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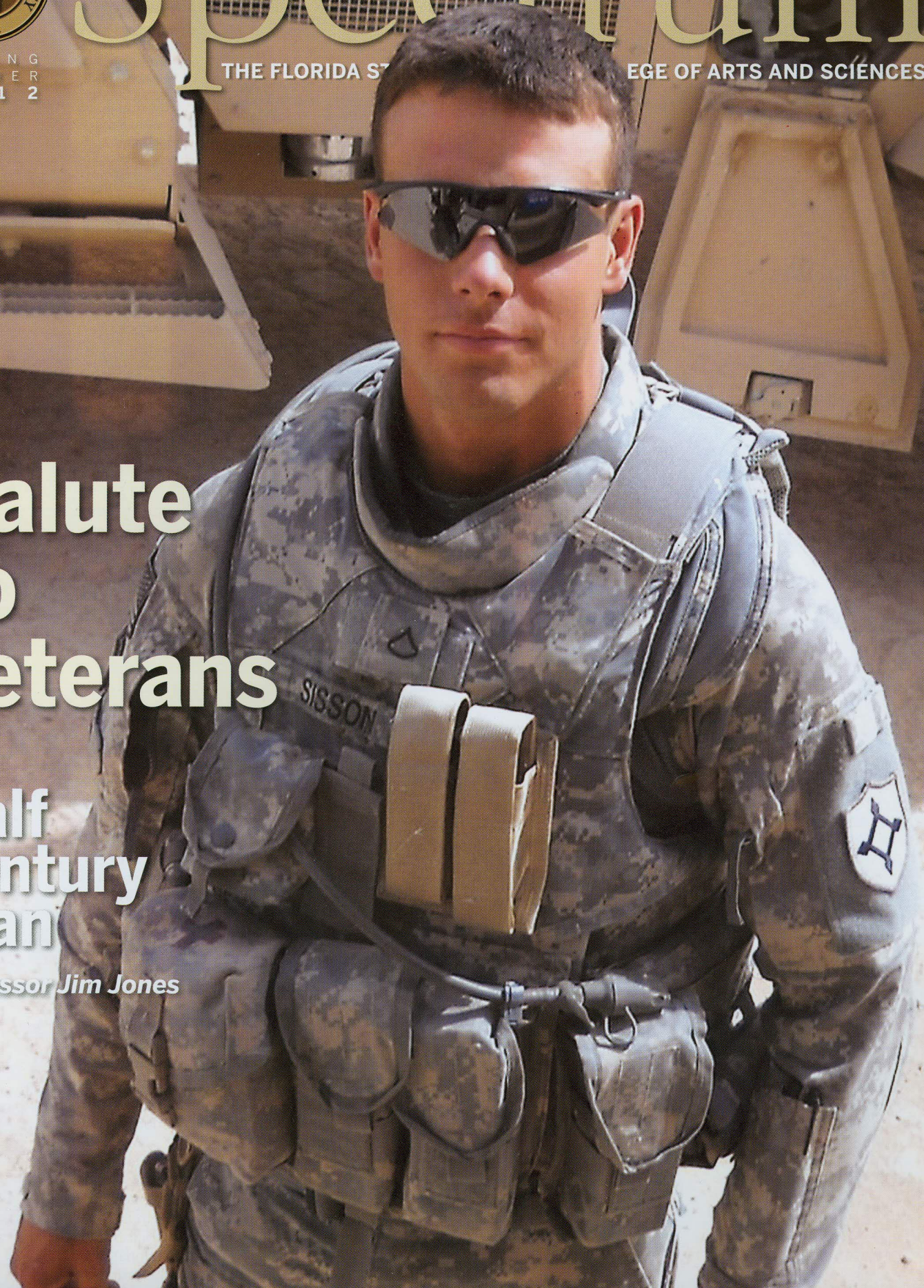
# Across the Spectrum

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

## Salute to veterans

## Half century man

*Professor Jim Jones*





# From financially strapped student to successful M.D.

## 1945 alumna Louise Cason remembers her alma mater with \$500K gift

By Susan Hellstrom

**A**s an undergraduate chemistry major at Florida State College for Women (FSCW) in the early 1940s, Louise Cason worked in the dining hall and as a laboratory assistant in the Department of Physics to pay her tuition. Now, several decades later, following a highly successful career in pediatric medicine and wise financial investments, Cason has made a gift to her alma mater for half a million dollars.

The gift, the M. Louise Cason M.D. Endowment, will equally fund two named endowments, one in the College of Arts and Sciences and the other in the College of Medicine. In Arts and Sciences, Cason's gift will be used for faculty research in organic chemistry and/or biochemistry.

"The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry is immensely grateful to Dr. Cason, who has long served as a wonderful role model for women majoring in chemistry," says Tim Logan, department chair. "And for the department to have discretionary funding for faculty research—especially in these days of tough budgets—is both timely and most generous."



FSCW chemistry alumnae Louise Cason (left) and Ruthie Taylor get a tour of the new chemistry facilities from Tim Logan, professor and department chair.

Photo by Nancy Smilowitz

Cason appreciates what the university, particularly the chemistry and physics departments, did for her decades ago. "I have great loyalty to FSU," the 89-year-old retired pediatrician says, recalling a couple of the many people from FSCW who touched her life, one of whom was her professor in organic chemistry and biochemistry.

Before she even arrived on campus, Cason was no stranger to hard work. After all, her father had died in 1926 when she was just 3 years old, leaving her with vivid memories of her mother's struggle to raise four young children on her own in Lakeland, Fla. during the Depression. Her childhood also left her with what seemed like an impossible dream in that era for a young girl: She wanted to become a medical doctor.

Fortunately, Cason found encouragement in a young high school physics teacher, 1937 FSCW alumna Marion Brantley Florin, and graduated with honors from Lakeland High School. After that, Cason enrolled at FSCW.

And so the young chemistry major's hard work—not only in the dining hall and in the laboratory, but also in the classroom—caught the attention of someone who would become another key mentor in her life. That person was chemistry Professor Jennie Tilt, who had earned her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and who had held leadership roles in several scientific organizations, among them the Florida Academy of Sciences.

"Dr. Tilt was one of the finest teachers I ever had," Cason says. "She was hard on me, but she was hard on everybody. She used to watch me in the lab—she expected a lot out of me."

Tilt, who had joined the FSCW faculty in 1923, encouraged Cason to pursue her dream of a medical career. "Dr. Tilt told me that if I did certain things—basically, that if I was the best student in chemistry she ever saw—she would write a really strong letter of recommendation for me to the University of Chicago Medical School," Cason says.



For financial reasons, however, Cason had to take a hiatus from full-time studies at the end of her third year at FSCW. So Tilt helped Cason find a job as a chemical analyst at the Goodyear Synthetic Rubber Company in Houston. "With the war on, there was a mad dash to create something synthetic that you could make tires out of," Cason says.

"I worked the 4 p.m.-to-midnight shift and was the only woman in the plant, although I was never hassled by any of the men," Cason says. "As part of my job, I used to climb on top of the railroad cars to collect samples out of the tanks."

In addition to working full-time in the plant—and with Tilt as her advocate—Cason continued her college coursework at the University of Houston, where she took physical chemistry and petroleum chemistry, which she describes as two of the hardest courses she ever took. Yet, despite the difficulty of the courses and the pressures of working full time, Cason had already decided that, if she never made it into medical school, she would pursue a career in the burgeoning petroleum industry.

Fortunately, Cason did get accepted into the University of Chicago Medical School and received a full scholarship, thanks in part to a strong letter of recommendation from Tilt. Also thanks in part to Tilt, Cason received her B.S. degree from FSCW in 1945 even though she had taken part of her coursework in Houston.

After graduating from medical school, Cason completed residencies at Duke University and Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn (later called the Interfaith Medical Center) and then set up her own practice in 1953 in Coconut Grove in South Florida. She was affiliated since the early 1950s with Variety Children's Hospital in Miami (which later became Miami Children's Hospital), serving as chief of pediatrics from 1958-1971 and director of outpatient clinics and emergency services from 1981-1987. As director, she led a \$50 million renovation of the clinic and ambulatory service. Cason retired in 1988.

Louise Cason, who graduated from FSCW in 1945 with a B.S. in chemistry, received her medical degree from the University of Chicago and went on to have a successful career in pediatrics and hospital administration in the Miami area.

Now, as she looks back over her life, Cason still has many fond memories of her FSCW mentors and coursework, but perhaps none fonder than her memory of Professor Jennie Tilt and the chemistry department.

"Chemistry teaches you to think and to work hard," Cason says. "I don't think I would have gotten into medical school if I hadn't majored in chemistry."

In turn, the department sees her gift as a way to foster the Jennie Tilts and Louise Casons of future generations.

"We are honored that previous chemistry faculty were so inspirational to Dr. Cason," Logan says, "and hope that the research supported by these funds will also propel current students toward their future careers."

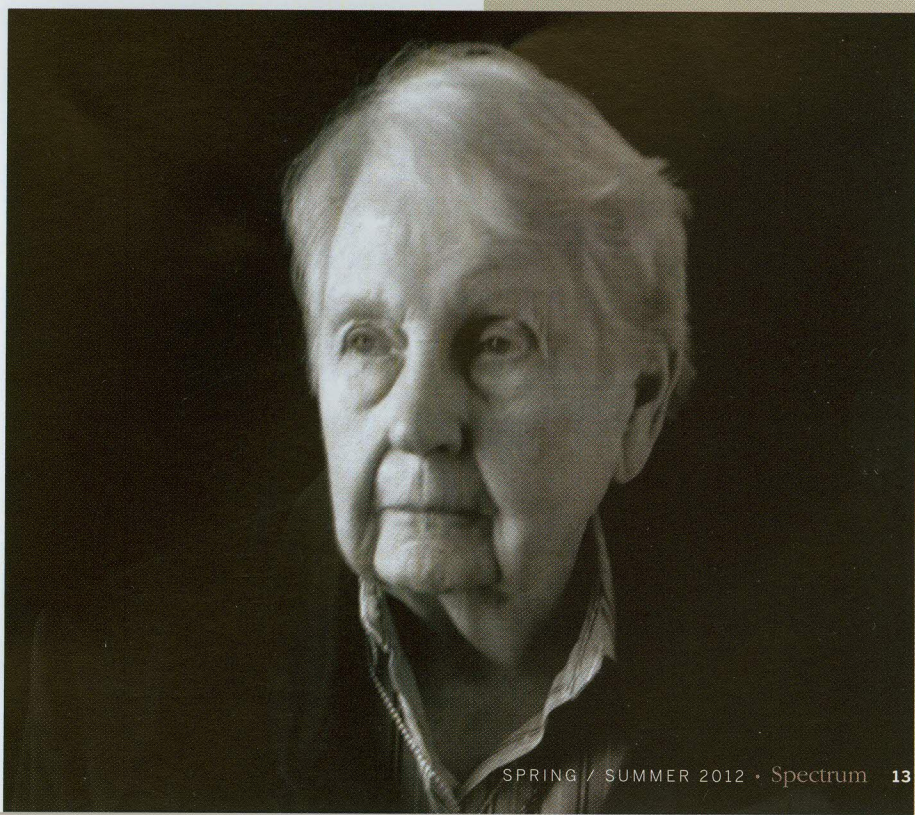
*"I have great loyalty to FSU," Louise Cason says.*



Louise Cason in her yearbook photo while a junior at Florida State College for Women (FSCW).



FSCW chemistry Professor Jennie Tilt (above) was a mentor to Louise Cason.



Photos courtesy of FSU's Special Collections

Photo courtesy of Louise Cason