

Alice Murphy Lawson

My mother, Alice Murphy, was the fifth child of Irish immigrants Hugh and Theresa Murphy. She was born and grew up in Windber, Pennsylvania. Education was very important to my grandparents. Mother recalled her dad drilling the kids on mental arithmetic at bedtime, and they were all expected to do well at school. The girls all graduated from Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and the boys from Notre Dame.

Alice majored in English and home economics and worked as a teacher before going on to earn her master's degree in human nutrition from Penn State. Mother was introduced to my dad while studying at Penn State. She needed the chemical formula for vitamin C, and one of her friends introduced Alice to her cousin, Neal Lawson, a Ph.D. candidate in the field of chemical engineering. It was the beginning of a long and happy relationship!

Mother loved teaching and helping others. She was always delighted to teach my Girl Scout troop and my 4-H club the basics of cooking and sewing. Not only did she help us and our friends with our homework, but I can remember neighborhood kids coming to Mother for help with many subjects, from math to English, and for advice and guidance (and homemade chocolate chip cookies!) as they grew older.

Mother had a special empathy for young women who faced financial challenges in pursuing a college degree. When the time came for her to begin college, my grandfather's resources were strained by educating her older siblings and by the difficulties of the Great Depression. Reluctantly, my grandparents decided that Alice could not begin college as planned. Soon they received a call from a nun at Seton Hill who remembered what a great student my Aunt Bea had been. She was eager to enroll another Murphy girl and offered my grandfather the option of paying tuition month-by-month. Mother never forgot how glad she was to begin her freshman year!

Mother was a lifelong member of AAUW. Wherever she and Dad lived, Mother always joined the local AAUW, knowing she would meet and enjoy the company of other college-educated women. Of the many activities she enjoyed in West Chester, her AAUW book group was probably her favorite.