

## INVENTOR



It is a mysterious word: Inventor. As a child, all I wanted to do was to be an inventor. I never told anyone because I was afraid that just the utterance of the word would jinx my ability to create an idea. I tried to practice the mysterious art of invention at my own tiny work bench in my Father's shop. Not getting very far, I turned to my Mother's kitchen to concoct recipes "from scratch." I was famous (in my family at least) for my cherry pies which I only made once a year when the cherry trees were ripe. Then there was my quince jam when the quince trees were ripe. I would invent songs on my long walks through the woods with my Irish setters. I decided at 7 years of age that I wanted to get a Ph.D. Again, I never told anyone because I was sure that would jinx the idea. I was always considered the poorest student in the class and I did not know why. I was always put in the chair at the back of the class as far away from the teacher as possible. I do remember something that happened in 5<sup>th</sup> grade though. I asked my best friend, Christie, who sat in the chair next to me if she could read anything that was on the blackboard. She said she could not and I shrugged my shoulders thinking that was normal. Then, a few weeks later she was moved to the front row wearing her new pair of glasses while I was moved even further away from the teacher to a chair that just happened to be in front of the class bookcase. I read every book on that bookcase and on the bookcase behind my seat when I was graduated to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Things changed dramatically, though, near the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade with a class vision test. I could not read anything on the chart except the big **E** at the top. Although I could not see the faces of my teachers at the time, I knew that they were upset. Soon I also had a pair of glasses and I was moved to the front of the class – actually right next to my friend, Christie.

In high school, Christie took shop which I now wish I had taken too. Instead, I concentrated on public speaking, getting parts in school plays, trying as hard as I could to learn French and Latin, and writing poems in the style of Emily Dickenson. I knew everything about Emily Dickenson and you should be able to see her style in my writing here. I came up with my own idea for a biology project as a sophomore: I raised honey bees. I got the idea because my next door neighbor had bee hives and he advised me on how to get started. I still occasionally thought about the Ph.D. idea but not very often anymore because I had never met a female inventor or anybody with a Ph.D. – until I took a night school college chemistry class from Dr. Joyce Corey! It is one of those moments burned in my memory. I remember exactly where I was sitting in a huge auditorium and I remember thinking “If she can get a Ph.D. in Chemistry – maybe I could too.” It turned out that I had a knack for lab work. It was easy for me because the skills for cooking and chemistry lab work are so similar: (1) develop a plan; (2) organize equipment and supplies; (3) multitask keeping track of several things going on at the same time; (4) document the results; (5) improve on the recipe the next time around.