Alumnae Profile: Margery Davis Boyden, Class of 1933

On Friday, March 26, 2010, the Smith College Club of Oregon lost our oldest member and wonderful friend, Margery Boyden '33. Margery was 97 years old, and had a marvelously sharp mind up until the end of her life. Those of us who knew her were lucky people, and hope to be able to continue her legacy of service to Smith and to our Club.

Margery was one of our last links to Smith's earliest 19th Century history - her mother, Anna Paret Davis, graduated from Smith in 1895, just 24 years after the College was founded. Our scholarship fund, which Margery was instrumental in establishing, is named in her honor.

The following is excerpted from a “Profile” written by Claire Wilson, Class of 2009 for our February 2010 newsletter.

Margery Davis Boyden was born in Philadelphia. Her mother, Anna Elizabeth Paret Davis, also a Smithie, graduated in 1895 and is the namesake for the Smith Club of Oregon’s scholarship. Margery’s father, a genetic botanist, graduated in the first class of Stanford (where Margery was also accepted as a student), and pursued graduate studies at Harvard. During her time at Smith, Margery lived in Lawrence House as a scholarship student, majored in genetics, and remembers always being called “Miss Davis” in class. The economy crashed in October of 1929, and 1933’s college experience was profoundly shaped by the Depression. The custom had always been for Junior Ushers at Commencement to wear beautiful hats, but in 1932 Margery herself insisted that the tradition had to change—such luxuries were too expensive. Juniors haven’t been required to wear hats since! During his commencement address, President Neilson (a “small, sweet man with a twinkle in his eye” adored by his 2,000-some Smithie “daughters”) said of the 1933’s 413 graduates, “We’ve never sent out a class of better sports.”

After graduation, Margery worked for a year with Miriam Van Waters, a Massachusetts judge specializing in juvenile delinquency. The following year she moved to Michigan in order to follow some advice given to her by Margaret Sanger. During her senior year at Smith, Margery had gone to the vocational office with the desire to meet Ms. Sanger. The staff arranged a meeting, and off Margery went to New York City where the pioneering birth control activist recommended she go to Ann Arbor in order to volunteer her interests to the Michigan Birth Control League. Margery eventually created and occupied the position of the League’s executive director (this during a period when birth control was still illegal in every state) and presented at monthly medical society meetings all over the Michigan.

It was in Michigan that Margery was to meet her future husband, Allen Boyden, a surgeon who had gone to medical school at our own OHSU before attending
University of Michigan. The two of them met at party and ended up talking together the entire night. They were, Margery admits, probably “very rude” to the other guests—including Allen’s blind date (“a real lemon”).

After a year of marriage, the Boydens moved to Oregon, where Allen performed surgeries in Astoria’s Scandinavian community and Margery worked for the Public Welfare Commission. When World War II came, Margery was pregnant with their first of three sons, and Allen waited until he was born before leaving to serve for three solid years as a frontline surgeon. After the war, the Boydens moved to Portland. Now Margery has a large family in the area, including several grandchildren and great-grandchildren, one of whom is featured in Linnea Osterberg’s upcoming Future Smithies? photo exhibit! Margery feels sure that there are many things she would not have been able to do without Smith College. She was “never even mad at Smith for a moment,” and says that she could never thank the college enough.