

Preface

June 11, 2002

The Science and Everyday Experiences Initiative is honoring the Legacy of The Late Geraldine Pittman Woods, 13th National President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and Past President of Delta Research and Educational Foundation.

The only child of poorly educated but economically successful parents, Woods was born in West Palm Beach, Florida in 1921. She attended a segregated private Episcopal grammar school for a time, and then transferred to the public school system (also segregated). Although Woods excelled in science courses during high school, she was a rather indifferent student in her other courses. She graduated from Industrial High School in West Palm Beach in 1938, and enrolled in Talladega College in Alabama. Unlike many of the women scientists of her day, her quest for a science education was entirely funded by her family. According to Woods, her mother was especially determined that she get an education, so she set a strong pattern of support.

In her own words:

My mother couldn't help me, even in grade school, as she was not fortunate enough to have had an education. But if I needed help in a subject like I did in math - my mother would find someone to help me, and then she would be so pleased when I did well and pleasing her made me happy.

My mother paid for everything. She had a tremendous commitment to education in general and my education in particular. She just paid the bills when they were sent to her each semester. She had property - rental property - and my college bills were her first priority. She probably sacrificed in some areas, but we didn't suffer at all. I wouldn't say we were well off financially, but we were comfortable, we didn't want for anything. Since she was always aware that she had never had the opportunity to get an education, she wanted me, her only child, to have all the education I desired. In spite of her education, she was an excellent businesswoman.

In my high school, teachers motivated students, although we didn't have the finances for equipment and supplies for each student to have a hands-on experience. I attended a segregated high school and the teachers inspired and taught us in the best way they could...

In college, particularly at Talladega, the professors usually performed an experiment and, the class stood around and watched.

I would refer persons to NIH to give them suggestions. Before I was chairman, I could work with the [NIHJ] staff but after becoming chairman at Howard, NIH would not allow it. I was able to meet many professors by working with NIH, though, so when I became chairman, I knew many in the sciences and this was often beneficial (From Black Women Scientists In The United States Wini Warren - Indiana University Press).