

Scarlet Letters

Volume 2, Number 1 January 2017



The class officers of 1956 in the Suzy Newhouse Center for the Humanities on campus, gathered for Alumnae Leadership Council in 2016. From left to right: Genevra Osborn Higginson, Sally Blumberg Linden, Susan McTighe Berkeley, Sherry Scott Putney, Ann Svensson McAdams. Unable to attend: Barbara Gelder Kelley, Katharine Freie Gaillard.

Scarlet Letters, a journal for the Wellesley College Class of 1956, will feature our memoirs, poetry, prose, and the reviews of the books of class members. *Scarlet Letters* aims to foster interaction among Fifty-Sixers and to encourage them to write. Class members are invited to submit short pieces, up to a page and a half single space, in such categories as first memory, significant Wellesley experience, travel commentary, work experience, and humor. One ongoing effort will be the production of our own obituaries while we still have time to revise them!

Scarlet Letters will be available quarterly online at the class website.

Featured in this issue, the work of

Maud Hazeltine Chaplin

Jane Kentnor Dean

Jean Fairgrieve Granum

Genevra Osborn Higginson

Sally Blumberg Linden

Gertrude Richards Russell

Laura Ginsburg Strauss

Obituary—Jane Kentnor Dean

Here is another in the Scarlet Letters series of obituaries, drafted in advance of our next great transition, telling the story the way we want it told.

Jane Kentnor Dean of Southport, CT died _____. Born in Bridgeport, CT on December 16, 1934, daughter of the late Charles and Jeanette Kentnor. A graduate of Bolton School (now Greens Farms Academy) and Wellesley College, Class of 1956, which she served in several capacities, including President and 50th Reunion Co-Chair.

She was the widow of George Alden Dean, Princeton '52, who died in January 2003. They had homes in Southport and Edgartown, MA. Her beloved family survives her: Jeffrey Pratt, Brookline, MA; and Susan Pratt and Susan's son, Harlin, Edgartown, MA; her brother and sister-in-law, Charles and Elen Kentnor, AZ; her stepchildren, George Dean, Jr. (Menlo Park, CA) his wife, Marianne, and their children, Charlotte and Mac, and Dianne Dean Stocks, her husband John and their children, Matthew, Drew, and Nick Losee and Kate Stocks, all of Massachusetts.

Jane's life outside her family was spent in the non-profit world, with the Fairfield Villages Wellesley Club, the Junior League of Bridgeport, and Pequot Library in Southport, all three of which she served as Board President. Professionally she was the first Director of Development at Greens Farms Academy from 1974 to 1984. She then was a senior executive of The Advertising Council in New York City and later a consultant in development at the UN International School in New York and for other nonprofits.

Jane's work and passion for Wellesley College was recognized in fall 2015, when she was one of 4 alumnae to receive the Sed Ministrare Award. This award recognized the joy she had for more than 6 decades serving both her class and her Wellesley clubs (Fairfield Villages & Martha's Vineyard which she helped found) in various offices including benefit, committee chairs, and President. She was also proud to be the recipient of the Hoyt O. Perry Award for service to Pequot Library in various capacities.

Jane's large intergenerational network of friends gave her the materials for her favorite hobby—net-

working and helping others meet one another in the pursuit of careers or non-profit ventures. She always attributed her long and healthy life to these friends who enriched her and supported her in both joyful and in challenging times.

Gifts in her memory may be sent to Trinity Church which served as the foundation of her faith for more than half her life, to Pequot Library, or to Wellesley College.

Jane Kentnor Dean
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The Inauguration of Wellesley's 14th President, Paula A. Johnson: Impressions

The main event, under an enormous, multi-peaked tent on Severance Green, was launched with the pageantry of majestically robed faculty marching behind an array of alumnae dressed in white and organized by class color, each carrying a pennant bearing class numerals. Oldest first: I was second (behind a '48-er) in the red group.

Processing past students cheering at ultra-high decibel levels was thrilling. Even more memorable was the joy expressed throughout the ceremonies—finger snapping, clapping, shouting, laughing.

My sense of pride and gratitude dominated, while thoughts of the amazing advancement in women's opportunities bubbled up.

Was every speaker unique and excellent? Yes! (The main talks are accessible at the wellesley.edu website.)

Paula Johnson focused on the need for "Intersections"—research and teaching that blend the traditional disciplines. Her obvious leadership abilities and the affection she has already evoked seemed to be the inspiration for almost palpable optimism.

What an honor to have been the 1956 representative! I believe that in spirit all of us are participants in celebrating our college and the ambitious education it continues to offer women.

Sally Blumberg Linden
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Running Downhill

Everybody thinks that running downhill must be much easier than going up. I know better. I finished the Boston Marathon with two bloody feet: my big toenails came off with my socks. Not from climbing one hill after another but from pounding down the other side. The toenails grew back in, but I've been watching out for downhills ever since.

All this came back to me one afternoon last fall when I was trudging back from the pick-your-own fields at the local community farm. Convinced I should be eating local, I had taken out a membership and every week faithfully went off to the fields to pick the strawberries and green beans, herbs and tomatillos the farm hands left for those with an interest in getting their hands dirty. Walking back with my berries and herbs, I was taken by surprise when the farm truck, driven by the head farmer and her assistant, sidled up to me.

The assistant leaned out the window:

"Is that you I see walking almost every morning on Main Street, near where it intersects with Pleasant?"

It took me a few seconds.

"You have just hurt my feelings beyond repair," I answered. "I'm not walking, I'm running as fast as I can."

She didn't miss a heartbeat. "Ah, so it is you I see sprinting every morning."

But the damage was done. My running was definitely going downhill. Putting in more miles was not going to help. The course ahead was downwards, and there were no turnoffs.

I should have seen it coming. Just that morning when I was out on the trail a young man with a Welch Corgi strolled past me. The ease with which he lifted each foot, the relaxed tilt of his body taunted me. Did he think I was walking?

Disheartened, that evening I almost didn't go to a forum on civil disobedience at the local Unitarian Church. I was feeling disobedient, but not civil. As the group was breaking up for the evening, a very attractive blond woman who had been staring at me off and on all during the discussion came over. She introduced herself and then hesitated. I thought she

was going to invite me to join the church, and I began to prepare excuses that would sound legitimate. The truth was that Sunday mornings were one of the few times I could count on for a run.

"Are you a runner?" she finally spoke.

I mumbled something like, well, yes, I did like to run.

I thought so!" She almost shouted the words. "My husband and I have watched you running for thirty years and always wondered who you were. I can't wait to tell Bill I've met you."

Thirty years? Had it been that long? It was June, 1986, my fifty-first birthday, when my son gave me a pair of running shoes.

"Try it, Mom," he said, "You'll love it."

The woman was right. It had been thirty years.

"Bill said he saw you just last week—on route 16. But we've seen you all over the place—you cover a lot of ground." She smiled. "You know, there weren't that many women runners thirty years ago—it was almost an act of civil disobedience in itself. But you did it, and I see you're still doing it. You're our role model—we started running in high school and now we're hoping that we can go as long as you have."

So maybe it is downhill but it's not yet the end of the road.

Maud Hazeltine Chaplin
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Letter from a Reader

The "Pink Lilies" poem is extraordinary—perfect—as very few things are. I don't ever cry over literature but I did this time. I lost two of my dearest '56 dorm mates, Carol Dickey and Judie Molinar, very early. It is a lasting sorrow. Thank you, Sheila, for writing this poem and in doing so, helping us to remember our dear lost '56 friends—I wish they knew.

Laura Ginsburg Strauss
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My Painting Life

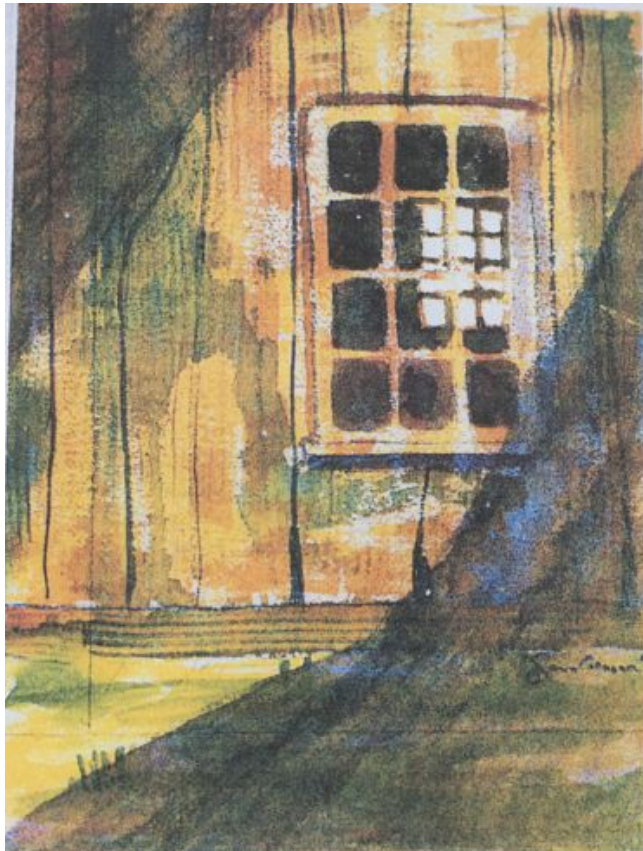
When I was registering for classes my junior year, I was told I couldn't take a painting class as I was not an art major. The powers that be told me to take an art history class instead. I got a D in it even though I thought I had done well in the final exam! Rumor had it that the grader had been getting a divorce and she lowered everyone's GPA.

In any event, that propelled me to take an art class as soon as I graduated. I took an evening watercolor class in Cambridge, MA, where I lived. It was just that: color. We splashed around and had a lot of fun. I actually did two paintings that I liked. One of them hung in a bank window for a while and I liked to drive by and see it. I think that class influenced my later painting as I never worried about making a mistake.

The next class I took was a bit more serious. The first assignment was to do a portrait. I went home and painted Robert Frost from a picture on the cover



Geraniums



The Shed

of a record sleeve. (That painting has an interesting history: there was a fire in the shop where I was having it framed so the painting now bears brown smudges!) When I was married and had three children under three, I decided to put the painting in a show. I hung it in the showroom on a pillar made of brown rocks, which I thought matched the brown burn marks. When I went back to get it at the end of the show, it wasn't there. I was told I had won third place and that the painting was going to hang in our local museum with the rest of the winners! That kept me on my game.

I persuaded my husband to watch the children one evening a week while I took a class with Gus Trois. I stayed with him for two years and learned a lot. During that time I entered a mixed-media piece in another show. At the end the show, since I was going away for the weekend, I asked a neighbor friend if she would pick up the painting. When she did, she found I had won a second. Wow! I was still on my game!

Later we moved to Williamsburg. I had two cancer operations and got a divorce, but painting saved me, and I did some of my best work at that time. I took courses with Anne Murphy, who had just graduated as an art major from the College of William and Mary. I would do two, maybe three, paintings in each of her classes. Fortunately, there was cheap

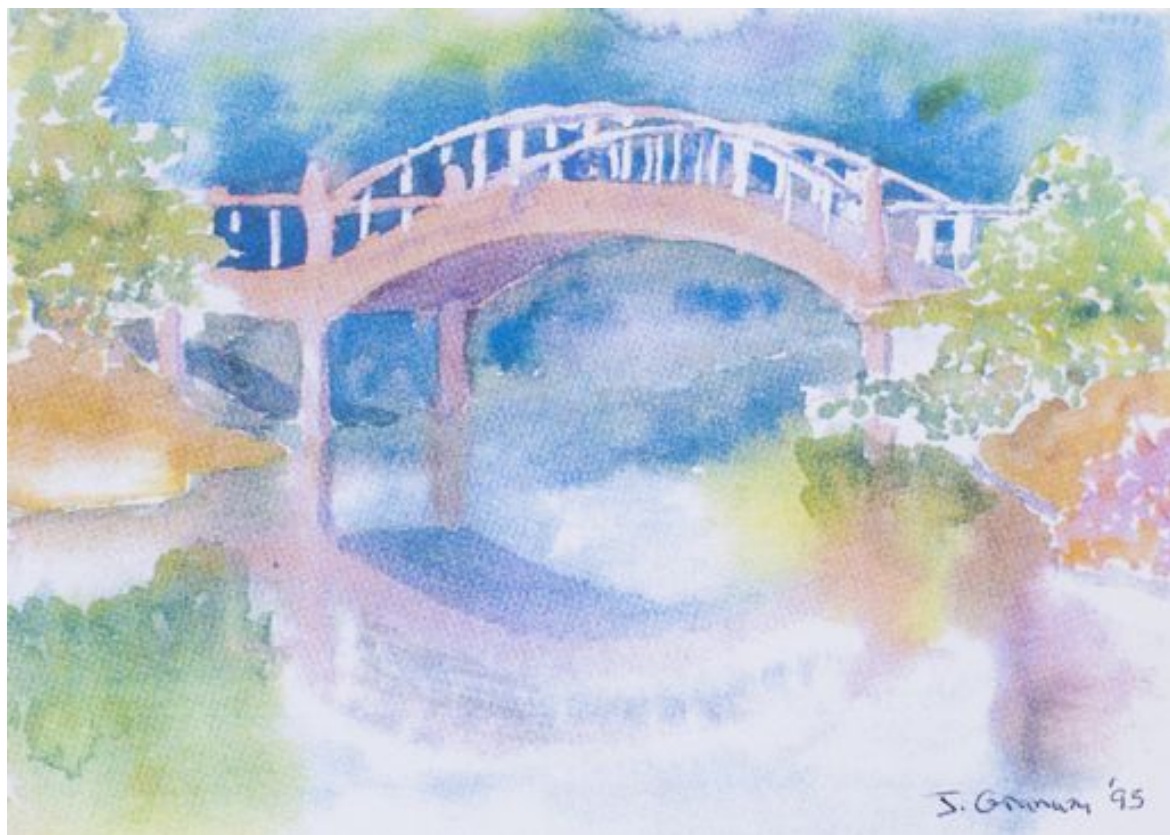
framing available so most of those paintings are framed.

Because I couldn't bear to part with my paintings, I made cards from them, which I send to my friends for their celebrations. The cards each have a title on the back. I now have two complete notebooks full of paintings.

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Ginger



The Bridge

Light at the Corner

“Hello. American Woman!”

There he was, the same round-faced boy running beside the car, pressing his nose to the glass when she stopped at the light. His face was the only round part of his body. The rest all bone and angles and flapping pieces of over-large clothing.

She rolled down her window.

“Hello! Ethiopian boy!” she said. He beamed. She beamed back and added “Thank you!” in Amharic—the only word she was sure of. And then, “See you later!” in English as the light changed. He stepped back, waved, and yelled “See you later!” as she turned the corner onto Churchill Road and the last half block to the alley where their apartment building loomed over the surrounding shops.

The elevator was broken again. Halfway up the staircase that spiraled tightly through a windowless tube in the center of the building, she burst out laughing. It was such a ponderous greeting. American Woman! My goodness! She felt huge. She felt like a gleaming fifty-page magazine, filled with recipes, distributed nationwide. She stood there, her hand on the damp curve of the wall, laughing, gasping for air in the darkness. She was mildly hysterical with relief. She had survived her first encounter with the dreaded beggars of Addis Ababa.

That was the beginning.

He never followed her home. He never appeared when she was on foot in the neighborhood. He was not a part of the group that staked out the corner of the alley under the overhanging roof of the shops and the National Theater. His beat was the cars. His passion was learning. In the course of the three months or so since the end of the war and the return of the foreigners to the city, he had learned the Embassy license plates and the languages to go with them.

“Hello! Russian Woman!” he greeted the wife of the Russian Military Attache—in Russian. “Hello! Norwegian Woman!” the Director of Red Barna—in Norwegian. There may have been more, but those were the two she’d heard about.

The beggars were everywhere—all ages, all stages of disability, disease, derangement: packs of children, women with infants, legless veterans on four-wheeled pieces of board, polio and birth-defect

victims maneuvering with a block of wood in each hand, swinging their twisted legs forward, reaching for another “step.” There were leprosy-reduced hands reaching to car windows. There were piles of rags in the street that would rise suddenly and drag themselves away, followed by dogs.

The subject of how to respond was much discussed at the Embassy. There was no one without a Rule. One woman always gave to women with children. Another never gave to women with children because she had seen some with different babies on different occasions. One gave to nobody because “once you start. . . .” She would be in tears before she finished the sentence. One gave only food, never money, because she had seen the small ones beaten and the money taken by larger boys. Some women had decided never to drive alone. Some never left the Embassy compound on the hill. Everyone had discovered “fraud” among the beggars at one time or another. This justified the Rule. For some it was necessary to hate Ethiopia.

Others, who disapproved of begging, hired as many children as they could to wash cars, dig in the gardens, carry groceries. One woman established an adoption agency and ferried children to new homes in Belgium. The American Ambassador and his wife adopted infant twins.

Security briefings advised keeping car doors locked and windows shut while driving in the city. Nobody mentioned laughing. No one mentioned language—offered twice daily or more at the light on Churchill Road. It was her secret. Her life boat in an overwhelming sea.

His name was Tedla and he preferred English. Their conversations were short, dictated by the length of the red light, but frequent. She passed the light at the corner at least twice a day. It was the route up the hill to the Embassy—the only one, so far as she knew. If the light was green when she reached it, he would shriek: “See you later!” as she passed and laugh uproariously. He was always there. His English sentences got longer. So did her Amharic. She would bring new words for his approval. He did the same. Once in a burst of fluency, she said, “There is a lake at the bottom of my street” in Amharic. “It is raining too much,” he said, in English. A triumph.

It was from Tedla that she first learned of the

round-up—the gathering of all the street children in their part of the city. “We are going to school,” he said, “for learning. Maybe tomorrow. See you later.”

At the Embassy there was relief. The government was “doing something” at last. The street children of Addis Ababa were to be taken to the country—those who had no family and those whose families could manage without their earnings.

Later she learned that the children were taken in trucks, fifty miles or so outside the city and unloaded—a few to each village—to help with the harvest. Later still, when travel was allowed outside the city she saw the villages. Barren countryside. Skeletal cattle were closely herded by small boys on the roadsides and between the fields. The occasional gas station or tire-repair shop or eating place was awash in begging children. Only the shopkeepers spoke Amharic. Nobody spoke English. Or Russian. Or Norwegian.

In a week or two the streets of the city were again filled with children. A soldier stood at Tedla’s corner, directing traffic under the broken light.

Gertrude Richards Russell (“Trudy”)
Addis Ababa, 1994

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Adventures in Algeria

When Charlie was posted to Algeria in 1973 we knew we would have many adventures, but had no way to imagine what they might be. He flew ahead: it was a challenging time diplomatically, as Algeria had severed relations with the United States in 1967, after the Arab-Israeli War, so we were then called the United States Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy. *El Moudjahid*, the main newspaper, proclaimed daily that Americans were warmongers and barbarians. Algerian people, however, were unfailingly friendly, and privately, very pro-American.

Our four boys and I followed Charlie in mid-August, flying to Charles de Gaulle and going straight to the Peugeot headquarters on the outskirts of Paris to get the 504 “brique familiale” station wagon, equipped for the desert so we could explore the Sahara. We drove out grandly, and, after a night in Dijon, arrived in Marseilles just in time to board a packed ferry for the twenty-hour trip across the Mediterranean.

The sight of Algiers rising up out of the bay as we approached was astonishing. Called the white city, Algiers cradles the bay, going up to the heights of El Biar, where we were to live in the Villa Oued el Kilai, on Chemin Cheikh Bachir Brahimi. It was a 16th-century Turkish summer house full of mosaic tiles, filigreed arches, domes, and stained-glass windows: 53 windows in all, none with curtains, and with very little furniture. All that would wait, as we started to explore our new country. We drove as much as we could while all together, along the beautiful, palm-lined Mediterranean beaches; through cedar forests and olive groves; and up over high Kabylie mountain routes, to see some of the vast Roman ruins of North Africa in Djémila and Tipasa.

Then school began in New England, and also in the little international school which was located in the old stables of our house. We learned forever that teachers are far more important than bricks and mortar. That fall, when Comet Kohoutek was vaunted as the “Comet of the Century”, supposed to rival Halley’s Comet, our son Steve’s 7th-grade science teacher, a white Russian emigré named Dimitri Bushin, said that his class needed to go deep into the desert

to see it when it was closest to earth. So, as people gathered all over the world to see it approach for the first time in 150,000 years, we organized one of our first Saharan expeditions, with all nine of Steve's seventh-grade classmates; some of Philip's fourth-grade friends; and Dr. Bushin, who somehow had found three long-range telescopes for the journey. He told us all to bring warm clothes, as the desert becomes very cold when the sun goes down; high boots to repel the venomous "death stalker" scorpions which emerge from the sand at night; and lots of water. The Sahara covers eighty percent of Algeria, and the few roads through it go from oasis city to oasis city, often some 600 miles between them; it is stony in the north, and then changes to great shifting dunes or flat sand further south. We drove for hours, from Algiers to the oasis of Laghouat, which appeared suddenly, verdant and welcoming, with wells, date palms, oleanders and pistachio trees. That night our little troop went out into the cold and dark, not knowing what we might see, to be overwhelmed by the beauty of the sky. So far from any city lights or industrial haze, the stars, the planets, and the Milky Way all shone as we had never seen them. And there, amazingly, when the rest of the world called Kohoutek a dud, through our borrowed telescopes, it blazed across the sky, followed by a brilliant, shimmering tail.

Our next Saharan adventure took us to Bou Saada, the oasis "city of happiness" cooled by some 24,000 palm trees. Lured by stories of Saharan caravans, we sought out their camel drivers, and were treated to a long, bumpy ride around the dunes. Mounting grumpy camels is tricky: they extend first their front and then their back legs: you pitch forward, then back, and hope finally to sit straight. Once aloft, the ride is surprisingly comfortable.

Our longest oasis trip, due south from Algiers, was via Djelfa and Laghouat to Ghardaïa, the fabled oasis city that inspired Le Corbusier. We set forth alone in our Peugeot, without the recommended caravan, but well equipped with extra water and provisions. Most important always were our Michelin maps, which not only showed the roads and cities, but also had a special symbol for gas stations: essential, and rare, in the Sahara. We hurried on from the old oasis of Djelfa, but soon saw

that we were perilously low on gas. To our relief, the Michelin map showed a station at a tiny oasis just south of Djelfa, but as we neared it, we saw that the oasis, and therefore also the gas station, no longer existed. Studying the map, Charlie saw another little mark, this one indicating an oil well in the desert, about a kilometer off the road. We put our Peugeot to the test, driving directly over the sand, until we saw the rig ahead—only to realize that of course we couldn't use the crude oil. Once again proving the friendship of Algerians, the rig workers siphoned gas out of their trucks, gave it to us, and wished us a good trip back over the sand to Laghouat. Finally at our inn, we told Steve and Philip to play in the inner courtyard while we unpacked. Water dripped into a pool, mimosa was blooming, and all seemed perfect until we heard a large commotion. We ran to find that the owner had a small baboon chained in the garden. Seeing two boys playing, he lunged at his chain, broke it, and chased after them. The inn keeper finally caught him, but wasn't very pleased. The next morning, we were glad to head on to Ghardaïa. The city is at a crossroad: north and south, between Algiers and Tamanrasset, the site of ancient cave paintings, near Algeria's southern border; and east and west, along the old salt routes that cross Africa. Here, in the heart of the M'zab, this city of gardens, palm groves, and winding narrow pathways, has been built over centuries. The white and ochre buildings rise up the terraced hill, until the whole city seems to be a tall pyramid, ascending out of the desert sands. We understood why it captivated Le Corbusier: all the challenges of the long drive were worth it.

Too soon, we needed to hasten back to Algiers. After so many difficult years, there was reconciliation, and we could hold a ceremony raising the stars and stripes over our own Embassy, signaling the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Algeria. It was a great day in this vast and varied country, which had become so important to us.

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