

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### I REMEMBER EDITH<sup>1</sup>

by Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm

*Editor's Note: One of Edith Bramhall's former students wrote "the following reminiscence of this influential and much loved teacher."*

I first saw her conducting a campus meeting. She was dressed in white. Her beautiful red hair was piled high. Her voice was rich and compelling. I thought that she had just arrived from London, wearing that beautifully tailored suit and the inevitable brogues, with the toes turned ever so slightly up.

Dr. Edith Bramhall had recently joined the Colorado College faculty as Chairman of the Political Science Department. Her manner was so direct it might have turned me away but for the magnetism that held and fascinated me. That day I was truly drawn to her, sensing in her something dynamic and unusual. We were friends from the start. It seemed easy for her to persuade me into her class, undecided though I was on transferring as a sophomore.

"Now you must know, Letitia, that all too few women know anything about the political process. I have so few girls, I really need you." The fact that my best beau was her student made me a pushover.

Having persuaded me, she insisted on my coming to her house Saturday mornings regularly to work on an incomplete credit on my record from the University of Colorado. She went about her household tasks, always of help when I needed her.

Because she thought we should get involved in the election process, she became a candidate for the City Council. When she was elected, she was

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<sup>1</sup> Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm, "I Remember Edith," Colorado College alumni magazine, June 1985, in file: Faculty-Bramhall, Edith C., in Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College. Rehm was a member of the class of 1930 at Colorado College.

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no little surprised. [Colorado Springs was] a conservative little late-1920s town. But she was pleased with our thorough house-to-house canvass on her behalf. As a [City Council] member, she reported on the meetings, which provided much food for discussion and some laughs. [She told us] her constituents' reactions to some issues. We learned a lot in an entirely non-textbook situation.

She owned a cabin a little way up Ute Pass. It was a joy as well as a lot of work to be invited for a weekend. She organized it like a military campaign, telling us what and how much to bring, how many should drive - we all had our turns. The first order of business on arriving late on Friday was a brush-up of the cabin and making up all the bunks.

She was a wonderful cook. She hand-picked the people to help in the kitchen. The fellows, accustomed to their work, marched dutifully away carrying gunny sacks in which they would bring back coal for all kitchen purposes. The coal was gleaned along the railroad tracks. A few split logs for evening fires. I never saw it, but she was said to have burned sections of old tires on those fires until students persuaded her that she might start a forest fire. "How would that look," they teased, "to have a 'City Father' responsible for such a frightful thing?"

Dinner was always a joyous, festive occasion - appetites cared for shamelessly, joke rivaling joke, until a crescendo of hilarity was brought to a halt with, "Now see here, everybody, its getting late. Bob, please light the fire, and we'll all make short shrift of the clean-up."

And we did. Soon we were on couches, on the floor, on stair steps. As Edith knew we would be, we were putty in her hands, ready for conversation and lively debate, deftly guided.

Not everybody liked Edith. Some said she "used people." She provided luscious gossip for the women's circles.

"My dear, do you know she hitches rides with truck drivers. Imagine! Can we trust our young people with her?"

Edith never drove a car, but she read people accurately. When she wanted to go to her mountain cabin she would inquire, "Going up Ute Pass?" That was enough. "Now you know," she told us, "truck drivers are in the main honest hard-working people. I have never regretted riding with a single one of those men. We have good conversation, and I learn a lot."

"You'll never believe this, girls. She takes corpses East and West. How could she do such a thing? What will she think of next?"



**LETITIA FINN SAUNDERS REHM**

*She wrote this memoir about Political Science Professor Edith Bramhall in 1985. Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm was a member of the Colorado College class of 1930, and this photograph of her is from the 1930 College yearbook, the Nugget. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

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Frugal, generous Edith had learned that corpses shipped by rail required an accompanying passenger with a ticket. She made the acquaintance of morticians who called her when there was a ticket available. Often she helped the less affluent students get home for Christmas with such a ticket. [In the same manner,] she occasionally visited Congress during spring breaks, sitting in on committees, and checking with our representatives.

As Edith persuaded me into her class, so she regularly made a point of this with every promising student she found. The late John Kenneth Emmerson, class of 1929, relates his experience in his auto-biography, *The Japanese Thread*, published in 1979. He came to the College for his senior year, after studying abroad. [He wrote]:

“As a senior, my problem was still my major. Would I be a French teacher? Edith Bramhall, the dominating, irascible, demanding, yet utterly unselfish head of the Political Science Department, settled it for me. Brammy, as we called her, believed anything was possible if you were ingenious and had imagination and industry.” [She said:]

“Who wants to be a French teacher? Obviously, you should major in Political Science and join the Foreign Service.” [Emmerson concluded:]

“She thought that turning out a Political Science major in one year would be simple. The more I thought about it, the more her determination on my behalf made sense.”

John Kenneth Emmerson had an illustrious career in the Foreign Service.

Another of Edith’s adopted students was my college friend Effie, who has retired in Colorado Springs after a teaching career in the South. She and her two brothers, Dolphus and Tandy, were children of an ash hauler. Because of [Edith’s] guidance, all three members of this [African-American] family graduated, finding happiness and success at a time when [racially-motivated] lynchings were still a fact.

Life separated us. For years we corresponded. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Colorado College [1964] brought us together. She appeared on the program, being recognized for her service as well as for being the same age as the College. As she came on she was greeted with a standing ovation. She mentioned how far the College had progressed in contrast to how little she had accomplished. The audience, as well as people far and wide, knew better

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and were grateful for her high standards, her ability to inspire, her infinite empathy, but most of all for her love of every student.

The last time I saw her was after she had suffered a stroke. She greeted me with, “Oh, you are a Bramhall, too, aren’t you?” Aware that identifications were almost impossible, and feeling as if it were almost true, I answered, “Yes, Edith, I am.” “Good,” she said. There it was, that wonderful ring and force in her voice, still there. I never saw her again, but I have never stopped loving her.



*I REMEMBER EDITH*

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**EDITH BRAMHALL IN 1930**

*This photograph appeared in the 1930 Colorado College yearbook, the same year that Letitia Finn Saunders Rehm graduated from the College. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*