

# GETTING TO THE ROOTS

*of adult education*

a conversation with Goddard's ADP pioneer

If you ask Evalyn Bates, the founder of Goddard's Adult Degree Program (ADP), about the legacy she has left for thousands of adult students, not only at Goddard but at colleges around the world, she just laughs.

"Well, it made sense to me," she says.

BY KELLY COLLAR

As the first woman to graduate with a bachelor's degree from Goddard and the long-time assistant to its first president, Tim Pitkin, Evalyn combined her experiences and her love of education in 1963 to create the ADP, the first program of its kind in the nation. Today, similar programs can be found at colleges throughout the world.

I spoke with Evalyn by phone during the fall semester, along with Alumni/ae Director Sarah Hooker, to learn more about Evalyn's work at Goddard and the origins of the ADP. Just a few months before our conversation, Evalyn had celebrated her 90th birthday at her home in Albuquerque, N.M. The arid landscape of the Southwest couldn't form a more stark contrast to the lush hills of Vermont, where Evalyn lived and worked for most of her life.

"It seems that I have always been connected to Goddard College," Evalyn says. "I went to the old Goddard in 1935, when it was a junior college in Barre."

While she studied at Goddard Junior College, she also worked as President Pitkin's secretary, beginning a long and productive working relationship. When Goddard was reborn as a four-year college in Plainfield in 1938, Evalyn was among those who worked to get the fledgling enterprise off the ground.

She also continued her studies and, in 1943, was one of the first two graduates of Goddard College as it is known today. Her senior study, "Two Projects in Adult Education," grew out of her own experiences as an adult learner, one who earned her degree with students who were several years younger than herself.

"It seemed to me that people my age had ideas of their own about what they wanted to do," she says. She started forming the idea of an adult program at Goddard "when I began to see myself as something other than a secretary."

She put some of these ideas into practice over the next

decade, organizing adult educational forums and teaching secretarial studies. She went on to earn her master's degree in 1957 from the University of Chicago and then spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar in Australia, assisting in the adult education department of the University of New England.

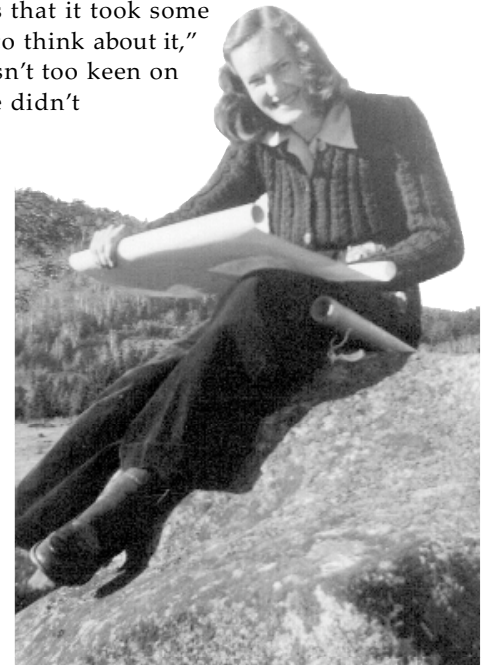
Evalyn returned to Goddard and continued her efforts to promote adult education, investigating programs at other colleges and directing the first midsemester conferences. When she ultimately approached Pitkin with an idea about a new kind of program for adults—a low-residency model for those who couldn't move to a college campus—she says she met with some initial resistance.

"My recollection is that it took some prodding for him to think about it," she laughs. "He wasn't too keen on the idea at first; he didn't understand its dimensions."

But when they started to develop a plan, they began to see that for an adult, it could be a very good way to fit a college degree into an already full life.

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Evalyn Bates, c.1943





Evalyn Bates, c. 1959, points out the location in Australia where she carried out her Fulbright Fellowship.

a program for them," she says. "You have to have a program that meets their needs and allows them to have time and space for learning."

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In 1963, Goddard formally introduced the Adult Degree Program, a program that was very much like the low-residency programs of today.

"During the resident period, there were seminars, but most of the work was done by students on their own initiative, with good contact with the faculty," Evalyn says. "I think Goddard was one of the few places that took seriously the idea that adult college students could make their own minds up about what they wanted to do."

Even with her own tremendous efforts to bring the program to fruition, Evalyn credits Pitkin's energy and support with actually making it happen.

"I don't think there would be an independent program like the program for adults if there hadn't been a Tim Pitkin," she says.

Pitkin's own children, twins Belmont and Ronald, graduated from the residential program in 1949 and 1950, respectively. Evalyn's own sister, Bernice, or "Bunny" as she jokingly refers to her, graduated from Goddard in 1955.



Evalyn Bates and Peter Liveright, who together made up Goddard's first graduating class in 1943, attended the college's 60th anniversary celebration in 1998.

Evalyn worked throughout the 1960s as special assistant to the president and director of adult education and community services. In 1970, after more than three decades at Goddard, she left Plainfield to spread her expertise in other pastures, both at home and abroad. "Once I got into adult education, I didn't go back," she says. "I was very excited about how people who hadn't had education for some time could leap into these programs."

She eventually worked and traveled as academic director of the Scandinavian Seminar, which allowed American college students to live and learn for a year at unique residential schools for young adults. While she was there, she developed the relationship between Scandinavian Seminar and Elderhostel, which led to programs in Scandinavia for older Americans.

In 1996, Evalyn returned once again to Goddard, volunteering to work in the college archives. She and Forest Davis and other retired seniors began working to resurrect and preserve the history of which they have all been such an integral part.

"It seems to me that Goddard was always changing," she says. "That's part of its nature."

As for her own contributions to Goddard and the changes that came about through her energy and scholarship, Evalyn keeps it in perspective.

"Every now and then I say to myself, 'You did all that?!'" she laughs. "But I couldn't have done it without all the happy cooperation with others who were involved."

As a tribute to Evalyn Bates and her unequaled legacy to Goddard and its students, it seems best to conclude with her own words. In her master's thesis some 50 years ago, she described not just her studies but in essence her life.

"[It] has represented a truly educational and stimulating experience, one which has led to an ever-widening spiral of deeper understanding and greater appreciation of the field of adult education . . . it is much more a beginning than the end of a learning experience." ■