Dorothea Hirst

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations
This is the portrait of a scholar, 1964 model.

She is slim, brunette, attractive and has just recently crashed through the age barrier to 21. She has had a lively interest in everything from baseball to bugs. She knows right end from wrong end about a tractor, and can continue knitting a sweater right through a television commercial. With practically straight "A" for her grades, she will be graduated from Montana State University this spring in just a little over three years, and she expects to hurdle right over MA requirements directly into a Ph.D. degree at Stanford beginning this fall.

That's Dorothea Hirst, a ranch girl from Florence, Montana, currently pursuing a degree in microbiology as one of Dr. M. J. Nakamura's bright young researchers.

She didn't develop a set of brains overnight. In fact, anyone interested in such matters could have picked Dorothea as a comer all the way back to grade school. It was about nine years ago that she got into 4-H work--projects in beef fattening, clothing, swine raising, woodworking, photography, weeds and entomology. This all started on the Hirst ranch in the Swan Valley, about 90 miles north of Missoula, and when the Hirsts moved into Missoula, entomology (the study of insects) was a project that could go right along with her.

At high school in Missoula it wasn't all books by any means. She was active in intramural sports, basketball, volleyball and baseball. She was president of the Girls Recreation Association; won a trophy as outstanding senior in the club; participated in the Arts Club--and betimes, won a first place ribbon with her insects at the state 4-H Club and a trip to the national 4-H Congress in Chicago.

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Her interest in science was formed up in high school, however. She was a member of the Science Club during junior and senior years, and in that junior year won fourth place in the state Science Fair with a project based on hypo and hyperthyroid effects in rabbits. It was in her senior year that she won the state's grand prize for girls with a project on color mutants in chromogenic bacteria. She was also assisting in science classes and when she started at Montana State University in the summer of 1961, she fitted in naturally with the science offerings, such as the National Science Foundation program administered by Dr. Nakamura. In her sophomore year, she was named a member of Alpha Lambda Delta scholastic honorary, and this year was named to membership in Phi Sigma, national biological honorary.

Meanwhile, the Hirsts are back on a ranch again, and Dorothea mixes her studies with the ranch chores. Three scholarships for outstanding grades have helped out with school fees and such. One of them was provided by the Montana B.P.O.E., one by the Exchange Club and the third by the State Board of Education. Now there's that fellowship starting at Stanford next fall.

What does she want to do with all those brains? Get into virology, do college level teaching perhaps, or something connected with the space program.

That seems like reasonable ambition for this particular Montana ranch girl.