports outfits on a bright
sunshiny morning in the gym, but when the lights are low, give me a fluffy full-length net or taffeta. Tuxedoes certainly didn't rob our male escorts of any of their charm, either!

By the way, you remember the man I told you I danced with on Spring Day? Well, I've since discovered he's exceedingly popular at Brockport—much more so than I imagined at the time. Not that that makes any difference to me, of course. As I said before, my boy-friend is in the Tank Corps, and although we're not engaged or anything, I wouldn't dream of getting engaged to anyone else—at least not while he's away.

When he comes back we'll have plenty of time to see how we feel towards each other. He wants it that way just as much as I do. If we decide to have an M-Day, I'll be ever so much better able to run a home and a husband than I would have been if I hadn't come to Brockport. If either of us feels like calling it off, I will follow my new career until the right man comes along. Either way I have everything to gain and nothing to lose by having set my course for a B.Ed. degree and a life certificate to teach in this fair state. I'm more grateful than I can say to the good angels who turned my steps towards Brockport, and I guess the best way I can show my gratitude is to try to bring you to Brockport too.