The Road to Vanderbilt

BY JACK M. SASSON

After serving for 33 years on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Jack M. Sasson, an Assyriologist, accepted an appointment to Vanderbilt University Divinity School as the first Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies. On September 12, 2000, Sasson delivered the following address upon his installation to the professorate.

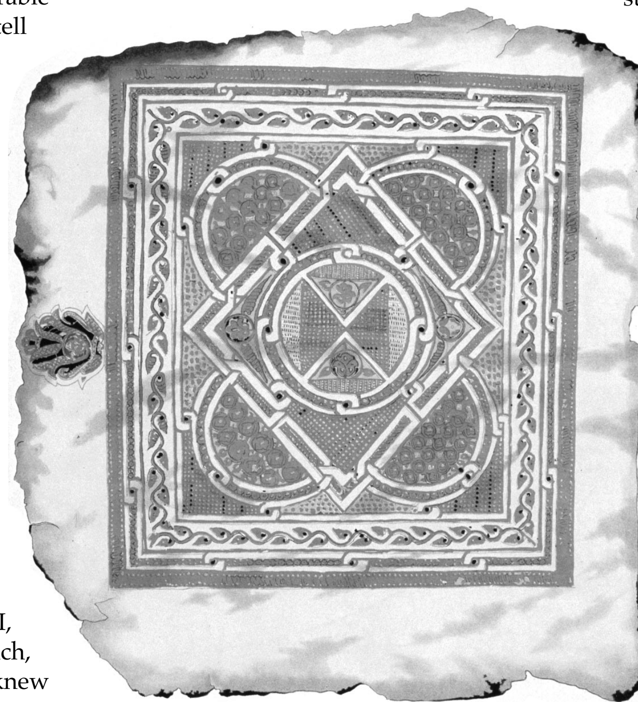
The endowment of the Mary Jane Werthan Chair of Judaic and Biblical Studies is another harbinger of a shift in the way people of different backgrounds learn to welcome each other, not only for what they have in common, but especially for what continues to make them different. Even in America, with its decades-old conviction about the rewards of a pluralistic society, this shift was not always apparent. I want to weave together three stories to explain why this celebration of difference may well be the most desirable portent for the new millennium. I will tell you my own story, a typical immigrant tale that includes physical as well as intellectual travel. But the more important accounts will be how the studies of Judaism and of the Hebrew Bible have fared in academia and why it seems perfectly reasonable today for a Jewish scholar to teach and learn at a divinity school that was founded by very Protestant Methodists.

Setting foot in the golden land

I was born into a world that had largely ceased to exist by the time I reached adulthood. You may have read about it in the works of André Aciman or tasted it from the recipes of Claudia Roden, Egyptian Jews both, and survivors of the same Atlantis. It was a world in which Jews, such as I, spoke Arabic, fancied ourselves French, and admired everything American. We knew nothing about socialism and believed in an aggressive form of entrepreneurship. But, just in case, we prayed in Hebrew, a language that was sacred for us, not at all suited for mundane conversation.

We were a significant minority within a Muslim culture in Syria, my birthplace and that of my mother, and in Iraq, the homeland of my father. While we rarely experienced there the mindless hatred and the murderous rampages that were devastating our European relatives, we were not integrated into the Muslim majority. In those parts of the world, people kept to their own communities and shared no stories to knit them into a whole, such as we tell here on Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. Ironically, once the Western nations decided to let the Jewish people have their dream of a rebuilt nation, we all sensed that our long and rich history in Arab countries was about to end. So even before the creation of the state of Israel, my own parents took their children to Lebanon, to escape the looming riots. But troubles continued to brew, and in the mid-fifties we came to what to all of us was the Golden Land.

I can share with you many experiences about being an immigrant to these shores; some of them funny and others similar to your grandma's lore. My sharpest memory was of being driven through neighborhoods in Brooklyn with shops everywhere displaying Jewish stars, and lots of Hebrew letters that spelled nothing I knew. Later, I learned I was reading Yiddish, a Hebrew-enriched dialect of German. In the Arab countries that I left behind, Jewish symbols could not be displayed publicly except at a synagogue, and Hebrew could not be uttered openly. So for me landing in America was truly setting foot in Zion. My path to Vanderbilt began a few years later when, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, I started graduate studies in the Ancient Near East, Islam, and Biblical Israel. It took me over 30 years to make it here.



Illumination from the Hebrew Bible of Leningrad
9th to 11th centuries, C.E.

Shift in metaphors

I began my studies during the Kennedy era, and in those days ideas and ideals were percolating, like the coffee in the Maxwell House jingle. It was a time of broad changes in academia, among them a sharp distinction between instruction in religious values and instruction about the history of religions. Seemingly light years earlier—but in fact until just after the Second World War—most American colleges, including those dedicated to research, had it as their mission to instruct students on hard work, piety, and other virtues, all in a decidedly Protestant cast. In many places, quotas were set for non-Protestants, and attendance at chapel was required of all. Except for token examples, the faculty in most departments was homogenous in gender, creed, color, and, for all anyone knew then, also in sexual orientation. True, there were special institutions for Jews, African-Americans, and women, but generally the drive to diversify students and faculty was not uppermost on the minds of most educators and administrators of the time.

The reaction began to set in right around the Second War World, and it was no doubt hastened by the absorption into academia of highly qualified refugees from Europe, many of them not Christians, or not exactly the American sort of Christians. Too, the student body was shifting radically, at least because the GI bill made education no longer the province of the young, genteel, and the privileged. But above all, the reaction was fueled by the fresh memory of academic abuse and of theological distortions that led Europe to many crimes, including the vile resolve to turn Christianity into a sword against the Jews.

Jack M. Sasson was installed in September as the Divinity School's first Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies. He also holds an appointment as professor of classics in the College of Arts and Science. His wife, Diane, is a senior lecturer in the Women's Studies interdisciplinary program in the College.

After the War, the better institutions of higher learning began to set the teaching of religion into newly formed units often called "Departments of Religion." Staffed by faculty from diverse backgrounds, they instructed not on how to profess one's faith, but on how to study the world's religions. So keen was the distinction between the two enterprises, that occasionally, as it happened here at Vanderbilt, research units were created and nestled within divinity schools. It is under such circumstance, for example, that first Samuel Sandmel then the incomparable Lou Silberman came to Vanderbilt, and both of them were among the first throughout this land to teach courses on Judaism as a living and evolving tradition rather than as background to Christianity. Unusual, too, was the resolve to enlarge library holdings at Vanderbilt through the purchase of Judaica collections, thanks to the generosity of a number of Jewish families in Nashville and beyond. A bit later, beginning in 1977, the oldest continuously presented Holocaust lecture series was inaugurated here.

Simultaneously, the more prestigious academies divorced themselves from connections with theological institutions that were not research oriented. The reinforcement of faith was relegated to off-campus privately funded institutions such as Hillel House, Newman Club, and the campus Y. A few divinity schools, which had long ago sundered their parochial attachments, began to serve an increasingly broader constituency, welcoming not only a wider spectrum of Protestants, but people of other faiths as well. Vanderbilt's Divinity School was one of them.

At Brandeis in the 1960s, I did not study Judaism or Christianity. But as they say, some of my best friends did. And it was obvious that these friends were framing a different family metaphor for the relationship among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam than what still obtains today. For them Christianity and Islam were not the daughters of Judaism. Rather, they argued that two of these Abrahamic faiths, namely Judaism and Christianity, were born only decades from each other, emerging from the same social upheavals and eschatological yearnings that were gripping the area under Roman rule.

> *"Neither [Judaism nor Christianity] is spiritually superior to the other; neither is lacking in virtues, and neither has a surplus of vices. Above all, neither needs to lecture the other; neither needs to evangelize to the other, and neither needs to predicate its fulfillment on the devastation of the other."*

Practically speaking, therefore, Judaism and Christianity were twin daughters of one mother, that mother being the Hebrew faith which, after its birth at Sinai, had been groomed by the prophets, had reached maturity in exile and, despite her many disappointments in her adult life, still hoped for a messianic consummation. After the Roman destruction of the temple, however, Mother Israel lived through the experiences of her daughters, Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and, a little later, Islam. On them, she bestowed her choicest Mosaic, prophetic, and messianic legacy so that, despite the centuries in which one was mistreated by the others, the three sisters never lost sight of their ancestry. Judaism retained an attachment to the original language it inherited and consequently kept to a distinctive interpretation of Scripture. But the sisters dug deeply and repeatedly into their mother's scriptural coffers as when for Christianity during the Reformation and for Judaism during the Enlightenment they molded new visions from Hebrew Scriptures.

This shift in metaphors from mother-daughter to siblings may seem trivial, if not frivolous; but as far as Judaism and Christianity are concerned, if you recall the European artistic depictions in which the church was personified as young and vital, the future in her grasp, but the synagogue as dour and old, you will recognize why the relationship among the faiths needed to be rethought. One can now say that, as the two sisters matured and eventually produced multiple personalities, neither has had to apologize to the other for how it interprets its faith or how it organizes its communities. Neither is spiritually superior to the other; neither is lacking in virtues, and neither has a surplus of vices. Above all, neither needs to lecture the other; neither needs to evangelize to the other, and neither needs to predicate its fulfillment on the devastation of the other.

Gazing on Mother Israel

I was young when I got to Brandeis; yet, I was attracted to the mother more than to any of her daughters although I did flirt with the youngest of the siblings, Islam. Increasingly, I fixed my gaze squarely on Mother Israel. I

became fascinated by how she grew up and matured, the smallest and least promising of nations, surrounded by far greater powers in Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. When Israel was but a child, these civilizations had been adults for millennia. They were the world's oldest cultures, and their experiences would prove of uncommon significance for human history. The inventory of firsts they left us is bewildering: first to develop irrigation, first to create cities, to found temples, to invent writing, to preserve traditions, to codify behavior, and to internationalize relations. But they were also the first to organize empires, wage total war, brutalize their neighbors, and institutionalize slavery.

In contrast to the hard knowledge we amassed about these cultures, we had little independent testimony about ancient Israel. We have all seen movies about Abraham, Rebekah, Charleton Heston, David, Solomon, Elijah, and Esther; but would you be shocked if I reveal to you that not one contemporaneous monument has ever been found to authenticate their existence? In fact, the earliest biblical personality to find independent confirmation is, of all people, Ahab, husband of wicked Jezebel; but that was in the ninth century B.C.E., practically yesterday as far as the ANE was concerned. Still, at Brandeis, we all believed that the absence of proof was no proof of absence and that the behavior, if not the history, of biblical ancestors in any case was being affirmed by comparative research. Moreover, the spectacular Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries had given us hope that the massive Israeli archeological effort then under way would one day expose the archives of the great kings of Israel and Judah.

In the spring of '66, I left drizzly Waltham, Massachusetts, to interview at a number of universities. But when I entered spring-soaked Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with its perfumed air, beautiful azaleas, and lilting language, there was no returning North. It was the first of many good things that happened to me there; but none better than in meeting my lifelong partner, Diane, and in raising there three sons, David, Noah, and Daniel.

The South turned out to be a very fine place in which to reflect, learn, and teach. I explored the rich harvest of documents from Mesopotamia, often focusing on one city-state, Mari, whose archives allowed the reconstruction of a complex society from the 18th century B.C.E., long before the Hebrews had formed their identity. The kings of Mari depended on a professional diplomatic corps, its merchants traded deeply into the Aegean islands, its generals deployed advanced military weaponry, and its physicians understood the nature of disease and of contagion. But the people's real virtue was a garrulity that made them leave tons of records on every aspect of daily life. Most stimulating was our recovery of a sophisticated network of prophets, seers, and visionaries, men and women, advising the kings on how to know the divine will. With some emotion, one locates profound ethical truths in some of the oracles delivered to the king of Mari, almost 4000 years ago. Permit me to share with you a light paraphrase of such an oracle; and as I do, let its sentiments and metaphors transport you to those from Scripture. Adad, a major god, is quoted as saying to the king of Mari:

I had given all the land [of your kingdom] to your father and because of my weapons, he had no opponents. But when he abandoned me, I took his land away and gave it to his enemy. But then I restored you to your father's throne and handed you the weapons with which I battled the Sea [symbol of chaos]. I rubbed your body with oil from my own numinous glow so that no one could ever stand up to you. Now therefore listen to my only wish: Whenever anyone appeals to you for judgment, saying, 'I am aggrieved'; be there to decide his case and to give him satisfaction. This is all that I desire of you."

These are noble convictions. Yet, realizing that it will be another millennium before they are passionately echoed by our own prophets, only sharpened for me the permanence of Israel's accomplishments. So, despite my love for the cultures I was studying, in writing on biblical matters, I never doubted that however superior or anterior were the accomplishments of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Ancient Israel remained unequaled in its capacity to discover the logic of monotheism and in its courage to broadcast it as a historical truth.

Yet, as I hardly need to remind you, all was not peaches and cream during the sixties and seventies. Searing battles were being fought to secure a just society, to terminate a needless war, to spare the environment, and to erase racial and sexual discrimination. At Chapel Hill, it was impossible not to notice how often the prophetic voices that appealed to our better instincts regarding fairness, justice, and sharing one's bounty, were being launched by the largely off-campus rabbis and ministers. I recall the role played by the YMCA at UNC in rallying sentiments for racial equality and the pivotal support the local Hillel Foundation gave to the effort to oppose denying American communists access to the campus. My colleague Dale Johnson is currently editing a history of Vanderbilt Divinity School and you will soon be able to refresh your memory on the heroics of its faculty when, early in the sixties, it forced the campus to confront its racist past at home and when, in the late seventies, it outspokenly urged repudiation of racism abroad.

Still, for me to have reached Vanderbilt University, two other factors had to come into play. The first was scripted in Washington, and the second was internal to my specialty; but both were feeding on major upheavals in our culture.

"At this Divinity School, it is taken for granted that divine messages need not sound uniform to be authentic, that ideals need not be absolute to be profound, that values need not be homogeneous to be admirable, and that lives need not be perfect to be meaningful."

—Jack M. Sasson,
the Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies

Enlarging the tent

We drum it into our children that America is a land of immigrants. That is true of course; but throughout its history America has had moments of dreading the consequences of immigrations. In the wake of World War I, Congress passed legislation limiting entry to just 150,000 newcomers, establishing quotas for each country based on two percent of each nationality that lived here in 1890, that is before the height of the Jewish migrations. Effectively, the law reduced to a trickle the flow of immigrants from all but England, Germany, and Ireland. You can now understand why so few Jews were granted asylum from the killing fields of war-torn Eastern Europe. My own story is illustrative. After my mother registered us at the American consulate, we waited nine years to receive eight out of just two dozen slots allotted to émigrés from Lebanon in 1955.

Controlling the influx of foreigners was matched also by a drive to Americanize them as soon as they hit American soil. Those who quickly lost their accents were praised. (And obviously, I was not one of them.) The quicker they got to love baseball, hot dogs, and apple pie, the quicker they got to drive away in their own Chevrolet. Or so was the promise of the time.

Right after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, however, a law was passed which phased out quotas based on national origins. Subsequently, the numbers of entries were increased sharply such that, by the mid-eighties, there came to be good-sized communities all over the United States, made up of folks that were hardly represented heretofore, among them Vietnamese, Thai, Hindus, Pakistanis, Kurds, Turks, Nigerians, Haitians, and Guatemalans. It is estimated that 35 million of the 276 million souls presently in the United States are foreign born, as is 12 percent of our labor force.

For these immigrants, making a better life for themselves and their children continues to be a fervent dream. But unlike previous immigrants who willingly dissolved in one big melting pot, these newcomers have insisted on their individuality and on the freedom to retain proudly, their ethnic characteristics. This is expressed most starkly in the ways they continue to worship. While they readily adopt the ceremonies of civil religions, such as the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving, and while they eagerly participate in the shopping orgies around Christmas, these immigrants have not Protestantized their faith as in the past, and have not adjusted their rituals or temple architecture to American standards. Just visit our Ganesha temple on Old Hickory Boulevard and you will sense what I mean. Moreover, few among the new immigrants find that tolerance is enough of a virtue; rather, they insist on the right of all Americans to be accepted for whom they are.

Together with the social changes begun in the sixties, the implantations of many faiths have resulted in a diversity of voices entering public discourse, and it has encouraged the formation of new spiritual configurations, in a richness of imagination not seen since the first centuries of the Christian era. Additionally, older immigrant groups, Jews among them, have become more willing to differ from the mainstream, even to return to more traditional ways. It has also become chic for politicians, among others, to wear their piety on their sleeves. Yet, because pluralism has effectively impeded the dominance of any single religious ideology, their public pronouncements have lacked the coerciveness of past appeals.

For some Protestants, Catholics, and even some Jews, so much diversity, so openly expressed, seems a harbinger of spiritual collapse. For them, what my colleague Patout Burns labels "a polyphony of voices" betrays the seriousness of religious commitment. They fear that when multiple religious perspectives enter public discourse, religion itself may be more easily ignored. Rather than trying to understand how this pluralism came about and why it belongs here, they have chosen to retreat into institutions, colleges, seminaries, yeshivot, and madaris that are increasingly homogenous, in membership, belief, practice, and attitude. We do recognize, of course, that all this — the action as well as the reaction—is evidence of a healthy and free society, where people have choices to participate or withdraw, to join or choose seclusion, to persuade or be persuaded, to assimilate or stand apart.

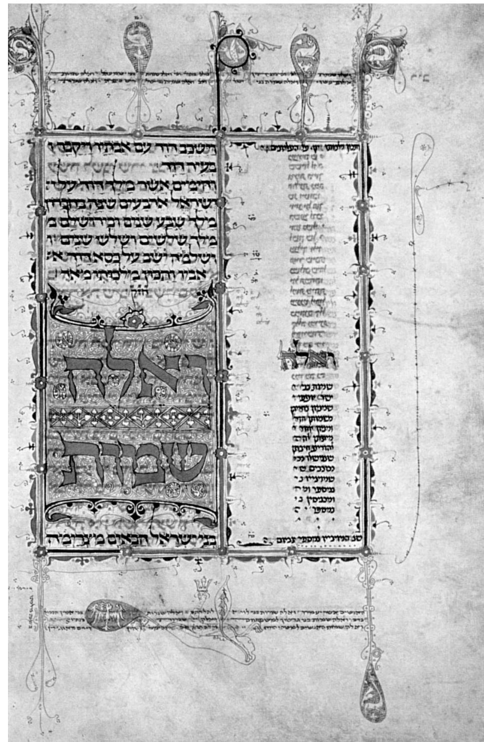
König David
Aus einer Bibelhandschrift vom Jahre 1476
(Bodleiana, Kennicott Nr.1)
Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1934

But at least since the sixties, there has been another setting in which to face the increased religious complexity of our age. At distinguished secular institutions of higher learning, a few non-sectarian divinity schools have welcomed students from diverse backgrounds, creeds, interests, and goals, encouraging them in their spiritual and intellectual growth, in their wish to become scholars and teachers, and in their desire to act as agents for social justice. That currently there is only a handful of such schools, among them Vanderbilt's Divinity School, makes their work the more crucial and in need of support. At this Divinity School, for example, it is taken for granted that divine messages need not sound uniform to be authentic, that ideals need not be absolute to be profound, that values need not be homogeneous to be admirable, and that lives need not be perfect to be meaningful. Here, too, professors need not be of the same faith as the excellent students they teach, and they need not practice the faith of the Scripture they have mastered. So, we now have a Jewish scholar, wonderful Amy-Jill Levine, teaching the New Testament, and it would not be far-fetched one day for a Muslim to teach Hebrew Scripture or for an agnostic to teach theology.

Planted by everlasting waters

I have tried to give you an explanation why, as we are about to enter a new century as well as a new millennium, Vanderbilt Divinity School finds it urgent to persevere in enlarging its tent and to multiply the voices heard within it. The demographics and the desire of individuals to retain their own voices simply demand it. I suspect that similar forces are also helping to shape a desire for a more diversified undergraduate student body, and I applaud all efforts now under way at Vanderbilt to bolster Jewish Studies and to enlarge the presence of Jewish undergraduates on campus.

During the seventies, my own work was shifting, from studies that were essentially based on historical methods to those that



Illuminierte Seite der Bibelhandschrift
Ms. Berlin, Or. Qu. 1
Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1934

exploited literary and social approaches. I was by no means alone to take that path for, in the same period, scholars across many fields were becoming increasingly mindful that the writing of history cannot be shielded from subjective designs. What had happened in Hitler's Germany and in Soviet Russia were parade examples; but please recall the sharp conflicts on whether or not our own involvement in Vietnam was driven by accommodating, even deceitful, reconstructions of the past. Increasingly, then, history was no longer Sergeant Friday's "just the facts, Ma'am," but it was viewed as a narrative with many goals, some far from noble. Think of the great movie *Rashomon* and how a single event is recalled self-servingly by each of those participating in it.

The doubts about history had immediate and profound effects on biblical scholarship. Lacking independent confirmation of events as told in the Bible, scholars by droves gave up reconstructing what really happened in ancient Israel, and this abandonment, in turn, compromised all assessments that depended on historical reconstructions, such as the evolution of theology in ancient Israel. Worse, those who continued to write history lost their compass and got mired in uncompromising evaluations of the same evidence. So, today, within the pages of the same journal, you might read one respected scholar authenticating the biblical version of the Exodus from Egypt and another, equally respected scholar, dismissing it as the imaginative invention of an old Hebrew priest.

Amazingly enough, rather than driving us to despair, this narrowing of the historical portals invited us to find other ways to penetrate the world of the Hebrews. Suddenly we were all entering Chairman Mao's garden to watch a thousand flowers bloom. There was now a willingness to put aside old methods, to work interdisciplinarily, and to adopt multiple strategies for solving a problem. Questions were framed differently, and no answer was deemed taboo. So much so, that if biblical scholars from Chancellor Harvey Branscomb's days would return to their old classrooms, they might think they took the wrong turn down the hall.

To give you a better insight into what I mean, I invite you all to any of the sessions I am now teaching on the book of Genesis, or at least to inspect the website I have prepared on that course, *http://people.vanderbilt.edu/~jack.m.sasson/index.html*. In recent years, Genesis has come to be a premiere text for humanistic research, not least because, for over two millennia, people from all cultures and faiths have used it as sounding board for their ideas and aspirations. If you think you have heard enough explanations about Genesis from your ministers, rabbis, Sunday school leaders, Bill Moyers, and the Senate's therapist, Naomi Rosenblatt, you are in for a shock. A couple of generations ago, in such a course you were likely to discuss how the Hebrews differed from their neighbors in their notion of God, how the repetitions and apparent contradictions in its stories allow insight into the development of Hebrew thought, or how archeology and epigraphy are confirming the historicity of the patriarchs and the matriarchs.

You will still hear lots about these topics in my Genesis class; but mostly as background to many other interesting issues that are bursting on us like field mushrooms on a spring day. Now, we pay attention to a broader group of participants: gender specialists, feminists, psychologists and psychiatrists of many flavors, historians of music, art, and religions, folklorists, philosophers, experts in sexual politics, game and critical theorists, and theologians of many faiths. Each and all have had their say, some no doubt more lucidly than others, with insights for all of us to inspect and adapt.

So, despite the tons of brain power already expended on the study of the Ancient Near East, the Bible, and Judaism, many important questions remain open. But these cannot be engaged where dogma triumphs and, above all, they must not be discussed where passion is cold. I cannot imagine a livelier place to debate them than right here, at Vanderbilt Divinity School, where people of many backgrounds, commitments, interests, and preparations have come, with open minds, to reason together on many matters, some new and some old.

So now you know why I came to Vanderbilt and what I am hoping to find, as a teacher and as a learner. I consider it an omen, therefore, that behind the door of the office which I have inherited from Gene TeSelle, I found a page from the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Hebrew Bible. On sleuthing, I learned that the page was posted by Lou Silberman soon after he moved into this same office, some forty years ago. The page has on it a beautiful rendering of the First Psalm in which the poet applauds those who delight in the life of the mind, for they are:

> *Like a tree planted beside*
> *streams of water,*
> *which yields its fruit in season,*
> *whose foliage never fades,*
> *and whatever it produces thrives.*

I may not be as wondrous as that tree; but after a year at Vanderbilt, I already feel well planted by those streams of refreshing and, I dare to hope, ever-replenishing waters.

Images from the Judaica Collection were photographed by Denny Adcock of Nashville.

In Memoriam

"All the material prosperity in the world has meaning only in terms of what it can do for and to human beings."

—Mary Jane Lowenheim Werthan
(September 30, 1907 – August 15, 2000)

When Mary Jane Werthan, BA'29, MA'35, the first woman elected to serve on the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust, was invited to campus on November 16, 1965, to address the undergraduate women during "Charm Week," she encouraged the members of her audience to invest themselves in the lives of people. "I am not berating cocktail parties, bowling, golf, hairdos, or bridge—fun and frivolity are important to young and old—but activity without invol-vement in a cause or purpose can be totally enervating and lacking in satisfaction," remarked Mrs. Werthan.

A distinguished civic leader in Nashville, Mary Jane Werthan selflessly committed herself to improving the welfare of other individuals. "Study and the acquiring of knowledge are intrinsically important," she admitted, "but I see a relationship between what the mind absorbs and what we are expected to do in the world." Her life exemplified the constructive relationship that can develop between the acquisition of knowledge and the advancement of public policies.

Mary Jane Werthan in 1966, photograph by Jeff Carr, JD'66, Vice Chancellor for University Relations; General Counsel; Secretary of the University, emeritus

Enrolling at Vanderbilt University when only 50 women were admitted to the freshman class, Mrs. Werthan was graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude with a baccalaureate in English. President of the Women's Student Government Association, the Women's Athletic Association, and Alpha Epsilon Phi national sorority, she was elected by popular vote of her peers the Lady of the Bracelet, the highest recognition for scholarship and leadership accorded a female undergraduate. After her marriage in 1932 to Albert Werthan, the retired chairman of Werthan Industries, she returned to campus and earned the master of arts degree.

As a reporter for the *Tennessean*, Mrs. Werthan became aware of the problems and the opportunities in her hometown and worked to promote social, educational, and cultural programs. A charter member of the board of directors of Planned Parenthood and a life member of the organization's advisory committee, she also was a founding member and president of Family and Children's Service. She served on the boards of the Public Television Council, the Nashville Symphony Association, the Nashville School of Social Work, the Friends of Cheekwood, the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center, and the Jewish Community Center.

Mrs. Werthan's dedication to her alma mater was evident by her involvement with the Alumni Association, Vanderbilt Aid Society, and Vanderbilt Development Foundation. But in May 1964, she was awakened one midnight by a telephone call from Chancellor Alexander Heard who extended her an invitation to became a member of the Board of Trust. After asking the chancellor to repeat the purpose of his call, Mrs. Werthan replied, "Wait, I have to wake up Albert and ask him if it's all right." Her husband promptly instructed her, "Run to the phone and tell him 'yes' before he changes his mind."

She jokingly compared her first board meeting to crashing the Men's Bar at the Biltmore Hotel. "I was so 'snowed' that I wore a hat and gloves to the meeting," she later recalled, "but I need not have taken myself so seriously for the welcome and the atmosphere were completely relaxed."

Assuming the role of University trustee during a period when college campuses were protesting the Vietnam War and traditional perceptions of American universities were questioned, Mrs. Werthan chaired the academic affairs committee and modestly described herself as a *conduit* between the students and the board. When Vanderbilt students staged a sit-in at Kirkland Hall, Mrs. Werthan "sat-in" with them. She enlisted fellow trustees to visit with students and to hear firsthand their concerns. An advocate for the continuing education of women, she also is remembered for her interest in the University's recruitment and retention of African American students.

"A woman has instinctive and intuitive feelings that work in relationships," she once advised, and her service to Vanderbilt—during such critical decades as the sixties and seventies—proved instrumental in the election of other women to the Board of Trust.

Thirty-five years ago, Mrs. Werthan reminded the young women who assembled to hear her speech during Charm Week that "Learning is the raising of character by broadening vision." The ecumenical vision of the Divinity School has been broadened by the *character* of this remarkable woman and her endowment of the Mary Jane Werthan Professorship of Judaic and Biblical Studies, and by the recent funding of the May and Morris Werthan Scholarship established by Mr. Werthan and his daughters, Elizabeth Werthan of Philadelphia, and the late May Werthan Shayne of Nashville. Mr. Werthan explains that the scholarship provides an opportunity for the family "to live out" the fourth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother."

—VJ

PEYTON HOGE

Mrs. Werthan in 1999 with alumna Esther Hecht Cohn, BA'60