

Meet the 2012 Outstanding Alumnae Award Winners

*From alumnae networking to crossing cultures,
regulating nuclear materials and saving new lives,
these women exemplify the range of possibilities that
come with a liberal arts education.*



Service to the College

Virginia Brown McKenzie '47

VIRGINIA BROWN MCKENZIE '47 HAS BEEN involved with the Alumnae Association for 65 years, making her mark as alumnae director and as an avid volunteer. It is most fitting that McKenzie should be awarded the distinction—Outstanding Alumna—because she created the awards in 1975.

Virginia Lee Brown enrolled as a freshman at Agnes Scott in 1941, only months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Shortly after the United States was drawn into World War II, Brown met and married artist and printer John Stuart McKenzie. Married and working, McKenzie returned to Agnes Scott and graduated in 1947. As a result of her roundabout college journey, she now celebrates two reunion years—the class she entered college with, 1945, and the class she graduated with, 1947.

McKenzie initially became involved with the Alumnae Association because of Alumnae Directors Eleanor Hutchens '42 and her succes-

sor, Ann Worthy Johnson '38. She remembers the women as being fun and vivacious and that they made alumnae want to get involved. She served on the Alumnae Board as Alumnae House chairman and as president of what was then the Atlanta Club in the 1950s and 1960s. McKenzie drew on these experiences when she became alumnae director in 1974.

Among her many accomplishments as director of Alumnae Relations, she created the 50-Year Club to recognize alumnae celebrating their 50th reunion year and older (the club is now known as the Anna Young Club). She laughs as she remembers the first gala dinner for the club. The catering company for the event didn't bring enough servers, and McKenzie and then-President Marvin Perry found themselves pouring water and waiting on tables to pick up the slack.

After her retirement in 1985, the mother of four took time off from the Alumnae Association to spend time with her family. It took a major milestone to draw her back: the class of 1947's 60th reunion in 2007. Once committed to helping plan the reunion festivities, McKenzie was hooked.

Her spirit and tenacity were noticed by the Alumnae Board, which nominated her to serve a term starting in 2007. McKenzie also became a champion for the Alumnae House renovation project and has willingly shared her wealth of knowledge with the current alumnae relations staff.

Despite her long list of accomplishments as an alumnae volunteer and staff member, what brings McKenzie the most happiness are the friendships she formed with fellow alums. "To me," McKenzie says, "it was fun. [The Alumnae Association] was what I called 'doing my own thing.' It wasn't about my husband or the children; it was just something that made me happy."

—Julia Stover '03



MARILYN SURIANI

Virginia Brown McKenzie '47

Originally from: Atlanta

ASC major: Journalism

Now living in:
Alpharetta, Ga.

Last book read:
Sister Revolutions:
French Lightning,
American Light
by Susan Dunn

Betsy Morgan Wiggins '82



MARILYN SURJANI

Wiggins' major professor, John F. Pilger, Ph.D., now William Rand Kenan Jr. Professor and chair of biology, remembers Wiggins' natural and insatiable curiosity. "I found her really hungry to learn about the natural world and to put that together in frameworks that would allow her to understand beyond what she was reading, to be able to experience the natural world and to come to some synthesis about it," he says.

After graduating, Wiggins joined the staff of the Carter Center, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's human rights and peace-building initiative, before it was built. "We had typewriters on the floor and a watercolor rendering of the Carter Center on the wall [in a downtown Atlanta office building]," she says. For six years as a program director, she coordinated international symposia on issues such as arms control and Middle East peace.

Wiggins' gifts of perspective and compassion spurred her to action in the aftermath of Sept. 11. Concerned about threats toward Muslims in her Syracuse community, she connected with a Muslim woman, Danya Wellmon, and the two went on to found Women Transcending

Boundaries. The organization reaches nearly 400 women of different faiths who wish to learn about one another's cultures and beliefs. The coalition has engaged in outreach projects, from helping build a school in Pakistan and supporting refugee women in Syracuse to raising funds for microfinancing for women in developing nations through Women for Women International.

"I think a liberal arts education is really a foundation for understanding the world," says Wiggins, who now works as a speech language pathologist. "If you pick up the newspaper, it's full of economics, history, religion, politics, ethics, education, the environment. If you are a thinking person, you want to be able to see the big picture, not just the bits and pieces. You want to see how things fit together, because one thing affects another. A liberal arts education encourages you to live with passion and commitment. Agnes Scott is an ideal community, but you can take those ideals and translate them into your own community."

—Allison O. Adams '89

BETSY MORGAN WIGGINS '82 IS ABLE TO view complicated situations from perspectives other than her own. That quality is part of what inspired her to co-found Women Transcending Boundaries soon after Sept. 11, 2001. This organization is dedicated to improving cross-cultural and interfaith understanding. And she directly attributes her own understanding to her liberal arts education.

"I drank up what [Professor of English] Margaret Pepperdene taught us," Wiggins recalls. "She said, 'When you leave Agnes Scott, we will all have failed if we have not taught you how to think and how to think critically. That is our mission.' I get choked up just thinking about it ... There is no greater gift."

Wiggins was one of the return-to-college students (now known as Woodruff Scholars) at Agnes Scott. Married, with two small children, she became a full-time biology major and relished the experience. "I had to take language, all the arts, art history, religion, astronomy and everything that everybody takes for the Bachelor of Arts," she says. "It damn well just about killed me, but it was a pure joy."

Betsy Morgan Wiggins '82

Originally from: Baltimore, Md.

ASC major: Biology

Now living in: Syracuse, N.Y.

Graduate degree: Masters in speech language pathology, Syracuse University

Special honors: Recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Unsung Hero Award, with Women Transcending Boundaries cofounder, Danya Wellmon. The award is given annually at Syracuse University's community-wide Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

Last book read: *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers

Distinguished Career

Martha Campbell Williams '62

Martha Campbell Williams '62

Originally from:
Johnson City, Tenn.

ASC major: Mathematics

Now living in:
Kensington, Md.

Graduate degree:
Masters of Science in
mathematics,
East Tennessee State
University

Special honors: Elected
Fellow of the Institute
of Nuclear Materials
Management, 2007;
Nuclear Regulatory
Commission Meritorious
Service Award, 2005

Last book read:
Sense of an Ending by
Julian Barnes



MARILYN SURJANI

IAEA inspection results and training inspectors in fundamentals of materials balance statistics. And when not working, she was traveling, criss-crossing Europe. In 2000, she returned to Washington to work for the NRC again, this time as senior physical scientist responsible for inspecting nuclear materials control at NRC facilities.

In 2009, Williams "retired" but started a new role as consultant. Currently she assists countries in developing regulations for

MARTHA CAMPBELL WILLIAMS '62 ENJOYS HER work too much to retire. She did not plan on a career in nuclear materials control, but her story is a classic case of the intersection of opportunity and preparation. Agnes Scott played an important role in her preparation.

This math major and mother of two had not originally intended to have a full-time career. Williams had worked part-time teaching statistics, mathematics and operations research at the college level in East Tennessee and, at 40, needed a full-time job. A friend's husband told her that Nuclear Fuel Services in nearby Erwin was hiring. He gave her a book on statistical methods in nuclear materials control and asked her to call him if she understood it. Williams not only understood it but found it fascinating, and she got the job. She spent eight years at Nuclear Fuel Services, where she managed a team of statisticians who evaluated and provided quality assurance for nuclear materials measurements.

Williams' career has taken her around the globe. In 1988, she accepted a job with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C., where she worked in nuclear materials control. In 1992, she was hired by the International Atomic Energy Agency, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning agency, and moved to Vienna, Austria. Williams' Agnes Scott German class stood her in good stead during her eight years in the country. In Vienna, she was responsible for evaluating

nuclear materials control, produces guidance documents telling facilities how to establish safeguards and helps with inspection procedures for IAEA inspectors.

Williams says Agnes Scott heightened her concern for and enjoyment of other cultures, a fact that has played an important role in her work. "I've loved getting to know people from other countries and cultures," she says. One Agnes Scott class that helped Williams prepare for her scientific career was Merle Walker's philosophy class. "She taught me to clarify my thinking and articulate my thoughts," Williams reflects. This preparation, along with her English classes, gave her a strong background in writing, which has been essential to her career.

"A Renaissance woman" is the way Agnes Scott classmate and friend Ellen Middlebrooks Granum describes this warm, gracious scientist whose passions include philosophy, travel, opera and family. This grandmother of four recently traveled to Beijing to participate in a meeting on nuclear security held jointly by Harvard University and Peking University. Anticipating her return to campus for her 50th reunion this year, Williams says, "Agnes Scott gave me the well-rounded education that has helped me interact with people throughout my career."

—Margaret Daniel

Outstanding Young Alumna

Tomekia Strickland '97

TOMEKIA STRICKLAND '97 IS IMMERSSED IN NEW life every day as an obstetrician, but she's made it her mission to immerse herself in some of the most challenging aspects of bringing new life into the world.

She practices in Tucson with a unit that specializes in high-risk pregnancies and births. Births don't conform to a 9–5 schedule, and neither does Strickland's work to protect the lives of mothers and babies. She devotes much of her time outside of practicing to volunteer work, writing and social media related to global women's health issues.

Before coming to Tucson, Strickland spent four years living and working in the Navajo Nation in Chinle, Ariz., the largest Native-American reservation in the United States.

"It was an amazing experience. It was also a major catalyst for my interest in poverty and women's health," Strickland said.

While Strickland's experiences in the Navajo Nation helped solidify her path toward raising awareness of the global challenges facing women's health, she says it was her time at Agnes Scott that helped define the beginnings of that path. Strickland was a biology major while at Agnes Scott, but some of her favorite classes were in anthropology and creative writing. The skills she learned in both subjects continuously benefit her career and life, she added.

As a women's college, Agnes Scott also reinforced the strongest and best aspects of being a woman, Strickland said. "Agnes Scott helped complete the picture, making me a more compassionate and broader-thinking physician. In health, particularly women's health, you start as a scientist, then become a physician and then realize there's so much more to becoming a doctor—psychology, anthropology, communication," Strickland said. "I received all those things at Agnes Scott. That's the beauty of a liberal arts education."

Strickland's writing skills have certainly served her well—she has been published in everything from the *Journal of Minority Medical Students* to the Huffington Post. And when it comes to more succinct communication, she also has an impressive following on Twitter (@DrStrickland) where she tweets about women's health and her work as an obstetrician.

She will travel to Ghana this summer as a mentor to a group of University of California, Santa Barbara students with Global Brigades, a student-led organization. The group will be addressing women's health issues in the country.

"It's a great time to be in public health. Reaching out to the world is easier than it's ever been before," she said. "There's no excuse not to help in some way."

—Megan Terraso

Tomekia Strickland '97

Originally from: Atlanta

ASC major: Biology

Now living in:
Tucson, Ariz.

Graduate degree:
Doctor of Medicine,
Morehouse University

Special honors:
Dr. Nelson McGhee
Service and Humanism
award; published in
the *American Journal
of Obstetrics and
Gynecology*; featured in
Jezebel magazine's "50
Most Beautiful Atlantans"

Last book read:
*The Grandest Challenge:
Taking Life-Saving
Science from Lab to
Village* by Drs. Abdallah
Daar and Peter Singer

