

IN
MEMORIAM

*AAASE Community
Mourns the Passing
of its Founding
Coordinator, Prof. K.
Wilhelmina Boyd*

1935-2009

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The Black Oaks Newsletter

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Prof. Anne Cassebaum Eulogizes her Friend Wilhelmina Boyd

On Monday, October 12th, 2009, Prof. Anne Cassebaum eulogized her colleague and dear friend. Following are her remarks

It 's a comfort to be here today just as it was always a comfort to be in Wilhelmina Boyd's presence even when Alzheimer's garbled her words or reduced them to murmurings. It is good to be here with her family, the center of her days and thoughts, whom she loved fiercely. To think of the many caregivers who appreciated her and nurtured her. And to be here in her church home, Wilhelmina was always clear to me that her church was her community.

Those of us who knew Wilhelmina Boyd at Elon want you to know today how much she brought to our lives and our campus. When she came in 1987, she was the only African-American faculty member. This meant she was on each and every committee to promote or even just give the image of diversity. But Wilhelmina Boyd made best use of her situation and never complained. She advised the Black Cultural Society, created popular African-American literature courses, founded the African/African-American Studies program, brought in many speakers, and gathered the campus together every year to read and hear the words of great writers and patriots on African-American Reading Day. She was a force, leading us to a more diverse faculty and a more aware campus.

Born two decades before Brown vs. the Board of Education and three decades before the Civil Rights Act, her life and gifts prepared her well for that work. Wilhelmina Boyd was seasoned to know real problems from small worries. She had grace and natural elegance. She had a wonderful voice that got you to lean in to listen. She was a great human being, a friend to all, and a restorer of sanity. Wilhelmina knew when to nudge us forward, when to bide her time, and when to make a stand as she spread awareness and built community.

When you stopped by her office as many did, she might pull a book from the shelf, telling you "I think you will like this one" Or she might nod you toward a chair to talk and smooth out a wrinkle in your day or hear a heavy problem. At meetings, when things were not going in a good direction or losing all touch with reality, Wilhelmina would simply say, "I'm confused" to let us know rethinking was in order. She was a savvy teacher. I watched her bring a whole class to a new awareness of power and gender roles, opening a crack in their perception, all at the same moment. Wilhelmina reflected joy. It was a pleasure to see her at a jazz concert smiling as she kept the beat, or to hear her students talk about the celebrations at the end of an African-American lit. class.

She will always be remembered at Elon by those who worked with her, and when we are gone, by the Wilhelmina Boyd African/African-American Scholar Award given to a student each year, who embodies her values and spirit: community involvement and service, scholarship, and global and multicultural awareness

I'll always remember my friend Wilhelmina for what she did for others. I see her inviting a student bewildered by Elon for a walk. And I watch them go off and dwindle in view, but not before that student's head, heavy with a burden, starts to turn up toward Wilhelmina's. And I knew she was helping that one find the inner strength to get through, to carry on. Like that student, those of us here today are all fortunate to have had Wilhelmina Boyd in our lives."



*K. Wilhelmina Boyd
1935-2009*

Wilhelmina Boyd AAASE Scholars Pay Tribute



When I received the Wilhelmina Boyd African/

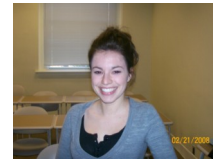
African-American Studies Scholar Award in 2008, it was humbling to be chosen to honor this woman's impressive legacy. Today, I continue to work towards my goal of researching and serving African communities; I currently teach English in France with the hope of improving my language skills to a point where I will truly be beneficial in future work in Francophone African nations. In 2010, I will be pursuing a Master's degree in International Affairs and anticipate completing a dissertation on the efforts of women's organizations in Senegal to increase female political participation. I was saddened to learn of the death of Professor Boyd, but I know that her legacy will live on in Elon

students, like me, and the faculty whose lives she touched. —
Justine Davis '08



Today we live in a global society where no continent exists without affecting the others. Around Africa, one sees retired American clothing, technology from Asia, and European tourists. In the same way Africa's challenges also touch those who consider it such a distant and foreign place. Wilhelmina Boyd knew better and inspired students to get to know Africa because to improve the world's future, it is where we must begin. And so I have found myself in Malawi living through her legacy and hoping to better understand the roots of a civilization whose

growth was stilted. Her legacy will carry on just as everyone who has ever worked to help the people in under-developed lands, and for that she stands as someone who will never be forgotten. —Bonnie Harvey '09



At press time, our other Boyd Scholar, Ashley Titolo '08 could not

be reached for commentary, but we know that Miss Titolo is in her second year working as a middle school Math teacher with the highly competitive Teach for America program in New Orleans, LA. She has been working to close the achievement gap between low-income and high-income students in her district. We are sure that Prof. Boyd would be proud of her work.

First AAASE Major Sowande' Mustakeem '00 Salutes Wilhelmina Boyd



Sowande' Mustakeem '00
First AAASE Major &
Post-Doctoral Fellow
Washington University

Upon entering college, we often hear that these years will represent the best time of your life, and that along the way your life will forever be changed. During my Elon years, as I signed up for different courses, attempting to contemplate my future career path, instead of following the masses, I opted to follow my heart and general interest in African American history and culture. Despite countless warnings from peers that Prof. Boyd was one of the hardest professors at Elon, during my sophomore year I enrolled in her "African American Women Writers" course. Little did I

know then that the extreme rigor she demanded of all of her students, her passion for teaching, and devotion to making education practical and relevant to people's lives would provide the foundation for my own approach to the classroom. Even more, as she opened my eyes to the literary worlds creatively constructed by black women such as: June Jordan, Alice Walker, J. California Cooper and Sonia Sanchez, my drive to delve deeper into studies of African American Studies further intensified. Years later after I graduated, upon hearing of younger students who endured Dr.

Boyd's heartfelt yet candid scolding to get their lives in order, it only brought me back to the lessons she continuously bestowed upon me: always strive for and accept nothing but the best, maintain rigor, be unafraid to stand up for your beliefs, be precise, and most importantly always go after opportunities made available for your growth. Elon has lost a truly remarkable treasure in Dr. Boyd; however, we can rest assured in knowing that the seeds have been planted far and wide in all the students' lives she touched with the hopes of creating a much better society through its leaders.

Letting Go: A Daughter's Reflection

A few weeks after the passing of her mother, I asked Kay Boyd whether she'd like to offer a contribution to this edition of *The Black Oaks Newsletter*. I knew it would be a difficult prospect, but hoped that the end result would bring Kay some comfort. The process was challenging, but here we have another, more intimate dimension of Wilhelmina Boyd. We thank Kay for the effort and the beautifully written and moving reflection that follows:

"Following this week's church service, I prayed with two students from the local college who will soon be returning home for the holidays. "This week!?" I thought and then realized: It's December.

It was fall when Mother passed. In our neighborhood where tall oaks loom large, the leaves were turning various shades of yellow,

red, and orange, and as the winds passed through, the trees let go of their leaves and the breezes carried them across the yards and down the street.



Shortly before Wilhelmina left, I found a sleeve of slides which had been shot at Elon. In these beautiful images, one who knew her can see the vibrancy of her teaching: Her face is full of wit and wisdom, insight and knowledge, and her hands --authority and grace.

I have been holding on to these images as though in letting go of them, I might also be letting go of my mother. But I am learning that I can no more hold on to her than the oaks can hold onto

their leaves when it is time to let them go.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die...a time to weep, and a time to laugh;...a time to keep and a time to throw away" (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2,4,6 NRSV). There is also a time for the leaves to change, for the trees to let them go, and for the winds to sweep them away. And there is a time for us to accept that they are gone.

It's December. The leaves are gone and so is Wilhelmina. But she left a beautiful and vibrant legacy, rich in color and texture, the memory of which I will never let go.

We continue to hold the Boyd family in our prayers.



"Her face is full of wit and wisdom, insight and knowledge, and her hands -- authority and grace."

Alzheimer's: Finding a Cure

Too many of us know someone, directly or indirectly, whose family has been touched by Alzheimer's disease, a progressive and fatal brain disorder named for German physician Alois Alzheimer, who first described it in 1906 after treating 51-year old Frau Auguste D from 1901. As many as 5.3 million Americans are living with the disease, which destroys brain cells, causing memory loss and problems with thinking and behavior severe enough to affect work, lifelong hobbies and social life. It is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, accounting for 50-70 percent of dementia cases. While no cure currently exists for the disease, the right treatment and support can help make life better for the millions living

with the disease. Worldwide efforts are underway to treat the disease, delay its onset, or prevent its development

According to the 2009 World Alzheimer's Report, the rate of people living with Alzheimer's and dementia is expected to nearly double every twenty years, rising from current levels of 35.6 million to 65.7 million in 2030, and approximately 115.4 in 2050, unless we accelerate our research efforts to not let another century go by without a cure.

To honor our program's founder, we are asking everyone whose lives have been touched by Prof. Boyd to make a tax-deductible donation via her tribute page at <http://act.alz.org/site/TR/Events/Tributes->

[AlzheimersChampions?pg=fund&fr_id=1060&pxfid=22710](http://act.alz.org/site/TR/Events/Tributes-). (Please paste the link into your Internet browser if necessary.) The immediate target is \$1935 (the year of Wilhelmina's birth). All funds will be used to benefit the greatest need of the Alzheimer's Association, whose website is located at www.alz.org

In addition to making a donation, alumni, faculty, staff, students, and community members are also encouraged to leave comments or messages of support and encouragement for the family, or share memories in the guest book,

Let's all support efforts to build "a world without Alzheimer's."



Dr. Prudence Layne
AAASE Coordinator

AAASE Coordinator Shares her Insights

She is the person who most influences my Elon University career and we never met, yet, our paths cross everyday, and I felt like I knew her! K. Wilhelmina Boyd leaves a legacy to Elon that few fully appreciate and even recognize. She was hired with a view of formalizing the range of Black Studies courses at the university, the first of which was offered in 1989 prior to her arrival. In 1994, AAASE was born with Wilhelmina at its helm. Her efforts during that time are made even more valiant by the fact that she was operating in what

might call “pre-historic” times: few computers and no Internet. She offered vibrant and intellectually challenging classes, the hugely popular African-American Reading Day during Black History Month, and encouraged service to and engagement with the community. Throughout her tenure, she challenged all her students to set the bar for academic and social excellence very high and to dream big! As Elon continued its racial integration process, she showed all students that the cultures of Black peoples at home and abroad were impor-

tant and vital to understanding their place in the world. When I arrived at Elon in 2005, I inherited Wilhelmina’s office, Carlton 322m which came with important files documenting the program’s development, her reflections on its progress, and insight of the challenges and work left to accomplish. I’ve always felt her presence in the work I do and I remain keenly aware that her work paves the way for all of us. AAASE presented an award in 2008 to Prof. Boyd for her service to the program, and for her tenacity, spirit, and legacy to Elon we say thank you.

“To catch the reader’s attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here.”

Boyd to be Honored on Elon’s African-American Wall of Fame

On April 24th, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. in Alumni Gym, Elon’s Multicultural Center will honor the life and work of Prof. Wilhelmina Boyd by adding her to Elon’s African-American Wall of Fame during the Black Excellence Awards.

The Wall was created as an opportunity to educate students, faculty, and staff about the major achievements of African American students and organizations that foster African American

culture at Elon. The Wall of Fame is the centerpiece of the African American Resource Room. The exhibit traces the accomplishments of African Americans at the university from the first Black graduate, to the first Black Greek organization, and more.

How appropriate for Prof. Boyd to be honored in this way; not only was she the first AAASE program coordinator, but she was a fierce advocate of student

excellence and academic challenge, regardless of one’s background and circumstances. Her standards were tough, exacting, but fair and countless Elon generations.

Prof. Boyd’s family will accept the posthumous honor on her behalf at the Spring event. For tickets or more information, contact the Multicultural Center at (336) 278-7243.

African-American Reading Day to Return in 2010

One of the initiatives Wilhelmina Boyd instituted as Coordinator of African/African-American Studies at Elon was African American Reading Day. It was an event typically held in February to celebrate Black History Month, and attracted students, faculty, and staff from the Elon community. To honor the tradition, and the legacy of Prof. Boyd, African-American Reading Day will return on Friday, February 19th, 2010 and will form a part of the National African-

American Read-In Chain, which enters its 21st year in 2010 and was founded by Dr. Jerrie Scott, a literacy professor at the University of Memphis. The program has been successful in making reading a traditional part of Black History Month celebrations throughout the country. Sponsored nationally by the National Council of Teachers of English and endorsed by the International Reading Association, the intent of this national literacy campaign is to popularize

reading as an essential, fun, and productive practice that will last a lifetime. The program also encourages young children and youth to make reading a lifelong, life-enriching practice. The Elon program will feature readings from the works of African-American authors in exchange for donations of books that will be used to support the development of under-resourced libraries in North Carolina. For event details, visit www.elon.edu/aaase in the Spring.

Tributes Pour in for Professor Wilhelmina Boyd

I am truly saddened by the news of her death—shocked would be more appropriate. Prof. Boyd inspired me in so many ways. I met her when I was only 17 and researching colleges. That's nearly nineteen years ago. It was her influence that led me to pursue a Master's in English and Afro-American Literature. I still remember her trying to convince me that *Beloved* is a good book. Live on Wilhelmina and stay strong, my sister, my mother, my friend. —Terri Fletcher-Herring '95

I had her my freshman year at Elon. I liked her. Always entertaining! — Ashley Marshall '07

Professor Boyd was one of the finest faculty members Elon has EVER had! I was fortunate enough to start my Elon career in her class. She will be missed. We love you Wilhelmina Boyd. — Reggie Wells '99

I was so saddened by the news of Professor Boyd. I'm sure there aren't many whose life she didn't touch in some special way. She was a treasure and will truly be missed. — Erica Johnson-Hawkins '99

When we were at Elon, we were always demanding more African American courses and professors, so we had to take the African-American literature class. I felt like I was an English major after all those readings. She pushed us and it paid off by raising our study standards. R.I.P. Prof. Wilhelmina Boyd. Professor Boyd, former Associate Professor of English and founder of Elon's African/African-American Program . . . One of the few Black professors at a majority white college. Her courses were the toughest in my four years of undergrad. She will be missed. — Dan Ridley '93

Definitely sad news. She was the cornerstone of the school while we were there. She will definitely be missed. — Steve Walker '93

She absolutely demanded that you be prepared for class and participate in class in a profound way. She broke African-American literature down in a way that helped me have a deeper appreciation for the struggle and the opportunity that being at Elon provided me as an individual, an African American, and a woman. — Tracey Helton Lewis '93

Besides Chalmers Brumbaugh, she had the most influence on my education at Elon. She will be missed. — Maurice Frazier '02

She introduced Black literature to me, and it is now an irreplaceable part of my life. From Alice Walker to Langston Hughes, she broadened my world beyond Macmillan and Moore-Campbell into the realm of the relevant, the historic, and the true artistry of black life in their own words. —Tonya Taylor '94 (The first Black female to serve as Editor-in-Chief of *The Pendulum* in 1997.)

She was not just an outstanding educator, she was a friend. Always exemplifying what an extraordinarily capable woman she was and her belief in people. Her ability to speak her mind in such a gracious manner set her apart from others. I miss her presence, but most importantly, the respect she gave, and the confidence she had in me. made me think about lots of issues in a way that only wisdom brings. What a great gifted beautiful Black woman! —Janice Ratliff (Elon Colleague)

Wilhelmina was a dear friend and had a one-of-a-kind personality. I loved talking with her each day. Some of her comments about life would have me laughing. My husband enjoyed having breakfast with her at Skid's almost every morning. Wilhelmina had my true respect because of her love for teaching and for caring about students. I truly miss her! —Betty Covington (Elon Colleague)

Wilhelmina was always so modest and humble about her gifts and her influence on others, but I know that she is smiling down on this newsletter and finally being able to accept the tributes to what a special soul she was. I still miss her so much. — Janet Warman (Elon Colleague)

To add your tributes, share memories, or send messages of condolence to the Boyd family, visit her tribute page located at http://act.alz.org/site/TR/Events/Tributes-AlzheimersChampions?pg=fund&fr_id=1060&pxfid=22710&pxfid=22710

Mission Statement



The mission of the program is to provide imaginative and productive spaces that foster excellence, nurture the scholarly and cultural pursuits of our students and faculty, bring global exposure to the program, and expose a wider cross-section of the Elon University community to the histories, societies, politics, languages, cultures, and economies of Black people within the United States, Africa, and throughout the world. In addition to its principle aim of stimulating teaching, research, scholarship, and service, the program will also serve as a national and international forum for individuals and organizations with an interest in and concern for African-Americans, Africa, and the rest of her Diaspora.

Elon University
AAASE
Campus Box 2338
Elon, NC 27244

Phone: (336) 278-5618
Fax: (336) 278-2014
E-mail: aaase@elon.edu

Visit our website:
www.elon.edu/aaase



The Coordinator's Corner (In Memoriam)

It is highly appropriate to relinquish this edition's "Coordinator's Corner" to our program's founder. Following is a reprint from her funeral program:

Mrs. K. Wilhelmina Webb Boyd, 74, a resident of Lutheran Home at Trinity Oaks, made her heavenly transition on Saturday, October 3, 2009.

She was born March 10, 1935 in Fayetteville, and was the daughter of the late William R. and Katie McNair Webb.

Educated in Fayetteville City schools, she as a graduate of Bennett College in Greensboro, where she received her B.A. degree in English, and a graduate of NC Teachers College, now known as NC Central University, with a MA in English. She also

did further studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

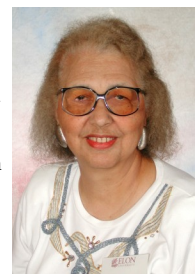
Mrs. Boyd was a Professor of English at Howard University, University of Rhode Island, Livingstone College and retired from Elon University.

She was an active member of Soldiers Memorial AME Zion Church, Salisbury, where she participated as a member of the Missionary Society and the Church Choir.

A member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., she also founded the African-American Studies Program at Elon University and was Professor Emeritus from Elon. The K. Wilhelmina Boyd AAASE Award was also named in her honor in 2008.

She is survived by her loving husband Dr. Robert E. Boyd, Sr.

of Salisbury, sons Robert E. Boyd, Jr. of Fayetteville and William R. Boyd of Salisbury, daughter Kay W. Boyd of Salisbury, and one grandson, Quinton Boyd. Rest in peace Wilhelmina; your legacy lives



**AAASE Founding
Coordinator
Wilhelmina Boyd**

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