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'Fish lady' still listening after 13 years

Freshmen find shoulder to lean on

By Becky Weisenfels
Reporter

It's the only round table in the room and it's in a corner. No one would ever notice it unless he was looking for it. Just like her.

She sits at the round table in the corner, her back to the room. Occasionally, a person might catch a quick glimpse of her face as she turns to include someone in her conversation. More than likely, though, a person will notice the group of Corps of Cadets freshmen gathered around the table and intently listening to the woman with black-turning-gray hair and a small black tag on her blouse that identifies her as the "fish lady."

Ruth Hunt sits in the basement MSC snack bar every weekday morning and talks to anyone who pulls up a chair, but it's usually the Corps freshmen who need her most. That is why Hunt started coming to the snack bar.

"I guess I saw a need and tried to fill it," Hunt says. "That's as near as I know how to explain it. I love A&M. I love the Corps. I love the girls, and I love everybody. But the non-regs don't particularly need me."

The small woman with a big following came to Texas A&M almost by chance.

"I have one son and he works for the University," Hunt says. "He was here, and in 1965 his stepfather left me. I just didn't know which way to turn. He persuaded me to move down here, since he had only one mama, and I had one son. I don't live with him, but I'm so glad he did (persuade me) because I have had something to care about."

As she talks, Hunt uses her hands in small movements to emphasize her words. Her blue eyes, behind glasses, rest on whomever she is speaking to, drifting around the room only when she searches for a word. Her face is covered by wrinkles that come from a lifetime of caring. She is dressed nicely in a plum-colored suit.

Hunt came to College Station in 1967. The first group of Aggies she started talking to were student athletes who ate at the Ramada Inn restaurant. The group called itself the Roof Club.

Hunt began working as a cashier for the Rudder Tower Restaurant when the Ramada Inn was sold.

Hunt attends freshmen conferences to invite the students to visit her. But last August she became sick and had to be hospitalized.

She attempted to make it to her table, but couldn't. She missed a whole semester for the first time in 13 years, and speaks about it with regret.

But this semester she is back at her table talking to freshmen.

"I can't call all the Corps by name, of course," she says. "I just say 'Hello, honey!' It's good for me, and I hope it's good for them. Most people my age are not doing something like this. I would be bored stiff crocheting and rocking in a chair."

Hunt displays an extensive knowledge of Corps life and of Corps vocabulary. As she speaks, she stops to explain the different terms used by the Corps so that no one feels lost or left out.

Hunt, with a South Texas drawl, admits she is a grandma figure for many students and says this understanding and tolerant image allows students to talk more easily.

"We normally just talk about the Corps and what their problems are, and I'm interested in where they

went and what they're gonna do," Hunt says.

She gives advice and answers questions when she is able. She anticipates questions that she won't be able to answer by asking a fifth-year senior to be around the table, or one whom she thinks is knowledgeable, yet not intimidating.

Although she supports the freshmen, she would never take their side in matters concerning the Corps. Instead, she advises freshmen to have complaints to wait until they are upperclassmen, and then to correct the problems.

"I have pretty good luck with freshmen," she says. "I always say can keep them until bonding couldn't take a stick and run the off. I hope I do some good. The (students) tell me I do."

Not only does Hunt talk to freshmen, but she enjoys being remembered by Aggies at reunions at the Ramada Inn on game weeks. Last year, at a 15-year reunion, a man told her that he used to work at the Ramada Inn just to see her smiling face on days when he was stressed.

Sidewalk circus entertains audience at A&M

By Cray Pixley
Reporter

Students and visitors were treated to the smallest complete circus in the world at noon Wednesday by Rudder Fountain.

Despite morning rains, the skies cleared to allow the Royal Lichtenstein Quarter Ring Sidewalk Circus to perform magic, animal acts, narrated mime fables and juggling.

The Rev. Nick Weber, ringmaster and circus founder, attracted a large audience using fast-paced jokes, a miniature horse, two spider monkeys outfitted in diapers, parrots and a three-legged dog named Mr. Scotty.

This is the first time Father Weber and his circus have performed at A&M, the Rev. Marvin Kitten, campus minister at St. Mary's, said. Texas A&M is one of the few major universities that had never been visited by the Royal Lichtenstein Circus, he said. The Texas A&M Catholic Student Association members were hosts of the circus.

The circus, founded in 1972, is the full-time ministry of Weber, a member of the Jesuit order.

"It revives a medieval way of performing magic and animal acts, then we perform a few fables, which are intended to inspire and entertain audiences," Kitten said.

One fable performed Wednesday, "Ploughsharing," conveyed the ideas of friendship and sharing.

"We are excited by the performance, but because of the circus' schedule we may not have a return performance until three years from now."

"We perform a few fables which are intended to inspire . . . audiences."

— The Rev. Marvin Kitten, campus minister at St. Mary's Catholic Church

Kitten said. "The circus divides the country into three sections and travels through one section during nine months of the year."

The troupe is composed of Weber and four volunteer members — two men and two women.

One member, Larry Ryan, escaped from a locked postal bag after being chained hand and foot. Weber and his troupe used "volunteers" from the audience to help with many of the acts.

Circus members Jody Ellis and Kelly Peterson performed juggling and balancing acts

the crowd, while the animal circus stars jumped through hoops and one dog was shot out of a cannon.

"Most of the circus members are former university theater students who saw the circus performance and were interested in joining," Kitten said.

Mitch Kincannon, circus manager and performer, who has been with the circus for years, said most volunteer performers stay with the circus for one to two years.

"Circus members get room, board and a few other things," Kincannon said.

The circus is interesting because it does not charge for performances, Kitten said.

"The circus usually receives donations from sponsors, but it would perform even if we couldn't make any donation," Kitten said. "We do not take up donations from the audience at all."

The circus also has patrons from all over the country who contribute to their performance, Kitten said.

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