

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 27, 2008

**Juliet Mace Pyle (ca. 1902–ca. 1980):** Juliet Pyle was widowed in the early 1930s with two small children, Bob and “Bunny.” Well educated, she was left penniless in the midst of the Depression. Charles W. Bush, then principal of Wilmington Friends School, heard of her plight and offered her a job as a teacher’s assistant. A fringe benefit was a free education for her children, who both turned out to be “straight A” students. Bob and I were in the same class. His mother became an assistant to beloved teacher Mary B. Passmore, who taught fourth grade at Friends for 35 years. That was the year (1932–33) that I went through the fourth grade.

Having no place to live, the Pyles moved in with a Mr. Downing, an elderly widower who lived at 504 So. Clayton Street in Wilmington. Mrs. Pyle was a good cook, and the presence of her and her family in his comfortable home was a real shot-in-the-arm to his lonely life. Before Mr. Bush retired as principal at Friends, he needed a dietician and someone to run the school cafeteria. Juliet Pyle fit this need perfectly. She held this position until the school left 4<sup>th</sup> & West Streets in 1937 and helped organize the new cafeteria at the Alapocas campus.

With financial help from a few friends, she opened a restaurant called the Coffee Shop in the basement of the new DiSabatino Building at 9<sup>th</sup> and Orange Streets in Wilmington. With good home cooking, it was quite successful from the start, especially at lunchtime. In those days, there were few good restaurants in the downtown area. The competition seemed to be the caterer Edith McConnell’s restaurant (first on Market Street and then on West 9<sup>th</sup>), Judson Ryon’s Natural Food Restaurant on King Street, the New York Restaurant on lower Market Street, and two seafood places on Shipley Street: Comegy’s and McClafferty’s. Restaurants in the Hotel du Pont and even in the Hotel Darling were considered too fancy and expensive for the average lunch.

When World War II was raging, Juliet Pyle, then in her early 40s, joined the WACS (Women’s Army Corps). Eventually, as a staff-sergeant, she became head of the WAC recruiting office in Oklahoma City. In March 1945, when I was assigned to Will Rogers Field for Weather Reconnaissance training, I learned she was there, and I asked her for a date. She accepted, so here was this 21-year-old lieutenant having dinner with a staff sergeant old enough to be his mother. We had a brief but pleasant evening together.

After the war, an elderly Robert Pyle, a distant cousin of her late husband, Lawrence, owned the Conard-Pyle Company (Star Roses) of West Grove, Pennsylvania, and his company owned the Red Rose Inn. The inn had served food and had a few rooms for overnight guests (Calvin Coolidge’s widow, Grace, stayed there with a companion in the 1930s on their way down U.S. Route 1 to Florida). The older Pyle needed a resident manager for the inn, and he thought of Juliet. She took the job and greatly enhanced the food operation. In the 1950s, it was one of my parents’ favorite eating places, and we would often go for Sunday dinner. Robert Pyle died in 1952, but his successor, Sidney Hutton, liked the inn’s management, and Juliet stayed there until she finally retired in the mid-1960s. A very attractive woman, she added a lot to the people and places that touched her life.