After 41 Years, “Flo in Low” Remains An Integral Part of Columbia

(Continued from Page 1)

best minds has been one of the most rewarding parts of the job for Grant, who says that count-
less holiday parties and other functions have always been the best place to strike up new
friendships. With her warm per-
sonality and desire to offer help to whoever she can, the effort has never been difficult for her.

Grant is well known for the brownies she often bakes for co-
workers and every spring she hands out candies to those par-
ticipating in graduation, some-
time she “just likes to do.”

Though not in her job descrip-
tion, she makes sure the flags flying on either side of Low Library are cleaned and even hems them herself when they need hemming. “Just like Betsy Ross,” she says, laughing.

Since starting her career in 1961, “Flo in Low” has worked for the University’s controller, the director of residence halls and dining rooms, the vice-pres-
ident for finance and deputy to the president for governmental affairs, and the general counsel. Her favorite role at Columbia, however, has been working as an administrator for the security department, a job she has had since 1978.

Grant has played an important role in contributing to investiga-
tions by proving herself a reli-
able source for tracking down former employees and profes-
sors; few are better at knowing where to begin searches of that
test. She can call on 41 years of accumulated acquaintances to help her piece together informa-
tion for sergeants needing to reach families and friends of those deceased or in need of help.

“I say to the guys, ‘Call me anytime—morning, noon or night—I don’t care. I love help-
ing out because I’m good at it,’” she says.

George Smartt, assistant vice president for security, says that Grant’s “total dedication to, and knowledge of the University” is surpassed by few. He remembers calling and waking her up in the middle of the night on many occasions to ask for help in a security emergency, always to find her ready and willing to do whatever she could. Her assist-
ance, he notes, is especially valuable in crisis situations.

The kind of willingness (Grant shows) to assist people often tends to wash off on oth-
ers,” says Smartt.

Indeed, Grant enjoys the action of working in security. “I love the excitement,” she admits.

She found herself right in the middle of it in 1991 when author Salman Rushdie came to Colum-
bia for his first public appearance in the United States after having death threats issued against him by Islamic militants. He was a guest at the School of Journal-
ism’s celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. Grant helped keep things in order, remaining the point per-
son in the security office while the officers were out securing Rushdie’s safety. His arrival, she said, was planned and executed with the greatest of precautions. The situation was intensified by immediate set at half-mast. Grant says she had never seen so many students, professors and administrators all walking around in such a depressed daze.

She was in her office in Liv-
ingston Hall during the riots of 1969, watched the kids climb-
ning up the walls,” she says of the mobs of students who took over Hamilton Hall, the presi-
dent’s office in Low Library. She found reporters crowded in her office because she came to work in the morning. People were marching and screaming on College Walk and Broadway. The chaos required staying late into the night for several days to assist with administrative strat-
egy sessions.

was she scared by the scene on campus that night? “No, because I love excitement,” she says again.

Grant believes that protest period had monumental effects on the students she sees today. “Since the 60s, everything’s changed,” she says, noting the various styles in clothing and music she’s seen come and go. She has seen the youth cul-
ture in Morning Side Heights metamorphose from hippy, punk, hard rock, alternative and now to rap and hip-hop. The most obvious change she notes has been the clothing. When Grant came to Columbia, many students still attended classes in suits and ties, something rarely seen today. She admits that formal wear in the classroom would seem strange in these times and that regardless of what clothes the students wear or what music they listen to, “they’re all good kids.”

“Flo in Low” has observed a multitude of other changes at Columbia since her arrival. In the early 1960s, she notes, the University had no air conditioning, no sprinkler and no comput-
ers.

Several buildings had differ-
ent names and there was a beau-
tiful street of stately brown-
stones, called “Dean’s Row,” on 117th Street, which is now occu-
pied by East Campus. There were also fewer restaurants and few good stores in the neighbor-
hood and absolutely no girls allowed in any of the dorms.

The all-male residences posed a challenge for Grant who used to work in one of the ground level offices in Livingston Hall, a dorm now called Wallach.

When being upstairs to a storage office, on a floor that also accommodated students, Grant says she would always shout, “Woman in the hall! Woman in the hall!” to announce her pres-
ence. “Otherwise,” she notes, “they might have had their doors open, or who knows what.”

Grant has no retirement plans yet, but someday she would like to volunteer for advocacy work and is intent on continuing her service as a notary public, which she’s done for more than two decades. A job she started because it helped her to “meet so many people,” she says. She has notarized documents for “all the big names” at Columbia, includ-
ing George Stephanopoulos.

For now, “Flo in Low” is comfortable staying right where she is. “If I love it here,” she says, “I feel so at home.” After 41 years, she has made Columbia a home for many others as well.

“‘The kind of willingness to assist people [Grant shows] often tends to wash off on others.”

– George Smartt, assistant vice president for security

the fact that other than some
security department staff, nobody, especially the press, knew the controversial writer would be attending the event. A helicopter even brought Rushdie directly to campus by way of using South Field as a landing strip.

Of course, Grant has also
watched the campus community react to tragedy. She remembers listening to the radio and hearing that President John F. Kennedy had been killed in Dallas. Class-
est were cancelled, offices closed down early and the flags were

Basking In A Fountain of Knowledge

Eric Drummond, CC’05, finds a comfortable seat in one of Low Plaza’s fountains as she immers-
ses herself in Dante’s “Inferno” on an uncommonly warm 53-degree February afternoon. The fountains are not filled with water until early April.

A photograph by Jason Bellaver

RECORD

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People

Lee C. Bollinger, Law’71, Columbia’s president elect, recently received the Colum-
bia Law School Association’s Medal for Excellence at the 53rd Annual Winter Lun-
cheon, held at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers Astoria. David J. Stern, com-
missioner of the National Basketball Association and chairman of the Columbia University Board of Trustees, introduced Bollinger. Bollinger was named Columbia’s nineteenth presid-
ent last October and will take office this summer. He is a distinguished scholar and has published numerous books, articles, and essays in scholarly journals on free speech and First Amendment issues and other subjects.

The Medal for Excellence is awarded to Columbia faculty members whose profes-
sional accomplishments reflect the character, intellect, and social and professional responsibility that the University believes are basic to School natures. Previous winners include U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Professor Louis Henkin, Fed-
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Columbia psychology pro-
fessor Donald C. Hood has been elected to the Corpora-
tion of Brown University to serve on the school’s Board of Fellows through June 2012. Hood, who received an M.Sc. and Ph.D. from Brown in 1970, has been a faculty member at Columbia since 1969. His research is focused on the biological basis of vision. His more than 150 publications focus on the basic neuroscience of vision and diseases of the retina and optic nerve.

The Journal News noted that Social Work student Matthew Marquart, 26, is the first Asian American president elected to the New York Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW). In a statement, the group said she is the youngest woman to serve and one of the few women of color to fill this position. Marquart, who promised to boost membership and activist participation, is working on her masters at the School of Social Work.

School of the Arts gradu-
ate Sherry Wilser’s (Theatre Arts ’99) one act play “Bake-
Off” was selected for the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival’s recent previous actors credits are “Lobor Day” (1999 Humana Festival co-winner of the 1998 Heideman Award) and “Joan of Arkansas” (1999 Act Showcase, Atlantic Acting Society). Both plays have since been published in numerous anti-gest. 

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