

Tribute In Memory Of Dean Winifred Coleman
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The late John Gardner once wrote that we don't need leaders to tell us what to do, but rather, we need them to rekindle hope in the future, the hope that we will find our way through to a better society. (John Gardner, *No Easy Victories*)

Dean Coleman --- Winnie --- introduced me to that idea of leadership in her many talks with student government leaders in the early 1970's about the true meaning of our work on behalf of our sister students at Trinity. Quoting from many sources including Gardner's *No Easy Victories*, she was a student of leadership theory and practice, an ardent advocate for the engagement of students in self-governing processes so that we would learn how to grow as effective and persuasive professional women.

We had other ideas. At least in the early days of her tenure as dean at Trinity.

Dean Coleman came to Trinity in my sophomore year at the height of student rabble-rousing about issues that now seem so, well, quaint. Parietals (*What?* say my students today...) Dorm control (*Really?* say today's students, *we'd prefer concierge service...*) Irish bluegrass protest music and Red Army criticism posters (Thank God we didn't have Instagram back then!)....

I started off on the other side of things with Dean Coleman --- the far side, to be sure. We sophomore editors on the *Trinity Times* came up with the totally sophomoric idea of devoting an entire edition of the paper to Dean Coleman. Yes. Every single article and photo was about her --- and not in a good way. We were just ridiculous. (I'm paying for the sins of my youth!)

However, clever as Winnie was, she outwitted us immediately. "*Come talk TO the Dean and not About her*" posters went up all over the Marble Corridor, and in the subsequent packed-house forum on Social Hall, Dean Coleman effectively smacked down the sophomore revolt with a real display of charm, humor and gracefully stern admonitions.

We editors learned our lesson. The next edition had NO stories about Dean Coleman.

Over time, as Dean Coleman confronted and cajoled and even connived with us to change or adapt policies for the rapidly changing social environment of the 1970's, I also came to know her as someone with a powerful gift of persuasion and engagement, ultimately convincing this newspaper editor to run for student government, which I had vowed after high school I would never do again. I ran, I won, and I began my passage over to the dark side of administration starting in residence life immediately upon graduation. As a residence hall director, I worked with Winnie closely on a wide range of student challenges. I will never forget the moment when

we drove through the night to find a missing student --- successfully --- her care and concern for the students was remarkable.

Winnie was truly my first teacher in higher education leadership and administration, and in those brief years that I worked with her, she lived by three core values that I always try to remember in my work today:

1. The student is the center of our lives; nothing else matters except the health, welfare and progress of the student through her academic and co-curricular program.
2. Never be afraid to be the leader; too many women are too reticent, even still, and young women do not have enough strong role models for great leadership. Too many women don't know how to give a great speech --- Winnie was a past master at every kind of speech, with her ready supply of hilarious jokes or equally encyclopedic collection of solemn quotes.
3. Good humor and great friendship are sustaining gifts; Winnie's ability to reach out and draw in so many friends across the years is what brings us together this morning at Trinity, and what has prompted such an outpouring of support and affection at the University of Saint Joseph, at Cazenovia and Le Moyne, and throughout the communities she influence in her beloved Syracuse, Hartford and Washington neighborhoods.

We all have different memories of Winnie, and we'll have time to share them following this liturgy when we gather for lunch in Social Hall. Some may recall festive evenings at The Dubliner; others will smile at the memory of Winnie belting out "Carolina" with the Belles; still others will recall her Winnie Awards for special people, or her ability to recite Robert's Rules almost verbatim, or the way she tried to balance fidelity to tradition at Trinity even while respecting and easing the pathway to change and modernity in difficult times for the college. Who among us can forget the iconic photograph of Winnie greeting Pope John Paul II on Kerby Lawn in 1979? He's a saint now, and she's probably teaching him those dance steps that go along with the "Carolina" chorus.

When I think of Winnie through the years, I hear the meaning of the words written by the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, paraphrasing slightly here, "*There's no friend like the old friend who has shared our morning days; no greeting like her welcome; no homage like her praise.*"¹ That was our Winnie.

She was thoroughly devoted to Trinity in her decade as our dean, and though not an alumna she was in so many ways one of us, a clear exemplar of someone who knew what it mean to "*proclaim ideals that never swerve.*"² As we conclude this celebration of her life --- on her birthday, no less! --- and as we remember her many contributions to all of our lives in and through Trinity, let us say of Dean Coleman --- Winnie, "*our lips are praising you, our hearts are loving you, and our lives are living*"³ your lessons of leadership, service and warm friendship each day.

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "No Time Like The Old Time," 1865

² From Trinity's *Alma Mater*

³ Ibid.