

Bliss, Frances Louise (1927–2016)

T. JAMES JACKSON

T. James Jackson is a history major student at Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama. Jackson is also an accomplished musician.

Frances L. Bliss was a longtime educator who spent most of her professional career at Oakwood College, teaching there for more than thirty years.

Frances Louise Hudson was born on June 10, 1927, in Chicago, Illinois, to Nathan Hudson and Nancy Carruth. Born an only child, her parents died during her early childhood years. She was raised by her aunt Phyllis Ward and Phyllis' husband, William Ward. It was in the Ward household that she was introduced to the message of Adventism. Frances attended the Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church in Chicago and in 1944 graduated from Shiloh Adventist Academy. From an early age Frances was a precocious learner, with a sharp intelligence and thirst for knowledge. This only fueled her desire to further her education, enrolling at Oakwood College in the fall of 1943. She graduated in 1948 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in secretarial science and a minor in elementary education.

While attending Oakwood, Frances met World War II veteran and theology student Alfred Nelson Bliss (1925–1973). They were married on August 28, 1949, in Chicago. They parented four children: Alfred Nelson, Jr.; Andre; Darlene; and Shana. During the early years of their marriage Frances devoted her time to her four children, her husband's pastoral ministry, and teaching elementary education. Her husband's pastoral duties allowed her to teach scores of children in a number of cities across the country.

After the untimely death of her husband, Frances resumed her educational pursuits in 1974, graduating with a Master of Arts degree in education, with a specialization in reading education, from North Carolina A&T State



Frances Louise Bliss

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

University. Her love and passion for education allowed her to pursue a PhD in education: curriculum and instruction, with a concentration in reading and a specialization in linguistics and elementary education, from Southern Illinois University in 1984.

In 1974 she joined the faculty of Oakwood College. There she rose to full-time professor, ultimately serving as chair of the Education Department from 2000 to 2004. With her educational background in reading fundamentals, she served as reading specialist for the department, teaching all upper-division reading courses. She also served in various capacities at the college, including director of the summer program and senior class sponsor. Jeannette Dulan, former Oakwood colleague and associate professor in the Department of Education, remembers Bliss as a gregarious and reliable individual who was always looking for ways to advance the department.¹

Bliss desired that the department have the latest cutting-edge technologies, for she believed that there were innovative programs and devices that would make a teacher more productive. Holding true to this belief, Bliss was able to introduce the use of a smart board to the department, along with other new technologies.

As chair, Bliss worked untiringly to push the department to its limit, never losing sight of God along the way. "Of course, my desire is that the department would soon be able to offer a stand-alone Master of Education degree. . . . Most of all, I would pray that my department would never lose its passion for service to God and to His young children."² During her thirty-year career at Oakwood Bliss was the recipient of several awards and recognitions, including the Zapara Award for Excellence in Teaching. Bliss did not limit her abilities to Oakwood; she also served in other educational programs, including as an instructor for several summers at the Tuskegee University School Veterinary Medicine Graduate Studies.³

With a deep desire to see Seventh-day Adventist Christian education flourish, she continued to work for the success of teachers and schools well past her formal retirement in 2004. She served on the school board of Decatur Adventist Junior Academy, participated in accreditation reviews, consulted on curriculum development and school administration, and evaluated and encouraged countless teachers and principals. Bliss died on February 1, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia, after a bout with cancer.

Bliss remains a source of inspiration and mentorship to countless students of education.

She worked indefatigably to promote Adventist education as much as she was able, spending most of her professional career working in the Seventh-day Adventist school system. Her most notable contribution to Oakwood would be being responsible for introducing the Education Department to the latest technology to further advance the students' educational experience.

SOURCES

Funeral program for Frances Bliss. Huntsville, Alabama: Royal Funeral Home, 2016.

Staff. "Focus on Education: Training Students to Train Others to Serve." *Oakwood College Magazine*, October 2002. Oakwood University Archives.

NOTES

1. Jeannette Rogers Dulan, interview by author, Huntsville, Alabama, February 14, 2018.
2. Staff, "Focus on Education: Training Students to Train Others to Serve," *Oakwood College Magazine*, October 2002, Oakwood University Archives.
3. Funeral program for Frances Bliss (Huntsville, Alabama: Royal Funeral Home, 2016).

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