

**Alumnae Achievement Awards
September 2008**

Renie Ferguson Steves '58

Laura Geisel Sullivan '74

Alumnae Achievement Awards - 2008

President John E. Klein's Opening Remarks

Welcome alumnae, special guests, students, faculty, and faculty emeriti to the 28th presentation of the Alumnae Achievement Awards, another rich tradition of our College.

Each year since 1981, the College has recognized remarkable alumnae, nominated by alumnae, to receive this award. The Alumnae Achievement Award is conferred upon selected alumnae who personify the value of a liberal arts education and have brought distinction to themselves and the College. Nominations for the awards come from alumnae, and the recipients are selected by an awards committee that includes administration, faculty, a trustee, and alumnae members.

Each recipient receives an elegant Tiffany and Company crystal trapezoid on an ebony base which has been engraved with the College seal and her name. A plaque listing all past Alumnae Achievement Award recipients hangs in the Anne Jeter Ribble Alumnae Lounge in Smith Hall.

One often-repeated definition of leadership is: *a person of influence*. Since its inception, the College has honored over 80 leaders and women of distinction—artists, attorneys, advocates, educators, researchers, and communicators, to name a few, all of them powerful and positive influencers. As I become acquainted with the alumnae and the history of the College, I recognize there is no shortage of influencers among you. The two influencers we're honoring tonight, and those recognized in prior years, are the legacy of our College: a legacy of diligence in study, of the encouragement and guidance received by our faculty, and testimony to the rich rewards of being life-long learners.

It is my pleasure and privilege tonight to introduce the recipients of the 2008 Alumnae Achievement Awards to you.

Introductory remarks by President Klein for Renie Ferguson Steves '58

Renie Ferguson Steves, class of 1958, is a nationally-published food and wine journalist, cooking school entrepreneur, restaurant critic, and food stylist. Her R-MWC education in political science and economics not only helped her raising her family, but gave her the business background to launch the French Apron school of cooking with a partner in 1979. They started by teaching French, Italian, American regional, and Chinese cooking. The courses and enrollment grew to include entertaining lessons including menus, garnishing, presentation and table setting, as well as pairing wine with food. Just two years after its founding in 1981 the school was featured in *Bon Appetit* magazine.

Since 1989 in her current business, Cuisine Concepts, she has consulted with some familiar names and some heavy-hitters:

- As a food stylist for the Texas Beef Industry Council, Hardee's, Sonic, McDonalds, and the American Ostrich Association.

- As a menu consultant for many non-profit fundraisers in Fort Worth such as National Historic Society, Museum of Science and History, National Victims Society, and Botanical Research Institute of Texas.
- As a food service consultant for the Fort Worth Independent School District, and Fort Worth Country Day School .
- And as a freelance wine, food, and travel journalist with weekly columns in the Fort Worth Star Telegram and Fort Worth Business Press, she has published articles in *Cook's Magazine*, *Wine Spectator*, *The Wine News*, *Better Homes and Gardens Holiday Cooking*, and others. Renie has self-published two books, and co-authored the Texas Chapter of Culinaria USA. Together with her husband she has written 900 articles on food, wine, and travel.

Renie thrives on travel—and has visited 57 countries, some destinations several times, to experience first-hand their art, culture, attitudes, lifestyle, and cuisine. To stay fresh in her career, she takes culinary and journalism education courses each year. Renie has created over 2500 recipes in her 30-year teaching career, some appearing in *Southern Living*, *Cooking Light*, *Bon Appetit*, and *Fine Cooking*.

After all certifications, recognitions, and association leadership titles are listed, and believe me they are numerous, the real untold story is her influence and mentorship.

Renie chaired the International Association of Culinary Professionals Foundation. During her tenure, the Foundation, now called Culinary Trust, awarded over \$200,000 in grants and scholarships for education in the culinary arts. With the Dallas chapter of the Les Dames d'Escoffier, Renie has, in the past 25 years, helped raise and award over \$1M in scholarships and grants to women in food, wine, and hospitality. She later became International President of all 26 chapters of Les Dames.

She adores mentoring young people and has helped many find schooling and scholarships. For students with promise and desire, she has helped with introductions to top professionals and networking for job interviews.

For the 50th reunion of the class of 1958 this past spring, Renie was a pivotal committee member. She was spark—encouraging her classmates to attend and lending her expertise on the selection and purchase of wine for one of their receptions

Renie, 50 years ago when you were part of the Student Government Association, writing for the *Helianthus*, and serving on the Judiciary Committee, you got a taste of how influential you could be. It seems that the seeds planted by your professors then have allowed you to finesse your passions into a global business. Renie, the College is thrilled to count you among our Texas alumnae and to recognize and applaud your achievements.

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Acceptance Remarks by Renie Ferguson Steves '58

Thank you President Klein. You've heard this before, but with heartfelt emotion know that Randolph College appreciates your leadership, your commitment, your charisma, and your caring. Thank you for being here.

And to Laura Geisel Sullivan, thank you in a direct way for doing what you do. My proudest achievement is being a two time cancer survivor.

And to our two daughters, Stephanie Steves Burk '81 and Sarah Steves Eastman '86 and granddaughter Tiffany Burk Schmid '92 for understanding and appreciating the education they received at Randolph-Macon.

In 1954 wide-eyed and smiling, I knew my primary reason for being at Randolph-Macon was for one of the finest liberal arts educations available, but there were friends to nourish, boys to meet, and the pleasure of a small group of social friends through my sorority, Pi Beta Phi.

Randolph-Macon exposed me to strong, competent, gracious, intelligent women and made me at ease with them. Some letters I wrote home are more clear now than then. Senior year while roommate Toni Day was off to Yale for a weekend, our triplet roommate Helen Polkey Clark and I attended a foreign students dinner at the Tri Delta house. I wrote my parents "I love these girls so much. Connie from Japan and Cho Wan from Korea are my favorites." That must have been the beginning of my passion to see the world.

My senior year Mother and my sister Barbara caught a ride in a private plane from Shreveport to Washington and then took a train to Lynchburg. President Quillian was seated nearby and offered them a ride to the college. It was a dark rainy night. Mother wrote, "As we drove to the front of Main Hall there was Renie and lots of her friends with their noses pressed against the window panes watching for us. As we climbed the stairs in Main Hall girls lined them singing a welcome."

The honor system at our college has remained constant. In 1957-1958 we dealt with many infractions — among them curfews and drinking within 20-miles of the college. (That's why we spent a lot of time at Natural Bridge and Bedford Lake.) Today the vast majority of what Judiciary deals with is pledgerism, especially through the internet. During college Kitty Eley Becker remembers going to a beautiful home for an elegant lunch in Lynchburg with several classmates. As they were leaving, the hostess whispered "I put a little sherry in the soup."

As I look back over those four wonderful years and lessons learned in small classes from the best, most caring, devoted professors such as Carl Stern, Dorothy Hughes, Kenneth Moreland, Edwin Penick, Shirley Strickland, Phil Thayer and Mary Williams, I hope they are not disappointed that I'm not an economist, a politician, an artist, a social worker, a historian, a lawyer, or a medical researcher. But....something from all of these teachings was put in a blender and whirled, making me who I am today.

How I've integrated all aspects of my career is through passion for food, wine, and travel. When I began teaching cooking in my kitchen 30 years ago, there was no foam on the gourmet wave.

Males dominated the food industry and in America the only chefs were at large hotels. At every opportunity when I wasn't teaching, I was taking cooking lessons at home and abroad. It was a challenge to stay ahead of the students.

Wine education was part of the classes from the beginning. We all learned to say 'sauvignon blanc' together.

Cooking is a unique vehicle to learn about yourself and how it arouses the senses. It's very cerebral — what you see and smell in a perfectly roasted chicken, listening to the spices pop as they are toasted in an iron skillet, tasting a sauce for the balance of sweet, savory, and salty, and touch being important for that tender, flaky pie crust. Teaching cooking also affects your judgment of others. I am more humble, more tolerant, less judgmental, and appreciative of the magic in a student's eyes when they watch fish change texture in a hot pan.

In 1988 our first freelance wine column was published. My husband Sterling and I have a dual byline and have written for dozens of publications over the years publishing about 900 articles. Our international experience is with a wine magazine in Seoul, Korea whose editor I met at Vin Italy in Verona. They even use my photographs.

As we visited and made friends in all the major wine areas of the world, our wine knowledge increased along with our perception of the industry.

In the early 90s I self published two books, Dallas is Cooking! and Fort Worth is Cooking! I quickly found out that chefs didn't know how to write recipes for the consumer. To this day, those chefs, 27 in each book, are among my best friends. It was cutting edge to be recognized through your restaurant at the time.

Now we don't publish as many books, we 'publish' websites. Mine is finally up and active as of this fall. It's www.reniesteves.com. Have a look. It's all about sharing interesting information from good value wines, to chef's tips and tricks, to recipes, and adventures in travel.

Being International President of Les Dames d'Escoffier's 26 chapters and 1300 professional women has been a source of great pride. In the last 30 years about 6 million dollars has been distributed to help women in education in the fields of food, fine beverage, and hospitality. In Texas style our Dallas chapter has raised over a million, \$500,000 of which is in endowments at five colleges and universities. "Cooking with Les Dames d'Escoffier ... At Home with the Women Who Shape the Way we Eat and Drink," a cookbook, will be out November 1st.

A bit of insight....The National Restaurant Association states that the US Department of Labor categorizes 'chef' as a non-traditional career for women even though women made up 52% of the food service industry in 2006.

Experiencing the culture and cuisine of many countries through local hearts and eyes has been an amazing tool for my career in the culinary arts. Many ladies in Hanoi patter to their food stalls at 4:00am to start the broth for Pho, the one dish that each of them sells all day and into the evening for \$1.00 for a large bowl. In Istanbul a café in a market resembling a Toddle House with stools

at a counter serves the best stuffed eggplant ever. These people are like painters who put their soul on canvas, only they are chefs putting their soul on a plate.

Today my favorite travel photo is one a trip friend took of me with my arm around the shoulder of a shorter Indian woman and her arm around my waist while we walked down a dirt road in a small village. The photo of our back showed our feet moving at the same pace and with the same motion. We can be so alike.

A great source of unending pleasure is when I run into a student who says — “oh, your cooking classes were one of the best things I ever did. I still make beurre blanc sauce for asparagus, and oh, that chocolate divine.” Knowing that my teaching has enabled many students to put an interesting, delicious, relatively easy, and nutritious meal on the table with confidence and caring, warms my heart.

To the students of today...fuel your passion through education. After you decide where you are going, what the vision is, and how you are going to get there, try to do the most good for the greatest number of people. Call or text your parents everyday.

To young alumnae...Show up and be present, really present for life. Learn new skills by taking new jobs and responsibilities. Take advantage of every opportunity to travel, especially out of the country. Don't forget about your college.

To older alumnae, faculty and staff...Convey respect and show your caring by listening. One of life's greatest skills is to be a good listener. It helps you connect to people even if you are delivering bad news. The older we get the more important it is to remember, being negative is exhausting and being positive is exhilarating.

I wish for each of you the enjoyment and passion in your lives that I have had in mine.

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Thank you, Renie.

Introductory Remarks by President Klein for Laura Geisel Sullivan

As a student, Laura Geisel Sullivan, class of 1974, applied to R-MWC early decision and was awarded the Florence Quinby scholarship for academics. She was inspired, like some of you, by two factors: the lure of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a great contrast to her home state of Florida, and by the influence of an alumna, Dorothy IZARD Parks '48, from her hometown of Jacksonville.

Laura admits she wore a path between Martin Science building and Presser Hall each day pursuing what she has called a ‘symphony of her two academic interests’—biology and music. It was out of the freshness of these two disciplines that Dr. Sullivan was encouraged and gained the confidence she needed to apply for medical school in a male-dominated class at University of South Florida. Professor Elaine St. Vincent, her piano teacher, always said she could imagine Laura wearing a white lab coat and dissecting a cadaver.

There is no question that Laura, too, is an influencer, a role model, and has mastered life balance. Following medical school, she pursued a residency in anatomic and clinical pathology, and earned a fellowship in blood banking. She holds four specialty certifications from the American Board of Pathology:

- Anatomic and Clinical Pathology
- Blood Banking/Transfusion Medicine
- And Hematology

Dr. Sullivan has also taught pathology for a number of years, first at University of South Florida, and later at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

While in the Charleston area, Laura re-energized the alumnae chapter acting as chapter president, and an Alumnae Admissions Representative for 15 years. In gratitude for what she was given, she has established a scholarship at the College, the Laura Geisel Sullivan, M.D. scholarship, for pre-med studies.

Currently, Dr. Sullivan is the Staff Pathologist and director of the hospital lab in the busiest hospital system in the country in Orlando, Florida. She spends the majority of her day with cells and the microscope to help with a speedy and accurate diagnosis for patient cases, but also oversees blood banking and transfusion services and teaches pathology in the residency program. Outside the hospital, Laura is the mother of four young adults, including Kathryn Sullivan, class of 2009, and she is training for a half-marathon. When asked what was on her iPod, she replied, “Flower Power, the 10-CD set, but it could just as easily be Mozart’s Sonatas.” She still plays the piano daily, practicing Chopin or Gershwin for the Physicians in Concert series.

Laura, your energy is enviable. Thank you for being with us tonight so that we can recognize you for your accomplishments and for your influence on our current and future students.

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Acceptance remarks by Laura Geisel Sullivan '74

Thank You, Randolph College, for this Great Honor. I am especially thrilled to be honored at this time as my daughter Kathryn is a member of the Randolph College Senior Class, THE CLASS OF 2009! YEAH!!! My large and boisterous family is here including my brother, three of my four sisters, my four children and my husband. They are due many thanks for their unwavering love and support over all the years. I especially want to pay tribute to my Randolph-Macon professors who are here with us tonight: Elaine St. Vincent, Professor and Chair of the Music Department for many years and Chemistry Professor Dr. Laura Bliss. Thank you for your teachings, the personal interest and guidance you gave me and especially for unconsciously being such outstanding role models. And I also want to thank the students who are here taking time from their weekend. I especially want to speak to you as the future generation of graduates of this Great College.

In high school, I was passionate about music and had become a rather good pianist but in 10th grade I fell in love with Biology and decided I wanted to be a Doctor. I mentioned this to the Guidance Counselor at my large public high school in Florida, and she chuckled. She practically

patted me on the head as if to say “Oh, How Cute”, but I’m pretty sure I just imagined that part. And in her defense there were VERY FEW women doctors in those days. But let’s face it, her attitude was NOT helpful.

I chose Randolph-Macon Woman’s College. This small academically strong college (and you Students and Alumnae know what I’m talking about!) provided excellent pre-medical preparation and allowed me to continue my studies in Piano. These talented, dedicated Randolph-Macon professors here tonight and others who are no longer with us took me and my goals seriously which helped me believe in myself. And the beauty of the campus with its red brick against the gorgeous backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains provided daily inspiration. Even now, coming back to campus, I feel like Scarlett going home to Tara – this Great College has been a major source of strength for me.

My four years at Randolph-Macon were challenging and fun. I had classes in the mornings, Labs in Martin Science Building most afternoons, and 3½ hours of piano practice very evening in Presser Hall. I spent a lot of time studying in Lipscomb Library and was a Dean’s List student. I tried hard to take advantage of special events on campus because I knew many were once in a lifetime opportunities. I took the Medical College Admissions Test. I gave my senior piano recital playing Brahms and Ravel. I graduated from R-MWC with my biology degree and started medical school at the University of South Florida College of Medicine.

But it wasn’t all smooth sailing. My sophomore year was especially difficult. I had to decide between being a Performance Major in Piano, something my family and many people who knew me expected, or take on the challenge of majoring in Biology, fulfilling the requirements for medical school and actually attempting to become a physician. There were so few women doctors that I still had never even SEEN one! My father had seen one and said she was big, mean wore saddle oxfords (not my favorite shoe style!). I had peeked in through the windows at University of Virginia and seen those large med school men in their impressive white coats and felt pretty insignificant in comparison. In my sophomore decision making year, I found it hard to imagine myself, a petite piano-playing young girl, as a physician. This plagued my thinking until I mentioned my concerns to Elaine St. Vincent during a piano lesson. She very calmly told me that she could “visualize me perfectly as a woman doctor”. That short statement, delivered with such confidence, made all the difference. And in medical school I successfully competed with men, many of whom had graduated from Duke, Emory, and Vanderbilt.

I met my husband, physician-scientist Jerome Sullivan MD, PhD, during Pathology Residency and we have been married 27 years. My oldest child, Best, was born 6 weeks after I finished my Residency and Blood Bank Fellowship. I worked in Cancer Research with my husband at the Medical University of South Carolina for 3 years on our National Institute of Health grant. During that time I had to wean my second child, Lee, so I could fly to New Orleans and take the 3-day Pathology Specialty Board Examinations. I did take one year off from medicine. It was the year Kathryn was born and I had 3 children under age 3 1/2, but I went back part-time the next year and full time the year after that. I have practiced pathology full-time ever since, only taking 2 weeks off when my fourth child, Will, was born - thanks to my being Director of Laboratories at a hospital with an on-site day care facility.

When Jerome and I moved from Florida to Charleston SC in 1984, my oldest child was under one year old and I was expecting my second child. I knew no one in Charleston. So I called Alumnae Director Muriel Casey, she sent me the names of the Charleston Alumnae, I invited them over for a little get-together, and I had instant friends and a network! We reorganized our Alumnae Chapter which had been inactive for years and I served as President. We had fun meetings with special guests including College President Linda Lorimer, pianist Ray Luck, and Maier Museum curator Ellen Schall Agnew '80. We sponsored prospective student parties (I also served as the area Alumnae Admissions Representative), provided representatives at the local college fairs and just had a wonderful time together. The moral of this story is: **Graduates of our Great College need never feel alone in this world!**

My work as a pathologist is demanding and highly satisfying. As a Surgical Pathologist I receive all biopsied and resected tissue removed in hospital Operating Rooms. A description of the tissue is dictated, significant areas of the tissue are sectioned and submitted for processing and glass slides are prepared for histopathologic examination. I study the slides microscopically and make the diagnosis. We Pathologists are often called "The Doctor's Doctor" because for cancerous biopsies and resection specimens, the pathologist is the doctor who makes the diagnoses on which prognosis and future treatments given by other doctors fundamentally depend. I am part of a team of physicians including the Surgeon, Radiologist, and Oncologist who incorporate the specific pathologic findings with the laboratory, radiologic and clinical findings to come up with the best treatment plan for the individual patient. I also perform and interpret bone marrow examinations, do Autopsies, and read Pap smears and other cytology specimens. As Director of the hospital Laboratory I oversee the branches of Clinical Pathology which include Hematology, the Blood Bank, Chemistry, and Microbiology. And I spend a part of my time teaching residents in the Family Practice Program at my hospital, which is enjoyable and keeps me on my toes! This follows the old dictate in medicine of "See One, Do One, Teach One" and it provides another opportunity for me to give back just a little of what I have received.

Balancing the demands of a stressful and at times emotionally wrenching medical practice with the constant pressure to keep up with the marked advances in medical knowledge is hard enough but trying to do it and maintain a normal family life can be overwhelming at times. As a woman doctor, and for women in general, leading a complete fulfilled life is not easy. And, let's face it, it's hard for men, too. Having the support of a loving family, believing that what I am doing is good, and accepting the fact that at times my life is going to be out of balance - helps me in my daily quest of **Vita Abundantior**.

I want to address my last remarks to the students and young Alums in the audience. I remember being where you are now, full of dreams and ambitions. And I remember what it is like to be young, without a track record, and at times unsure of yourself. Some unknown previous student had taped a Goethe quote in the Presser Hall cloakroom which I saw twice every day - before and after practicing piano. This quote has stayed with me all these years and I would like to leave it with you now:

"Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute;
What you can do, or dream you can do, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

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Thank you, Laura.

Two women who attended in different decades and applied their liberal arts education in different ways, both echoed encouragement from favorite faculty and their fondness for their experience here. Both have experienced *Vita Abundantior*—their lives are more abundant.

Let's take time to get to know Renie and Laura and to congratulate them on their life's work at the dinner reception. We'll now adjourn to Cheatham Dining Hall for an informal dinner followed by a speed networking event with the alumnae and students.