

## THIS SAME PASSION

by Jennifer Jerrue Bradley

Four years ago, when my speech team was preparing to attend our first national tournament I received the following note:

"Enclosed is a check to help you on your way to Nationals. I doubt if you know it but I was the first female to ever win extemporaneous speaking at the national tournament in 1938.

Sincerely, Reba June Green."

I immediately called Mrs. Green who lived not fifteen miles from my home to thank her and to express my delight at her accomplishment.

Recently I read of Charles "Pop" Grady's inclusion in the NFL Hall of Fame and noted that he had coached at Oklahoma City-Classen during the years Mrs. Green had attended there. I called her and asked if I could bring her the article and interview her. I had no idea such an amazing woman lived right in my own back yard. Mrs. Green has lived in Bristol, Tennessee for much of her adult life. She greeted me at the door with warmth and made me feel right at home doing an interview. I already knew who she was because I had grown up listening to her talk show on the radio for thirty years. She laughs now when anyone refers to her as inventing talk radio saying; "I hope not! It's completely out of hand".

Mrs. Green represented her high school at the national level in Extemporaneous Speaking for three years. During her senior year in high school, she won the national championship. She was also a powerful debater. When asked what had attracted her to forensics, she smiled and said, "Well, in seventh grade we had to take an elective and I

couldn't do art and I couldn't sing, but I sure could talk. So, I took speech. It was a natural for me." I showed her the article with "Pop" Grady's picture in it and for a moment she just held it, her eyes reflecting the many memories it evoked. "He was such a good man. He encouraged us to be friendly, to be sincere. He gave advice that would carry us through life. On the road, he would play word games using the dictionary. He was always looking for ways to keep developing ourselves."

When we discussed the way our extemporaneous rounds are currently run, Mrs. Green explained that in the 1930's it was very different. "We had no audience. We went in one by one and no one watched except the judges. It would be nice to have an audience to interact with. Yes, I like that. Topics could be from either foreign or domestic and sometimes they were of questionable taste. One [topic] that I remember from either nationals or college was 'Is there an Ethiopian in the international woodpile?'"

In terms of sources, Mrs. Green recalls carrying a **1938 Case Champion Reba June Long** long useful, but certainly never the tubs of evidence that we regularly see carted around at tourneys. That there were few women competing in Extemporaneous, in no way hampered Mrs. Green, who was then Reba June Long. What was the advantage that clutched the 1938 championship? "That's a good question." A thoughtful pause. "You know, this isn't bragging, but I think it was personality if you come right down to it. The judges at that level know. They can tell a fake or a phony." [Don't you love it when someone else expresses what you try to tell students all the time?]

Mrs. Green graduated from Oklahoma City-Classen High School and was wooed to Virginia Intermont College in Bristol, in spite of being offered a wonderful scholarship at the University of Southern California. Coach Roy C. Brown carefully recruited for his nationally known Virginia Intermont team. Mrs. Green explained that he literally lured her to V.I. with a scholarship that was too good to turn down. During her career as a speech major at V.I., Mrs. Green debated in a very special debate that gained international attention. Two debaters from Oxford had been chosen to come to the States and hold a series of debates in an attempt to draw the U.S. into the war. They debated at Harvard and Princeton and, finally, at Virginia Intermont. Mrs. Green debated against Phillip Street, who would later give his life for his country, and her teammate debated with Edward Heath, a future Prime Minister of England. At this time, the United States did not anticipate entering World War II.

Mrs. Green recalled with an ironic smile and a glow in her eye; "I even recall in an extemp round during those pre-war years that I won a round concerning whether the Japanese were to be feared in terms of attacking the U.S. I emphatically answered 'no', only to be soon proven 100% wrong."

After graduating *magna cum laude* she worked for a time for David O. Selznick in publicity. "Oh, I auditioned for NBC all right, but this was a time when women were simply not being considered for any television broadcasting. They said 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'" She grins, shaking her head; "They never did".

Trading her career for **(Bridge to the Page 43)** to Bristol

with her husband, Ralph  
Brummit, attorney and former  
Wake Forest debater. Three  
children later, she found her-  
self divorced and seeking a  
good