

Scarlet Letters

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Wellesley Class of 1956 Officers at their 35th Reunion: Valerie LeBrun Smith, Ann Colby Zachos, Diane McCracken Brown, Toni Holland Liebman.

Scarlet Letters, a journal for the Wellesley College Class of 1956, aims to foster interaction among Fifty-Sixers and to encourage them to write. Class

Comments, Contributions, Inquiries Invited

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members are invited to submit pictures and short prose pieces, up to 700 words, in such categories as first memory, significant Wellesley experience, travel commentary, and work experience. An ongoing effort will be the production of our own obituaries, before we need them, while we still have time to revise them!

Scarlet Letters is mailed to class members quarterly as well as published and archived at the class website.

This issue features the work of

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Lia Gelin Poorvu, “Our” Wellesley Trustee

Claudia asked me to write about my friend Lia—what an honor!! Lia was elected Trustee of Wellesley College in June, an honor we classmates can celebrate as we celebrated when she received the Serena Stackpole award in 2016. Terrific, but do we really know all that Lia has brought to this position—and, indeed, what the job of a trustee is? Lia herself is worth 600 words.

First, about Lia: A French major who lived on the French corridor and spent her junior year in Paris. A lecturer of French at Tufts for twenty-five years. A mother of two; grandmother of five. A world traveler and global thinker (just look over your old Record Books to confirm that.) A super volunteer in the humanities, WGBH, and Adolescent Consultation Services that led to her being last year’s recipient of the Massachusetts Governor’s Award in the Humanities. An Alumna Trustee in the early 2000s. One of the founders and a frequent hostess of the Martha’s Vineyard Wellesley Club. A perpetual networker for Wellesley. A brilliant, modest, and caring continual learner. A quiet catalyst. With her husband, Bill, she has supported Wellesley in many ways—Wellesley Library Special Collections, Centers for Women, the President’s Fund for Academic Initiatives among them. This latter led to the announcement at Commencement 2016 of the Lia Gelin Poorvu 1956 Dean of the College endowment. Currently Andy Shennan holds that position.

So that is a thumbnail sketch of Lia.

But what does a trustee do? Over fifteen years ago Lia spoke on that subject at the Martha’s Vineyard Club when she was an Alumna Trustee. Now she represents all of Wellesley’s constituents at a most challenging time in history. After a phone interview about this had been set up, Lia, not uncharacteristically, sat down and wrote it all out for me!

Lia writes:

When asked to go back on the Wellesley College Board after my six-year stint as Alumna Trustee (2000–2006) ten years ago, I was nervous, but excited that a member of the class of 1956 might still have something to offer. The present Board consists of twenty alumnae including a young alum of the

class of 2015. There are also seven men on the board with specific fields of expertise. I am the oldest, understanding that my mandate, given my age and experience both in academia and with other not-for-profit boards, is to provide historical perspective and an appreciation for the value of the humanities.

The full Board meets four times a year, with individual committee meetings interspersed as needed. The range of ages, backgrounds and experience provides an interesting diversity which is difficult to attain on many boards on which I have served. The amount of reading is very ambitious, and I marvel at how well prepared members are. They take their roles seriously and participate fully. Two new committees were recently added: the Wellesley Experience Committee and the Wellesley in the World Committee.

In terms of actual priorities, the academic program has expanded over the last decade towards the sciences and away from the humanities. To support these changes, there has been a shift in the allocation of available resources, and it is clear that the expansion has come at the expense of buildings and residential life investments. This means that the two funding priorities going forward will be for modernizing our science center and for renovating our dorms. Both are essential to maintaining our position in the twenty-first century as the premier women’s college in the country and the world. Regarding dorms, there is also an interim initiative called the Living Room Project to improve the most commonly used spaces to enhance community until the dormitory renovations proceed.

Our new President, Dr. Paula Johnson, has been embraced enthusiastically by alumnae, faculty and students alike. I am stopped by people on the street who congratulate me on Wellesley’s new leader. I strongly recommend her TED talks, accessible on the net. It is a joy to work with her and I am very confident that the Class of ’56 will feel the same way.

Jane Kentnor Dean and Lia Gelin Poorvu



ASH WEDNESDAY

“This religious occasion,” our minister says, gazing down at
Us, the remnant, and the small pot of
Home-made ashes on the pulpit before him, “arises from
“The imposition by the clergy
“On the foreheads of the faithful
“The symbol of their
“Fallen state.” A good, gentle man,
Non-Christian, he falters,
Scandalized by the prospect of imposing on us
Anything, let alone something so
Demeaning, so demoralizing, as our
Fallen state.

Inwardly, my bones and blood conspire to
Testify to what they have since childhood known:
The chancre in the rose;
The fatal microbe lodged, poised for its moment to
Plunge into the vital coursing stream; the fattening
Grub blindly winding its tunnel through
Quivering flesh. This is our
Fate, and no amount of lovingkindness or universal salvation will
Keep us from it. Gently and graciously, perhaps; but more likely
Murderously, grotesquely, we shall go down
To Death.

So then, kind minister,
Mark us, indelibly;
Emblazon on us
This, the simple single sign of our most profound
Bond: Our mortal fate. May we thus
Know our kind, and be known.

Oh God,
Will there be
Something, Someone, to
Deliver us to transcendence?

Joan Miles Oliver

How I Became a Painter by Eunice Agar



I come from a New England family, a long line of farmers, craftsmen, a paper mill owner, and some local legislators for all of whom painting and drawing were unknown territory. There was one exception, a great great aunt who painted still lifes in oil and watercolor, well painted but according to a standard pattern that I've seen by other artists of that era. And I spent twelve years in a small town public high with the same art teacher. She would do things like pass out sheets of 8 x 12 paper and Crayola crayons. Then she held her sheet against the blackboard, drew a curved line, then a few more lines and colored in some spaces, all of us dutifully copying as she drew. Voila, a flock of robins which we cut out and pasted in the windows.

In high school we shared a classroom with mechanical drawing students taught simultaneously by the same teacher. (She really had a terrible job, carrying supplies to each weekly class in three eighth-grade grammar schools—24 classes—plus the daily early-morning sessions in the high school.) The art students were left on their own in the back of the room, but, most unusual, we were given oil paints. Art schools usually don't let students paint in oil until their second year. I made a

lot of messes, but I did get used to pushing paint around. Actually I first used oil when my mother gave me a set in the sixth grade, not, I am sure, with any intention of making me an artist. It was just an idea for something different to give a child at Christmas or a birthday.

Actually an event in the eighth grade was the catalyst for my starting to paint and draw. The same usually unimaginative teacher—whatever happened that day—had the class members take turns posing on top of the teacher's desk and drawing each other. It was like being hit with a ton of bricks. I knew that was something I wanted to do. During the summers in my teens I took painting classes in two different local studios and liked them very much, but at the same time an older form of creativity was a strong attraction. I fulfilled part of my urge to make things by doing embroidery, crochet, knitting, and even tried unsuccessfully to tat (a form of lace making). It was part of the female country culture. My mother had no interest in handwork, but an aunt and grandmother were very prolific. It was not very creative because we just followed patterns. Later I gave that all up to focus on painting. It was interesting that in the sixties people started using the traditional crafts in a very imaginative way. I was also ambiva-



Eunice Agar, Hill Above Mason Bay

lent about going to art school and fully committing to being an artist because college was for years a priority. When I was about ten years old I heard the word “college” and asked my father what it meant. He told me. I said “can I go?” He said yes. End of discussion. This from a man who didn’t finish high school because he was completely on his own from the age of sixteen. I was the oldest child, the first to go to college, and a girl!

I was so naive. I didn’t like Smith College because I thought the rectangular brick dormitories looked like prisons. On the same day I had interviews first at one of the Boston art schools and then at Wellesley. In Boston I did not like the woman who interviewed me. She talked about all the girls meeting with her to talk about “Life.” Yuk! And my father was taken aback by the life drawings on the walls. Little did he know that in time I would do literally thousands. (How else does one learn to draw and paint people?)

At Wellesley I loved the campus but had no idea about its reputation or that I was supposed to be nervous, worried about the competition. I was totally relaxed at the interview and initiated what was probably considered a very adult conversation about whether or not I should go to art school. That was probably why I was accepted.

Of course I majored in art history, loved the lectures and the studio sections exploring the media and ideas presented in the lectures. Agnes Abbot deserves much credit for developing that curriculum. I took the twelve hours of studio which was the maximum allowed and enjoyed the courses

very much. However, they were mainly design projects based on contemporary abstract modes without much drawing, and in retrospect I don’t think they were that helpful.

I feel strongly that drawing is the basis of everything. As I used to tell my students, Picasso could draw like an old master when he was twelve years old, and all the other major innovators of his era had classical training. Jackson Pollock studied with a representational painter, Thomas Hart Benton, at the Art Students League of New York.

After graduation I joined a student tour of Europe and then moved to New York where I became an editor for *American Artist* magazine and worked nights and weekends at the Art Students League. On Sundays I sometimes drew at the Bronx Zoo. At the League I studied painting and drawing with Jean Liberte. Then after three years painting in Greece, I returned to the League for a few months to study with Robert Beverly Hale, the legendary teacher of anatomy for artists. I also studied printmaking, mostly etching with Robert Cassarella.

Although my own work is a loosely painted or drawn expressive realism, over many years I have carefully studied every possible kind of work, including the most experimental. At one time I spent about three months painting hard-edge geometric abstractions to develop a course on color. I think it is beneficial to experiment with ideas that are diametrically opposite to one’s sensibility. Maybe that also applies to writing and music.

My subject matter is landscapes in oil, casein, watercolor or drawing, media done on location, and figurative genre studies of people in public places



Eunice Agar, Midway

like the painting I did for the class reunion catalog of 2011. I drag my heavy French easel and other gear in a square vertical grocery cart to my landscape locations. I've painted in Meran in the Tyrol, north of Bolzano where I had close friends now gone, in Jonesport, Maine where I've had a bungalow for the last thirty summers, around Tallahassee where I also have friends, early on in Greece, and of course in western Massachusetts.

In the last few years I've been painting close-ups of nature, the texture of the natural world—grasses, fields of flowers, stones and rocks. The paintings look like tapestries. That idea inspired a very recent foray into poetry.

Over the years I have taught painting, drawing, and printmaking and written many interview articles on other artists for *American Artist* while producing and exhibiting my work. I've had solo shows in New York, Washington, D.C., Florida, Maine, and Albany, New York. I've also participated in group shows. And I do hope to continue painting to the end. As my ninety-six-year-old friend who is still painting, teaching, exhibiting, and curating shows (he is a phenomenon) says about age: it is just a number.

Lest Old Traditions Fail by Shirley Schneider Henderson

Springerle cookies are a centuries-old anise-flavored German Christmas cookie made using decorative, carved wooden molds or rolling pins.

When I was a child, one of the first indications that Christmas was approaching was an invitation from my Great-Uncle Lou and Great-Aunt Mayme to come to their house to make springerle. The invitation included an afternoon and evening of springerle making.

Uncle Lou was the keeper of the two springerle boards which he had inherited from his parents—my great-grandparents Jacob and Caroline Schneider. Lou, who was born in 1872, had been making springerle since he was a child. He knew exactly how to do it. Uncle Lou always pre-measured the ingredients—eggs, powdered sugar, flour, salt, grated lemon rind, and anise seed. He passed out aprons for each of us to wear. We stood in a line, taking turns stirring the mixture. The eggs had to be beaten for ten minutes. Gradually the other ingredients were added. We always stirred in the same direction. As soon as one person stopped stirring, the next one in line would immediately take over so that there would be no



Eunice Agar, Website—19

break in the mixing. We started with an egg beater, continued with a wooden spoon, and finished with a large metal bread mixer. When the dough was so stiff that we could barely put a dent in it, Uncle Lou declared it done. He then put the dough in a covered bowl and moved it to chill on his enclosed unheated back porch.

While the dough cooled, we ate supper—always steak and scalloped potatoes. After supper we pressed the springerle. We rolled out balls of dough to the desired thickness and we took turns pressing the springerle boards onto the flattened dough. The finished—but unbaked—cookies were placed on cookie sheets. My sister and I took the trays to a dresser in a second-floor bedroom where the springerle dried overnight. Uncle Lou baked them the next morning.

Lou died in 1950. The springerle boards passed to my parents. Just before Lou died, he confided to my mother that he always added a little baking powder to the recipe. He had broken with tradition and obviously felt guilty.

My parents continued to bake the springerle. They didn't always wear aprons and they might not have stirred in the same direction, but they produced springerle and treasured the boards. One day, after Pete and I were married and had three children, my parents announced that they were passing the boards (and the bowl, spoon and bread mixer) to me. It was a sobering moment. I feared they thought their end was near. I soon realized, however, that it was a joyous moment for them. They had figured out how to pass on the job and keep the ritual alive. They lived for many more happy and productive years.

Pete and I are still making springerle. Sometimes with help from our children and grandchildren; sometimes not. Now we have an electric stand-mixer. We load it and press the switch. No lines, no spoons, no bread mixer.

We also have a back-up plan. Several years ago I discovered House on the Hill, a company that manufactures resin and wood composite cookie molds replicated from historic carved wooden cookie molds. I ordered nine replicas of our two hand-carved pear wood molds. Now my three children, two grandchildren, and my sister and her three children, can all produce their own springerle. I have usually mailed springerle to the family before Christmas. But last



Christmas 2016. The tradition continues. Granddaughter Rachel Henderson Freivogel presses, cuts apart, and prepares the springerle for baking.

year, I had my own joyous moment when Pete and I received tins of springerle from two of our grandchildren—the great-great-great grandchildren of Jacob and Caroline Schneider.

Did You Know

- That what is now Wellesley's Washington Street was once the Natick Path of the Indians?
- That from Wellesley's Lake Waban, a person could navigate lakes and streams to the Charles River along Boston's entire eastern boundary and into the harbor?
- That John Eliot first preached to the Indians in 1650 on Natick land in the wigwam of Chief Waban for whom the lake was named?

These, and other facts, can be found in Alice Payne Hackett, *Wellesley: Part of the American Story* (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1949).

Preliminary Obituary for Marlene Zahnke Hoerle

Marlene Zahnke Hoerle was born in Bristol, Connecticut on September 25, 1934, daughter of the late Gertrude Johnson Zahnke and G. Theodore Zahnke. She was a graduate of Dana Hall School, Wellesley, Mass., and Wellesley College Class of 1956.

She was married and divorced from Frederick Oliver Hoerle, who died in 1991. Her beloved family survives: her daughter Elizabeth Fangiullo and granddaughter Allison Fangiullo of Plainville; daughter Virginia Hoerle of Bloomfield and son, William Hoerle, and grandchildren Olivia Hoerle and Ethan Hoerle of East Granby.

Marlene's life was spent in the nonprofit world trying to increase health services for Central Connecticut. She was a founder and leader of the Wheeler Clinic, Plainville, Connecticut, and the second woman on the Board of Directors of New Britain General Hospital. She was a long-time active leader of the Congregational Church in Plainville.

In her forties she attended graduate school. She received a master of counseling from St. Joseph College and a master of divinity from Yale University. She then worked as a psychotherapist at Woman's Workshop in Bloomfield, Connecticut.

In 1998 her brain was struck by the herpes simplex encephalitis virus. She was in a coma for seven weeks and two doctors said that she would be a vegetable.

She reclaimed her life thanks to her power of attorney, Dr. Michelle Toomey, her family and herself and wrote a book about her journey, *Riches To Rags to Riches*, available on Amazon, the story of a financially rich accomplished woman who became a financially poor, brain-damaged, independent woman.

She cared deeply about truth, fairness, helping others, and being kind. Gifts in her memory may be sent to the Wheeler Clinic or local senior centers.

Scarlet Letters offers this ongoing series of documents for the benefit of classmates. These documents can be prepared in advance of their need and revised annually on birthdays.

RAZOR THIN

by Judith Mandell Bruder

No, no, not me!
At 83 I'm somehow hefty,
All five feet nothing
That once was five feet two.
No, I mean the margin
Between safety and decline.
One misstep.
Just one!
That's all it takes
To take me from my home
And into care.
I'm well aware every day,
That every minute,
Every step I take
Must be measured,
Be prepared, planned for, thought out
Before it's taken.
Handle with care!
That's the label for my life
At 83.
That's the difference
Between youth and age.
No more margin for error.
Or if one still remains,
It's razor thin.