

## **Remembering Juliet**

**My aunt, Juliet Ballard Hawks, who died last spring at the age of 102 had an indomitable spirit. My cousin, Judith Hathaway, who took over many of Juliet's personal errands and affairs in Juliet's later years would say the adjective "pigheaded" was more like it. We can all agree that Juliet was a character in personality and even appearance. She would not give up a personally held conviction or wearing a hat.**

**Juliet's spirited ways manifested themselves in girlhood. She followed her two older sisters, Bettie and Virginia, to Westhampton College. Both Bettie and Virginia graduated at the very top of their class. Juliet, on the other hand, often heard from her professors "Miss Ballard, you are skating on thin ice..." Juliet left Westhampton before graduating to marry Otis Jefferson Hawks, a hometown sweetheart who owned a hardware store. After the death of Juliet's father and my grandfather, and, as a result of having a mentally and physically handicapped daughter, Joan, Juliet and Otis moved in with Juliet's mother, my grandmother, whom we grandchildren called Mam, and everybody else called Miss Effie.**

**My fondest memories of childhood were visits to the home on this property which was called Floral Point. I have**

vivid recollections of the house itself and primarily of the wonderful midday dinners eaten there, but since it is the property that remains, let me take you to my memories of the outside which is now the domain of Hoffler Creek. In front of the house was a huge magnolia tree that I believe may still be in these woods. Along the front yard ran a hedgerow where wild asparagus grew. Beyond the hedgerow were crop fields separating Floral Point's property from the houses of River Shore. To the side of the house was a lane down to the waters of Hampton Roads where the Monitor and Merrimac fought. Along the lane grew hugely prolific pecan trees. You were not allowed to sit more than five minutes at Floral Point without shelling pecans. Along the lane also was a scuppernong grape arbor full of happily buzzing drunken bees. To the other side of the house was a pasture where resided an old broken down cow with one horn. When I was little I didn't know how scared you needed to be of cows so I kept a polite distance as did she. There was also a screen corncrib full of furiously chewing field mice with beady eyes and little round ears and a barn with old law books strewn around. These had belonged to Mam's brother, Howard, who ended up being a U.S. Customs official in Hawaii (pronounced Huh WHY ya in those days). Way in back of the barn was a family cemetery. I took the same approach to the cemetery as I did to the cow. A polite distance seemed the safest bet.

**To the back of the house was a spring house in which one moldy, petrified ham hung during my entire childhood. Next to that was a garage which housed a succession of black Oldsmobiles. These were driven daily into Churchland for the mail and to visit the cemetery of the Churchland Baptist Church and then on to Spear's Restaurant for a coke. Attached to the garage was a greenhouse already abandoned by my childhood. Mam loved camellias, and many varieties were planted here.**

**A fence ran along the back of the spring house, garage and greenhouse and through the gate in it was the crown jewel of the Floral Point outdoor experience, the chicken yard. On the right side of yard was the chicken coop. Juliet always said how hard it was to make the chickens go in there. I didn't blame them a bit. It was pitch dark and smelly with two long wooden rods for roosting and everything was totally covered in chicken poop. The hen house was more attractive with its straw nests, except to the hens who preferred to lay their eggs in the bulrushes by the creek. To be asked to hunt out said eggs was not a favorite assignment, but I would console myself that I might encounter a snake and raise the alarm at which point Juliet would sail out of the kitchen door with a huge shot gun and blow the thing to bits. There was zero tolerance for snakes of any kind at Floral Point, and I would bet the ones that may be here now are still a little nervous. In the middle of**

**the chicken yard there was a hand pump. I learned how to prime the pump with water from the creek, and I would pump gallons of water all over the dusty ground just for the sheer exhilaration that a person, a child even, could do such a thing as draw water up from underneath the earth. The creek was one of the sides of the chicken yard. It had a muddy, reedy edge, and I can attest from my childhood observations that marsh land is the richest in life forms of any habitat. I loved the leggy water birds, but my favorite creatures were a species of fiddler crab. They had one big claw on one side of their bodies and a miniature of that on the other side. If you disturbed them they would rush at you brandishing that big claw. Brave little souls, I always thought.**

**My grandmother and Otis died one right after another, and, as it was impractical for Juliet and Joan to go on living at Floral Point, they moved to an apartment in Churchland. So, about 1970 the house was torn down and the property sold to a developer. The developer went bankrupt, and the property passed on to VDOT who wanted it for borrow pit material. After they had gotten all of the fill they wanted from it, VDOT was persuaded to transfer title to the land to The City of Portsmouth. A foundation for a wildlife preserve here was formed and Hoffler Creek Wildlife Preserve is the rest of the story.**

**Randi asked me to talk to you today about Juliet, and I guess I have really talked more about my and our family's attachment to this land, but that is Juliet's story too. She was all about family and place. Happily, Juliet had three loves, family and place and the stock market. Juliet may have skated on thin ice academically, but she was far from dumb. She put all of her fairly modest inheritance from her mother's estate including from the sale of this property into the stock market and watched over it her entire lifetime like the Hawks she was. As a result, at her death, Juliet was able to give a sizeable gift to the Hoffler Creek Wildlife Foundation, and so Lake Ballard has been named for our family. Floral Point was Juliet's home and the enchanted time and place of my childhood that I will never forget. How perfect that this special place will go on to educate and enchant others, especially other lucky children.**

**Julie MacKinlay**