

Carol Held, Wyoming's Musical Ambassador
V.J. Reckling Bales

Collectively and individually, University of Wyoming music students have been duly recognized for their outstanding programs. Yet no UW sophomore has ever received widespread recognition for a single piano performance like that Carol Held (Chenoweth), EX '51, has merited for playing A Piece in a so-called early-fall dramatic production of national interest.

Outside of her home state, Carol is remembered as the Miss Wyoming whose exceptional musical talent had earned her the position of first runner-up to Miss America, Beatrice Vella "Bebe" Shopp, and a \$3000 scholarship on September 12, 1948 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Carol had played Edward MacDowell's *Hungarian* for her entry in the talent contest at the Miss America pageant, including 54 accomplished young women from 43 states, nine cities, Puerto Rico and Hawaii.

Carol's "win" was reason enough for Wyoming residents to be proud and think of her as being a musical ambassador, imagining that international news coverage was likely to have mentioned that she was a representative from the Equality State and its "one-and-only" university. To be sure, numerous reports caused people elsewhere to become more aware of the area and its four-year institution of higher learning.

According to some alumni who know Carol best and can look back upon her university activities from the time she was a freshman majoring in piano performance under the direction of UW Music Department Head Allan Willman, her campus activities seem to have prepared her well for complete living, in keeping with the message in stone above the entrance to the College of Arts and Sciences, formerly known as the College of Liberal Arts and the setting for the Miss Wyoming competition in the spring of 1948.

At that time, many co-eds took much interest in the Miss Wyoming competition, especially the members of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority. ~~Previously,~~ *A year beforehand,* Kappa member Dorothy McKay (Hitchcock) B.A., art '48, had served as Miss Wyoming 1947 and had won a scholarship while taking part in the national Miss America Pageant that followed the states' pageants earlier in the year. So naturally there were several Kappas who hoped to follow McKay's example, and Carol agreed to accompany three of her Kappa "sisters" while they competed in the Miss Wyoming contest by singing vocal numbers. Despite the Kappas' request that she enter the pageant, too, Carol was hesitant, realizing that she "was not convinced" it was what she wanted to do. After she finally decided to become an entrant, she chose to play the first movement of a Beethoven sonata.

"We ended the competition at the Arts and Sciences Hall, and to my great surprise I was selected Miss Wyoming 1948," Carol said recently.

It's now obvious to friends that ~~57~~ years ago following the state pageant, Carol would have had no way of knowing her future would be shaped by her university associations for many years to come--nor could she imagine that in a short time she would be involved in movie-making thanks to a request made to UW President George Duke Humphrey after her pageant experiences.

When the report about Carol's Miss Wyoming role reached her hometown of Lusk, few residents in that Niobrara County center were surprised about her latest achievement. Most knew that she was an honor graduate of Lusk High School who had begun piano lessons when she was just eight years old--with considerable encouragement from her widowed mother, Jennie Carlson Held, a former surgical nurse. Mrs. Held then owned her late husband's Hiway Garage, a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership. She had assumed its operation after George John Held's

untimely death, resulting from injuries in an auto accident caused by a drunken driver. Because Jennie Held was left alone to rear her two young daughters (five and eight respectively), she necessarily became a successful business and civic leader, Carol once said. Lusk residents had observed that Carol's older sister, Mary Lee, B.A. journalism '48, ^{ALSO had Carol's} encouraged ~~her~~ music studies during ^{her} the formative years when she was known to show great promise as a musician.

During her high school days, Carol also played the clarinet in the school band, accompanied the solo performances of friends competing or performing at local and state levels, took part in music contests herself, served as an accompanist for the school choir, sang in its mixed octette and "enjoyed being in the junior and senior class plays." Many of her classmates also took note of how she treasured the DAR award she had received and the honors she had won in typing and shorthand contests.

When they learned of Carol's new role as Miss Wyoming, her former high school classmates probably thought she would continue to be devoted to her college studies of music even though she had acquired new obligations. ^{No doubt heard} Those young people later that she did what many persons had expected and carried out her newest responsibilities in her typically gracious manner throughout the rest of the school year and the months that followed.

Meanwhile, Lions Club and Junior Chamber of Commerce members in Lusk and Laramie, as well as other Wyomingites, were planning to honor Wyoming's native daughter at functions, and to give her proper send-offs before she left for New York City, her first destination where she would stay and keep to a rigorous schedule until the time to depart for Atlantic City on September 6.

Prior to Carol's departure for the "East," a benefit football game was played in Lusk. Later on, before Carol and her mother set off by car to drive to Laramie where they would join

Vivian Hendrix, Carol's chaperone and UW press representative, and then board the City of Portland ^{TRAIN} to travel to New York, the closely-knit Niobrarians held a farewell ceremony honoring their most-popular girl. The Lusk Junior Chamber of Commerce gave her a money gift to help with travel expenses and the community presented her with a 17-jewel wristwatch containing four diamonds. Afterward, an informal parade arranged by the Lusk Lions Club took place. Congressman Frank A. Barrett then wished Carol good luck and said goodbyes to her on behalf of the local residents.

Upon the Helds' arrival at the Union Pacific depot in Laramie, city officials, club members, local businessmen and women and other well-wishers staged an impressive send-off while the travelers waited for their train. According to a Laramie newspaper's report, the proceedings were broadcast with many notable residents on hand. The report also announced that like earlier contestants Carol would receive five days of training in hairstyling, make-up, posture, personality projection and poise through the Barbizon School of Fashion Modeling in New York, so to be prepared for the "real" test. The newspaper account additionally named the other donors of Carol's farewell gifts, mentioning several businesses that are no longer in operation as well as current establishments.

The "farewell" report additionally contained a detailed message from ~~Lenore~~ Slaughter, executive director of the Miss America Pageant, who said the "real test" would come as contestants glide down the 110-foot runway in Atlantic City's convention hall before "the critical eyes of judges and 30,000 applauding spectators."

In Slaughter's opinion, Carol would be taught "what is known in modeling circles as 'queenly poise and graceful carriage.'"

Slaughter went on to say that, "Miss Held will be subjected to numerous ^{roles and} ~~other~~ poses, besides those necessary to properly display a bathing suit. For instance, she must learn the correct postures necessary for adequate appearance in an evening gown and will learn to make a smooth turn before the judges' box at which time she must exemplify graceful hands and poised assurance."

Slaughter also mentioned what could turn out to be a worrisome situation, as "the mammoth Atlantic City stage presents other problems in grace for which Carol must be trained. There are numerous steps to be mastered as she descends and ascends the 110-foot runway. Carol will learn to walk with a carefree gliding step, head erect, and a natural smile on her face."

Upon completion of a part of her training Carol asked Jay Breen, a United Press feature writer, if he could believe she had to learn how to walk.

Breen reported, "Miss Wyoming—her real name is Carol Held—stands five-feet-eight-and-one-half-inches tall. A gratifying portion of same is legs. Nice legs."

Accordingly, the writer said he found it difficult to believe Carol had any trouble walking.

"Well, I did," she insisted. "I just got up there and tromped from where I was to where I was going. That is all wrong," she added, showing the proper way to glide over steps and back into a wall.

Along with her training, Carol had to face photographers who pictured her in a light-colored, flamingo-printed bathing suit, green and black evening gowns and a cowgirl ensemble. At one point, she said she had smiled so much her face "had grown into a permanent smile and she hadn't relaxed it for three hours."

No matter how much she was interviewed by judges and the press, Carol showed no signs of weakening under the strain of the almost unbearable heat and all of her activities, according to a report from Mrs. Hendrix.

Certainly, Carol's inherent composure served her well during the judging of her personality. Photographs and news coverage indicated she had competed successfully in the evening gown and swimwear contests.

No doubt one among many heartwarming moments of her national pageant experience occurred when spectators viewed Carol riding on her float in a beauty parade down the boardwalk of Atlantic City. Onlookers responded spontaneously to what a New Jersey newspaper described as "the attractive University of Wyoming co-ed who represents the Equality State in the national beauty competition."

"Gowned in blonde brocade satin and putting to shame the beauty of her float with her own natural ^(blonde) loveliness, Miss Held drew prolonged cheers from the enthusiastic crowd of 100,000."

What many spectators would never know was how a broken piano key could have ruined Carol's chances in a talent contest rehearsal. She regarded the mechanical problem with her sense of humor and practicality, realizing that the key would be replaced or another piano substituted. What was of utmost importance at that moment, she knew, was choosing another piano selection.

Paul Phillips, a UW alumnus and Laramie Daily Bulletin staff writer, later wrote about Carol's predicament and the reasoning behind her substitution of the MacDowell number for her original choices in his report following an interview with her. ^{She then said,} "When we began to rehearse for the talent show Friday afternoon, I found that both numbers I had selected were too long." So,

after changing her selection, she returned to the Traymore Hotel where she had been staying in order to practice. She said later that she was “a little bit upset” at having to make the change so close to performance time. But, conceivably, her college training in piano performance helped her to regain composure and to think about performing in the way she should.

In another Laramie newspaper account, published after her Miss America triumph, Carol revealed she was very intent on resuming her music studies at UW, adding she had turned down offers of a movie contract and a modeling job in New York.

“Music has always been a great part of my life,” she said emphatically. (And she says so now.)

During her interview with Phillips, Carol talked about her regard for those she met while a pageant participant. Phillips reported, “Carol had nothing but praise for the officials of the contest and the people she met in New York and Atlantic City.”

“If people could see the dignity and beauty with which the pageant is run, they’d appreciate much more. It’s certainly a lot more than just a ‘leg show,’” Carol pointed out.

In commenting on pageant procedures and requirements, Carol explained the contestants could not talk to men except by telephone while they were preparing for the competition. “The first man I talked to all week was my escort at the Coronation Ball Saturday night,” she explained.

On September 14, a Laramie newspaper reported on the anticipated return of Carol and her companions, scheduled the next day: “Lovely Carol Held, University beauty, who has brought Wyoming nation-wide publicity by taking second place honors in the Miss America contest, will be warmly greeted tomorrow at 10:12 a.m. at the Union Pacific station by a Jaycee-sponsored party.”

And what a party it was! The report listing the state and local officials, businessmen and women, civic leaders, students and residents present, not to mention the gift presentations and ceremony, reveals just how much people thought of their 18-year-old musical ambassador.

Included in the welcoming party at the station were: Mayor J.D. McNiff; Ken Worrall, president of the Laramie Jaycees; Bob Tichac, state Jaycee president; Julius Humphrey co-chairman of the local welcoming committee; and Oscar Hammond, president of the Laramie Chamber of Commerce.

Completing the welcoming group was the Laramie High School band making its first public appearance of the season, and Chuck Chamison's band.

Miss Held was presented with two dozen roses by the Jaycees and a corsage given by Robbins Florists.

The queen's party was honored by the Lions club this noon at the Connor hotel when Vernon Bentley presided at the meeting and quickly dispensed with "old business" and directed the club's attention to Miss Held. Miss Held played a piano selection for the group.

The Laramie Jaycees will entertain Miss Held and her party tonight at dinner at the Connor hotel.

Another local report told about the welcome for the "nation's second most beautiful and talented girl," apparently to emphasize her position. No one seemed to deny that Carol fit that description. However, if her childhood friend, Ann Bradley Godfrey, B.S. pharmacy, '50, had seen the report, she probably would have said Carol is the first most beautiful and talented. ^{during a} ~~on a~~ social occasion ^{a few years ago} Ann was overheard saying, "Carol is just as pretty now as she was when she was younger." (Ann has known the talented pianist since she was just beginning to be noted for her piano performances.)

In Lusk, Carol's post-pageant welcome was a reflection of the community's pride in its youth and its great regard for UW's higher education that benefited so many, judging from the success of local alumni.

Carol said recently, one of the most touching moments for her homecoming was seeing the "grade-school students standing on the hill" watching what took place. (All of the children had been dismissed for the special event.)

Carol's Miss America experience actually did not end upon her return to Wyoming and the University. In December she was called to Dr. Humphrey's office where he told her that the MGM Studio was planning to make a movie short showcasing the talents of several Miss America contestants and had asked that Carol appear. So with his wholehearted approval, she flew to New York City, met her chaperone and spent more than a day participating in a photo shoot with Bebe Shopp, Miss Minnesota, Miss Montana and others. For her part, Carol played a Schumann number.

A short while later, the film, called "Talented Beauties," was shown in a Laramie theater and the Wyoming Theater at Lusk.

Another time, when Bebe Shopp could not be present for the famous winter carnival in Minnesota, Carol and her mother flew there so Carol could serve in her friend's stead as a Miss America representative. The appearance was just one of Carol's roles following her pageant success.

The year 1948 will always be very meaningful to Carol for another significant reason. That was when she met her husband-to-be, Edgar A. Chenoweth, an Army Air Force veteran who had served ^{as a WWII cryptographer} in the Philippines and New Guinea. With the news of his engagement to Carol, he was described as being a psychology major who served as captain of the ¹⁹⁴⁸ UW football team of Coach Bowden Wyatt.

The Chenoweths were married on September 7, 1949 in Lusk and, following their short honeymoon in Yellowstone National Park, moved to Columbus, Ohio where both enrolled in

Ohio State University. Edgar worked toward a doctorate in his field and Carol continued her studies in piano performance.

While attending OSU, Carol also worked as a secretary to the buyer of a large department store, and did modeling for a similar concern, applying her educational skills and pageant training.

After Edgar earned his Ph.D. in experimental psychology, Dr. Robert Bruce, psychology professor and longtime dean of the UW Graduate School, contacted him in regard to returning to Laramie to teach psychology as a UW faculty member. Thus, Edgar served on the faculty for almost 40 years, until his retirement as a professor emeritus.

Needless to say, while her husband was a faculty member, Carol was active in university matters and served as president of the UW Faculty Women's Club for a term. She also enrolled in studies at the UW College of Education, after the Chenoweths' three daughters were in school.

Karen Kimble, the oldest Chenoweth daughter, earned her bachelor's degree at UW, as did her husband, Larry, and her two sisters. Karen now holds a doctor of divinity degree and is an ordained minister serving a church in Wyoming and others elsewhere. In her ministry, she has been privileged to officiate at wedding ceremonies for her sisters, Linda (Mrs. Chris) Faucette, and Janet (Mrs. Brent) Lockhart. Linda, a National Merit and Presidential Scholar, holds a degree in engineering. Her husband, Chris, is also a UW alum, having earned an advanced degree in Laramie. Janet holds a degree in music and consumer educational services, plus a degree in pharmacy.

Other family members of the Chenoweths are their five grandchildren: Allison and Larisa Kimble, Krista Faucette, Sean and Caitlin Lockhart.

In the years after Carol Chenoweth first majored in piano performance at UW, she became a "Nationally Certified Music Teacher Association member and a State of Wyoming Certified Teacher of Music" instructor, taking an active role in both organizations while giving lessons to aspiring pianists. For more than half a century, she has played an active role in the P.E.O. Sisterhood, a philanthropic and educational organization.

Of her piano students, Carol said recently, "They were terrific. And, in competitions they entered and were judged by very good faculty members of different states besides Wyoming, they always received superior or excellent grades. I taught them theory and piano performance. I loved doing it and had such wonderful associations with the students and parents."

So in her own way, Carol Held Chenoweth has shared her great love of music not only with the public at large, but also with students. That love reflects wonderfully from the latter's piano performances today.

Although she no longer teaches, Carol has never stopped playing, in accordance with Professor Willman's emphatic message: "Whatever you do, never stop playing."

Considering the way music has played a major role in Carol's life since it became her first love long ago, one can easily conclude that Carol's piano performances and lifestyle exemplify the main idea that when a person does what he or she loves well-deserved good things happen.