
Life Legacy Award

Ora Mae Kirk, English Teacher, 1978–92

Ora Mae Kirk came to GCA in 1978 to teach English. She retired in 1992 having left a legacy. She came with many years of experience that included public school teaching and serving at Malamulo College in Malawi, Africa.



It became quickly apparent to her students that she was not going to be “an easy A”. Or for that matter “an easy B”. Her expectations were high for all her students, but she also made it clear that she loved and believed in every one of them, whether they were great writers or not.

In the classroom, she often perched on a high stool so that she could see over the lectern and make sure that people in the back row were not napping. Her petite stature also seemed to impact the footwear Mrs. Kirk adopted because she had a penchant for heels. When not in heels, her daily walks around Faculty Circle were brisk and energetic. If you joined her, you could count on breathing hard while simultaneously discussing the virtues of Shakespeare’s later works or listening to a recitation of 19th-century poetry.

She was known for giving direct, and sometimes blunt, responses. With strong-willed students, these exchanges sometimes got pretty heated. And then the bell would ring, and she would hug them on the way out the door.

Her sense of humor was always present. In fact, it was more like a sense of joy in all things and all people. If you were fortunate enough to be a part of her Honors English class, you got to see it even better. You were expected to arrive in the evening with your work done and ready to discuss it with some maturity. However, much of the evening would be spent in laughter over blonde brownies.

The ultimate legacy of Mrs. Kirk must be measured in the lives of those she touched during her time at GCA. She was equally available and emotionally present for every student regardless of ability. She always looked at the potential we all had and made every effort to help us achieve it. She left a legacy of unconditionally loving every student.

Scott Begley, '84