Mary Ellen Smyth
continued from page 5

wish, had gone straight for a Ph.D.," she says. "I'm not sure I would have had a career as a professor, but having that degree opens so many doors." Still, the time at Penn State "opened my eyes to the big world out there. I finally got to New York, which was my dream because I loved theater. I came close to trying to become an actress there. But that was a hard thing for a girl from Wyoming to do — I was a product of my times."

She realized that without a doctorate she wasn't going to get much further in academia. "The students were getting younger and younger, and I was there and single," she says. "I thought I was ready to move on." She landed a job overseas as a director of entertainment at a military base, but before she left, she learned that her mother had developed leukemia, so she came back to Laramie and scrambled to get a teaching job at UW. Her former boyfriend, Pat Smyth, had finished law school by that time; they got back together and decided to get married. After her mother died, the couple moved to Chicago, where he worked as an orthopedic surgeon, she as a high school teacher of English and speech.

When the Smyths adopted twin boys, she stopped teaching and did not return, which suited her fine. But after she spent a few years at home with the boys, her husband decided to start his own practice. "He pressed me into service to run the place," she says. "I didn't know a thing, but boy, did I learn fast." His practice was one of the biggest solo practices in the country, and Smyth started out on a new career as a medical practice manager.

This was their life until 1980, when one of her sons died suddenly. Three years later, her husband died. "The '80s were a blur to me," Smyth says. "My son and I were left pretty much clinging to each other. But you learn to cope. The sun comes up and life goes on. It was an incredible learning experience - about myself and about people, their shortcomings and their capacity for love and compassion. There's to be some good that comes out of something like that."

She sold her husband's practice and decided to start her own business. Her experience had taught her enough that she felt able to offer herself as a consultant for other doctors, calling her business The Smyth Organization. She found plenty of takers and enjoyed being her own boss, but she has since let that part of her business go. The health care world started to become very uncertain when Hillary Clinton was working on a new health care plan and planning for physicians' futures became difficult.

At the same time, Smyth began to do more of what she had been doing so much of as a volunteer: offering her services as a speaker and a trainer. Now Smyth is excited about embarking on a speaking career. "One of my passions now is women and philanthropy," she says. "How can they be good philanthropists? That's what I really want to talk about."

In her training work, she helps boards of all kinds to organize and devise strategic plans. Smyth calls this her third career, and part of it grew out of her involvement with the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the largest organization of its kind in the world.

She had joined AAUW to meet some people in her community when she and her husband first moved to Chicago. She felt strongly about its mission of fostering education for women and girls; she got more and more involved and the AAUW became one of her great loves. She served as a national president from 2001-2005.

Smyth has also worked over the years with the UW Alumni Association, hosting gatherings in Chicago, even recruiting student athletes with her husband. She started with the UW Foundation in its fundraising efforts, serving on the last national capital campaign committee, which raised money to build the Centennial Complex and the Art Museum.

Underlying all her endeavors has been a strong sense of community service, but the paths her life has taken have been something of a surprise to her. "It is a little crazy and you wonder how it all comes together," she says. "But I was blessed with a good education provided by UW, and the vision to continue learning, exploring, growing. I think that's the better part of what education provides — the sense that four years is not the end but just the beginning. Once you learn how to learn, the world becomes a much better place for you." She can't help but think of her friend from Thermopolis.

"For many of us from small towns across the country, and certainly from Wyoming, those education years marked a beginning of wonderful things to come." Dr. Seuss said it best — "Oh, the places you'll go."

John Clay

John Clay was born May 19, 1923, in Canton, Mo. His father died when he was 4 years old, and his mother moved him and his three brothers to the grandparents' ranch west of Laramie. The ranch is now a part of the University stock farm.

Clay's mother, affectionately known as Wana, taught in country schools during the depression years and later became Albany County superintendent of schools.

During the summer months, Clay worked on a ranch in the Centennial Valley, where he was paid one dollar a day with board and room. Later, when he was in high school, he worked summers and after school at the First National Bank for $65 a month.

After graduating from Laramie High School, he continued at the bank while attending the University of Wyoming part time. In 1943, he enlisted in the US Army Air Corps and became a pilot. "I was assigned to a training base in California where I met a lovely lady, Enzer," he says. "We were married before I went overseas."

Clay flew 68 missions over France Germany and Belgium in a P47 fighter bomber. His job was to give air support to the 1st and 9th Armies Armored Divisions by dive bombing and strafing the enemy ahead of them. One of their toughest times was during the Battle of the Bulge. Clay was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for an especially harrowing mission, where he blew up a munitions plant while under heavy ground fire. "I am blessed to have come home in one piece," Clay says.

After the war, he returned to the University of Wyoming, studying accounting and business. He had only nine hours remaining to graduate, Clay was encouraged to take a position with Wyoming Farm Bureau Insurance Company, which was just getting started. He became the company CEO and eventually executive secretary of the Wyoming Farm Bureau. In 1961, Clay took a position of vice president of the First National Bank of Kemmerer. He left to become a stockbroker in Cheyenne with the company now known as RKB Dain Rauscher. He has been with the same company, in the same town, since 1963. He held several positions with the company and today is a senior vice president.

Clay is a strong believer in giving back to his community and alma mater. He has served as a member of the University of Wyoming Foundation Board for 12 years — as chairman and now as an ex officio board member. He served as vice chairman to Chairman Senator Al Simpson on the UW Foundation's Distinction Campaign, which just finished raising over $200 million in five years from private donations. He served on the Y Cross ranch board and is now an emeritus board member. The Y Cross ranch was given to continued on page 7
John Clay continued from page 6

UW and CSU by the Davis Foundation nine years ago. It comprises 50,000 acres and 700 head of cows. He has served as a board member of the American Heritage Center and is on the College of Agriculture advisory board.

Clay was the inaugural chairman of the UW Presidents Society for $1000+ donors. President Dubois presented him with "The President's Best Friend" award. In 2004, he was awarded the UW Honorary Doctorate of Laws degree, and last spring the UW College of Business gave him the Distinguished Service Award.

He and his wife are partners in philanthropy and have along history of establishing endowments in the colleges of Business, A&S and Agriculture, as well as the library and the honors program. They were leadership donors in the Rochelle Athletic Center and the UW Art Museum.

Clay has served in leadership roles at the Cathedral Home, the Wyoming Episcopal Church Foundation and for his church in Cheyenne. He served on the boards and as chairman of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, the United Way and Cheyenne Rotary Club. In 1997, the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce named him "Person of the Year."

The Clays were instrumental in establishing the Laramie County Community College and the LCCC Foundation; Clay has served there as chairman and a board member. The couple established an endowment to bring noted artists to LCCC for the Clay Summer Watercolor workshops. They gave to renovate the college art gallery and helped establish the music cultural series and the business training center. Esther, a water colorist, headed the capital campaign to build the Cheyenne Civic Center. The Clays support many community activities. "We are partners in philanthropy and believe strongly in education and the arts," Clay says.

The Clays have been married for 62 years and have two daughters, Carroll and Diane, and four grandchildren.

The College of Arts and Sciences
Congratulations
2006 University of Wyoming Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni
Douglas W. Owsley
B.S. Zoology 1973
Mary Ellen Smyth
M.A. Theatre 1960
2006 University of Wyoming Alumni Association Medallion Service Award recipient
John C. Clay

Join A&S for a reception in their honor Friday, October 13, 2006, 10:30 a.m. Wyoming Union Ballroom
For more information, call the A&S Development Office at 307.766.2755, or send e-mail to asdev@uwyo.edu