

Oldest living Newcomb alumna looks back

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Mary Lou Lanier Fife (pictured with the bowling team in the back row, second from left) was active in basketball, handball, synchronized swimming and other sports. (Photos from Mary Lou Lanier Fife and the Newcomb Archives.)

“Amos ‘n’ Andy” was blowing up the radio airwaves. The sounds of swing music filled dance halls. Herbert Hoover was president.

The year was 1930 and Mary Lou Lanier Fife was a young lady graduating from Newcomb College. Now 105 years old, the Louisiana native is the oldest living [Newcomb College alumna](#).

She recorded an oral history last year at 104 years old, telling her daughter — 1968 Newcomb College graduate Judy Mead — how she got to Newcomb and how she made a name for herself on the basketball court more than 80 years ago.

“I got a good education at Newcomb,” Fife said in the recorded history.

She was encouraged to apply to the college by her high school principal, Helen Cox, herself a 1919 graduate of Newcomb College.

“She was really what you call a No. 1 principal. Nobody ever told her how to do anything. She knew it all herself,” Fife said.

And so when Cox told Fife to consider Newcomb, she didn’t even consider another school.

“She said it was the best school she could recommend,” Fife said. “When Miss Helen made a recommendation, that was it. You never would think of going any other place.”

Fife made the most of her education and made a name for herself in women’s sports, including bowling, synchronized swimming and handball — her favorite.

But it was her skills on the basketball court that earned her a mention in a local newspaper article and also the nickname “Lanky Lanier.”

“I was good,” Fife said. “And everybody said I was good so I got to thinking in myself I must be good.”

After graduating from Newcomb College with a bachelor’s degree in physics, Fife taught physics and geometry as well as other math courses. She now lives in Dallas.

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Mary Lou Lanier Fife, class of 1930, on her basketball skills