This past spring saw the release of the motion picture “42,” which recounts the story of Jackie Robinson, the first person to break the color barrier in Major League Baseball in the United States in 1947.

The film centers on Robinson and Branch Rickey, who at that time was president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey broke with tradition by signing Robinson, an African American, to a contract in 1945. Robinson played for the Montreal Royals, a farm team for Brooklyn, in 1946 before making his debut with the Dodgers on April 15, 1947.

The film covers the drama that preceded Robinson’s actual appearance in a Dodgers’ uniform, but it doesn’t mention a little-known story which occurred prior to the events depicted on-screen. This is where the Whitman College and Northwest Archives comes in.

The William Fifield Papers document the activities of a family with connections to Whitman College. Fifield ’37 was a noted author of both fiction and nonfiction. He won an O. Henry short-story prize in 1942, and he published “In Search of Genius,” a collection of interviews with people he considered geniuses, including Picasso, Cocteau, Miró, Dalí and Robert Graves. He also published “The Devil’s Marchio-ness,” a novel based on the life of a notorious 17th-century poisoner, the Marquise de Brinvilliers; “The Sign of Taurus,” a novel set in Mexico about a Jewish refugee; “Modigliani,” a biography with interviews with members of the artist’s family. He also recorded conversations with such luminaries as Marcel Marceau and famed French artist Jean Cocteau, and wrote extensively for publication in magazines such as Harper’s. He also wrote about 130 radio and television plays.

Fifield’s first wife was actress Mercedes McCambridge, who won an Oscar in 1950 for best supporting actress in “All the King’s Men,” and was nominated for another Academy Award for “Giant” in 1956. He died in 1987.

His father, L. Wendell Fifield, was a pastor in the Congregational Church from 1927 to 1955, serving at numerous churches including one in Brooklyn. It was there he met Rickey, and their association led Rev. Fifield’s wife, June H. Fifield, to recount in 1966 her recollection of an event which occurred in Rev. Fifield’s office and is reprinted here, beginning on page 3.

It is a fascinating sidebar to an event which had a major impact on the history of social justice and race relations in this country.
Letters to the Editor

Jim and I enjoyed the most recent 50Plus News, but I do want to post a minor correction. We will excuse Carolyn Drennan Bishop '53 for being only a freshman at the time, but the “Red Mop” campaign in the spring of 1950 was for Shirley Wilson '52 (deceased February 2003) for secretary (and she won). She was a DELTA GAMMA and did indeed have red hair. The “funny red wigs” were actually mops dyed red. “Rag Mop” was a pop song of that time, which was the inspiration for the campaign.

Sue Moitoret Flexer '53

Memorial Building adorned with campaign signs.

Introducing Jennifer Northam '91
Jennifer comes to Alumni Relations from Downtown Walla Walla Foundation, where she managed events and public relations. Married to Jeff '88, the men’s tennis coach, she has never strayed too far from the Whitman fold.
News of the passing of Branch Rickey, a treasured friend of my late husband, Rev. Dr. L. Wendell Fifield, came on the day that I sat writing an anecdote about a game we saw with him at Ebbets Field for one of the chapters of a book based on my husband’s life and works.

It was a strange, mythical experience to me to have been so surrounded by the spirit of Mr. Rickey that I should be writing about him at that time. It seemed, somehow, a sign that the time had come to tell a story I had long hesitated to write because it seemed privileged material. Dr. Fifield had shared the feeling that Jackie Robinson and the rest of the world should know the story but that it should not be told in Rickey’s lifetime without his permission.

I had always felt that Mr. Rickey would be the first to approve, for his own life was so bound up in this young man, his affection so deep and his expectations so high. His affection, shared by his wife and “Auntie,” the sister in her 80s who never missed a game and kept an impeccable box score, was evidenced to us many times. Auntie gave us her own witness once when we dined at the Rickeys’ home. She said, “When we have the team over for refreshments, Jackie is the one who offers to lend a hand, and he unfailingly says a word of appreciation when he leaves. He has the best manners of the bunch!”

I write this in the spirit of a tribute and a plea: A tribute to Branch Rickey and L. Wendell Fifield – two men, strong of character, pastor and parishioner, whose rapport and a quick mutual outpouring of meaningful forces drew them together inextricably as friends; a plea to Jackie Robinson to realize what went into the launching of his career – that someone cared enough to grope for wisdom beyond himself, to call upon God’s guidance – and that the man who did this was, in common erroneous parlance, “white.”

One day, as my husband sat working at his desk in the study of the church house, his secretary buzzed to say, “Mr. Rickey is here and asks to come in.” No appointment was ever necessary for someone with an urgent problem, and my husband’s “Certainly, show him in,” carried with it more than casual interest. He was always warmed by the presence of this friend whose busy schedule of travel and activity allowed him little time for communication on a social level. In high hopes of a long chat, Dr. Fifield rose to greet him at the door.

“Sit down, Wendell,” said Mr. Rickey. “Don’t let me interrupt, I can’t talk with you. Keep right on with your work. I just want to BE here. Do you mind?”

Without another word, Branch Rickey began to pace the floor. He paced, and he paused, he paced and he paused. Occasionally he gazed out the window at the sooty gloom of Brooklyn Heights, slightly relieved by the church garden struggling for beauty below. Pace, pause, pace, pause; turn, gaze, pace, pause.

Once in a while my husband glanced up from his work, but he spoke no word. He knew that, whatever brought Mr. Rickey to his presence was an extremely important and personal matter, and he gave him the privacy of his struggle. Mr. Rickey stood with eyes closed and seemed to draw his great frame up to a new height. Then he’d sag again and pace. As the pauses grew longer, my husband once caught a kind of glow about Mr. Rickey as he stood in silence. Then, back to the pacing and pausing – and silence.

Forty-five minutes of this can be a long, long walk. I believe, on the average, allowing for pauses, about three miles. It proved to be a mighty significant three-mile hike, in the equally significant atmosphere of a minister’s study. At the end of the time, Branch Rickey, his face aglow under those famous outthrust eyebrows, bent
over my husband’s desk, his eyes piercing, and cried: “I've got it!” He banged his huge fist on the desk, rattling everything from fountain pen to intercom. “I've got it!” he banged again, elated, transported.

It was too much for Dr. Fifield. He’d waited long enough to know what was going on in his own home base. “Got what, Branch? How much longer before I find out what you’re up to – pacing around here and banging on my furniture and keeping the whole thing to yourself? Come on, out with it!”

Branch sank, exhausted, into the nearest chair, fortunately big and overstuffed, as he was himself in those days of generous good health and vigor. “Wendell,” he said, “I've decided to sign Jackie Robinson!”

Moisture glistened in Mr. Rickey's eyes. He blew an emphatic blast of his famous big nose, while my husband awaited the rest of the story.

It scarcely need be pointed out to anyone who reads that, in 1945, Jackie Robinson was the first African-American major league baseball player to be signed, a step in professional athletics that had worldwide repercussions and opened the way to careers for African Americans in virtually every phase of the sports world hitherto denied.

“Wendell,” Branch said, when he regained his composure, “this was a decision so complex, so far-reaching, fraught with so many pitfalls but filled with so much good, if it was right, that I just had to work it out in this room with you. I had to talk to God about it and be sure what He wanted me to do. I hope you don’t mind.”

Remembering this, I understand better a remark a young friend made recently when I chided myself at still missing my husband so terribly 18 months after his passing. He said, “What can you expect of yourself? It was a great experience for anyone just to be in the same room with him. Of course you’ll miss him – forever.”

Mr. Rickey straightened his bow tie and reached for his old battered hat. “Bless you, Wendell,” he said, and was off. He went from the study that day out into the fray where he loved to do battle, armed with a strength from his God, whom he trusted. He revolutionized athletic practices and attitudes in this country and beyond during that 45-minute with God in the warmth of my husband’s presence in the environment of the church study. He had humbled himself and sought to communicate with a Presence and wisdom and a power beyond his own, for he knew that, alone, he was insufficient to the task of knowing right from wrong, as we all are.

He went from that encounter in confidence and in faith. In the certainty of God’s guidance, he launched a young man, Jackie Robinson, who rose to great heights and has taken thousands of his brothers with him, earning the respect and adulation of all races.

I hope Jackie will see his fellow man in a new light, knowing this story. May he ever remember Branch Rickey’s soul searching in the presence of the God of us all, on his own “Days of Decision.”

The Sally Rodgers Award for Lifelong Achievement

Each alumni award is handcrafted by Jeanne McMenemy ’71, a Walla Walla artist. Pictured here is a photo of the 2013 Sally Rodgers Award honoring Gerald Fry ’54, whose career in television and radio broadcasting came to the attention of the Alumni Association Board of Directors. Gerald and Paul Pugh ’51 were both selected as award recipients at the Board’s fall meeting.
May 21, 1953

Whitman Goes Back to Marc
With Contests, Skits, Dance

Old “Marc” was given a royal commemoration in the best Whitty style last Thursday as the college turned out en masse to honor its namesake in a day of fun and entertainment for students and faculty alike.

It was evident right from the beginning that it was going to be no ordinary day. As classes took up, there appeared such a variety of unusual wearing apparel that it might be debated as to whether even Marcus and Narcissa would have recognized the fashions of their day. Nevertheless, things started off with a bang as a few spirited individuals unleashed the fury of their “six-guns” – cap pistols and water guns – on unsuspecting victims.

April 25, 1963

New Dorm Planned; Building to Begin in Fall

Tentative construction date for the new men’s dormitory was set at the April 12 meeting of the Board of Overseers. Plans call for construction to begin this coming fall with the building ready for occupancy by the beginning of the 1964 school year. The board also set the cost of the structure exclusive of landscaping, parking and movable furniture at $750,000. Costs of the latter three items are contingent upon bids which will be submitted to the board for approval.

According to Dr. Louis B. Perry, President of Whitman College, special attention is being paid to (1) acoustics, (2) inclusion of adequate study space, (3) space for recreational needs and (4) landscaping of the site.

Certain experiments in construction of walls of the new science building will provide information on acoustics for the proposed dorm. Combination lounge-study areas will be scattered throughout the building, while an attractive patio area between the new dorm and Lyman Hall is also planned. The majority of the rooms will be two-man suites, although some one-man rooms will be included.

“The new dormitory will be a ‘living-learning’ unit conducive to informal learning,” said Dr. Perry. “We have put special emphasis on the planning of the lounge-study areas which may be used for seminars, committee meetings, and the like. The building is designed to be more than a bedroom, rather, with a view toward a 24 hour existence.”

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* Assumes 25% income tax rate and $25,000 cash funding.

If you have any questions about gift annuities or other options to support Whitman College, please contact the Office of Gift Planning or visit the gift planning website: www.whitman.edu/gp

Jamie Kennedy ’96 • (509) 527-5989 • kennedjj@whitman.edu
Ruth and Bob Fluno

By Junius Rochester ’57

Bob Fluno and I first met during my sophomore year at Whitman College. It was 1952, just after I declared my major (political science). I walked into a classroom on the second floor of the old Memorial Building and shook hands with a tall, mustachioed gentleman wearing dark slacks and a reddish wool sport coat. We were both green as grass: This was my first class in political science, and it was Bob’s maiden class at Whitman. He told me I was his first student. (Several years later, during my senior year, nine of us comprised a memorable R.Y. Fluno class in Constitutional Law. We met around a large table squeezed into the Memorial clocktower.)

Over the next few years, I became close to Bob, his sport coat and his wife Ruth. Their home on Valencia Street was a meeting place for political science majors. Ruth served dishes of radishes, carrot sticks and pickles, while Bob led his guests in discussions about current events and class assignments.

Occasionally, I watched Ruth paint. I recall one of her works-in-progress depicted wine bottles growing perpendicularly out of a wall. Her colors were surprising and original. I attended Walla Walla shows of her work, which were exciting local events. Her playful images appeared to challenge and sometimes bewilder traditional Walla Walla audiences. Eventually, she displayed her paintings and drawings in a Bellevue, Wash., gallery. She told me how pleased she was to also be selling pieces through the trendy Gump’s store in San Francisco, Calif. (During that time, I wandered into Gump’s and saw her work on display.)

After Whitman (Class of 1957), I moved to Washington, D.C., where I attended graduate school at American University and worked on the staff of U.S. Senator Warren G. “Maggie” Magnuson from Washington state. At that time, I knew that the Flunos had moved to Bangladesh, East Pakistan. Bob had been awarded a Fulbright to establish a new department at the local university. Magnuson staffers told me that the Flunos were in D.C., but I was also told that their circumstances were unpleasant and difficult.

I called Ruth to see if there was anything I could do. Either then or later she recounted their overseas ordeal: e.g., they lived over a noisy and odoriferous animal pen; few “students,” other than one or two elderly men sitting cross-legged on the floor, were enticed to attend Bob’s classes; when Bob scheduled his first test, the students went on strike. Apparently, Bob, a World War II combat veteran, left East Pakistan on an emergency flight and was subsequently hospitalized due to what were likely PTSD-related conditions exacerbated by the experience.

After this ordeal Bob returned to Whitman where he continued his eminent career as chair of the Political Science Department. Ruth resumed her art and writing interests. The Pakistan adventure disappeared into the mists, except for Ruth’s record of that adventure in a series of wonderful paintings and drawings.

I kept in touch, seeing them at Whitman gatherings in Seattle. On one of these occasions, in 1974, I asked Ruth to choose a couple of paintings or drawings for me to buy from an exhibition of her work in Bellevue. I was later told by the gallery director that Ruth studied her works for several minutes and then pointed at two watercolors, saying, “These are for Junius.” I could not get to the gallery for about
three weeks. During that interim, Ruth took her life in Walla Walla.

When I arrived at the Bellevue, Wash., art gallery and identified myself, the director broke into tears. She pointed out “my” two Fluno watercolor paintings. Today, those precious works, plus another earlier (1955) large, hilarious black and white drawing called “The Banquet,” occupy conspicuous places in my Seattle living room. One of the watercolors is a comical depiction of cruise passengers standing on the ship's deck tightly bundled up in smothering life jackets. It is signed by Ruth as follows: “S/n Raffaello, 16 Maggio, 1970.” This light-hearted scene was inspired by the famous collision at sea of the ships M.S. Stockholm and the Italian liner Andrea Doria on July 25, 1956, off Nantucket Island, Mass. The Flunos were aboard the Andrea Doria and participated in the evacuation of over 1,000 passengers before the Andrea Doria sank the next day.

After Ruth died, Bob married Marsella, retired, moved to California, and kept writing political science treatises. A few years before he died, his former students, including myself, turned out for a luncheon in his honor at Seattle’s Washington Athletic Club. Several of us offered comments about our memories of the Flunos. I had the audacity to recall Bob’s rapid gestures and movements on a classroom riser, usually when excitedly writing on the blackboard. In fact, he would occasionally fall off the riser, recovering his balance before hitting the deck. Although he smiled at my remarks, I should have been more sensitive. I had heard that his nervous demeanor likely stemmed from experiences in combat.

Today, I hope Bob will look down and generously ignore my ill-mannered teasing about his classroom antics and instead remember other facets of our relationship: my friendship with both Flunos; my participation in the Whitman Political Union, Bob’s pet project; my campus leadership of the Democrats during mock political conventions (we always lost in those days, but had more fun than our opponents); and when I asked him to review my first book (“Roots & Branches: The Religious Heritage of Washington State”).

Ruth’s amusing art is everywhere, but her personality remains especially vivid in the memories of those who knew her. Her accomplishments remind me of another singular, independent woman from the Pacific Northwest: Emily Carr of Victoria, British Columbia. I occasionally give history talks on small cruise ships, and along Alaska’s Inside Passage, I often tell guests about the intense colors and heavy lines in Emily’s paintings. Both Ruth and Emily managed to combine fine art with poetry and prose. They also understood difficult times, which seemed to feed their deep need to create art in many forms.

While in Walla Walla several years ago, I wandered into the old Carnegie Art Center. Ruth had taught art classes in that beautiful building, and at one time it had been the city’s central library. When I dropped by, the Center’s basement held a rental gallery. While looking around I listened to an attendant show a customer one of Ruth’s large abstract paintings. When the attendant asked if she remembered Fluno’s work, the customer said she had never heard of Ruth Fluno. I quickly left, before allowing my emotions to surface.
The Whitman Class of 1944 turns 90

By Helen Hurley Barron ’44

In a recent Whitman Magazine (March 2013) six freshman, Class of 2016, are featured and will be followed as they go through their years at Whitman. Hopefully, they, too, will find some of the magic that we remember having found as we celebrate the almost 75 years since our graduation.

As Class Representative, in my letter to members of the Class of 1944, I asked each one to share how their Whitman experiences had shaped their lives. There are only 22 members of that wartime class still living. What had they remembered? Was it the lifetime friends they made? Was it a professor that inspired them? Was it a new experience they had never had before? Was it data they learned that made them change their thinking? Or was it special information that helped them in their chosen careers?

Their clear recollections and thoughtful responses evoke a very different world of 75 years ago and yet echo in the experiences of college students today. Whitman, then as now, opens students up to a broader world, new ways of thinking and lifelong friendships. Let me share with you some of my classmates’ responses, which triggered my own memories of other classmates who are now gone.

Many letters mentioned a special professor. Among these was Prof. John Ackley, a popular debate coach, who encouraged a number of men to go into law. Don McMurchie ’44 was one of these. Going to Stanford Law School after Whitman, he was an attorney in Sacramento, Calif., for some 40 years. His son is also a lawyer, and his granddaughter is in law school at USC.

Dan Henderson ’44 (deceased March 2001) was also a member of Prof. Ackley’s debate team. Later, Dan was instrumental in starting the Asian Law School at the University of Washington. I was also on the debate team and must add my voice to those who remember Prof. Ackley fondly as a mentor. The importance of public speaking has helped me greatly in my career.

Another favorite was Prof. Ivar Highborg ’32, who was teaching both physics and math, as most of the science teachers – including the famed Prof. Carroll Zimmerman – had government jobs in support of the war effort. Among those who recall Prof. Highborg is Michael May ’44, the youngest living member of our class at a mere 87. May went into a scientific career himself, and is now a retired professor of economic/engineering systems at Stanford University. He writes how he particularly liked Prof. Highborg, although Michael, who is French, recalls being teased about his accent. The science department has always been one of Whitman’s strengths and my good friend Norma Larsen Sanford ’44, recently deceased, always credited Prof. Rempel with inspiring her career as a biologist working on penicillin research.

Many classmates wrote about favorite social events. Helen Haigh Mills ’44 reminded me of the “get-acquainted tea parties” freshman year. The Dean of Women herself served tea and cakes to the girls and their dates. I remember we were decked out in hats and gloves. Mary Lou Hansell Gayman ’44 recalls dancing in the Great Hall, lengthy discussions outside the library to solve the problems of the world, bike rides around campus ending with gigantic ice cream cones from the nearby creamery, and the cabin “cokes.” More than one friend recalled Lakum Duckum, which in those days was more like a mud hole than the gorgeous pond it is today. Helen reported that her husband Robert “Charlie” Mills ’44 (deceased January 1999) delighted in regaling their grandchildren with tales of the freshman-sophomore tugs of war over Lakum Duckum. Of course, only boys joined in the battle, as we girls looked on at the mud-centered madness and cheered.

More than social life changed at Whitman on Dec. 7, 1941. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. entry into World War II changed everything. Mary Lou was one of several who reminded me to be sure to mention our trauma during this tumultuous time, “how our country was turned upside-down, and in our young freshman
lives at Whitman College, it was devastating.” Within weeks, students were leaving campus, many joining the military and shipping off to distant facilities to see what their next steps would be. Fraternity houses were half empty, and special military training units were being set up at Lyman House, the boys’ dormitory. Female upper-classmen were moved into the empty Phi Delt fraternity house to use as dorms.

Even as our Whitman lives moved quickly, so did the life of the country to prepare for war. There were Bond Rallies, USO events, as well as war stamps for rationed gasoline, meat, sugar, stockings and all appliances. Most frightening, families were pulled apart, as fathers, husbands, brothers and sons responded to their country’s call.

Our immediate concern was for our classmates who were there with us from Hawaii. They had come from Punahou High School to Whitman, straight from the islands, having never left home before, and they were understandably terrified at the news. They had absolutely no television, no national radio, no newspapers and no civilian air flights. A single telegram informed the Whitman girls that all their families had survived. What little mail came took days, and there was no way to know if the situation had changed.

The plight of the girls from Hawaii made many of us closer than we might otherwise have been. The Hawaii contingent in the Class of 1944 included Norma Larsen Sanford ’44 (deceased April 2013), whom we knew by her nickname “Peter.” Because of the war, Peter, as well as her younger sister, Margit, and Lydia Sutherland Young ’45 (deceased 1998), from the class behind us, could not return home. Other Washington state friends in our class, including Margie Windom Guletz ’44, from Seattle, and Janet Raymond Dodds ’44, from Spokane, joined me in entertaining the Larsens and Lydia during holidays and summer recesses.

As the war ended in 1946, the Larsens invited Margie Windom Guletz ’44, Janet Raymond Dodds ’44 and me to be their houseguests in Hawaii for the summer. We set sail from San Francisco on the passenger liner Matsonia, its very first post-war voyage. Margie met her husband, Scotty Guletz, that summer, and they were married in October.

Others in the Class of 1944 met their future spouses at Whitman. Barbara Holmes Stevens ’44 tells of meeting her husband, Fred Stevens ’44 (deceased 1998), in Prof. Highburg’s class. Later, Fred did his graduate work at Cal Tech and became senior vice president of Northrop Grumman Corp. Retiring early, he and Barbara sailed to many parts of the world before Fred’s death. Other Whitman couples from our class include: Al Clise ’43 (deceased May 1993) and Joyce McKay Clise ’44; Fred Phillips ’43 (deceased August 2012) and Evelyn Caldwell Phillips ’44; Dick Kenyon ’44 (deceased November 2006) and Norma Cooper Kenyon ’44. I know that other couples should be included.

After the war, members of the Class of 1944 went on to develop careers and raise families. We entered professions like medicine, business, teaching, music and farming. We pursued our passions for innovation, invention and creativity. Many chose to be housewives and together raise families that include the “next generation” of Whitman students. Hopefully, they, too, will find the magic that we celebrate after almost 75 years since our graduation.

We thank each one of you who contributed to our “Our 90’s Story.”
Classes of 1945-1947

Joyce Mulhair Seebart ’49, Richard Johns ’49, Adele Harris Goss ’46, Janet Whitehead ’47, Fran Felthouse Hurlow ’45, Doris Burch Saunders ’47.

Class of 1948

Don Seebart ’48

50-Plus Reunion Weekend
June 21-23, 2013

Left to right: Lynn Boose ’58, Sharoon Wootton, John Rigdon ’58, Jacqueline Durgin-Beck ’58, Paul Beck, Diane O’Neal, Maggie Savage ’58, Wilber Pribilsky ’55, Jean Gibson Coe ’58, Arnold Coe ’58, Karen Elder Pribilsky ’58, Dan O’Neal ’58, Cathy Ladley, Jim Ladley ’58, Frank Wood ’58, Mary Wilmot, Charles Wilmot ’58.
Class of 1963  🌸  Sunday, May 19, 2013

Row 1: Alec McKay, Dick Beamer, John Arbini, Gretchen Miller Kafoury, Kathy Davis Clarke, Lynn DeFrees Riegel, Candy Shorette Bocarde, Victoria Raymond Ford, Mary Pat Eckstrom Beard, Marian Hedgcock Wolfe, Lee Kramer.
Row 3: Mick Gillette, Cole Mason, Richard Venneri, Mary Helen MacLean Windell (in front of Richard), Kathy Hicks Ferriss, Raleigh Curtis, Mary Anne Highbert MacDonald, Anita Merrell, Denny Sargent.
Row 5: Roger Whitlock, Terry Parsons, Cora Enman, Ken BeLieu, Linda Wellsandt Howell.