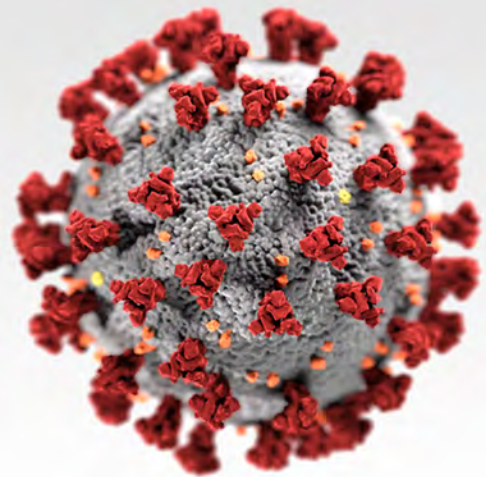


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IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC,
"ALWAYS READY" HAS NEVER BEEN
MORE TESTED OR REASSURING.

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A Life Well Lived

By Meliee Bridges

When Julia Byrom Whatley arrived on campus for Charter Day earlier this spring, she was quick to point out her lapel pins. “This moon pin was my original Tri Delta pin,” she says in her lilting Texas accent, pointing proudly to the pearl-adorned stars and crescent that serve as the international sorority’s initiation badge. “That was from 1942. And this one, the other little one,” she adds, displaying a pin that resembles layered triangles within the petals of a flower, “is my 50th Tri Delta anniversary.”

Born in Austin and raised in Georgetown, Whatley has much more than her Tri Delta membership to be proud of. Having earned her B.A. in English from Southwestern just shy of her 20th birthday, she enlisted in the Coast Guard Women’s Reserve soon after graduation, serving two years during the end of World War II.

Whatley’s father had served in the military in World War I, and she and her younger brother, James, were expected to follow in his footsteps. Whatley would choose the U.S. Coast Guard Women’s Reserve, or SPARS—the acronym derives from the Coast Guard’s Latin motto and English translation, *Semper Paratus* ‘Always Ready’—whereas Byrom would enlist in the U.S. Navy as soon as he graduated from Georgetown High School in 1944.

Whatley spent six weeks in basic training in Palm Beach, Florida, followed by four months of more specialized training as a yeoman, focusing on secretarial and clerical duties. She was assigned for 18 months to a post at Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., where she was promoted to petty officer 2nd class. But Whatley confirms that her role in the military was not so much engaging in war but rather providing support services for her male counterparts and their commanders—as the tagline on one SPARS recruitment poster touted, “Free a man for active duty!” She recalls once being asked, “Did you get a gun when you were in basic?” to which Whatley says she responded, “A gun? We had typing fingers!”

From studying and teaching abroad to a working retirement

The G.I. Bill allowed her to complete further coursework at SU, and after she and her husband, Calvin Whatley, married and spent several years as educators in Texas schools, the couple moved to Europe in 1958 to teach in France and Germany. After completing their careers in education back in the States in 1984, the pair retired to manage a 500-acre farm that used to belong to Calvin’s grandfather.



They devoted their time to managing the 500-acre farm in Falls County that had been in the Whatley family since 1874 and had been the couple’s residence since 1974. Whatley admits that farming is hard work, even with the “monstrous machines” in use today. But the couple were devoted to their efforts, planting live oaks, implementing conservation strategies, and even becoming caretakers of a cemetery a mile from their house.

Today, at 95 years young, she is still overseeing that farm (“we have 14 cows,” she clarifies, “[but] we used to have 70 or 80”), still drives a car, and still maintains her magnetic Southern charm and fiery spirit.

The Whatleys never had children—“I don’t think I could do that!” she exclaims—so she has handed off farming duties to “two good-looking bachelors.” Her beloved husband of 72 years passed away in February, but she is happily surrounded by loving neighbors, friends, and extended family. She still keeps in touch with many of her students, who help keep her young at heart and in mind.

“I don’t know why I’ve lived so long,” Whatley laughs, “but my cute husband and I, we just had a good time... My husband and I have had the best life together.” ≈

Editor’s note: This is an excerpt of a story published on Southwestern University’s news site. To read the whole story in its original format, visit www.southwestern.edu.

ABOVE: Petty Officer 2nd Class Julia Byrom Whatley served in the Coast Guard Women’s Reserve for two years at the end of World War II before using her G.I. Bill to become a teacher.

RIGHT: Whatley spent six weeks in Coast Guard basic training in Palm Beach, Fla., followed by four months at yeoman A-school. She was assigned to Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

