All throughout life, Jan Hiller marveled at the kind of woman her mother Jean was.

So when Janet learned about a desire her mother expressed during her lifetime, she wanted to make sure those hopes were carried out, and her mother’s legacy would find another way to live on.

“I was told after she died that she talked about giving money to Taylorville High School for a scholarship, but she hadn’t done it during her lifetime,” Hiller said. “My brother and I ended up being the primary heirs, and I decided that some should have gone to something she wanted to do.”

Jean Hiller was an extraordinary woman, graduating co-valedictorian from Taylorville High School in 1943 and going on to graduate with honors in three years from the University of Illinois with a degree in business administration.
Helping young women from Taylorville pursue their careers

And while she went back into the home as a housewife after school, Jan knew her mother could have easily chosen a different path and excelled there as well.

“She was just extremely bright, very intuitive, and was a kind person,” Hiller said.

That’s the spirit Jan Hiller is looking for in recipients of the Jean Lee Hiller Memorial Scholarship, a renewal scholarship established at the Community Foundation that is designated for young women who are current or former graduates of Taylorville High School pursuing a business or pre-med degree.

Jan Hiller is a neonatologist who worked with the neonatal group in Peoria before running the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in Missoula, Montana for 15 years. And while she traveled across the state of Illinois growing up and now lives in Montana, there’s a special place in her heart for her place of birth, Taylorville. It’s where her mother spent 60 years of her life. And it’s where Hiller is hoping young women can take advantage of more opportunities thanks to the scholarship.

The scholarship will help those who demonstrate financial need, something Jan knows her mother would have prioritized. Janet remembers walking the aisles of the grocery store and setting her sights on a can of mushrooms, asking her mother if they might be able to add it to the cart. Her mother (always budget-conscious) would reply that it wasn’t on the list, and they would go on their way.

Come Christmas morning, Jan would find two cans of mushrooms from Santa Claus in her stocking.

“I think she would feel if someone could afford to attend college on their own, then someone else could use the scholarship instead,” Hiller said. “Mom was very careful with her money, but very generous. She ran the household on not much money. She was probably the most organized person I have ever known.”

Hiller’s looking to find ambitious young women who want to give back to society. This would help them start that journey. It would also help carry on a tradition of remarkable women in Hiller’s family tree, including Jean’s mother.

“When she graduated in 1917 in New Harmony, Indiana, she was also valedictorian,” Hiller said. “Back then, it was almost all boys, so it’s kind of interesting. They were very smart, very unique women for their times.

“I want something of Mom to live on.”

For more information on starting a scholarship, or how to contribute to the Jean Lee Hiller Scholarship, please contact the Community Foundation at 217.789.4431 or visit CFLL.org.