

ALUMNI PROFILE: Carol Corson, 1951

By Maeve Sutherland



The Corson family has been important to PMFS, Plymouth Monthly Meeting, and the local area for hundreds of years. George Corson founded Abolition Hall, an anti-slavery meeting room hidden over a barn where Frederick Douglass and Lucretia Mott once spoke. His daughter Helen, an artist and abolitionist in her own right, married famous artist Thomas Hovendon, and they are both buried in Plymouth Monthly Meeting's graveyard. Feminist Dr. Hiram Corson started Philadelphia's Women's Medical College. Corsons have attended PMFS for at least five generations, with many family members also teaching or sitting on the School Committee. But Carol Corson has always subscribed to her mother's saying, "It doesn't matter where you come from, it matters what you do with your life." And Carol has done a lot!

Alumni may remember Miss Corson as their beloved teacher in the 60's and 70's, but before she taught at PMFS, Carol was a student in the PMFS class of 1951. As a child, Journey's End was her family home, and she and her sisters would run across the graveyard to school. Carol laughed as she recalled the friendly neighborhood bulldog that used to sit in a chair at the back of her classroom, waiting for the recess bell to ring so he could play with the children. Like today, "Strawberry Festival and Field Day were the biggest deal," Carol said. She was on the "Maroon" team all eight years, and it was a serious rivalry! It was during her time at PMFS that she started to collect dolls, and she is now a major collector and expert on Philadelphia's Schoenhut dolls, and has even published a book on them.

Carol came back to teach at PMFS in 1963 as a maternity cover in Kindergarten, around the time the carriage sheds were taken down to build new Primary buildings (now 5/6 and 3/4 classrooms). New to teaching but with a degree in Drama and English, Carol had the idea to get students' attention with a hand puppet made out of a paper bag, which the kids loved. Carol stayed on, changing grades often and growing as a teacher. One year she had a deaf child in her class, and she ran a wire

all around her room so that she could wear a microphone. Later in her career, Carol went regularly to the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf to learn sign language and other strategies to reach deaf students. At a time when public schools could deny entry to children with special learning needs, many of these students came to PMFS. To help them, Carol got her MEd in The Psychology of Reading from Temple University, which made her realize that she herself was dyslexic. She had been able to get by with her learning disability for years because of her First Grade teacher at PMFS, Mrs. Fancourt, who came up with a special system of rhyming words to help Carol learn to read when she noticed Carol was struggling. "Thanks to Mrs. Fancourt, by the end of Third Grade, I could read any word in the English language," Carol said. Carol made it her mission as a teacher to "reach kids through their strengths, not their disabilities." "It's like a treasure hunt to figure out what a kid is good at," she said enthusiastically.

Carol continued her teaching career at GFS, but always stayed involved at Plymouth. She has served two terms on the School Committee, including to hire Heads of School Anne Javicas and Brenda Crawley. In 1985 she and her siblings donated Journey's End and four acres of land to PMFS, and it was the father of her former deaf student who converted the building from a home to classrooms. A few years ago she and fellow retired teachers Holly Terry and Megan Hess volunteered as Library teachers when PMFS was between librarians. Speaking of the school, Carol said, "It's much bigger and more important than any one of us[...] It's important to be a part of something that's gone on so long."



Carol's Sixth Grade PMFS Graduation photo, 1951



"Miss Corson's Group", 1972