

# Wearing Different Hats

Esther Burroughs  
Home Mission Board

David was just two. It was "Ha-wa-ween time" as he pronounced it. Good mother that I attempted to be, I had made proper preparation. You must know that meant the purchase of two dime store costumes and two trick or treat bags. The hour of "spooking" had arrived. Melody, our six year old daughter, and David were dressed and ready. They began running down the hallway, in and out of doors screaming at each other, half in fear, half in delight. Suddenly my heart heard the magic cry, "Mommie, Mommie." I stepped into the hallway and saw that David's mask was turned sideways on his face. As I bent down to fix it, he continued, "Mommie, Mommie, where is I?"

As I reflect on my journey as a campus minister, I realize I have heard college students ask the same question, perhaps using better grammar. Where am I? Also on this journey I have been gifted by students who have helped me in the mask game. You see, as I have peeked behind their mask, or helped them take off their masks, I've often seen my own reflection.

One of the important masks of my life is that of being Mrs. Bob Burroughs, the wife. It has been a great support system for me that "Mr. B," as the students call him, and I work well together. Mr. B has always been my best friend so I have a good sounding board for ideas and frustrations. It has been an advantage to me that we had worked together on a church staff.

Before I came to Samford University I had no experience in campus ministry. Having served in the local church, I was acquainted with youth and music ministers and not campus ministers. In a sense I found myself "on my own" as I began a new job, new program and new relationships. This began a growth experience for me. I am a self starter, but move slowly to build a foundation rather than make a flashy beginning.

One area of my work that took several years to do was establish work relationships with fellow campus ministers. As the "new kid on the block" I had two hurdles to jump, first being female and second being campus minister on a Baptist university campus. As we began to cooperate with the Alabama Baptist BSU program by attending conferences and staff meetings we grew in our understanding of each other. Today, I count these ministers as cherished friends.

A trip to New York City with a mission team was life changing for me as well as the team. To take a group of Southern Baptist students from the deep south to New York City to work and return home safely was a satisfying experience. This mission group was a strong support family for me, helping me meet some needs in my life away from or unattached to Bob and his work.

In my first four years as a campus minister, as the program grew, I grew in self-esteem and independence, a new experience for me because I had always been very dependent on Bob. This felt good but I handled it poorly. Because the New York Team became my support group I acted like I didn't need to support Bob and his support group, "The Hear and Now Singers." This came as a shock to Bob since I had always been his number one fan.

I will always cherish the friend who helped me look behind my mask to discover that being Esther didn't mean destroying Mrs. Bob Burroughs, and being Mrs. Bob Burroughs shouldn't keep Esther from becoming. I had to learn to share success. In earlier years Bob was the one who traveled and came home to share in such a way that made me feel a part of his experience. I began to learn to share in a way to include, not exclude, my family. A real freedom to be creative, open and have personal integrity began to grow between us as we worked together and apart. It has been exciting to be the wife of a gifted man and be able to join our abilities in student work.

Looking back I realize Bob and I have done some role changing, or mask changing, the past few years. Bob has always done some cooking. Now he does almost all the cooking. It's been fantastic to come home in the evening and find the meal on the table ready to eat.

When I travel to speak, Bob takes over doing the cleaning and cooking and caring for the plants (another hobby). This has definitely been a plus for me, a campus minister/mother.

I have also learned that there really never is a "dust inspection" or "clean house" award and that's made everyone happier. We have all learned to take on more responsibility, cover for, and support each other. . . isn't that what home is all about?

The role of professional person and mother hasn't always been easy. Learning to switch masks with ease helped me in adapting to both worlds. Working as a campus minister has made me a better mother. Being a mother has influenced my leadership style as a campus minister.

I have been more understanding with my own teenagers simply from watching students grow, rebel, and change. This has made me more sensitive to my own teenagers and realize the normal stages they encounter. It has also helped me realize that just being a college student doesn't mean they are mature. I've learned a little more patience with my children. Watching college students "grow-up" that freshman year gives me great hope for my own kids.

I have learned that in the process of "becoming" each individual must "tear away" and "try it" even away from God and parents. Somehow parents don't think their children will have to pull away. Walking with students has helped prepare me to walk along side of, or I should say away from, my own, as they "become."

My college students often call me "Mom B" or "Mrs. B." In many ways, I've been a parent away from home to students as they drift in and out of my home.

When I came to Samford in 1971, I asked the Vespers chairperson if I could speak at vespers to help the students get acquainted with me. I was told, "Well, we've never asked a woman before." I did speak, thus began my career as a campus minister.

My childhood home gave me a strong sense of doing my best, my very best. As a teenager I answered God's call in my life to work with young people. I have not felt that God called men exclusively to do certain things and women to do certain other things. I have always thought that God's call had to do with the individual's ability. God calls, asks for your gift and desires that it be given away. He does not ask that I be someone else's gift. God calls and has promised in I Thes. 5:23b, "Faithful is He who calls you and He also will bring it about."

I have not done my work thinking that because I was female I could or could not do certain things. Rather, I have concentrated on being Esther, expressing myself through my gifts and giving my gifts away.

I have not encountered many things in my role as a campus minister that I could not deal with because I am female. I handle some things well, others less well, because of my limitations, not because of my gender.

I have definitely felt God's leadership in my life to do and become all that God intended. I do not give much thought to being a female campus minister — only to being a competent campus minister, growing and surviving the life of a minister. I have enjoyed

almost every moment of my role as wife, mother, and female campus minister.