

THE first woman to serve as president of the Maryland Press Association, Gertrude was cited as a “pioneer” for women in weekly newspapering. She amassed many awards and tributes locally, statewide and nationally. In 1987, she was named by the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association to its Hall of Fame. No one could write about her trailblazing career better than she in “Pen Points,” her weekly Letter from the Editor in the (Laurel) News Leader. She shared highlights of her career in her last “Pen Points” before retiring in 1980, after serving as editor for forty-one years. Following are excerpts.

“It is July 1931. My hand still tingles from clutching a high school diploma a month before.

“I am about to launch my career as a legal secretary, I walk from my home in Montgomery Street, opposite Laurel High School, where I learned my skills...I enter a white frame building at 357 Main St., walk down a narrow hall and timidly open a door on which is printed ‘George P. McCeney, Attorney at Law.’

“Mr. McCeney welcomes me as he would his own daughter...I am lucky. Not many of my co-graduates have yet found work in the midst of the Great Depression. I not only have a job, it is close to home. In spite of my tender age (I will not be 16 for two months) I feel confident I can be a good secretary. I’m eager to commence and to learn.

“Three years later, I am devastated at Mr. McCeney’s death. His kindnesses to me are indelible and in years to come will be emulated as I become an employer. I am ‘inherited’ by his son and successor in the law practice, G. Bowie McCeney. Bowie encourages me to study law. In September 1936 I take a leave of absence for



GERTRUDE L. POE
Journalist and Newspaper Editor, 1915-

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three years from my position at 357 Main Street and become secretary-bookkeeper at the notable Cosmos Club in Washington while I pursue law studies at night.

“It is June 1939. Law degree in hand, I return to 357 Main Street...I resume association with Bowie McCeney. He has acquired the Laurel Leader unexpectedly within the past six months. He hands me a copy with a grin and says, ‘My career as an editor just ended. Yours is just beginning.’ I am stunned. I am indignant. Law is my love. I know nothing about writing. I don’t want to be a reporter. ‘You can do it,’ Bowie said confidently. ‘The Leader isn’t much now, but see what you can make of it.’ Another challenge....Little do I suspect that newspapering, not law, is about to become my career. “...It is September 1945. The Leader becomes a full-sized newspaper as Bowie McCeney merges the Bowie Register and College Park News (which I also edited)...with the Leader, and changes its name to The News Leader.

“It is June 1980. Twenty-one hundred and thirty-two editions of Laurel’s newspaper have been edited by me. I wonder how many pages, how many words I’ve written. This is the last edition. These are the final words.

“...We know each other well. We are comfortable with each other...Remember World War II and ‘Our Boys’ column?...Just think what else we’ve been through together. The Korean conflict, Vietnam. The arrival of the National Security Agency in 1958, and the repercussions that changed a small community into a burgeoning city. Desegregation. An awakening to civil rights. The Atomic Age. The Space Age....Remember Laurel’s Centennial? And the [nation’s] Bicentennial in Laurel?

“...Can you imagine how proud I am to have been the chief chronicler of Laurel’s saga for more than four decades? I didn’t do it alone. It was done with teamwork.

“...For nearly 50 years I have been opening the door at 357 Main Street and reporting to work. I can never lock the door on the memory of those years, nor on the people who have come in and out of that door.

“Time now to pick up my bag of memories and start my journey into the future.” ❀