



## **Beauty** **By Anne Pound (NM)**

Doris is my same age cousin and I've known her forever and I have to say that the year her youngest left home I was real worried about her. I prayed for her a lot that year because all the sparkle seemed gone from her and she didn't seem to care about the chickens or the canning or anything.

Like most of the girls in our family, Doris married way too young and raised five boys on a Tennessee farm just like her father's. She made sure those kids had some things she never had, but life was not easy for them either. When the last son was grown, she was a forty-year-old grandma.

One day out of the blue she said, "Did I ever tell you I hate chickens? I'm actually scared of them." Can you imagine a farmer's wife saying a thing like that? So you see why I was real worried. Then she told me she was thinking of going into town and taking some classes at the community college. What I thought was, "Doris, you're no kid and nobody in our family ever went to college." What I said was, "Good, let's go see about it." She gave me a big hug and said she never would have the courage to go if I hadn't said that. I guess that's when I decided to go to college, too. She and I have done everything the same our whole lives so I couldn't let her go to college by herself.

Now we may be country girls but we had good schooling until we had our first babies and, even then, we were two of the very few Parker City High School girls who went right back for our GEDs when our first babies were still tiny. And nobody ever said we weren't smart. Our big problem was that we were dumb about boys, that's all.

I don't want to ramble on and bore you to death, so let me just say that we went to town one day and met some nice people at the college who didn't seem the least bit surprised that two forty-year-old ladies wanted to go to college. I know I shouldn't brag, but I have to say we did real well the first year, studying together and pushing each other. By that time, of course, Doris had got all her sparkle back and was involved in all kinds of college activities that I just didn't have time for. She always did have sunup to sundown energy, and while I struggled to keep up with our classes, she breezed through it all and had time to run for Student Senate and help with charity drives and all that extra stuff. It helped that her husband always went along with whatever she wanted to do and that a couple of their sons had joined their father working on the farm when all this happened. So all Doris had to do was keep house and go to college and never bother with another chicken. I wasn't so lucky.

Now here's where my story really starts. There we were at the beginning of our second year of community college, me working my tail off at home and at school and Doris cruising along as if she could go on forever. I should have known it wouldn't be long before she came up with another big idea.

That September we were having our pimento cheese sandwiches at the picnic table by the Student Center and Doris said, out of the blue, “Why does a Homecoming Queen at a college have to be beautiful? Why not the smartest girl or the one with the best grades or the one who does the most for the school? What’s beauty got to do with a college degree?”

I didn’t know where this conversation was going, but knowing how she encouraged the younger women when they got so tired (after all, most of them still had kids and chickens at home) I thought maybe she was thinking of one of them for the Homecoming Queen’s Court. But then she told me that she might try out for the Homecoming Court her own self.

Now I love Doris dearly and she is a beautiful person in her heart and soul, but I’m here to tell you she was not a pretty girl and she is not a beautiful looking woman. When Doris was growing up, there was never enough money for dentists or fancy haircuts or acne treatments, so Doris has the teeth, hair, and skin God gave her. He obviously decided that brains and energy were more important.

I learned a long time ago not to step in front of the steamroller that is Doris when she has an idea. Still, I don’t like to see her get hurt so I tried to talk some sense into her. She just looked at me the way she does when she thinks I’m wrong and said, “What’s the point of going to college if you don’t take a new view on things?”

I didn’t want to remind Doris that one of the things we dreaded about going to college at our age was being among all those young people who we thought would be so much smarter than we were. Well, they weren’t smarter but most of them sure were better looking, being eighteen and nineteen years old.

Doris started talking to other students during class breaks and lunch about her idea that beauty and college had nothing to do with each other, and one of the women said, “Then why don’t you put your name in?” I could have pinched her hard, but Doris laughed right along with the rest of them. Later she was real quiet on our way home and I began to get very uncomfortable.

I already told you she got the best husband. Mine would have been falling out laughing if I’d come home with such an idea. But George didn’t laugh. He said, why not? He thought there was no harm in getting the 150 signatures needed to get on the Queen’s Court. George has been a farmer out in the fields all his life and he doesn’t have the sense God gave him to see how mean people can be. He thinks everyone in the world is as nice and polite as the people in our church.

As one last try to get Doris to give up on the idea, I made her go talk to the librarian who had helped us so much with our homework. She seemed like someone smart enough to be able to redirect Doris, but I was wrong. She told us that Doris was right! She said that it would be fun to participate in the Homecoming activities and represent the older students on the Queen’s Court. After that what could I do? What I’ve always done, of course. I helped Doris talk to people all over the campus.

Getting the signatures was easy. I already told you how she did all kinds of extra things on the campus, so she was very well known. I think some of the young students thought it was some

kind of joke. The older students probably went along with it because Doris was so popular and always had an encouraging word for them. Of course, some of them told me I was prettier and if anyone tried this hair-brained idea it should be me. That made me mad and I told them they were missing the whole point and they better never say a thing like that to Doris and hurt her feelings.

We handed in the signed form by the deadline and the next week when the Homecoming Court was announced there were four real pretty girls on the list plus Doris. I thought we could spend a couple of weeks figuring out what she should wear and anticipating the big day when she would be sitting in a special section of the gym during the Homecoming basketball game. There were always a lot of Parker City people at those games so she would get lots of attention, which she loves.

Well, that's not exactly what happened. Maybe by now it won't surprise you to hear that Doris campaigned hard during the two weeks before the voting for the Queen. I helped her as best I could but I had to study a lot harder than Doris did and I kind of lost track of her during those two weeks.

I was a little worried because a couple of years before, the college had had their first ever black Homecoming Queen, and it caused quite a stir in the community. The girl was absolutely lovely and was the daughter of a man who worked at the college, so even the old guys on the courthouse benches couldn't come out and say it was any of their business what happened at the college. But they wouldn't hesitate to criticize Doris because half of those old men with their old-timey ideas were related to her. So just to keep myself from getting aggravated, I didn't go anywhere near the courthouse during those weeks. I didn't want to hear the mean things they would be saying about Doris being too old and homely to be a Homecoming Queen.

The big day came when the winner's name was to be printed in the student newspaper. There are no secrets in Parker City and as soon as the paper went downtown to the printer, my daughter Susie's son Al called me to tell me that Doris had won. I drove right over to her house to tell her and you should have seen her face. Did she burst into tears? Did she laugh out loud? Did she look surprised? Have you been paying attention to what I have been telling you about Doris? If you have, you know she smiled like a queen who is only getting what's due to her. She hugged me and that was that.

The week before the Homecoming game was crazy busy. Doris wanted my daughter to do her hair and she asked to borrow her sister-in-law's Sunday suit, but in the end her husband gave her money for a new dress and to get her hair done downtown. She looked as good as she ever did in her whole life when she paraded into the gym and sat in the special section of the bleachers in the middle of the Queen's attendants. And of course her husband beamed and I cried when the president of the college gave her a huge armful of red roses at halftime. The crowd stood up and clapped real hard and I looked around and saw that the librarian and some of our teachers were crying too. I can't to save me remember a thing about that basketball game, but I can still see Doris sitting there smiling from ear to ear through the whole thing. It was a wonderful day.

Now here's what I think is so funny about all this. Parker City has grown and changed a lot in the last twenty-five years and Doris has been raising money for the college and for United Way and for anything else that needs it ever since we graduated. I'm retired from my job at the post office so I help her when I can, although with her energy she still runs circles around me. I do

make a special point of always going along when she takes the Welcome Wagon to new people in town. It's fun to drink coffee and chat and tell them all about Parker City.

Sometimes when a lady in one of the big new houses gets a little snooty with us, Doris is apt to drop the fact that she was her college's Homecoming Queen. You can actually see that lady change her mind. Doris suddenly becomes a different and more important person because, although she looks just like any other old lady now, she must have been smart enough to go to college and she must have been a beauty once. The conversation just takes a different turn entirely. When we get in the car after a visit like that, Doris always reaches over and squeezes my hand and we laugh like schoolgirls all the way home.