

Scarlet Letters

Number 4 July 2017



Kate Trynin Kestnbaum, outgoing president, leads the class at its 30th reunion. Photo: Toni Holland Liebman.

AFTER STARING AT “MORNING POND”

*“Circles in
the still shine—
wings overhead.”*

—Burt Kimmelman

Reflections
may hold: words
fly over the earth
making ponds
where they stand
still

Words
tell pond grass
woods, sky
lifting, floating

They hold a true
scene: a world shining
down

Madeline Tiger

Comments, Contributions, and Inquiries Invited

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Wellesley Class of 1956

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Face of Egypt: Mine

Egypt, April 1977: “What does it say?” I asked the Egyptian USAID employee for the translation of the caption by my picture in *Al Mussawar*, Egypt’s answer to *Elle* magazine. She hesitated.

The Ma’adi Club was within easy walking distance of our house in the Cairo suburb also called Ma’adi. I spent a couple of hours almost every day at the club, mostly to play pick-up games of tennis singles with other women players. The club also had squash courts that were popular with the Egyptian members of the club. Our children often swam in the pool, particularly before the completion of the pool at Cairo American College, the K-12 school in Ma’adi. They also attended age-appropriate, open-air movies after dark at the club with their friends. I was told that Omar Sharif played bridge there with his cronies when he was in town, but unfortunately I never caught even a glimpse of the actor except in a showing once of *Dr. Zhivago*.

The club occasionally sponsored special athletic competitions. When its calendar advertised a ten-kilometer run for both sexes and all age groups, I signed up right away. I have enjoyed running and jogging for much of my life.

When race day arrived, I showed up promptly at the club, signed my name in Arabic on the check-in papers, and was assigned to the appropriate age group. Shortly thereafter we began running through the streets of our small town and out to the highway heading south toward Helwan, an industrial city. No interesting sights relieved the boredom of the six-mile course and no fans lined the roadways. If we had raced on the west side of the Nile at that latitude, we would have seen the Zoser step pyramid in Zaqqara and would have run on the ancient land of Egypt’s first capital, Memphis.

I vaguely recall that I made very good time. The Egyptian organizers congratulated me on a good run. I would later jokingly brag that I had made my personal best in Egypt that day—without mentioning that the race was also my first in Egypt. No one made much of a fuss over the runners, not even the winners. So I did not hang around the club very long after the stragglers finished.

A couple of weeks later my prize came in the form



of a multi-page spread in the most popular women’s magazine in Egypt. I had been mistaken. Notice had been taken of the race. *Al Mussawar* devoted some pages to the event with quite a few pictures, including mine.

I repeated, “What does it say?”

Again she stalled, hesitating to answer.

My impatience showed as I mused. She’s Egyptian. She must be able to read Arabic. She reads English, for goodness’ sake.

The third time I asked, I could see discomfort and embarrassment on her face. Her eyes did not meet mine. Then she said, “The caption reads, ‘This American woman is over forty-years-old—and she still runs!’”

Mary Russell Oleson

Baltimore, February 2011, after the so-called Egyptian “revolution”: I recently celebrated my seventy-fifth birthday. I still run. What would *Al Mussawar* publish about me these days if its presses also still run?

Mary wrote this piece in 2011 when she was a mere 75 years old. The event occurred in 1977, and the picture is from the 1977 publication of Al Mussawar.

HEIDI NITZE

POETRY AND ART



Heaven is More Beautiful than We

All orbs are thine, Heaven,
and Majesty in us
a brief imposter.
Circle us with thy Captivity,
where we are part,
not more,
with lark and newt and toad
and cat and goat,
great whale, wild amaranth,
and coelacanth before.
Quell our Vengeance.
Help us to repair
with careful hands
the diminished Catalogue
of thy broken Ark.

05/ 2004

Where Sleeps Sleep

Where sleeps sleep when sleep all die?
In which tomb shall cowslips lie?
Whose great tongue shall silenced be
when ears can't hear and eyes can't see?
The tongues of nations on Earth's brief home
translated are in Heaven's dome
and mingled in the stars' morass,
where infinite natures come to pass.
So pray we Lord, be born again
from time to time above our ken
the dust we were and are again
since our brief dot swam past the sun.

06/ 2004

Corinne Whitaker, Poet and Artist

Corinne Whitaker, a prize-winning digital artist, has published her online journal The Digital Giraffe for twenty-three years. She credits Wellesley College with its insistence on excellence, joy in learning, desire to investigate thoroughly and to question authority for much of her success. Her twenty-three books of digital painting and poetry can be found in the Wellesley College Art Library.

She writes:

If you want to understand an artist, look at her works, for everything we create is an autobiography. I write, I paint, I sculpt, I compose to bring out an inner voice that clamors to be heard. I use The Digital Giraffe (www.giraffe.com) as a vehicle for that voice, and as an alter ego (giraffes, after all, are peace-loving and vegetarian. They stand taller and see farther than others, and have very large hearts). I exhibit all over the planet (in dozens of museums, including the Louvre), and my works bring back visions of a species addicted to war, unable to exist one week without murder, obsessed with greed and power. I shudder for the dispossessed, the maimed, the children—oh-my-god-the children—that we use and abuse for ill-conceived goals. I would give all of my awards to save one child from poison gas. How can a species that creates the Ave Maria, the Sistine Chapel, the Mona Lisa, be so bent on self-destruction? Why are women condemned to the toxic silence of history, their voices all but silenced by a dominant patriarchy?

I write, I paint, I sculpt to make sense of a jabberwocky world, to stay sane in a world gone mad, to find inner peace in the vortex of chaos created by this brilliant but tragic species that we belong to. My current project/obsession is called “Shackles and Tears,” using artificial intelligence to compose music, combined with poetry.

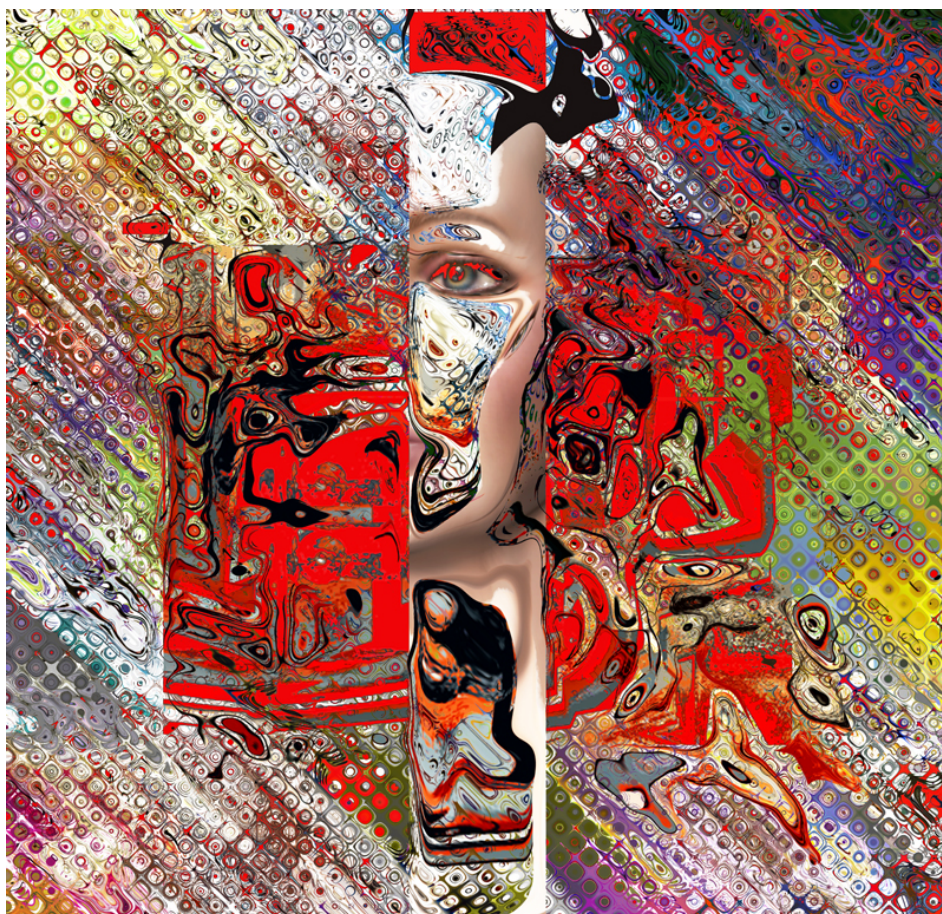
Corinne Whitaker



Mother Time c. Corinne Whitaker 2017



Hop Along Mud Puddle c. Corinne Whitaker 2017



Disappearance of the Peignoir c. Corinne Whitaker 2017

THE MIGHTY TORTOISE

“and do not call the tortoise unworthy
because she is not something else”
—Walt Whitman, “Leaves of Grass”

I choose to believe that Jesus was an African
American
And Buddha was a Jew.
I choose to believe that Mohammed baptized his
offspring
And Solomon knelt before Mecca.
I choose to rejoice that robins warble to all skin
colors
And gardenias smell no less sweet in Iran
Than in Peru
Or Zimbabwe.
I choose to believe that lilac and willow thrive not
only for Caucasians
That tides swell for poor and rich alike
That rain falls equally on all skins

And sunlight wakens children without enquiring
about their religion.
I choose to believe that when I paint, someone,
somewhere, understands.
Is it you?
That when I sculpt fireflies light up someone's skies
And truth awakens someone's eyes.
I choose to have faith in the honeyed taste of
laughter
The purity of kindness, the divinity of joy.
I celebrate a simple truth
That you and I are equal stalks of wheat on earth's
shores,
Equal strands of hair on earth's pores.
You and I, together, embrace the sanctity
Of the Mighty Tortoise.

c. Corinne Whitaker
dedicated to Mr. Garis, Corinne's
Wellesley thesis director

Cynthia Stephens Obituary

(First Prepared 2/20/1999; minor updates: June 99, Jan 00, May 00, Sept 00, Oct 00, May 04, Aug 06, March 09, May 10, Dec 14, Jan 15, June 16, Aug 16.) *This draft of Cynthia Stephens' obituary, a work in progress, has been updated several times over seventeen years to reflect changes and developments. Cindy's instructions at the end to those who will carry out her wishes reveal her strong feelings on some issues and might serve as a model to others preparing their own documents.*

Cynthia (Cindy) S. Westerman died of a ruptured artery (replace with actual cause; be specific) on Tuesday April 4 (replace with actual date). Cindy, who preferred to be known by her maiden name Cynthia Stephens, was born in New York City on November 25, 1934. She was predeceased by her parents Margaret and Philip Stephens of New York City and her only sister, Susan McDaniel of New Canaan, Connecticut. There are no survivors except for her pet cats which she dearly loved and considered her family. She graduated from Wellesley College with honors in astronomy and received an MS degree in meteorology from Cornell University. Cindy was employed at different times in her life by Haverford College (PA), Mount Wilson–Palomar Observatories (CA), the Hayden Planetarium (NYC), and IBM. She was a member of the American Astronomical Society and the American Meteorological Society as well as the Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi honorary societies.

In recent years Cindy had been active in environmental and animal welfare groups in the Binghamton area. As well as being a long-time member of the following organizations, she served as Chair of the Town of Vestal Conservation Advisory Commission, Vice Chair of the Broome County Environmental Management Council, Political Chair and Wetlands Chair of the Susquehanna Sierra Club, and held various offices for the Broome County Animal Care Council. She also volunteered at different times for the Broome Council of Churches Faith in Action Caregivers Program, Vestal Residents for Safe Energy (VeRSE), the Levene Gouldin profes-

sional tennis tournament, the Art Mission and Theater as well as the Cider Mill Playhouse. She was a member of the Leadership Society of WSKG and provided significant financial support for establishing the Art Mission movie theater. Cindy received the Lynda Spickard award for her environmental work from the Susquehanna Sierra Club in January 2010 and the Woman of Achievement award from Faith and Action in 2011. She was a member of the Triple Cities Hiking Club, the Binghamton University Women's hiking, travel, and bridge groups, the Lyceum, Binghamton Classic Films, Binghamton Ovarian Cancer Awareness and entered precipitation data for a national weather reporting network (CoCoRaHS). Cynthia liked writing letters to the *Press and Sun Bulletin*, usually on environmental issues. She was an active "fractivist" and was thrilled when fracking was banned in NY state by Governor Cuomo.

Cindy enjoyed her pet cats, reading, theater, movies, the ocean, outdoors, big snowstorms, watching professional tennis, and travel. She was an avid walker and swimmer. She traveled to five continents (not Antarctica) and to all fifty states. The happiest times in her later life were spent traveling and hiking in the northwestern US.

A memorial service will be held at abc on xyz date. In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Broome County Animal Care Council (131 Washington Ave, Endicott) or the Susquehanna Sierra Club (PO Box 572, Endicott). A special friend, Mary C. (Cay) Cohen, of 416 Main St., Vestal, may be contacted to obtain further information about Cynthia and her death.

Important Notes to the Editor

1. Please use the term "died." I despise euphemisms such as "went to be with The Lord," "went to meet her maker," "joined her parents," or even "passed. . . ."
2. I insist the cause of death be specifically listed in the obituary. I do not like terms such as "long illness," "short illness," etc. Even if I commit suicide or die of something socially incorrect such as AIDS or clap, it should be listed.
3. Have obituary run in the newspaper for 2-3 days minimum. One day is not sufficient to notify everyone who needs to know.

SOLITUDE AND LONELINESS

Did they come out of the same shell?

Which one boiled over
Which baked longer

Solitude drinks
Loneliness eats nothing
all day long
and doesn't know about
drinking. Childhood

was a whirl-i-go-round
a wheel with seats
on its sides between spokes
and iron handles to hold onto

Loneliness went there once
but loneliness couldn't make anything turn

Solitude never needs to whirl: if it turns, it goes
inward and finds - is that solace there?
No, stars.

Madeline Tiger

The poems in this issue are from Madeline (Mady) Tiger's latest book, *In The Clearing* (Dos Madres Press, Inc., 2016), an elegant small collection by the poet whose work has delighted us since college days.

Deeply feeling but never sentimental, Mady doesn't hesitate to visit profound sadness, the misery of the Holocaust, and the death of her son.

But she still rejoices in what is beautiful about the world, especially the natural world, leveling on it her clear-eyed vision to find, in her words, "miraculous signs of whatever we need to keep on."

Those small signs are what she continuously points us to: a hawk, a lilac bush, Netsuke, words—especially words. Through her special magic they reveal for a moment what is hidden, "to make this little world more clear."

Like me, you may find the world a little more clear—and a lot more beautiful—after reading this book!

Sheila Owen Monks

In The Clearing may be purchased from Dos Madres Press/New Pages, P.O. Box 1580, Bay City, MI 48706.

THE WILD RABBIT

The wild rabbit surprises me across the window pane
of the kitchen window.

Transfixed, his quivering, trembling ears pointing
outward, he gazes

Straight through at me. He is torn between fear and
fascination,

Unsure, then edging forward closer to where I stand.
I too am surprised: here, some 500 years later, is
Albrecht Durer's

Young Hare in my back yard, but
Breathing, breathing. Can I see his heart beat in the
Palpitations of his ears? His eyes, placed at the sides
of his head,

Bulge outward in perfect convexity. His feet are
Elongated, long bundles of slender toes like
Twigs tied together. He hops

Closer, feigning interest in the sorrel under the
euonymus bush,

But he and I know our focus is each other.

I cannot, I will not encourage him in this land of
Powerful dogs, and God knows what is lying in wait
in the

Thickets at the back of the yard.

We gaze at each other, enchanted, knowing that we are
in the

Presence of the
Beloved Other from
Beyond.

Joan Miles Oliver

Scarlet Letters, a journal for the Wellesley College Class of 1956, features class members' essays, poetry, and book reviews. *Scarlet Letters* 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 while we still have time to revise them! *Scarlet Letters* will be distributed quarterly and also be available online at the class website.

News from the Attic

After several hours burrowing through attic treasures—porcelain tea sets, Christmas glass ornaments, *Star Wars* outfits in which my husband and I occasionally costume ourselves—all covered in more dust than I would like to admit, I came across the old cardboard box. It was filled with notes from Bible 104, Econ 101, and assorted other priceless class papers that I had saved, for no good reason. And most important, I had at last found those memorable newspapers—pages yellowed, edges ragged and a few creepy crawlies wending their way across the faded lines of newsprint.

The 1955 and 1956 *Wellesley College News* had been rediscovered.

During fall of freshman year, I had been thrilled to be accepted on the paper after a challenging period of try-outs. My first assignment had been to interview the citizens of Scollay Square in Boston and write an article. About what? The scene? The action? Many questions, but finally a professor told me that Scollay Square was the Red Light District of the city. I must have written something since the article is lost, and I've blocked the journalistic experience from my mind.

The comradery of being a member of the staff was very special. Rae Baldanza (Lindsay), Jane Britton (Buchanan), Lynn Freydborg (Warshow), Connie Lieder, Nora Macfarlane (Nevin), Nan Schofield (Schofield-Guy), and Gene Skewis (Moll) were fellow members of the editorial board. They became my special friends. We all entered our *News* office in Green Hall through a window. The room must have had a legitimate door through which normal folks would come, but...maybe not. Time has dulled many of my memories, but I will always remember stepping through that window.

Producing the *News* in those long-ago days brings back an era that must sound centuries-past to current Wellesley students. We typed our articles, on actual typewriters of course. And then to prepare the paper for publication, we called a taxi that drove us to the printer, a person, not an HP machine.

As I read through the headlines of those historic pages, it's obvious now that we were living in the Fifties, an era now labeled as conformist. Despite the Korean War, Senator McCarthy's hunt for Communists, and the Civil Rights movement, we didn't demonstrate or protest. We (mostly) Liked Ike and lived a fairly insular and uncomplaining Wellesley experience. Not that we didn't include young men from Harvard, Yale,



Valerie Brown (Stauffer) and college roommates Lannie Burritt (McNichols) and Maggie Dandy (Gontrum) model their Princeton scarves, gifts from their boyfriends, who later became their husbands."

or MIT into our safe world.

Once a week, as editor-in-chief of the *News* I met with President Clapp. Although we got along quite well personally, I was periodically castigated for editorials that to her seemed to reflect badly on our college. I and the members of the editorial board were viewed as a Vocal Minority, worrying about problems that didn't exist. I flip through those yellowed *News* pages, trying not to become too nostalgic, and read the hot button issues—longer library hours, cars for seniors doing independent work, and the debatable status and residence of married Wellesley students.

Just when I had decided that complacency was the norm, I came across an amazing Page One headline, "Professors Strike." Reading further, I learned, "Spokesman Demands Class Knit Argyles." (Remember, we knitted argyle socks for boyfriends during classes!) The entire issue was a spoof! No strikes or demonstrations in our era.

Life at Wellesley in the Fifties may have been complacent, but editing the Wellesley College *News* was indeed a privilege—and tremendous fun.

Valerie Brown Stauffer