

The Ladies' Circle: A Lifelong Friendship

Who or what is actually to be found behind the name "Ladies' Circle" and who are these lifelong friends? Well, the name "Ladies' Circle"-- or "Ladies' Get-togethers," as we called ourselves more than 20 years ago-- grew out of the desire of some of the ladies in the local German Evangelical Church congregation to meet once a month to explore Washington's sights, visit museums, or sometimes just get together for a chat. It was meant to be a community activity, as shown in an early photo (1998 or 1999) of the ladies with Pastor Wolf-Barnett, but with the addition of other ladies from the Washington area, the circle expanded very quickly.

Was it just the shared activities that attracted the ladies over the years and still keeps them coming together today?

Certainly, but not only. Several ladies knew and still know each other from the time when their children went to the German School almost 50 years ago. Others did not have children in the school, but helped and still help with handicrafts for the Christmas market, went to pottery sessions for a long time or attended the popular concerts and lectures at the school. Some of the original teachers were and still are members. The children of the older ladies had gone to the German School when kindergarten children and some elementary school classes still had to be distributed among various church rooms and a convent (now the Bolger Center) because of a lack of space at the Logan Drive building.

The Logan Drive building was cramped and lacked so much. Teachers and parents had to fight for every advantageous change, for every improvement, for every new

acquisition. The parents of the kindergarten children (there was no preschool yet) had to fight to get their children, who had been in kindergarten for two years, into the first grade. There were just too many children, too many new applications for a place in first grade. In the end, Germany relented and three parallel classes were allowed. In and around Washington, one soon heard the warning to "immediately register a child for kindergarten at the German School when it is born." Shortages of many things led parents to step in. Volunteer work was a matter of course. It was still that way when we moved into the new building on Chateau Drive. From cooking and serving soup to students in the beautiful - then large - cafeteria to scrubbing pots and counters. Parents had to step in for so much.

The large, new school building was not something we took for granted at the time. The excitement and gratitude of having such a school in Washington was great, which was expressed in the many articles of the long-defunct *Washington Journal*. The topping-out ceremony was widely reported. Festivities were announced. The editor of this Washington newspaper was always on hand with his camera and parents wrote enthusiastically about events that had taken place, such as the concert by the group *Musica Antiqua* in costumes of the musical period: "The great virtuosity, the rarely heard instruments (who has a psaltery at home?) . . . made the evening an unqualified pleasure." (*Washington Journal*, 3/18/1977). There was no shortage of publicity for the school.

We mothers spent a lot of time together through our work at school, we got to know

each other, shared ideas, became friends and " suddenly" - after more than 13 years of years of their children's schooling - realized that since their children had graduated from high school, they would not be seeing each other as often. In addition to the great program offered by the Ladies Circle, the get-togethers of the school-age friends was also a reason to belong to the Ladies Circle.

We have also been fortunate in past years to have as members ladies who have been or still are museum guides at various museums, such as the National Building Museum, the Hillwood Estate Museum, and the Kreeger Museum. The museum lecture by one of our ladies (and former GISW teacher) on Buddhism or the lecture at the "Bureau of Engraving and Printing" on "The Dollar decoded" followed by a tour of the printing plant were unforgettable. But there were also excursions to the surrounding area (e.g., to the National Harbor when it opened, to an estate in Leesburg, to Pikesville, Waterford, Winchester and other places), always followed by lunch, of course.

But what did we do in the last few years? We've all gotten older and don't like to use the Metro very much nor drive long distances by car. But there is always someone willing to tell us something about their particular occupation. For example, a doctor once spoke to us about "hands." The herring dinner during Lent and the St. Nicholas lunch on December 6 (to which St.

Nicholas himself appeared in recent years) have become traditions over the years. During the Christmas season, we like to do crafts. So we always try to arrange our meetings in a way that keeps our heads and hands busy, but also gives us enough time to share joys and sorrows with each other.

In recent years, however, we have had to say goodbye to some of the ladies who have been with the circle the longest; some forever; others have moved away but remain connected with us thanks to today's technology.

We miss our departed friends. It always hits us hard. With each of the ladies, a piece of shared memory is lost.

The number of friends of the Ladies' Circle has dwindled, but there are still so many of us that - if everyone were to come to the meeting - we would need a long table to seat everyone. Even though only one or two ladies are still directly involved with the German International School, all of us still speak fondly of the time when we were fully active there and are glad that our children, and now our grandchildren, had and have the opportunity to receive an excellent general education through the German International School Washington, DC.

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