

# *Scarlet Letters*

*Number 13 September 2019*



*Carolyn Evans provided this 2011 banner picture which features Jane Kentnor Dean, Laura Ginsburg Strauss, and an unidentified 56er.*

## **Topics for Scarlet Letters**

Looking for interesting subjects that bring us together, we are beginning a recipe page here with some interesting offerings to tempt you.

Another subject, one that is a little puzzling, is the fact that many — maybe most? — of us can't seem to persuade daughters, granddaughters, even friends, to attend Wellesley, even though most of us loved our experience there. And why did we choose Wellesley in the first place?

I, Sheila, have to admit for me it wasn't the academics—it was the beauty of the campus.

A third and ongoing topic is our non-resident students. We have asked for contributions on this subject several times, and have received some.

It's a complicated story, one that we would like to know more about. You will find a short discussion of the story and some comments by your "commuter" classmates in this issue.

Let us know what you think and topics of interest to you and be sure to send us your recipes!

## **Comments, Contributions, Inquiries Invited**

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## Volunteering Rewarded

Volunteering has been my career for over fifty years. Except for one year after graduation when I taught school, I have been a volunteer in Stamford, Connecticut. I have been on the Board of Directors of a number of agencies, working in programs for children and seniors.

My start in volunteering was for a neighborhood group interested in forming a free-ride service for seniors who needed rides to medical appointments. This was fifty-two years ago and is still a vital program. In 2018, the program provided 67,000 free rides, thanks to the men and women who drive or are telephone dispatchers. All these are volunteers, as I am.

Among the programs I have created are a Child Abuse Prevention Education Team and a free Telephone Reassurance Program for elderly residents who live alone. For many years, I was the Chairman of the Fresh Air Fund for Fairfield County, Connecticut, and one of the young visitors from New York City became a part of our family.

Three years ago, I was invited to join a committee at my church—First Presbyterian in Stamford, Connecticut—to help a family of six from Syria settle and acclimate here in the United States. The family had been waiting for three years in tent cities in Jordan and Turkey. Since they arrived in Stamford in August, 2016, they have been amazing at adapting to a new language, culture, and day-to-day life.

My first responsibility was to find Arabic-speaking men and women who could mentor the family and translate for them until they became comfortable in English. Through my network of volunteering, I was able to find a number of people. Several met the family when they landed at Kennedy Airport and have remained on call for several years. After attending English classes provided by city agencies, the family is now communicating well.

Over the past three years, my role has evolved to find employment for the father. He has worked at several jobs—maintenance at a local hotel, supermarket odd jobs, gas station attendant—and is currently a custodian for a private family who own several properties.

Getting to know this family has been exciting and wonderful for me. I am in awe of their resilience in coming to a foreign country with no money, language, or family ties. They are happy here despite their concern for the many relatives they left behind in Syria.



*Katie has come to know this family of immigrant refugee children. (There is a rule against using their names.)*

We had hoped their relatives would have joined them by now, but the new restrictions of our government have prevented it.

The children are all doing well in school. The high school freshman, a girl, received high honors on her report card, all As, and told me, that having seen some photos, she would like to go to Wellesley. Her brothers, fourteen and twelve, and her eight-year-old sister, are all good students. They all play sports, and the girls are taking dancing lessons.

About a year ago, when I was driving the parents to their home after their English class, they asked about my family. I told them I was widowed and lived alone. When we arrived at their house, they asked me to come out of the car. When I did, they both hugged me and said, “You must come live with us.” In Syria, grandparents live with their children’s families, especially if they are alone. I was particularly touched because they live in a small apartment, which got smaller three months ago when they welcomed a baby girl into the family.

What began as a volunteer commitment has transformed into a family relationship. They are continually grateful for everything our community has done for them, and they treat me like family. Just as my own children send me photos and invite me to activities, they include me in all their milestones and celebrations. I’ve come to treasure them.

I can only hope that our country will open its doors to more families like this one, and that once we do, many others will experience the precious gift I have received.

Kathryn (Katie) Allen Pfaff  
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## My Favorite Recipe

In this issue, we are starting a new feature: My Favorite Recipe. Please send in your favorite and we will try to publish it.

### Flounder in Wine Sauce

|   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 2 lbs. flounder, or<br>other fish fillets | 1/2 c. skim milk<br>1/2 t. salt |
| 2 T flour                                 | 1/3 c. dry white wine           |
| Salt and pepper                           | 1/2 t. crushed basil            |
| 2 T butter, melted                        | chopped parsley                 |
| 3 tomatoes, sliced                        |                                 |

Sprinkle fillets on both sides with salt and pepper. Place in a single layer in a greased baking dish (12x8x2). Arrange tomatoes over top of fillets; sprinkle with salt. Blend flour into butter. Add milk gradually and cook until thick and smooth, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in wine and basil. Pour sauce over tomatoes. Bake @ 350 for 25 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Sprinkle with parsley. Serves 6

**Maggie Russell**

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### Steamed Salmon with Ginger-Black Bean Vinaigrette

1/2 cup rice wine or dry sherry  
1/2 cup dry red or white wine  
1/4 cup soy sauce  
sambal badjak or hot chili oil  
2 T. chopped fermented black beans  
2 T. minced cilantro  
2 T. sesame oil  
3 quarter-size slices ginger, minced  
1 large clove garlic, minced  
1/2 tsp sugar  
1 1/2-2 lb. boneless, skinless salmon filets

Combine ingredients in pan, add salmon filets, and simmer until salmon is done. Serve on garlic sautéed spinach with thinly sliced red onions.

**Jane Nieuwenhuis Baker**

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### Sheila's Chocolate Chip Cookies

In a medium saucepan, melt 2 sticks of unsalted butter. Then add 3/4 cup granulated sugar, 3/4 cup brown sugar, and 1 teaspoon of salt.

Remove pan from burner and beat in 2 eggs, 1 teaspoon of vanilla, 2 1/4 cups flour and 1 teaspoon of baking soda.

Let the batter cool; then add 3 cups chocolate bits (I used to do 2 cups bits and 1 chopped walnuts, but everyone likes them better with the 3 cups of bits).

Refrigerate at least 2 hours. I usually do it overnight.

When you're ready to bake, let the pan sit out of the fridge for 15 minutes or so to soften slightly.

With a teaspoon, scoop balls of dough onto ungreased cookie sheets, about a dozen to a sheet.

You don't have to be fussy about how the balls are shaped. The cookies flatten out as they bake.

Bake 8 minutes at 375 degrees. Makes 5 dozen.

I have already made about 50 dozen of these!

**Sheila Owen Monks**

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### Pink Stuff

Some years ago, my sophisticated daughter Clarissa visited in California to attend a social event for my parents. She regarded the buffet of food brought by friends, including many jelled dishes, and sniffed dismissively: "People in New York never eat pink food."

Now a New Yorker myself, I frequently serve pink food and people like it too. A batch can be whipped up in five minutes.

Boil two cups of water in the microwave, pour over two packages of raspberry jello, and stir to dissolve. Add 12-oz. of sour cream and stir until melted. Add two cans of whole cranberry sauce, breaking up the chunks and 1/2 c. cold water. Pour this pink stuff into a pretty bowl and refrigerate overnight. Serve in small bowls alongside the main course or use as dessert.

Crushed pineapple with green jello and mandarin oranges with orange work too, but the pink is the best.

**Claudia Bushman**

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## Havana, Cuba—A Faded Aristocrat

### December 2018

Sad, dark, mysterious, crumbling. Potholed cobblestone streets, decaying buildings black with mold accumulated over fifty years of neglect. Beautiful parks littered with rubbish. A once proud city brought to her knees by poverty and politics. A once proud people unable to improve the quality of their lives. Perhaps they've lost the will. The government makes the rules and controls the money. Very little of it trickles down to ordinary people.

People spend their time on the street. The ramshackle houses have no air conditioning or fans and the Cuban heat is stifling, even in December. I shudder to imagine what summer in this Caribbean island city is like. Most Cubans have never known any other life, never tasted beef or fresh milk. A feeling of hopelessness and helplessness pervades as people struggle to make ends meet with no money or medicine. Food is costly, bread is scarce.

Transportation is on scrawny horses or donkeys pulling old wooden carts. The famous refurbished 1950 cars are for tourists, not residents, and they are lovingly cared for and passed down through generations with their Russian innards, thanks to the skill of talented homegrown mechanics.

Our Havana guide for the day was a charming and knowledgeable retired university professor who was unable to survive on her \$600 monthly stipend and became a tour guide to supplement her income. She was surprisingly and equally critical of both the Cuban and U. S. governments. The Cuban hierarchy because the government makes it impossible for people to better their lives, the U. S. for withholding medicine and other necessities. She wistfully noted that she would love to travel off the island but did not have the means. Her take-home salary for a day of guiding was a paltry \$20 after the government and tour company took their share. Her one child, a daughter, left Cuba to live in in the U. S., and she doubted that she would ever have the means to visit her.

Santiago de Cuba was as impoverished and run-down as Havana but more rural and thus less dis-



*Dramatic Cuban architecture;  
a waterfall near Cienfuegos, Cuba*



tressing. We danced to native music in the zocalo (central square) with an elderly toothless woman and headed down a side street to shop for souvenirs. As much as we wanted to help the local economy, there was little of worth to purchase. We bought anyway, assuming the street vendors would not have to share their proceeds with the government. Fragrant orange tree coasters, wall magnets, intricately carved figurines. Little else.

The high point of our visit was Cienfuegos. The once grand city was formerly a vacation mecca and home to wealthy foreigners, including Americans, who built lavish mansions which now house restaurants and hotels. The wealthy fled Cuba after Castro came to power and their businesses were taken over by his regime. But their homes still stand, a proud and silent testament to a former life of grace and affluence. One Moorish structure, now a restaurant, spoke volumes about the lifestyle of its former inhabitants with its rich wood paneling and mosaic tiles. Europeans and Canadians are the main visitors to the city. Now that our government has once again tightened the entrance requirements, fewer Americans can be seen wandering the broad streets and admiring the magnificent homes set back on spacious grounds.

A van ride for two hours over rutted roads took us into the mountains where Fidel Castro hid with his rebels. After another hour of uphill trekking, we reached a verdant rain forest with magnificent waterfalls and tropical vegetation. The place has been designated a national park, and many Cuban families make the climb to swim in clear fresh mountain water and admire the splendid scenery.

How unfortunate that politics is again preventing many Americans from visiting this island nation with its rich culture, throbbing music, and proud people who survive in spite of a life of hardship and deprivation. We can only hope that our two countries will once again be open to each other's traditions and cultures.

**Cynthia Snider Greene**  
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## Poetry by Noel Smith Fernandez

### EQUINOX

Winter comes about by certain shifts.  
At dusk on the pond the mallards mumble  
and hunker into their dark silk water.  
A wood duck's piping like a blade slants in  
through the rosy air. A katydid waits  
for an answer.  
Something ticks.

I feel a slight tugging. There is a need  
to turn and say goodbye but  
the fire is lit  
and people are coming in  
the front door. It is not easy  
to know what is leaving  
or when it left.

### NIGHT VOYAGE

He lay day and night in his bed.  
His purple mottled hands rested gently  
at his waist. Day and night.

His cheeks had caved in and his mouth  
formed a tender oval as from time to time  
his breath stalled and took hold again.  
His children never left and always said,  
"Daddy, it's me, Lily. I love you,  
Daddy." Etcetera.

At last at 4:28 in the black dark  
came the signs he had been waiting for.  
He set his rudder and hoisted the genoa,  
jib and mainsail. The grommets clanked  
in the stays. The compass set itself.  
He felt the mainsail fill. He wound  
the lines around the capstan.

It was a sacred wind and it bore him  
through the night and through  
the world's air.

## The Commuting Class

I spent my years at Wellesley as a boarder, all four as a resident of Severance Hall, and as a result was curiously unaware of the non-resident members of our class, some married and all commuting to classes from their respective off-campus residences.

I was surprised to learn that there had been many “commuters”—and that some of their time at Wellesley had not been as happy as mine; sometimes it was sad or frustrating. I began to wonder why I knew so little and whether the situation was better today. I learned that many non-residents had been told not to talk about their experience. I recently called Wellesley and was put in touch with an associate dean who is in charge of non-residents. She indicated that there are far fewer married students today, and their accommodations (a lounge-type room to eat and relax in) are much improved. She sounded a little tentative, and when she failed to get back to me when I asked for some names of current commuters, I began to wonder. Here are messages from three '56 non-residents.

**Sheila**

Sheila asked me to write a few words about my experience at Wellesley as a commuter, a subject to which I've given little thought. For me the issue is enmeshed with the experience of being a married student at Wellesley, a situation more complex and worthy of a few words itself.

I lived on campus my freshman and sophomore years; first in Severance, then Beebe. I have happy memories of both. Then along came Jerry and marriage just before our junior year.

We had a small apartment in Brookline from which I drove, twenty minutes in those days. It was possible to park close to classes. So the physical aspect of commuting was not a problem.

What suffered most was the intensity of the connection to school and friends. I missed much of the fun and most of the intrigue. This was not a hard bargain to make.

I don't recall that the college had any special space for commuting students, but that was fine with me. When I wasn't in class, I wanted to be in Brookline! Other commuters may not have shared

this point of view, wanting perhaps a place to perch during the class day.

I suspect that the place of commuters has changed since 1954, as with everything else.

**Elsa Kahn Ramin,**  
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I was married after junior year and commuted from Cambridge for my senior year. I felt cut off from all Wellesley personal connections, something the administration had expected as they revoked my scholarship because I was no longer “contributing to the community.” I approached my classes in dead earnest, determined to finish up and graduate with my class, which I did, maternity clothes under my gown. It was a hard year. Should we have waited to marry? Maybe. Would I have lost my wonderful husband of 64 years if we did? Maybe.

**Claudia Lauper Bushman**

Did I receive a superb education at Wellesley? Yes.

Am I proud to be a Wellesley alumna? Yes.

Have I ever attended a Wellesley reunion? No.

Have I stayed in touch with anyone from my class? No, not since my freshman roommate passed away.

I understand that the situation has changed, but my experience as a commuter in 1953 was pretty dismal. I went to class, had lunch in the grim commuter room provided for the few commuting students, and drove home. I had no social life, no contact with my classmates.

Fortunately, my boyfriend came home from Korea the summer before my junior year, went to B.U. to earn a master's degree as a veteran and my life improved dramatically. We became engaged, I had someone in my life, I didn't miss my Wellesley connections or lack thereof.

At a highly impressionable and vulnerable stage of life, I was not made to feel like a valuable or valued member of the Wellesley community. I was ignored, looked down on, alienated, made to feel that my lack of financial resources impacted negatively on my self-worth.

After all these years it doesn't matter anymore. I keep telling myself I will attend a Wellesley Club meeting in Sarasota (I now live in Venice, FL), but I haven't done it. Obviously, I have residual negative feelings.

I hope if there are still any commuters that they are integrated into college life as full participants and not overlooked and undervalued as I was.

**Cynthia Snider Greene**  
<cyn1greene@yahoo.com>



*Cynthia Snider Greene*

#### HOW TO CARE FOR ELDERLY LOVES *Noel Smith Fernandez*

They get cold in bed.  
They sleep with their undershirts on,  
but the chill is on them.  
They once may have frozen  
in the battlefield while  
picking up the dead.

Take that frost bitten hand  
And tuck it like a duck  
would its ducklings.  
The bombs still whistle in the sky.  
Just hold and hold and hold it  
all the long black night.



*Julie, the honoree, with the man whose  
honor she bears.*

### **Julie Hinds Wright Honored**

In 2015, Julie Wright received the Dr. Kenneth Hood Award for outstanding voluntary achievement. The award recognizes people "who have carried forth the torch of service on behalf of today's senior citizen population". That same year, she was awarded the President's Life Time Service Award.

Julie began volunteering for the Arlington Heights, Illinois senior community in 1986. In 1995, this won her the Center's Volunteer of the Year award. In 1999 she became a member of the Senior Center's Board of Directors. In addition, she has volunteered for 25 years at her town library.

Julie and her husband Don are residents of Luther Village, an Arlington Heights retirement community.

She serves on its Board of Directors and Library Committee, and was active on the 25th Anniversary Celebration Committee and the Butterfly Garden Construction Committee. As she says, "Wellesley encouraged us all to be volunteers and I took that to heart!"

Julie can be reached at [jdhwright@hotmail.com](mailto:jdhwright@hotmail.com).



## *1956 at Chautauqua 2019*



*Mimi Gorn Tausner, Anne Sinnott Moore, Ellie Zurn Hutt, Sally Blumberg Linden, Mike Reece Horn, Cecily Parke Sesler, Olwen Beach Busch, Jane Kentnor Dean, Terry Larson Scheetz, Maya McGrath Percy. Mary Sayres Winants also attended.*