

Scarlet Letters

Number 8 July 2018



Wellesley Class of 1956 Officers at their 60th Reunion: from left, Betsey Cassel Stern, Barbara Booth Moses, Joan Ward Lasley, Carolyn Montgomery, Ellie Roos Faber. Photo by 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 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!

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My Life

My life changed dramatically in January 2016 when we were spending the winter in our condo in Jupiter, Florida. My dear husband, Wally, had been doing rather well with his health issues that were diagnosed at that time as Stage Four COPD. Then, one morning, he had an emergency 911 trip to the hospital where I signed a DNR. I thought our life together was over.

But here we are today, two years later, and Wally is alive and surviving his miserable disease. We sold our “Florida escape clause,” gave away our car, do not travel because it is too difficult, and live a rather protected life in Manhattan. I have three children all of whom are married, two living in California and one in Larchmont. I have six grandchildren, all of whom live in California. Wally has two children and three grandchildren. I consider them my family. They are all in various places with his daughter and one granddaughter living in Manhattan.

I am not fond of the word “caregiver” but that is what I have been for the past two years. I am fortunate to have a great support system (mentally) from all members of both of our families. Everyone wants to visit, to help, to bring food, to tell me how to order in, to tell me how to hire all kinds of help. But what they do not understand is that I am the only

one who believes I can do what I do. Yes, that’s a fact. At least that is the conclusion I have reached. I do not like to have help around and certainly no one messing around in my kitchen . . . no, thank you.

I knew I was stressed and I had to do something to ease my mental pain so I decided last summer to succumb to all of the requests and hire round the clock nurses for Wally and go to visit my California family. Everyone encouraged me to do this, including Wally and his family. My daughter, Cynthia, and her husband, Ken, live in Sonoma and they were having an “event” at their home. This event was started with the idea of performances by anyone who wanted to perform. I believe the idea originated because my grandson, Harry, taught himself to play the guitar. He is in a band called “The Injuries” (don’t ask!). His real life is tech, but that’s another story.

My six grandchildren were all going to the “event.” Four live in San Francisco and two live in Los Angeles. My three children were all going to be there as well. I had to go. The concert was planned the first week in August, 2017.

In July, without any warning, I had a panic attack in the middle of the night and ended up in the ER at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan. I was dismissed the same day in the afternoon and I was diagnosed as having, yes, a panic attack. I went to a psychiatrist and did receive a medication to help me “relax.” I admit to having slept better. I was looking forward to my trip to California the first week in August.

Two days before I was to leave for California, I had another panic attack, again in the middle of the night. I knew I was not going back to the hospital. I did call Hatzolah Ambulance Service once again but the marvelous EMT young men helped me decide that I did not have to go to the ER. The next day I did go to my PCP and he wanted me to go to my cardiologist. I told him that the only place I was going was to my family in California and that is exactly what I did, the very next day.

The “event” was fabulous. My children and their spouses were there, my six grandchildren plus one (Wally’s oldest granddaughter, who is at Stanford Business School), and about 200 people. It was quite a party. I danced with my grandchildren. I performed (yes!) a song (“Sisters” with lyrics I had written)



Merle and Wally with their grandchildren

partnering with my son-in-law's mother, Anita. This was a surprise and we were hilarious and it was well received by all. Over the next few days, I swam, I ate, I drank, I did whatever I wanted to do and never thought about my health. I felt fine. I went home.

About two weeks after coming home, I was walking to go food shopping and all of a sudden I felt a pain just below my neck. I thought it was very strange. I stopped and took a deep breath but the breath was not deep. I thought "uh oh" I had better see my cardiologist. I went the next day to see Dr. Alan Hecht and he gave me a stress test and sent me immediately to have a CT scan. I went back to Dr. Hecht the next day, Friday before Labor Day week-end, and he told me that I had an appointment on Tuesday, September 5th, to have an angioplasty with Dr. Samin Sharma at Mt. Sinai hospital. I had blockage in my arteries that needed to be examined further with probable stent implants. Wow!

My daughter, Cynthia, came to NY, nurses and family came to Wally, and with a 2:45 p.m. appointment, I was finally admitted to the cath lab at 9:45 p.m. I do not know how I would have managed without Cynthia. Well, I was found to have 95% blockage of the main artery to my heart and two stents were implanted. I stayed overnight in a four-bed room with two male and two female patients. A curtain separated me from my male neighbor. I later complained that a female patient who went to an all female college is not expected to pee in a bedpan with a curtain separating her from a male patient. Nevermind that he snored all night. It was a total disaster except that I had excellent medical care.

I was told the next morning that I had to come back in October for three more stents. I was in shock! The following Monday, I received a call at home from Dr. Sharma. He told me that he did not want to wait until October and he wanted me to come in on September 19th at 6:00. I asked him whether that was a.m. or p.m. He said, "a.m." I said to him, "Dr. Sharma, I am not a morning person!"

He replied that he was asking my permission to be the subject of his teaching class and if it would help he would send a Mt. Sinai car to pick me up. Well, I told him, I felt like a Star and yes, I would do that. And I did! A car picked me up at 6:00 a.m. and



Merle: Miss Bathing Belle, 1956

waited outside the hospital to make sure that I got in all right. The hospital was very dark and very empty and I was taken in immediately and yes, received three more stents. Cynthia came once again and took over my life. This recovery was a little more difficult since the surgeries were done through my groin instead of my wrist. I am now in a cardiac rehab program, thank you Mt. Sinai and Medicare. It is fantastic!

So, what is the point of my story? Other than demonstrating that I have not lost my sense of humor—oh, wait a minute. I forgot to say that September 19th was my first-born child's (James') 60th birthday. I figured that compared to giving birth, my surgery would be a walk in the park. Well, not quite.

The main point is that we, of a certain age and degree of intelligence, must be aware of our bodies and take action when something is not quite right. I am convinced that I saved my life by going immediately to the doctor when I felt a pain that I had never before experienced. Of course, part of this is just plain luck because I should not have gone to California. I have no regrets.

Merle Golden Bogin

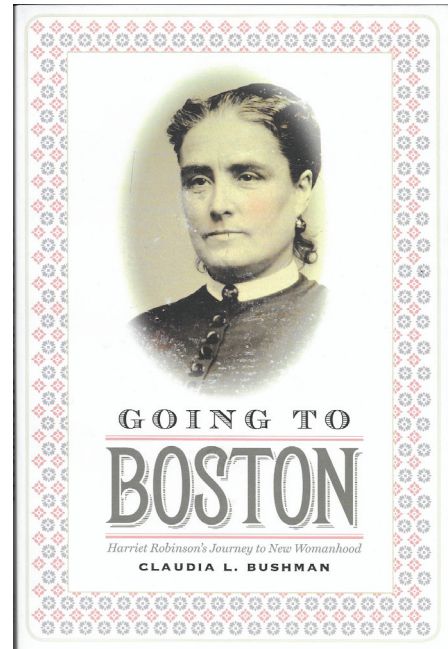
Book Review

Claudia L. Bushman, *Going to Boston: Harriet Robinson's Journey to New Womanhood*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2017.

For any biographer and/or historian, the discovery of original manuscripts is akin to finding gold. I can only imagine Claudia Bushman's delight at receiving the gift of three diaries written by Harriet Hanson Robinson. Claudia's most recent book, *Going to Boston: Harriet Robinson's Journey to New Womanhood*, entertains the reader with numerous entries from Robinson's 1870 diary, interspersed with wonderful text by Claudia, which illuminates the entries and expands our understanding. Her wealth of knowledge comes from years of studies in American literature and history and from her acquaintance with published works of Robinson.

Harriet Hanson lost her father at the age of six. Her mother was able to support her young family by running a boardinghouse in the mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts. Harriet herself worked in the mill for a short time as a youngster. She later published a book, *Loom and Spindle*, which provides valuable insight into this period. Though she had limited formal education, she was an intelligent woman with an active, inquiring mind and self-educated to an impressive degree. In 1848, she married William Robinson, a newspaper editor in Lowell. They lived in poverty in their early married life, but when William was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and then in 1862 to Clerk of the House, their means were much improved. They were able to move to Malden, with easier access to Boston. When these diary entries are written, in 1870, Harriet is taking full advantage of the city. The diary entries show a woman who is very much aware of a world outside her household. She also has a husband who appreciates her intelligence and talents and who does not restrict her to that domain.

Harriet, her husband, and their children were all avid, disciplined readers. Some of their choices are mentioned in diary entries, but Claudia provides an addendum with a much fuller list, which I found fascinating. Harriet is also a devotee of opera and the



theater, experienced and knowledgeable enough to comment critically, and sometimes tartly, on the performances she attends. What I found most interesting in this book is all the information Claudia provides on the formation and influence of the New England Women's Club, an organization founded to give women access to speakers, authors, and educational experiences of all sorts in a social setting. Harriet's comments on attendance are rich with the names of those who featured prominently in the history of New England: Julia Ward Howe, Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others of the transcendental movement. (I have to admit to a personal interest here because my grandfather's aunt, Hulda Loud, was a newspaper editor in Rockland, Massachusetts in the 1880s, lectured widely on abolition, suffrage, and labor, and worked with Stone and Livermore to introduce an article to the Massachusetts House. She also helped to found Channing Unitarian Church in Rockland. And, as it happens, I live across the street from the house where Samuel May, Abigail Alcott's brother, an abolitionist, lived while he was minister of the Unitarian church which I attend.) It was such fun to read these diaries by someone who knew all these personalities as intimates. I also appreciated learning a great deal more about the more mundane aspects of daily life: housekeeping chores, dressmaking, gardening, and even going on vacation.

We all owe a debt to these women, the activists who had the foresight and the daring to speak out and pave the way for new thought. One does not have to be a New Englander or a historian to enjoy this book. Kudos to Claudia Bushman for making the story of Harriet Robinson and her contemporaries so informative and so wonderfully interesting.

Betsey Loud Detwiler

Have you written a book you would like reviewed in *Scarlet Letters*? Send it to us.

A Prayer for the Ages.

Yesterday I went to the theater. In Santa Cruz. In a lovely venue remade from an old unused tannery. To see an excellent repertory company. To be completely overwhelmed by what I saw and heard.

The play is *Silent Sky* by Lauren Gunderson, which was first produced in 2011 and came out as a book in 2015. It is the story of Henrietta Leavitt. I had never heard of her. Maybe those of you who took astronomy had, but probably not many others. Henrietta Leavitt's biography can be found in Wikipedia along with all the necessary references. But that is not what I want to talk about.

She went to college in 1892. That alone was remarkable. What was your grandmother doing with her life at that time? How many did anything outside the home except teach or do nursing? Did any of them have a profession or business?

Henrietta went to work at the Harvard Observatory. She was limited to tallying data from the photographic plates. That was the job that the "computers" did. And just like the computers that we all learned about in *Hidden Figures*, that was women's work.

What was it like to be brilliant and burning with questions in an age where there were very few ways to get information? Where it was hard to find other people to talk to, to discuss with, to search for answers? At a time when so much of what we now know was yet unknown? This is what moved me so much. Today, when so much that is known is liter-



Henrietta Swan Leavitt

ally at the tips of our fingers. We can look up anything on our phones!

And yet the world is still filled with people asking questions, searching for answers, learning ever new things. I did not know the world of my grandmothers and I do not know the world of my grandchildren. And this is the way of the world, ever moving forward, ever exploring, ever finding new things. Always asking questions and seeking answers. And may it never stop.

Ann Ehrenfeld Bornstein

Mini Reunions

The various mini reunions planned for the fall are firming up. I am seeking additional '56ers to hold face to face mini-reunions near where they live, especially in communities where there are just a few classmates. These could be any size from one or two friends to a larger group.

Informality and minimal labor are recommended while celebrating the bond we have with each other.

Annsie Svernnson McAdams

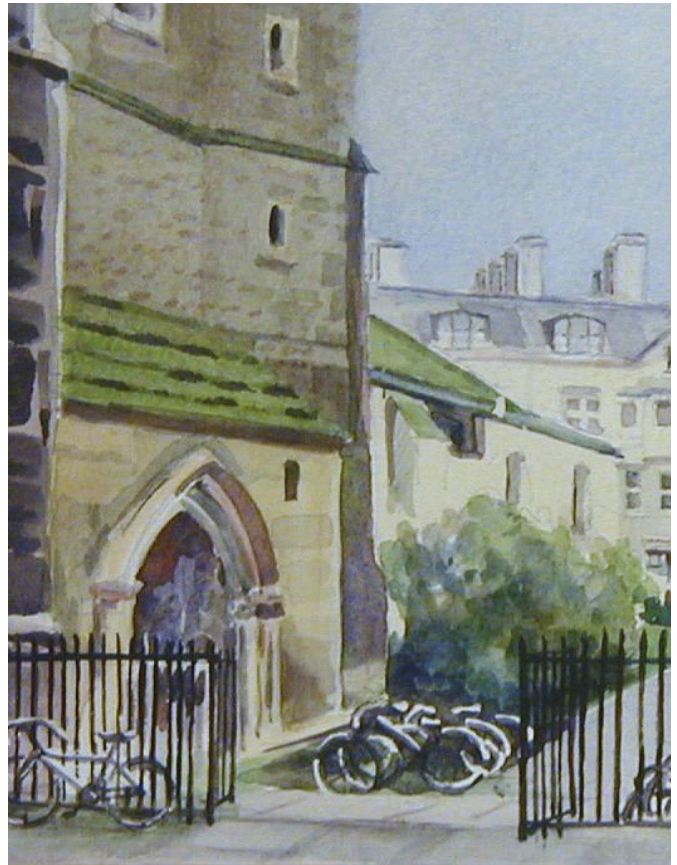
(annsie999@yahoo.com or 607-257-0044).

Paintings of Paula Barner Smith

Although I am not sure many, or any, of the Wellesley girls, will remember me due to my short time at the college, I am happy to share a bit of what I have been doing, which is watercolor paintings. I began painting in watercolor when my children were old enough to accompany me in the car to places in the countryside that I selected for painting. While they napped I painted. Eventually we moved out to the country and at age 42 I had my first horse, something I had longed for as a child. Our nomad life during the war years had not permitted owning a horse. Horses, dogs, and cats filled our lives for many of those first



Winter Field



The Bike Rack

years, as well as sailing. Much of my painting has been done outdoors in lovely areas evoking past eras in America, as in our Flint Hills, and of other things close at hand.

One of these, “The Bike Rack,” was done in Cambridge, England, on one of the many visits to our daughter over a number of years. When visiting, I took my paints or at least pen and ink to capture the wonderful buildings and landscapes of that country. Being an artist has opened up horizons and built acquaintances that have been a true joy.

Mainly my paintings have been a reflection of life in the Midwest countryside where we have lived since college days. “Winter Field” is typical of these. And occasionally I did one of our animals, as in “Only in Your Dreams.”

Paula Barner Smith



Only in Your Dreams



"Celebrating my daughter Rhonda's 60th birthday and looking forward to my granddaughter Michelle's wedding this August. Life is good, how lucky I am. Regards to my '56 classmates." Sonia Rauch Sibley

My Obituary

as of Winter 2018, for when it's needed

Mary Russell Oleson, who considered herself a life-long globetrotter, died of SICKNESS on DATE. She was born on August 15, 1935, on the island of Sha-meen in Canton (now Guangzhou), China, where her father, Robert Edward Russell, worked for the First National City Bank of New York (now Citibank). For five years she lived there, in Singapore, and in Manila, P. I., with her parents until they all returned to Maine before the United States entered WWII.

In 1941 the Bank sent her father to Shanghai, China—without the family—where the Japanese ultimately interned him in a camp in Pudong. He later was repatriated on the Gripsholm, a Swedish ship. His absence during Mary's earliest formative years affected her for life. It served as the catalyst for her commitment to compensate, whenever possible, for that past separation by visiting him wherever he was stationed overseas and traveling with him overseas and during his home leaves in the U.S.

While their father was posted to various cities in Japan, Mary and her only sibling, Ralph, lived in Saco, Maine, with their mother, Bertha Sears Russell, a teacher in the local public schools. For high school Mary went to Thornton Academy in Saco; for college, to Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, where her aunt, Helen Russell, chaired the mathematics department.

Thanks to Barbara Renell, a teaching colleague of their mother's, Mary and Ralph spent many summers during their school years in Barbara's camp on Thomas Pond in Raymond, Maine, rowing on and swimming in the pond and trekking through the pine woods.

In summers during her high school and college years Mary traveled to Japan to visit her father in Tokyo, Yokohama, or Nagoya. There she made friends with Japanese neighbors and her father's American colleagues and learned to play tennis at the Tokyo Lawn Tennis Club.

Mary graduated from Wellesley College in 1956 with a BA in mathematics. At college she enjoyed rowing on winning crews and served as president of

the Shakespeare Society where she helped produce the Shakespearean plays performed by members of the Society. She roomed in Severance dormitory with classmates Jane Kentnor Dean and Merle Golden Bogin, her best friends forever (BFFs). After college she attended her Wellesley class reunions whenever she was in the United States and became a devoted donor to the Davis Museum of Art on campus.

Mary's father gave her a graduation gift of a year of study at the International Graduate School of the University of Stockholm. She flew there by herself from Japan, visiting Wellesley friends and her father's contacts in Hong Kong, Manila, Bangkok, Calcutta, Delhi, Agra, Beirut, Cairo (during the Suez crisis), Istanbul, and Athens: an unforgettable trip.

While at Wellesley, Mary met John Oleson, a "blind date" arranged by Merle. Two years later he proposed marriage by mail to Sweden, and in 1957 married her in Saco. On their wedding trip, John stopped in Washington, D.C., to take oral exams to become a foreign service officer. They lived a year in Chicago where Mary worked as a statistician and John as a lawyer. The following spring, they moved to Washington for John to begin work in the State Department. Soon Mary received an offer from the Coast and Geodetic Survey (now NGS, the National Geodetic Survey) and started a thirty-year career in another kind of "globe-trotting." Whenever questioned about her work as a geodesist, Mary spoke of her contributions to the ever-more-precise determination of points all over the globe and to the size and shape of the earth itself.

In the 1960s the Olesons' lives followed a definite pattern. In 1960 the State Department posted John as a vice-consul to Bilbao, Spain, where daughter Lisa was born. In 1962 John was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City where two years later son Neil was born. In 1967 John began work with the Agency for International Development (USAID) as a lawyer in Bogotá, Colombia, where son Eric was born.

Mary taught mathematics at the American school in Bogotá and helped a young Peace Corps volunteer with his plan to create a women's cottage industry in the poor suburb of Ciudad Kennedy. His vision became reality for the Colombian women who learned from Mary to knit Irish-fishermen-type sweaters and

sell them to foreigners living in Colombia. John's parents, Arline and Emil Oleson, came to live with them in Bogotá, adding grandparents' pampering to the family mix.

In the 1970s the Olesons lived in Asunción, Paraguay; La Paz, Bolivia; Cairo, Egypt; and Tegucigalpa, Honduras. In each place, John served as a USAID mission or deputy director while Mary taught mathematics in American schools and joined women's groups doing charity work. After John's father's death, John's mother lived with them in Cairo and bought them an (Egyptian) Golden Retriever, Dusty, beloved by the whole family.

Mary considered living and traveling overseas with her whole family in Spanish- and Arabic-speaking countries a valuable learning experience and an opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultures. As time passed she and John learned the downside of overseas living when their teenage children left them to study in private schools in Delaware and New Hampshire.

In 1981 John was reassigned to Washington. The family went back to their home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. From there John and Mary frequently spent weekends visiting their children at school and college (Lisa, Goucher College; both Neil and Eric, Harvard College.)

In 1982 Mary returned to her old job in NGS. The Survey sent Mary to take computer science courses in a 20/20 program at the University of Maryland in College Park. She felt like a pioneer of Information Technology (IT), particularly when she was the only female in some of her classes. In 1986 she graduated with a BS degree in computer science and became an IT Specialist at NGS. As a feminist, Mary liked to think that, in the process of studying and working, she was doing her small part in adding cracks to the "glass ceiling".

Durring the 1990s Mary took two weeks of annual leave from work to care for each of her new-born grandsons: first, Declan Gareth Oleson Meagher and later, Finnian Carroll Oleson Meagher. John retired from USAID and took on consulting assignments until 2000 when they moved to Baltimore to be near their daughter and grandchildren.

Mary became a Democratic Party activist in the

early 2000s and continued as such to the end of her life. Every night at nine o'clock she watched *The Rachel Maddow Show* on MSNBC.

In 2007 Mary retired from NGS and soon traded her coding skills for memoir-writing in Osher classes at Johns Hopkins University. In reviewing her life from her scrapbooks, family folklore, and yellowed, dog-eared letters, she found joy in recalling the "old days" and the people she had known and loved.

In 2008 a third grandson, Jasper Davenport, was born via in-vitro fertilization with sperm donated by son Eric, a process Mary called the "cutting edge technology of modern pregnancy."

Lisa recalls that her mother always thought of her life as a series of adventures—new challenges, experiences, overseas posts, obstacles, and the like. Such adventures at the very least provided her with something to tell her grandchildren and to write in her memoirs. Mary was predeceased by her parents and is survived by her brother Ralph, husband John, their three children, and their three grandchildren.

A celebration of her life will be held at ABC on DATE. In lieu of flowers, please send memorials to Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, or a charity of your choice.

Mary Russell Oleson

The Latest from Clem

A year ago, George and I moved to a retirement center here in Los Altos, CA. It was a very easy choice since many of our close friends moved in with us. We are busier than ever with all the activities and outings they provide. Last year we celebrated our 60th anniversary. We still play tennis and ski with family in Vail, CO. Five of our seven grandchildren are now in college, so we have lots of graduations to look forward to. We feel very blessed at this stage in our lives.

Ann (Clem) Cleminshaw Limbach

Happy Birthday, Scarlet Letters

Scarlet Letters is two years old with this issue, a very young age compared to the people who write for it and put it out. Some have feared that because we publish quarterly, so often, we would run out of material. But it hasn't happened so far, and we hope it won't. We hope that you will use this publishing opportunity to get down on paper that Wellesley experience or that contrast between now and then and particularly a draft of your obituary. We all know very well that we will need such documents and that their existence will make things easier for people down the line and that we might well not like what someone else writes. Feel free to write those obituaries long, putting in everything that is important to you. As we all know from writing many papers, it is easier to cut than to add.

We also feel, now that our days are numbered, the urge to gather our Wellesley Sisters into a closer group. To that end, Sheila has been engaged in the momentous task of contacting each living class member to invite participation in *Scarlet Letters*, and also to ascertain that email addresses are correct. She has found a number of changed addresses and has forwarded that information to the class and the college. She and Sally have felt the need to reach all class members. And on May 11th, Sally and Sheila

gathered the Fifty-Sixers seen in this picture, classmates from the western suburbs of Boston—and Joan Lasley visiting from Florida—to write (long-hand!) letters (snail-mail!) to the sixty classmates who are not on email or who have not yet been reached. Sally says, “It was work and fun!” Should you be in touch with anyone in our class who is out of touch with us, please send us pertinent information.

Scarlet Letters is a labor of love. We publish it in memory of highly valued days on the shores of Lake Waban. We do it because we really want to know what our classmates are up to in their dessert days (as opposed to their earlier salad days when we knew them). And we have received encouragement and appreciation from classmates and the college. Our new president, Paula A. Johnson, liked the title (“quite clever—and so Wellesley!”) She praised the “rich collection of articles, poems, reviews, and remembrances” and said the class was fortunate to have them. She said that we were providing “a meaningful service to [our] fellow alumnae by keeping those Wellesley connections strong,” and said that *Scarlet Letters* was a “perfect example of why our alumnae community is so vibrant and engaged.” That’s enough to keep us going for another couple of years. Help us out. Send words and pictures.

Claudia



Left to right: Joan Ward Lasley; Janet Sommers Isenberg; Maggie Daniel Russell; Maud Hazeltine Chaplin; Sally Blumberg Linden; Sheila Owen Monks; Barbara Gelder Kelley; Dianne Isaacs Weil.