

Hairnets, High Noon and Hansen-Willis Hall

by Connie Willis



Editor's note: Connie (Trimmer) Willis (BA-67) is an internationally known science fiction writer, the author of "Doomsday Book," "To Say Nothing of the Dog," "Bellwether," and "Lincoln's Dreams,"

among other novels and short story collections. Willis has won six Nebula Awards (awarded by the Science Fiction

Writers of America) and seven Hugo Awards (awarded by the World Science Fiction Convention Association), the most awards ever won by a science fiction author.

Willis's writing covers a wide range, from comedy to tragedy, and a variety of subjects. She has written about the Black Death in the Middle Ages, Victorian England, fads, the Civil War, aliens, Hollywood, the London Blitz, women's lib, computers, and primates. In between science fiction conventions and deadlines for her new novel about near-death experiences called "Working Cape Race," she wrote the following for Spectrum.

If a time traveler had come back from the year 2000 to see me when I was a sophomore at UNC (then Colorado State College) in 1967 and told me what was going to happen to me this year, I never would have believed him (including the time-travel part). I probably wouldn't have believed any of the things he'd tell me about what was going to happen in my life—that I was going to become a science fiction writer, that I was going to get to meet all my childhood heroes—Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury and Arthur C. Clarke, that I would fulfill my lifelong dream and win the Nebula and the Hugo Award.

I certainly wouldn't have believed that I would have a dorm named after me. Heck, I wouldn't even have believed him when he told me that the junior I had a terrible crush on (this really cute guy named Courtney Willis) would eventually stop dating all my friends and roommates and finally notice me.

Some of it I still find hard to believe, espe-

cially the part about having a dorm named after me. Well, half a dorm, actually: Hansen-Willis Hall in the central campus area. I share

honors with Mildred Hansen, former publisher of *The Greeley Tribune*, a wonderful benefactor of UNC and a marvelous person. I'm thrilled to have my name linked with hers, but still a little stunned by the whole thing. I can think of dozens of people who should have a

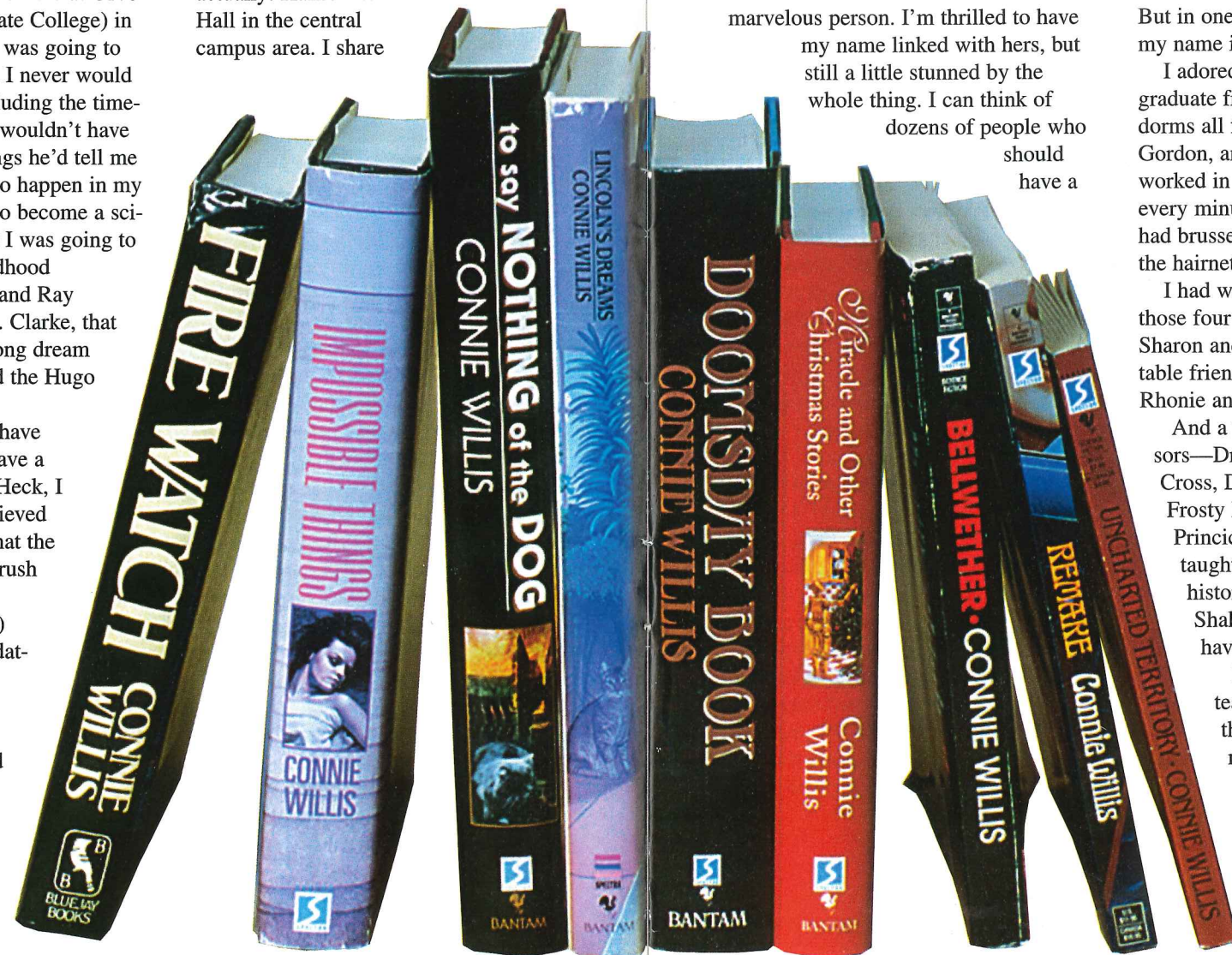
dorm named after them instead of me. Some of the wonderful professors I had while I was a student here, for instance. But in one way it's oddly fitting that my name is on a dorm at UNC.

I adored UNC when I was an undergraduate from 1963-1967. I lived in the dorms all four years (Weibking, Decker, Gordon, and Sabin by turns) and worked in Tobey-Kendel, and I loved every minute of it, even the nights we had brussels sprouts for dinner. (Except the hairnets. I hated the hairnets.)

I had wonderful roommates during those four years—Pam and Tannis and Sharon and Billie Ann. And unforgettable friends—Penny and Matsu and Rhonie and Chuck and Nadine.

And a whole slew of terrific professors—Dr. Freeman, Dr. Gates, Dr. Cross, Dr. Thomas, Cynthia and Frosty Frease, and especially Dr. Princic (Mr. Princic then) who taught me to love literature and history and science and Shakespeare. They all should have dorms named after them.

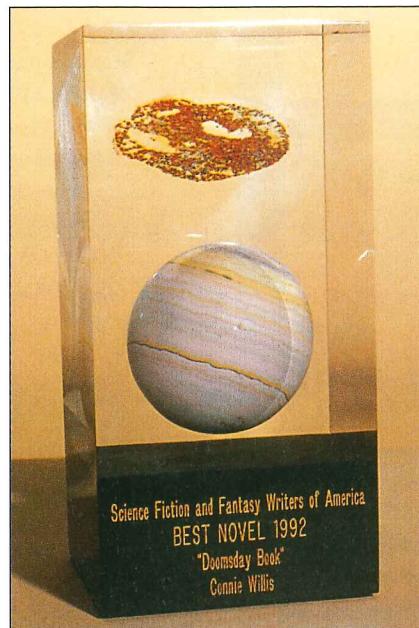
But a college isn't just the teachers or the students—it's the place, too, and many of my memories are of the campus itself.



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Photography by John Blake



The Nebula Award

Like Decker Hall, where I leaned out the second-story window of my room to flirt with Courtney Willis and lost a contact somewhere on the porch roof in the process. It may still be there, for all I know, a permanent part of UNC.

And Cranford, that crumbling red-brick building where I had biology with Dr. Thomas. It had a vine growing all the way down the center of the stairwell from the third floor to the basement. That vine may well have been the only thing holding Cranford, which was pretty dilapidated, together. Dr. Thomas had a penchant for pitching erasers at students who fell asleep in his class, and every time one missed and hit the wall, I was always afraid the whole building would come down. Eventually it did, I guess.

I remember Frasier, which was such a maze that when I had to pick up my paycheck from the payroll office and then get to Music Appreciation 204, I had to go back outside, around the building, and in another door. There were stories of students who hadn't done that and

"UNC has been a part of me all these years, that I am now

who were still wandering among the practice rooms, lost forever, like poor Charlie on the MTA.

And the student union (now Gray Hall) and its shady lawns, where I studied for my Shakespeare final and read "Antigone" and put up posters for Spurs.

The student union was also where I met Courtney Willis and delivered the deathless line, "I have the spoons." My roommate and I were having coffee at the Bru Inn. Pam grabbed cups, Sharon grabbed the cream and sugar, and I picked up spoons and turned blithely around to what I thought was my suitemate and said, "I have the spoons." Courtney said dryly, "How nice for you," and four years later, asked me out. And the rest, as they say, is history.

I have fond memories of Kepner, where I spent a lot of time staring out the window during Survey of Medieval Literature, and of Gunter, where I attended basketball games and a Bud and Travis concert and nearly flunked ballroom dancing. And of the library (now Carter Hall), with its

claustrophobic stacks and round reading room. I checked out Richardson's "Clarissa" from there, and T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets," and all the science fiction I could find.

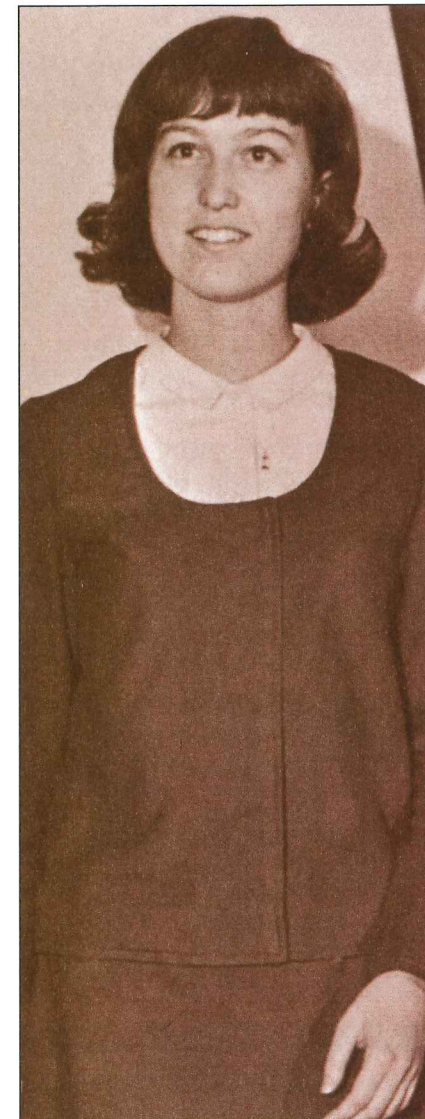
I spent a lot of my time in Tobey-Kendel, working as a waitress and then as a hostess. Dinner was served family style then, with big bowls of mystery meat and mashed potatoes on the tables, and with music. Putting on the records was one of my jobs. We only had about four LPs, and to this day I can't hear "The Theme from High Noon" or "Ruby, Out of the Mist You Came" without being instantly transported back to the high-ceilinged dining room and seeing the girls in their pink and blue pinafores and "Boss" Lawrenson in a starched shirtwaist with a triangle of handkerchief in her breast pocket, overseeing everything. Boss was my favorite person at UNC, and, I think, the favorite of every girl who ever worked at Tobey-Kendel. She definitely deserves to have a dorm named after her, and does.

It all worked its way into me—Dr. Thomas's erasers and e.e. cummings and the elm trees along Tenth Avenue known affectionately as Bird Alley, mystery meat and midnight trips to

so much years, it's fitting part of it."

Harry's for tacos and cherry 7-Ups, "Much Ado about Nothing" and dorm mothers and "The Theme from A Summer Place," Victorian Lit and sneaking a roommate into the dorm after hours (I won't say which one) and Santeramo's, running across the campus in the rain, and lying on my bed in the dorm studying humanities with the snow falling outside, and opening the high windows in Tobey-Kendel spring quarter and leaning out to look at the cut-grass and lilacscented evening—sights and smells and voices and windows, memories and people and places and books, all bound together by Cranford's vine.

It became a permanent part of me, a part that I carried to Connecticut and Arizona and Wisconsin and then back to Colorado. All sorts of things happened to me that I would have laughed at if a time traveler had told me. I became a science fiction writer and wrote stories about chaos theory and Hollywood and Victorian England and robots and church choirs, and even a story about CSC called "Chance." I never did learn to believe in time travel (a conse-



Connie Trimmer, president of Spurs Honor Society, 1966

quence of marrying a physics teacher who actually knows how these things work), but I did write a novel about time travel called "Doomsday Book" that won the Nebula Award and the Hugo Award.

I became friends with Harlan Ellison, did a comedy routine with Robert Silverberg, wrote a eulogy for Isaac Asimov. I had books published in Japan and Israel and Sweden and

Brazil and traveled to England and Spain and Finland, and this spring to Australia.

And moved back to Greeley, which felt like coming home. We bought a house with big windows you can lean out of and started in on a whole new set of memories: doing research at the big old library tables in Michener, running up to Ross Hall to meet Courtney for lunch, writing over at the student union (next to the window) and at Margie's Java Joint.

I said before that in one way it makes sense that I have a dorm named after me. It does. UNC has been so much a part of me all these years, it's fitting that I am now a part of it.

And if I'd gotten to choose, I couldn't have picked a better dorm than Hansen-Willis Hall. It not only has big windows, but balconies inside and out for students to lean over and flirt with cute juniors. It doesn't have a vine growing the length of its three floors, but you can't have everything, and the students I've met who live there are terrific—I hope their dorm and UNC will hold as many wonderful memories for them as they have for me. ■