

A 1974 Graduate's Memories of a Groundbreaking College on a Diverse Campus

By **Marian Murray**, LC'74

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Where to begin? I entered Livingston College in the fall of 1970 and graduated in the spring of 1974—my B.A. was in Urban Teacher Education (Secondary) and English. As Rutgers approved a double major—instead of a major and minor—one came out with a “double B.A.,” for all intents and purposes. To give you an idea of how serious this requirement was, there were 22 required courses for the Education major and 18 for the English major! And, even though there were no prerequisite courses, I took them anyway and am glad to have been rounded out as a liberal arts student.

My extra-curricular activities included eight consecutive terms as a student government representative, a formidable group composed of both faculty and students, which was imperative on the most memorable committee that I served on, the “Scholastic Evaluation and Scholastic Standing Committee.” In this committee, the fate of undergraduates literally was in the hands of we faculty and students saddled with the task of determining who could stay and who had to leave Livingston. [At our 10-year Reunion, several classmates came up to me to thank me for the compassion that I and some faculty members showed in allowing them to stay to go on to do good things, professionally and personally. Another of my activities was a wonderful memory of my participation in the glee club, as well as being a reporter/editor for the Third World Report (a paper put out by the Third World Coalition).

Because of Livingston's existence a direct result of the Newark summer rebellions (not riots), the time was thick with heavy issues, including but not limited to the lack of equal rights for African Americans (among others), Open Admissions/Enrollment was struggling to become a reality—I participated in demonstrations and rallies even though I could not qualify for the kind of financial aid that was so desperately needed by so many—, then there was the Vietnam War (or as the Vietnamese termed it “the American War”). There were mind-opening Teach-Ins about virtually every political theme one can imagine. Women's Studies got off the ground, as did Africana Studies, Asian Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, and such.

The dormitory Quads were unique and were named by the students for their compositions: Quad 1 was called “Woodstock”; Quad 2, “Suburbia”; and Quad 3 “The Ghetto”. In the last Quad were three “Black Houses” and one “Puerto Rican

House". The dorms of the Black Houses were both all female/male and co-ed! Being virtually bi-lingual, I found another "home" in the Puerto Rican House. The nights were magical with Congo drumming in which women as well as men were allowed to play to their heart's content.

This was a multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic campus. For the most part, we all lived in harmony and there was a solidarity that was remarkable achieve in any times, let alone the turbulent '60s and '70s. This was a time when anti-war demonstrations/protest rallies around the country were taking place. And, sadly, the National Guard was called in to "restore order" on some campuses, namely Jackson State and Ohio State where senseless student deaths occurred. What many people do not realize is the Guard is armed with the same munitions that is being used by the military during war time. Consequently, we had M-16s trained on us at some of the education-related as well as political rallies! I have never been prouder of Livingston's president, Mason Gross, who boldly and loudly refused the Governor's call to have the National Guard come onto the Livingston campus! [I believe he paid the price in the coming years when he was ultimately removed from his post.] That was a sad day, indeed. Then there were the takeovers of the President's quarter—I was among those who sat-in until demands were met. And, after I graduated I heard of some students took over the Registrar's offices and destroyed academic records. I cannot understand how that senseless act was going to advance their cause! But, I guess, in any movement it takes all kinds!

On the political front, there were moderates, conservatives and revolutionaries. Discussions between the differinig groups were lively to say the least. But what was terrific was that we listened to one another and much was learned by all—if one was open to hear sentiments different from one's own.

Academically, it was groundbreaking to have access to all classes that the different colleges offered, Livingston, Douglass and Rutgers New Brunswick, as well as the other campuses. Getting around was made easy by the three bus lines (A, B, and C) which made the commute a breeze. Being able to attend classes at the different institutions made for meaningful and lasting friendships and relationships, not to mention the broadening of one's horizons.

It was at Livingston that some innovative teachers used dormitory lounges to conduct class when space was tight, e.g., Vertamae Grosvenor's cooking class (she went on to have her own cooking show on PBS)! On one occasion, my Spanish Translation class was held in my apartment! It was taught by Miguel Algarin, who is the founder of the Poet's Cafe in Loisaída (The Lower East Side, in New York City). In this vein, some of my English professors would go on to international acclaim or had already established themselves, e.g., Toni Cade Bambara, Nikki Giovanni, Hattie Gossett, A.B. Spellman, Sonia Sanchez, and Marc Crawford, just to name a few. Toni Cade Bambara (who made her transition in '95) made such an indelible impression on me that I have dedicated my book to

her! [I will most likely self-publish; and a renowned poet, historian and scholar, Louis Reyes Rivera, who is a good friend of mine, is doing the editing of the book.] In Women's Studies I was introduced to the remarkable Chilean singer/songwriter, Suni Paz. This association included attending her concerts in the summers, in midtown Manhattan.

Let us not forget how many couples came out of liaisons at the College—including some that would end in marriage and long-term commitments. (I was one of those fortunates.)

Livingston was ground-breaking in the artists of all hues, activists, revolutionaries, educators, international political figures (some who would find themselves known as political prisoners for the struggles for independence in their homelands. One such person who I had the honor of meeting on campus was the Puerto Rican independentista Juan Maribras (sp.) who recently made his transition. What I truly loved about, and appreciated, was the ethnic and generational diversity in my classes and throughout the campus.

It made for stimulating discussions and true education at its best! I had a wonderful time at the 10th year Reunion of Livingston College; as well as the 20th, which I attended with a long-time friend who I met in my freshman year. I must say that the 20th was particularly memorable because of the "young ones" who gave their perspective of what the Livingston Mission was.

It was heartbreaking to learn of the College's demise, it was truly unbelievable and inconceivable to me that such a drastic decision was made!

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