

*The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
Class Day Ceremony – Alumni Salutation  
Ms. Hilda “Peggy” Kirby, F37  
16 May 2009*

Thank you, Dean Bosworth. Good morning.

It is a Fletcher tradition-in-process to invite a Fletcher alum to welcome the new class of graduates to the world-wide Fletcher alumni community. This year, it is my privilege.

Greetings to you, the Class of 2009 and a warm welcome. And greetings to your families and friends, to your faculty and the staff and to the other alums celebrating reunions. I share the occasion with you doubly, first as ancient alum and also as the proud great aunt of a 2009 graduate, Kirby Reiling. Congratulations to you all....all 289 of you.

Fletcher graduated its first class in June 1934. Our class of 20 – 16 men and 4 women – arrived in September, 1935. We were met by Bob Stewart, who eventually became Dean, Robbins who eventually taught history, and Louis Frechtling, who went to State...leftovers from the previous classes. We were all June graduates, very green, with an average age of 22. Incoming classes today number over 300, 52% are women, the average age is 27 and each of you has had a taste of the world beyond academia. What a difference. It's the times which give the class of 1937 and the class of 2009 something in common.

Let me tell you how I remember the olden days.

In 1935, the administration consisted of Dean Hoskins and his secretary, the faculty was a roster of Harvard professors, and the plant was Goddard Hall. Some courses were given at Harvard. We were given cubicles at the Widener Library in Harvard Yard. Mine was D12.

Look around us. Not much has changed. This was our world. The boys lived in that dorm; the girls lived down the street. Charlie Ransom's father was a professor and he lived in that very square house on "Professors Row." Years later, when my company opened a branch in Des Moines, Charlie was managing director of the Des Moines Register. It was fun doing business with him.

No one had a car. Kingsley Hamilton had a bike. Our nearest food was across campus in a red brick building. I believe it is still in use. We slugged pennies to see who bought dessert. Either I was very good at it, or the boys were very kind.

That first year, my professors included George Grafton Wilson of Washington Treaty fame, John R. Williams of the Federal Reserve, Dean Roscoe Pound of the Law School – he of the outlandish memory and his adored wife, Kittykins – and Phillip Thayer, Far East businessman turned teacher. For many on that Harvard roster, we were the first females they had ever seen in a classroom. For some, it was daunting.

Dr. Fletcher had training for the State Department in mind when he made his bequest. So automatically, most of us took the 3-day exam. But State did not expect women and was having none of it. Sue Hannum and I passed the exam – and got a congratulatory letter advising us that they would fail us on the oral. We were before "careers for women" ...we were before Kleenex. There is a wonderful article which has appeared in the Boston Globe several times. It is called "*Wellesley '38, a Different World But In Many Ways the Best of Times.*" It lists all the things we were "before" ...but we did not know it. What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve after.

Three of our boys made it to State – Roy Melbourne, Harlan Clark, and Bill Kreig. Bill was associated with the Latin desk for many years. Last fall at a foreign policy lecture, the subject was Latin America, and the speaker emphasized his time at State. I had the chance to ask him if he knew Bill. Almost without thinking, he answered, “Yes, great guy!” Then he did a double take, turned to me and asked, “How do you know him?” ... “I went to Fletcher with him.” Bill is one of our survivors. Sadly his wife is ill and has been for years.

I wound up in the retail jewelry business. The jewelry business seems a far cry from international law and diplomacy, but nothing you learn every goes to waste. A course given at Harvard was titled “*How to Read A Newspaper.*” We naturally focused on reading editorials and foreign news. I am grateful for that every day. But, how to use the demographics of a paper, and the tricks of the layout were a godsend to me when I was scheduling advertising in 50-odd newspapers a month. For the figures I compiled then, I got the nickname, “the red-headed computer.” For reach new department my company opened, there was a new contract. It was my job to sort out the terms OUR way. Each time I would hear old Thayer warning, “And now when you come to the contract...”

But back to 1937. Remember, we were the depression babies. We were in first grade in World War I, freshmen in college when the banks failed in 1932. We were the lucky ones – we were in college. But it was in the depths of the depression. It was ugly, it was sad, and we were scared. And, fear was very real. That same fear was all around last fall when the market went into a free fall. Did you feel it? Roosevelt nailed it when he said, “the only thing you have to fear is fear itself.”

Our depression came after the frivolous years of the roaring '20's. Your recession has come after the irresponsible boom years. Our depression came with no safety net. Your recession has in place Social Security, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance. May they hold and stave off a depression until the Obama plans kick in.

One day, Wally Stone and Fred Hinz told me that so-and-so looked dreadful. "Go find out what is wrong," they said. The lad was starving, trying to live on lettuce and bread at 5 cents a day.

1937 had its stilly side. The media, in a frenzy, regaled us each day with the abdication doings of Edward the 8<sup>th</sup> of England. Each day, Grant Meade made a stanza of doggerel to match the headlines. One day when I was at lunch, it went: "Wally and he/Started to spree/without the clergy/...WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY ARE FOR?"

I was in Grant's wedding. His grandchildren visited me last summer.

By May 1937, World War II was inevitable. While FDR accomplished much, the depression took a step backwards that year. Ours was an uncertain future. By the same token, you 2009-ers, with the worst recession since ours at your backs, with a world not really at peace, also have an uncertain future. As I said, it's the times that united 1937 and 2009. Please God, the hope of Obama succeeds. You have the hope of being part of that success – I cannot tell you how.

I can assure you that the Fletcher fundamentals are the same today as they were in 1937. Treasure your friends. Wherever you go, rely on your Fletcher Alumni network. Make a pact to come back in X-number of years from now...and keep it. With your program, you will get a

list of alumni clubs around the world. Such lists change constantly. Just call the office here for an update.

Remember, you are not the most valuable employee to anyone just now. You have had a privileged preparation. Somebody is going to take a chance on you. Whatever you do...do it well...and you have a rewarding life.

So with all good wishes...good-bye...au revoir...good luck.