

## **Margaret Thomas "Tommy" Warren**

*Margaret "Tommy" Warren passed away peacefully in a hospital near her home in West Cork, Ireland on August 22, 2004. She was the wife of the late Bayard Warren (1986), mother of Mary and Michael, grandmother of Margaret B Warren, loyal friend and resident of Castletownsend and patroness of Irish Arts. Service of thanksgiving were held in St Barrahanes Church, Castletownsend.*

*Donations, if desired, in Aid of the National Council for the Blind of Ireland  
Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland.*

### *The Early Years*

*BY MARGARET "TOMMY" WARREN, Charter Member  
99 NEWS - Jan/Feb 2002*

### *Forest.of.Friendship*

For 47 years I wanted to know what happened to The 99s and felt sure that Fay Gillis Wells could tell me, if I could locate her, and I did, finally. She was the White House Correspondent for the Storer Broadcasting Company. She answered my letter right away.

*May 15, 1976.*

*How delightful we've found you. You have been on the 'Address Unknown' list of the 99 Roster for ages .....And now that we've found you, how about joining us for the 99 Bicentennial Horizon program, the dedication of the International Forest of Friendship in Atchison, Kansas ....it is going to be old home week .....*

*--Fay*

I was ambivalent about accepting Fay's invitation. What would the young modern day women fliers with the crowded skies, their instruments and orders from airport towers be like? So long out of touch, I was hesitant to step back into a world nearly forgotten. Still, Fay's letter was warm, and it would be nice to see her and whomever else I might know.

In the International Forest of Friendship a portion of the National Recreational Trail is designated Memory Lane, and the names of those who have been part of aviation are etched on granite plaques and embedded in a concrete walk. So, in the end it was Memory Lane that made me decide to go.

I wasn't sure why, but I wanted to sponsor Frances Harrell Marsalis' name. I thought of her death and funeral, far from her place of birth, mourned by no kin. I thought of Roosevelt Field, now a shopping centre and soon there would be no one who flew there alive to

remember it. Having Frances' name etched in granite would be a gesture, at least, a protest against so many places and people disappearing forever, like jet vapour trails in the sky.

And so I find myself on the way to Atchison on the aisle seat of United Airlines Flight 242. I was reading a paperback edition of *Everyman's Life of Buddha* to keep myself from speculating about the next two days. A voice ordered us to fasten our seatbelts. I marked my place in the book, Chapter 3, "The Characteristics of a Future Buddha." The man across the aisle leaned toward me and grinned. "What are the characteristics of a future Buddha?" he asked. "To have the Ten Perfections." I answered glibly. Somehow I felt better.

I was to be met at the airport by members of the Atchison Zonta Club. I wondered how they would know who I was, but I was barely through the gate when two young women came toward me. "Are You Mrs. Warren?" they asked. I nodded and they said "We thought you looked like a flier!" You did'? What does a flier look like, I wondered, but I was pleased all the same.

As we drove through the rolling countryside they pointed out the tobacco fields and peaches already ripe on the trees. It was somehow very nice to be with these Midwestern women, so friendly and with pride in their state and their town, Atchison, which was also the hometown of Amelia Earhart. The early afternoon temperature had reached 100 degrees when we reached Benedictine College where I was to stay in a dormitory. The college was located on a bluff that rose straight and sheer above the Missouri River.

Clockwise from left to right: Sheila Scott, Betty Gillies, Blanche Noyes, Fay Gilles Wells, Nancy Hopkins Tier, Frances Harrell Marsalis, and Anesia "Shortly" Machada surrounding the statue of Amelia Earhart at Forest of Friendship in Atchison, Kansas.

Fay, whom I hadn't seen since the early 1930s, was already there. She had married the dashing foreign correspondent, Linton Wells. Together they had covered nearly all the world



until they settled in Washington in 1962. Now a widow, it was Fay who conceived the idea of the International Forest. Will she be stuffy now, I wondered.

I got my answer late that afternoon. Outside heat shimmered over the dry grass, while inside the iced tea cooler dripped with sweat. Fay pattered barefoot about the dormitory common room, hair loose and falling over her shoulders. She was dressed in a long robe and, I suspect, nothing else. She somehow looked beautiful, even in the heat. A young Benedictine student in the office carefully paid no attention, but another man did. "Fay," he said, "if you're going to go around dressed like that, I won't make any promises!" Fay just grinned.

Nancy Tier and Betty Gillies were there - both 99s Charter Members who had flown to Atchison in their own aeroplanes. Nancy came from Connecticut, Betty from California. I hadn't known Nancy, but Betty looked about the same as in 1935 — small, pretty, self-assured.

We greeted each other about the same, too — amiably enough, but without enthusiasm, politely. Blanche Noyes was there, her legs unsteady but her eyes observing and direct, her smile warm and friendly. Blanche was one of the great women fliers. "We're glad to have you back," she said. "When people have asked whatever happened to Margaret Thomas, I always wondered where you were."

There were 99s from other countries, too. Anesia "Shorty" Machada was up from Brazil. Shorty comes up to my shoulders and I'm only five foot two. She moved incessantly, striding about the room — sitting, standing, walking again. Shorty has the oldest woman's active pilot's license in the world — she has flown more than 50 years.

Dr. Sunila Bhejaker, Rabia Futehally and Chandra Sawant arrived in late afternoon. I marveled at how they flew in from India and still managed to look fresh and pretty in their silk saris. I wondered how they would be able to endure the night and day ahead, with no chance to catch up with their jet lag.

Tonight there would be a banquet, with guest speaker Captain Ronald Evans, command module pilot for the Apollo 17 moon mission; the dedication of the Forest of Friendship tomorrow, July 24, was Amelia Earhart's birthday.

One person I felt especially drawn to was Sheila Scott, from England. Sheila is one of those fine-boned English beauties whose unruffled, quiet good looks give no clue to what is beneath. When I later read her book, *Barefoot in the Sky*, written in 1973, I could scarcely believe I'd never heard of her, but I hadn't. She has flown in a small light aeroplane around the world several times, and was the first solo pilot to pass over the North Pole in a light

aircraft. We talked of flying, and agreed that the interesting thing was not *that* we fly, but why we fly.

That night at the banquet I met other old friends and, after dinner, listened avidly to Captain Evans' description of what it was like to walk on the moon. "It was such great fun," he said. I thought about that, then said to myself, "Maybe, but I bet it wasn't as much fun as hedgehopping over the barbed - wire fences and mesquite trees of Texas."

It had been a happy day and evening. I was glad I had come to the Forest of Friendship.



Charter Member Margaret Thomas Warren believes she might have been the youngest Charter Member of The 99s — only 17 when she joined. She was not present at the first gathering of women aviators on Long Island in October 1929, but did go into New York with Frances Harrell for the second meeting on December 14 at the home of Opal Kunz and was appointed to represent Texas.

Tommy wrote a book, *Taking Off*, about her early flying experiences that was published in 1993 in England. This hardcover, fully illustrated, 218-page book is available for \$20 plus s&h. For ordering information, e-mail [schullbooks@eircom.net](mailto:schullbooks@eircom.net).

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