

A publication for alumnae and current students of the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership

Dr. Brenda L. Bryant, editor  
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## VWIL Celebrates 15 Years

AS THE VIRGINIA WOMEN'S INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP APPROACHES ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY, former cadets were invited to share their fondest memories of life in the corps. A framed copy of the call for responses is on display in the VWIL office and will commemorate the anniversary along with the corps' annual inaugural parade in March 2010. It must have been a meaningful request, because dozens of VWIL alumnae responded — so many, in fact, that we needed to select excerpts from the notes to fit into this issue of *The Leader*! Their notes are both touching and humorous, and they are filled with life lessons that we pass along to family, friends, and the Mary Baldwin community.

**VWIL by the Numbers**  
Founded: **1995**  
Graduates: **230**  
Commissioned officers: **97**

### Erinn Singman '02

**CAPTAIN, U.S. ARMY**

During the past couple of years I completed Marine Expeditionary School at Quantico and have commanded the

289th Military Police Company, Fourth Battalion, Third U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). My Change of Command occurred October 2 and my next assignment is as an aide-de-camp for Maj. Gen. [Richard J.] Rowe in Iraq.

My best VWIL memories include the excitement of Meet Your Cadre, particularly when I was sergeant major. I was so nervous to give the Meet Your Cadre speech I must have rehearsed it



Capt. Erinn Singman '02 (third from right) at the presidential inauguration with her colleagues and Vice President Joe Biden and his wife (center). "Working the inauguration was the most exciting and complex mission I've completed since I've been in the Army," Singman said.

## Mini-Memories *The VWIL program thanks everyone*

*who sent in memories and anniversary wishes and who continues to keep in touch. The following excerpts illustrate the unique and powerful (and, sometimes, quirky) experience that is VWIL.*



### Kim Primerano '99

My favorite VWIL memory is when Dr. [Brenda] Bryant spent the night

[in Tullidge] to keep us from being expelled.

### Abigail Withnell Davis '07

One of the things that I remember fondly from VWIL is that, although I'm a night owl by nature and don't like getting up early, I was up before dawn for formation and I would admire the sunrise while going to breakfast.

### Karla Stewart '05

My latest and best VWIL memory is the birth of Ashanti Isadora Hines — Aliah's daughter. I was privileged to be there for her birth, and I could not begin to express how amazing it was. I am very proud of Aliah. I have met so many wonderful people through VWIL, and although some live far away or may not be able to keep in touch, there are others that are close lifelong friends.

*See more Mini-Memories on pages 2-5.*

at least 20 times. I was equally nervous when first commanding a pass in review during a parade as First Captain. It makes me laugh to think back to my sister nULLs and how they asked how I was going to announce pass and review. I actually had to audition for them and get their approval, which was funny, but something I was truly thankful for at the same time.

I have great memories of running all over Staunton, spirit missions, being a calic, "girls night," and fantastic road trips. VWIL made me stronger and taught me lessons that I didn't fully appreciate until after I graduated from the program. I wouldn't trade the experience for the world.

### Jenni Powell '02

VWIL: so many memories. There are memories of the big events (Cadre Week, Meet Your Calic, Rites of Passage, Change of Command, commissioning ceremonies, graduations, spirit missions), and small events (hanging out with sister nULLs, struggling through calculus ... twice), good times (Apple Day and Junior Dads), and bad times (being called to Tullidge and being on confinement). I think the memories of the exceptional young women I have met through the corps are what stand out most,

because without them there would be no memories.

I am so proud to be a VWIL alum. Over the past few years, I have really felt that there is a sense of a VWIL community. I first noticed it at the memorial ceremony held at Mary Baldwin for my classmate Sarah Small. I was impressed by the number

of cadets who attended and participated in the ceremony although they didn't know Sarah personally. I still remember cadets standing in the pouring rain outside First Presbyterian Church, waiting for everyone to exit. I was also impressed by the number of cadets and alumnae who traveled to her funeral at Arlington National



Powell and Elsass' 2002 classmate 1st Lt. Sarah Small (above) died while on assignment in Egypt in 2005. Her classmates and the college continue to honor her memory.

(l-r) Jenni Powell '02 and Jessica Pasini Elsass '02 got together at Badlands National Park in South Dakota, near where Elsass and husband, Jake, lived. Powell says: "I am very excited that they are moving to Ohio soon ... they'll be within driving distance!"

### Mini-Memories, *continued*

#### Liz Hackett '03

VWIL offered me a sense of purpose, which still drives me in my professional choices. In my work with the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations, I help 58 organ procurement organizations tackle ethical, multicultural, legislative, regulatory, public education, and public relations issues.

#### Jennifer Atkins Lanz '99

The learning experience that has influenced my life and sums up four years of VWIL occurred during Wilderness. The first feelings were pride and confidence as we got support from the

community and the media. The next stage was independence and self-confidence as I was able to accomplish the things that I did. When I began to participate in a more supportive role, I learned that others needed me as much as I needed them. This led me to a career as an educator.



#### Christian Romeo Davis '09

My most memorable prank had to be unleashing my class spirit on one of the painted dogs [Da and Da] outside Deming during the week before Junior Dads.

We met early in the morning. I brought paint and googly eyes. It was so cold that my fingers were numb as I sprayed the dog purple. Then we painted different parts of the college on it — PEG, ADP, VWIL, RCW and CLASS OF 2009. We finished it off by gluing on the eyes and giving her eyelashes. I heard people talking about the dog for the rest of the week.

#### Virtré Sterling '06

I reflect on the VWIL nULL days and laugh at how we carried everything in one hand, walked down the straight stairs only and never on the grass, awoke super early, marched to

Cemetery. Sarah was special to us because she was our sister nULL, but on those days I realized that we are all special to each other, no matter what class we are from, where we live, or what we chose as a career.

As VWIL moves into the future, I am very excited to see what is to come! I live in Winchester and teach fifth grade at Apple Pie Ridge Elementary. I just started my eighth year of teaching.

## Nicole Littlejohn '04

**CAPTAIN, U.S. AIR FORCE**

I miss everything about VWIL. VWIL taught me to be the best leader I can be. Leadership is a big part of my life: I am a mother, soon-to-be wife, daugh-



VWIL training helps Nicole Littlejohn '04 juggle career and family responsibilities.

ter, sister, and a captain in the U.S. Air Force working for a contracting company that serves the FBI. We used to have to get up for physical training at "o'dark thirty." I still do it every day, just with more to do. Life is hectic, crazy, fun, filled with drama, and more, but VWIL taught me to juggle many things at one time and that's definitely what I am doing.

## Ballu Bangura Lee '04

I credit VWIL with the fact that I became U.S. citizen on April 15, 2009. I joined the Army during my sophomore year. I have found it very interesting that a lot of my VWIL experiences keep coming up in my jobs and even in my personal life. I am able to handle several tasks at a time now and I feel like VWIL has a lot to do with being able to juggle my responsibilities as a mom, friend, employee, and a student in a master of education program.

## Mallory Showalter '08

All is well here at Fort Lewis, WA. I'm working as a medic in Madigan Army Medical Center and debating about earning my RN. I would have to say my best VWIL memory was Club Windsuit '05, which happened the night before the St. Patrick's Day Parade.

The New York Maritime Academy



Mallory Showalter '08 (left) and another cadet bundle up on the bus ride to New York City for the St. Patrick's Day Parade.

hosted a social for the corps, so we hopped off the bus expecting pizza and some light socialization. However, the Maritime Academy had planned a mixer — cadets were dressed in their clubbing best — while the VWIL corps showed up in our windsuits. Nonetheless, a VWIL girl knows how to have a good time.

## Shannon Edwards '05

The memory that sticks out most for me was in my nULL year. The nULL line had exhausted me. I had a class in [Carpenter] Academic and 10 minutes later I had a class on the other side of campus in the basement of Kable. So I would carry my VWIL bag in my left hand until I got to the crosswalk at Sky I and then hide it in the bushes. I

## Mini-Memories, *continued*

formation, forgot the ma'ams names in our platoon, and ran around Staunton.

### Sherri McCracken Ballenger '99

My favorite memory followed the long hike to our campsite our first day of Wilderness. I may not often talk to or see the women I connected with on that trip, but the bonds of friendship made through VWIL and the memories we made are what remind me of the power we all possess to be more than we ever thought we could be. I am a stronger, wiser, and a better person for experiencing four years in the VWIL corps.

### Lexi Miller Eastman '03

The Leadership Challenge Program, team building exercises, and physical training were especially effective in boosting my confidence in all areas. The summer after my freshman year I took a job as a lifeguard and promised myself that I won't doubt my capabilities anymore.



### Elizabeth Williams Cramer '07

The memory that stands out the most to me now from my time in VWIL has to be Breakout. Never was I so proud of what I could do than I was that night. I

still remember just waiting to climb up those curvy stairs (although the idea of not being able to climb stairs or go on grass now seems hysterical). I don't believe I could have made a better college decision.

### Melinda (Mindy) Cousins '00

For Halloween, Charlynda and I dressed in black and painted our faces with black shoe polish. She asked me if I was sure that black shoe polish was a good form of camouflage face paint. With our faces practically burning off, we went out and scared the life out of so many people! The red marks on our cheeks the next day were priceless.

would pick it up when I came back through on the way to my next class.

One day, my bag was not there. All that I could think was that a ma'am had seen me do this and had taken the bag so I would have to earn it back. My roommate gave me a message that Gen. Bissell wanted to speak with me. My heart dropped. I began to think of what I could have possibly done to have the commandant want to talk to me.

I went in haste to his door and knocked twice just like I had been taught during Cadre Week. I announced myself and was given permission to enter. In awe I sat just like I had been instructed. He asked how classes were going and how I was enjoying my time. I answered in a positive way. He then showed me my VWIL bag and asked if I was missing it — a groundskeeper had found it in the bushes. I explained that I was hiding my bag there to lighten my load. He laughed but told me to hang on to my bag.

It was the first of many times I was in Gen. Bissell's office for doing something ridiculous that other cadets would have never have thought of doing.

### Kristen Cardillo '04

VWIL was a major changing point in my life. Before becoming a part of it, I



Kristin Cardillo '04 cuddles with her puppy, Captain Jack, while pursuing a B.S. in computer animation at Full Sail University.

was so painfully shy that sometimes just saying a simple hello to someone new was too much for me.

The most memorable part the program was during Wilderness. It didn't start off so great for me. The first hike with my group was hard, trying to keep up with everyone else, trying not to let anyone else see how much I was struggling. My dad had tried to help me train prior to coming to school, and although I made some progress, I was still woefully out of shape. Luckily, one of my sister nULLs was struggling too, so I wasn't alone.

When I reached the camp grounds, it was already dark and the others had cooked and eaten. Our stove didn't work, so the counselors

told us to find other nULLs to share their food. I was sure I wasn't going to eat dinner that night. I just couldn't approach a complete stranger to ask for a favor like that. I barely had to glance around before one of my sister nULLs invited me to eat with her. There have been very few times in my life that I was as thankful as I was at that moment.

Maybe that doesn't seem like much to some, but to me it was everything. There were many things in VWIL that pushed me to the limit, but I survived it, and I'm a stronger person.

### Jennifer Kukla '04

CAPTAIN, MARINE CORPS

VWIL prepared me extremely well for my experience thus far in the Marine



Jennifer Kukla '04 has had many international adventures as a flight navigator in the U.S. Marine Corps.

### Mini-Memories, *continued*



#### Terri LeAnn Shupe Kanode '04

Through VWIL I was able to learn what my boundaries were and that I could be pushed

past those and be successful. Being a VWIL alumna and seeing other former cadets achieving greatness in this world is what inspires me to keep pushing my boundaries and to be successful.

#### Stephanie Long '05

I often think back with a sense of nostalgia about Wilderness, Cadre Week,

spirit missions, and the camaraderie that my class and the corps as a whole shared. VWIL has reinforced my sense of integrity and has instilled in me a strong sense of professionalism and honor.

#### Ashley Kizler '05

I remember nULL year, after all the other students had left Woodson dorm, when we staged a giant slip n' slide in the hallway with all of our leftover detergent and dish soap. We lined the halls with mattresses and used one as a launching pad. All of us donned our swim gear complete with goggles to keep the soap out of our eyes. It was hysterical.

#### Jasmine E. Padua '07

I will never forget when I was a senior marching with a sister nULL and she said, "you've changed, Jasmine. You never took charge during the marches before." I realized I had changed and learned that being myself is the best way to obtain my goals. I am proud to say that I am an English teacher in Japan.

#### Lois Nicole Lanier '04

While I have many favorite memories, one of the most special was during my senior year (2004) at my nULLs' Rites of Passage ceremony. I remember with great clarity and pride when they walked up the curvy stairs for

Corps and I am thankful every day for the leadership skills and confidence that the VWIL Corps instilled in me. The time management skills I honed in VWIL have proven to help me excel in my work in the Marine Corps — from graduating top in my flight school class to just starting the Weapons and Tactics Instructor program in Yuma, AZ. This is a seven-week course, after which I will deploy to meet my squadron in Bagram, Afghanistan.

### Tina Moore '08

I can't believe the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership is already celebrating its 15th year! I recall the 10th anniversary, when there were many friends, family members, and honored guests in attendance. I am curious to know if the infamous additions to the 10th anniversary parade — ducks — will attend this anniversary parade.

I will never forget that moment: With the entire corps standing at parade rest and listening to the speaker at the podium, a family of three ducks began to “troop the line” as though giving us all a surprise inspection! An unforgettable experience, and yet, looking back on my time in VWIL, I realize that it was all just that: a truly unforgettable



A row of ducks made a special appearance during the VWIL corps' 10th anniversary parade in March 2004. It remains one of 2008 alumna Tina Moore's favorite VWIL memories.

experience. And so, I wish good luck to all the cadets of VWIL as they march forward and forge their own unforgettable experiences.

### Elizabeth Kiser '01

During my nULL year, participation in the Leadership Challenge Program (LCP) often involved off-campus activities. Upon completion of the activities, nULLs would ride back to

campus in vans driven by the upper-class students. Dusk was falling, and the majority of us, tired out from a long day of classes and VWIL activities, would doze off, usually on the shoulder of a sister nULL. As I looked around at my sisters, I remember feeling the incredible sense of well-being and camaraderie that pervaded the quiet atmosphere in the van. We had all worked together toward

### Mini-Memories, *continued*

the first time. When each one approached, I smiled, shook their hands and introduced myself with my first name.



#### Felicia Jefferson Goodrich '02

The memories that I recall most fondly were the spirit missions we did our

nULL year. I remember how absolutely serious they were. We'd spend days planning and organizing. Everyone had a job ... then, we'd execute!

#### Patrice Bly '05

My fondest VWIL memory is cadre week of my nULL year. We had been working out at the PAC and Katie McEwin lost her canteen. To get it back, the class had to crouch low, waddle, and flap our arms while chanting, “Quack, quack, quack! We want our canteen back!”

#### Aubrey Wies '09

The circumstances of 10 days of room confinement were less than ideal, but the time I spent with my sister nULLs was priceless. At the end — as we sang “Lean on Me” at the top of our lungs — I

realized that I had found people who would be my friends for life.



#### Crystal Newcombe Nosal '00

One of our biggest jokes was wondering what college kids who were not in

VWIL did with their free time, because we did a lot and still found time to have fun. I am glad I had the opportunity to spend my time with my VWIL sisters, and I thank them and our mentors for helping me become the person (mom, wife, cop, and citizen) that I am today.

a challenge and realized how individuals, working together, could accomplish a goal much larger than any one of us could alone.

Another memory: As we turned a corner at the start of the Lexington Christmas Parade, out of the darkness, I heard women cheering for us, “You make us proud!” It was at this moment that VWIL’s importance struck me. Not only does the program benefit the young women who are lucky enough to make up its corps of cadets, it also inspires other women, including those who may not have had the opportunities we have today. That was one of the moments that made being a VWIL cadet worthwhile.

### Samantha Petro '05

There are so many fond memories of VWIL, it was hard to choose just one. Early in my nULL year, we were on a run. I was out of shape and found myself falling farther and farther behind the group as we ran up a hill. I couldn’t catch up and I felt like quitting, walking the rest of the way, hoping that I wouldn’t get lost on the way back. That was when the group turned around and headed back towards me. I expected the worst, but got the opposite. They encouraged me, told me not to quit and to keep on going forward. It was the first time anyone outside my family had offered me that kind of support. I pushed harder and continued forward.

I’m not sure if my sister nULLs realized how much those simple words impacted my life that day, but after this, I hope they know how thankful I am. Those words are with me even eight years later as I continue to drive forward to accomplish my dreams. I now develop computer games, something I never dreamed I could do.

### Erin Knocke Collins '01

As funny as it sounds, some of my best memories from VWIL were some of the most awkward and uncomfortable moments at the time, particularly promotion boards. The dread welled up in me in the days preceding; trying to find a question — *any* question — when prompted, “Do you have any questions for the board?” Thinking quickly on my feet was not a skill I was born with.

Now I can laugh at those moments. I have silently thanked VWIL on many occasions in my adult years for those skills when I called on them in interviews, parent-teacher conferences, and during our adoption of a beautiful baby boy. Even if I couldn’t find the right words, I was able to speak from my heart.

### Charlynda Kelly Ellison '00

Before we had a VWIL band, I played the national anthem solo for the parades. Once, as my time to play was approaching, my mind went totally blank. I couldn’t remember the second verse (it’s the same as the first). I was really nervous and hoped that it would come back to me as I played. It didn’t. I skipped straight from “twilight’s last gleaming” to “and the rockets’ red glare” and finished way before I should have. When the parade was over, one of the

colonels came up to me and joked that he didn’t like standing at attention for that long anyway!

### Allyson Hatfield '99

I recently found my copy of the VWIL *Record* in a box of old papers. As I flipped through, I smiled remembering tidbits from that first day, the first week, the first year.

The first sentence reads: “The Virginia Women’s Institute for Leadership builds character and competence.” It goes on to outline the leadership, determination, training, and teamwork skills we would acquire.

It has been 14 years since my classmates and I received that *Record* and read those words. All of us have gone on to do many wonderful things. Although VWIL and MBC are distant memories, the experiences we had in the four years we were there molded us into the strong, successful women we are today.

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# THE LEADER



*The Leader* celebrates the accomplishments and interests of alumnae of the Virginia Women’s Institute for Leadership. The goals of the program

— which remains the only all-female program of its kind in the world — include preparation for leadership and service, major components of the mission of Mary Baldwin College. *The Leader* is published by VWIL to highlight the lives of its alumnae and foster a continuing relationship with each other and the college. Readers are encouraged to submit ideas and contribute to *The Leader*.

**For more information and to contribute please contact:**  
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