

# The Berry Legacy Lives On



PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY CLARK

"We're very Berry active," says Martha Bowen (far left) with husband Tom, daughter-in-law Renee, and grandchildren Jason, 7, Keylee, 4, and James, 11. The three children attend Berry College schools.

*Work continues to be the tie that binds past and present students at Martha Berry's academically acclaimed and religiously inclined college.*

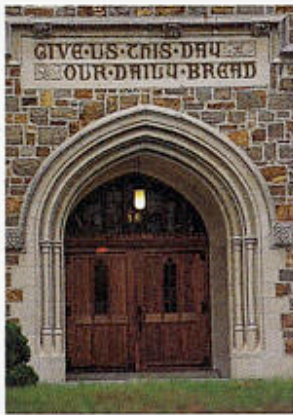
**T**he sun broils Tom Bowen as he scrubs the Berry College entrance gate. Even the lush, ethereal backdrop of the 28,000-acre school cannot negate the shimmering heat. Then, as if part of a mirage, two students appear, bearing a tall glass of ice water. "You looked so hot out here," the young strangers explain.

The campus is still as caring as it was when Tom graduated in 1955—and just as work-oriented. That's why graduates and their spouses return each year, as he does, to refurbish and restore, to clean and unclutter, to paint and play during Alumni Work Week.

**ABOVE:** The Ford Buildings, funded by industrialist Henry Ford, add Gothic splendor to the bucolic beauty of Berry College in northwest Georgia.

Begun in the early 1900s by heiress Martha Berry, the northwest Georgia institution near Rome enlightened poor mountain children who were willing to work for their tuition and board. Through sweat and muscles, the students built, then operated, the school under the founder's strong, compassionate leadership. In return, her threefold mission—education through heart, head, and hands—uplifted their lives from the limited to the lyrical.

The school still commands a lingering devotion. "You want to come back and help preserve it," explains Jerry Winton, a Powder Springs, Georgia, resident.



Inspirational passages adorn campus buildings. "We want people to come in wherever they are in their faith—or lack thereof—and grow," says John Heneisen, dean of student work.

The rhythm of a saw and the zing of flying wood chips punctuate his words, as he labors to restore a campus log cabin. "Berry was a place to have friends, but more than that, it became a family."

The mountain college truly translates to family for Tom and Martha Bowen of Dunwoody, Georgia. Almost 50 of their relatives have attended. "I don't ever wonder *why* I came to Berry, but I believe my life was so much better *because* I came to Berry," Martha says. "I

learned independence and the meaning of responsibility. I learned how to get along with and respect people—whether I liked them or



not. I was exposed to good music, art, and literature, written and on-stage. And I met my husband here."

The first year Martha came back



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Robyn Powell (left) of Cartersville, Georgia, and supervisor Jennifer LeCroy work together in the weaving room, the last handicraft program created by Martha Berry. Overall, the college's voluntary work program provides more than 120 different categories of positions.  
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for the work week, she wanted to refurbish the doors at the Ford Buildings, the dazzling Gothic edifices funded by Henry Ford. But

propriety kept her from signing on with the crew called "strippers." Instead, she volunteered to rake leaves and mow grass. "I had blisters on my blisters in about two days," she recalls. The next year she gladly became a "stripper."

Out-of-the-ordinary roles seem ordinary during this special week. "Last year I did some hoeing in the garden," says Betty Anne Rouse Bell of Atlanta. Sitting beneath a graceful gazebo, she leans over and confides, "I don't even do my own yard work."

An accomplished singer, Betty

Anne turned down New York fame to sing for churches, conventions, and an occasional Braves game. She gazes over rolling green fields and recalls the circumstances that initially brought her to Berry: an absent father, a mother badly injured in a car accident, and a brief stay with willing, but elderly, grandparents.

"Berry was just the salvation of so many students," she says earnestly. "And work was such an integral part of Berry's success. You know its motto is 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' I think everybody who went to Berry feels that way."

Today's Berry student honors that same spiritual code and work ethic too. Historically a school for the needy, the college continues to serve students from low-income families. But now middle-income, even millionaires' children,



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**"The religious training that you get here stays with you forever and ever," says Betty Anne Rouse Bell of Atlanta.**

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populate the campus as well.

"The challenge was to create a culture where students would want to work, where they would see work as a part of their life here," says John Heneisen, dean of student work. Although it's no longer required, about 80% of the 1,800 undergraduate students hold critical, on-campus jobs.

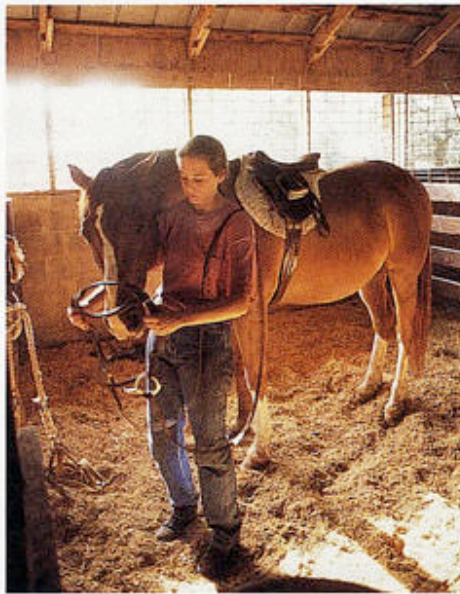
"I can't imagine not working. It's almost a given," says horticulture major Ethan Thurber as he carefully snips hedges at Oak Hill, the home of Miss Berry (as she's still affectionately called). The founder died in 1942, but student guides continue to tell her story to some 20,000 visitors annually. Ethan had already put down a deposit at another school when he visited Berry. The sheer awe-inspiring beauty of the place prompted him to change his college destination.

Wild horses couldn't have dragged Blair McBee from Berry once she discovered the Gunby Equine Center, where she and other student workers care for donated and loaned horses. The smell of fresh hay fills the barn, and streaming sunshine warms

Blair's fresh-scrubbed face as she saddles her favorite, Reggie. "It's so beautiful here," she says. "How could you leave?" The college's equestrian team has won several top honors in national competition.

Berry's academic programs win accolades as well. Gloria Shatto, president of Berry since 1980, attributes that to the commitment of students, faculty, and staff. "If you weren't serious about school, would you go to a college that has study, work, and religion in life as part of its mission?" she asks. Student/teacher ratios are small and faculty offer both home and office numbers to students.

"You can talk to the teachers any time you want to," attests junior Robyn Powell, her soft voice barely discernible above the repetitive wooden clack of oaken looms in the weaving room. Constructed by Berry students in the 1920s, the



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Jerry Winton

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"I've learned  
as much  
working at  
the barn as  
I have in  
classes because  
it's hands-on,"  
says senior  
Blair McBee.

looms still provide jobs today to students participating in the last of the handicrafts division created by Miss Berry. Visitors eagerly purchase the handiworks.

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"Although students are learning something they're probably not going to do in the future, this whole process teaches them patience, problem-solving, and leadership skills," says Jennifer LeCroy, an alum and supervisor of the Handicrafts and Gift Shop. Explaining the weaving process, she says, "Part of what determines the pattern is the way the loom is threaded."

And part of what determines the pattern of life is the way heart, head, and hands are woven together.

Nancy Dorman-Hickson