

# The Dean Mother: Elinor Seidel's Legacy to UMGC

## Memoir in Memoriam

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I am writing about my mother, Elinor Seidel, who passed away in 2017, before this memoir project began. She was a pioneer for women at UMGC at a time when the lead administrator was a dean, and she was often fondly referred to, as a sign of those transitional times, as the Dean Mother. When she first was hired in 1959, there were few women in positions of authority in the organization. She rose to become assistant to the chancellor, but was a de facto dean, handing new faculty recruitment, personnel, and later affirmative action. She was in the inner circle of decision making for many years. After she retired, she was replaced with three different people, two of whom women who held the title, Assistant Chancellor. As her daughter, I can say that title and salary should have been hers, yet she paved the way for this transition. A 1975 article in the UMUC newspaper, *The Marylander*, calls her a woman who heralded the new age for women, and that she was. (Please see below.)



She started in 1959 as an assistant in the Asian Division. I recently saw the letter in which she was hired. She was an ideal choice. She had attended Columbia University for three years with a psychology major and submitted a stellar transcript. She left Columbia during WW II to marry my father, Carl Seidel. That was the second reason for her hire. Dad was a Lt. Colonel in the U. S. Army, assigned to intelligence in Tokyo. As an Army wife, Mom understood the military, having lived in Germany, the Philippines, and the D.C. area as well as Japan during my father's postings.

The third reason she was hired, not mentioned explicitly but no doubt the case, was she had the gift of gab. She was easy to talk to, so interested in what others were doing. She had charm and charisma without being flashy. Many faculty remember her fondly as their escort to Europe and Asia, but she also coordinated the visits of the many VIP's who attended overseas commencements. One of her treasured memories was assisting Neil Armstrong in his trip to the Europe Commencement in 1971. We have his signed photograph and letter to my mother thanking her for her help.

If she were able to write this memoir, I know she would have many anecdotes about Ray Ehrensberger, UMUC's irascible and mercurial Dean then Chancellor, her boss for many years. Readers, you may have known him as the foul-mouthed raconteur with stories of his travels, but Mom, Dad and I knew him as a kind and humorous man. While I was growing up as a teenager in College Park, Big Daddy, as he was known, came to dinner at our house every Monday night when he was in town. Mom would have just returned from the office, and in heels, dress, and yes, pearls, she would cook his favorites. He in turn sat at the small table in our kitchen and kept us laughing. He criticized our dog, Jocko, he chatted with Mom about office situations, he talked with my father about his job as Director of Graduate Admissions at the College Park campus,

and he teased me about all my activities, such as they were when I was in high school. He was always respectful of us, and he clearly valued my mother.

Yes, she was a Fifties housewife, but she raised the bar on what that meant. She loved to cook and make what then were exotic meals such as steak Misono style, which she adapted from a restaurant in Tokyo. She took a Chinese cooking class from nuns in Tokyo, she authored a book of recipes from UMUC faculty and staff, and she collected recipes for her own cookbook. She was a finalist for the state of Maryland in the Pillsbury Bake-Off, with a recipe for a bar cookie but was unable to attend the bake off because she was in Japan at the time.

Yet as a “new” woman, she launched a career, had a supportive husband, and continued her education. She traveled frequently, leaving her husband as the homemaker and caregiver for me. She got her bachelor’s degree in history, a master’s and was ABD in history at UMCP. She loved her job and was devoted to UMUC.

Mom was kind, but she was also shrewd and perceptive; she could see what motivated people and predict what might happen. As an advisor to the deans and chancellors she worked with, she was invaluable. She held many parties at our house in College Park, and that is where I met some of the notables of UMUC—Bob Daly, Stan Drazek, Helmut Sieg, Joe Arden, Vida Bandis, Julie Porosky and Paula Harbecke.

Mom had both me and my Dad working for UMUC in one way or another. We worked registrations with punch cards and lists; I was 16 at the time. Then she would take me to her office on weekends and have me alphabetize files, all the while explaining how the university worked. Years later, I became a professor and then Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Central Florida, not in small part because of her and my father’s examples.

I worked for UMUC intermittently, teaching courses in writing at Walter Reed Army Hospital to the military people assigned there. Later I taught Organization Communication in UMUC’s College Park graduate program. I worked one summer in the European Division office in Heidelberg, writing biographies of faculty members for the military contract renewal application. I also was a consultant in Okinawa and Tokyo where I conducted faculty workshops in teaching what was then the new field of technical writing.

I met many UMGC people whom I remember fondly—Tom Tulloss, Janet Di Leonardo Kilbourne, Julian Jones and Rosemary Hoffman. Julian and Rosemary remained friends with my Mom long after she retired, and it was touching to have them and many others attend her memorial service in 2017.

Mom collected Japanese prints, as did many Marylanders who had served in Japan. I donated a number of them to the planned Emory Trosper Gallery—she and Emory made shopping trips in Tokyo during which he advised her about what to buy. And she also had a collection of twenty beer steins commemorating annual events in UMUC Europe. Those, along with her papers, I donated to the UM Global Campus archive.

The history of UMUC/UMGC is not just the tactics and strategies but the people who created a culture for the organization. That culture is one of tolerance and adventure blended with the highest education values. Elinor Seidel was one of those pioneers, adventurous, devoted, curious. She was positive and looked for the good in her co-workers. The most she would say as

a withering criticism, was that someone was a "logistical nightmare." This was a person who forget to bring his passport, who lost her military orders, who wanted to bring seven suitcases, who went to the wrong airport and the like. Was that you, Gentle Reader?

*From the Spring 1975 issue of The Marylander:*

## Number of women in colleges grows

More people are enrolled in part-time college programs today than ever before. And the percentage of adult women in continuing education is increasing by leaps and bounds.

According to Mrs. Elinor Seidel, assistant to the chancellor of University of Maryland University College, "In just two years, the percentage of women enrolled in evening and weekend classes at University College has jumped 12 per cent—from 30 per cent in 1972 to 42 per cent today. And we project that by the time of the Bicentennial, half of our students will be women."

Mrs. Seidel, who earned her baccalaureate degree in history through University College in the Far East, attributed this changing trend to the Women's Liberation Movement and to the increased awareness of working women that education is essential to advancement.

Clearly, women in government service have become aware of this fact. In a survey taken at the headquarters of the National Park Service, over 90 per cent of the women interviewed, regardless of their federal grade, expressed interest in additional formal education and training. They also showed a demand for general college courses and those related to occupations—and not necessarily to "women's studies" per se.

In remarks prepared for the National Park Service's Women's Week program, Mrs. Seidel said, "The spotlight has been on women's courses because of the vocal and visible efforts of those connected with the Women's Liberation Movement. Government agencies and large segments of private industry are also incorporating into their budgets training and educational opportunities for women and minorities."

She pointed out that programs for women have expanded from those offered at less than a dozen universities a few years ago to programs offering hundreds of classes at schools throughout the country. The George Washington University here in the District of



Assistant to the Chancellor Elinor Seidel explains University College's continuing education program to Mary Jane Coluzzi of the Bureau of Mines at a recent U.S. Interior Department "Women's Week" program. Ms. Coluzzi later enrolled in UC's Evening and Weekend Division.

### *UC's woman of the future*

Elinor Seidel is not the typical woman of today. But she may well be a model for the future.

Not only a wife and mother, she is an Assistant to the Chancellor of The University of Maryland University College and a lecturer. And she still finds time to be a student.

She entered Columbia University in 1943, but left three years later when she married her husband, Carl, a career army officer and they were assigned to Europe. For the next 16 years, Mrs. Seidel travelled with him to military posts throughout the world.

It was while he was stationed in Japan that 20 years after she first entered college, she received her bachelor of arts degree in history

from the Far East Division of University College.

When her husband retired in 1962, they moved back to College Park, Maryland and she was appointed coordinator for administration. At the same time, she began her graduate studies in history.

In 1970, she was awarded her master's degree. A year later, she was promoted to her present position of assistant to the Chancellor for administration. Today she is also a doctoral candidate pursuing research for her dissertation.

Certainly no ordinary woman, Mrs. Seidel is, however, a model of today's women who are discovering how challenging and fulfilling it can be to lead a life inside and outside the home at the same time.

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## Women in College

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Columbia is one example of an institution whose women's program led to a baccalaureate degree, and which is now awarding a master's degree in that field." Smiling, she added that according to the *Washington Post* "one in three persons enrolled in such programs is a man."

By contrast, "the University College at Maryland has never separated its courses into those for women and those for men. And even though there are courses that readily lend themselves to being identified as "women's studies," anyone many enroll in them.

More than 2,000 women are enrolled in some 60 non-credit short courses offered through the Conferences and Institutes Division of University College. These courses are now listed under categories ranging from "the consumer and the community" to "personal and physical development."

Many other programs are designed to assist women in developing their self-awareness and in achieving their career and personal goals. These include such courses as "women's new working careers" and "women: returning to college."

Mrs. Seidel stated that "it is never too early" for parents to start their daughter thinking about her future position in the world. "Girls should have assistance in planning realistically for their future within the context of their own knowledge of themselves as persons." She said, "Teachers, counselors and parents must be sensi-

tive to their needs and encourage them to plan ahead realistically. They also need as models women who are successfully combining home and job responsibilities so that they understand that such combinations are possible and that they need not expect to restrict themselves solely to one role or the other."

But while there is a definite need for emphasis on young girls, "Mature women also need help in many areas." Citing a Labor Department survey, she pointed out that even though the birth rate declined 1.5 million since 1970, there are 650,000 additional children whose mothers are now working. The study also noted that last year 29 per cent of mothers whose children were under three years old worked, as did 57 per cent with children between the ages of six and 17.

"Mature women need understanding and encouragement from professional educators as they contemplate returning to school. They are often insecure and fearful of competing with younger students, as well as embarrassed by their age."

"Age is not a limiting factor," said Mrs. Seidel. "A recent University College graduate was a 77 year old woman."

Speaking as an educator, Mrs. Seidel said, "my goal is to help all women, as well as men, regardless of their present situation, to more fully develop their potentials." She concluded, "that is really the role of continuing education."