

*The Wellesley College Class of 1956 presents*

# *Scarlet Letters*

*Number 19, April 2021*



*Severance Hall juniors, c. 1954, left to right on floor: Joan Miles, Mary Ann Hill, Diane Weeks, Ruth McHaney, Claudia Lauper, Sheila Owen. Standing: Claire Bateman. On bed, left to right: Carolyn Jaffe, Sue Snodgrass, Maggie Daniel, Beth Montgomery, Estill Henlein, Betsy Cassel, Claire Wilkinson.*

## **The Big Sixty-Fifth**

Is it possible that those fresh-faced girls who gathered at Wellesley sixty-nine years ago will celebrate the sixty-fifth anniversary of entering the adult world this very year? Surely not. We are still planning what we will do when we grow up.

To document that span, we are compiling the 2021 Record Book, a volume that will chronicle our years. Surely you want to be part of it, to reveal the joys and sorrows of the real life beyond our enchanted years at Wellesley. If you have submitted your entry for the book, good for you! If you haven't yet, please do. We hope for a rich and full account of our class. If you need help, write or call someone who will help craft a paragraph or so to tell your story.

We will be distance convening to reunite this year,

without the pleasures of traveling the infected landscape and sleeping in the dorms. Wellesley will come to us through Zoom. We will meet in dorm groups for reunion teas, to be organized by our valiant class officers. A picture will be taken; come looking your best!

Our major class virtual event will take place on May 23rd. See you there!

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

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# A Time of Cholera

It was first detected by satellite, a large irregular body at great height  
Somewhere between the atmosphere and the stratosphere,  
Gray in color and curdled in texture.  
It was somewhat too high for the meteorologists and  
Too low for the astronomers, so  
Much discussion ensued. It was at last determined to be the residue  
Of massive wildfires that had raged for several previous years.  
What could not be explained, however, was that in disregard of  
Prevailing winds, it seemed  
Tethered to a large swath of the Earth below.

The affliction had already begun:  
Sometimes slipping through the back door in the  
Guise of a schoolgirl in a smocked dress  
With a cheerful face framed by yellow hair,  
She would hide for days behind a drapery or  
A sofa or a door. Meanwhile her host would have to  
Take to his or her bed for a few days; but who has not had  
A bit of fever every now and again or a  
Recurring headache? Then she would  
Steal out the back door as silently as she had come.  
But sometimes she strode boldly to the bedside of  
The afflicted and let her dress fall,  
Took off her mask and wig,  
Revealing the skeleton and skull beneath.  
She might just as well have slit their throat:  
They died strangling on their own blood.

The other issue was the easiest to explain: it was an  
Optical illusion caused by the refraction of light during a  
Period of unusual pollution. It was  
An eye, or rather an eyeball, for there were  
No lids to frame it. It had the peculiar attribute of  
Seeming to follow the person watching.

Despite assurances, people felt uneasy,  
Unsettled. Mostly, they preferred just to  
Stay inside. If they had to go outside, they made the trip  
As short as possible, walking shoulders hunched,  
Head down, eyes downcast,  
Praying silently not to attract the attention of  
A nameless god.

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## An Experience Like No Other

On March 19, 2020, Peter and I drove to our daughter's house in Brunswick, Maine to celebrate my eighty-fifth birthday. Peter did the six-hour drive with no problems. On March 21, we had the birthday dinner, including a Wellesley fudge cake made by our eleven-year-old granddaughter, Ruby Rose Morris, assisted by nine-year-old Gemma Grace. This was my mother's recipe from a 1930s magazine. About four days later my husband woke up shaking and almost comatose. I called his New York doctor who said he had to go to the hospital immediately. Diana drove him to the Mid-Coast Hospital in Brunswick and that was the last we saw of him. Every morning she got him on the phone—he could hardly talk. Every evening the same, with an additional call to the doctor on duty. At one point we had an indication that he probably would not live. But after two weeks he was brought home by ambulance and his rehabilitation began—slow exercise, slow walking, and a little eating. While Peter was away, Kevin, Diana's husband, got a fever and isolated himself on the third floor. After a week he recovered without evident negative effect. I also had COVID-19, but milder, and I slowly regained my strength by walking down the rural road and back to the house—eventually I could do a 45-minute walk. This is not an elegant neighborhood. Mostly hardworking people in simple houses. One older woman popped her head out when I came by on my usual schedule and said she was worried about me and asked if I was all right and offered me a coke. I explained my situation—old and recovering from COVID-19—and thanked her. One of the few positives was watching spring come to Maine—snow melting, ducks swimming in the culverts, and pairs of flying birds. I became an observer of how people take care of their yards and their garbage. I tried to pick up after the unknown person whom we called the Bud Light vandal—cans and pieces of cartons strewn on people's fields every Saturday night. After two months, we returned to Scarsdale. As a result of COVID-19, Peter lost his short-term memory. He cannot remember my birthday or the hospital. He vaguely recalls the therapists that

came to Diana's house. He does not remember writing five thank-you letters to the doctors and nurses or the gift he sent to the hospital director. He doesn't remember his calls to Harvard Business School for information he needed to write his 337th class notes column for the HBS magazine, but he managed to do that as perfectly as before. I remember all of it—our terrible fear that he would die, the tremendous work that Diana did to make meals and take care of us, her thoughtfulness in playing two days of Bach for me at the absolute worst time. I am grateful for Peter's recovery, for our daughter and her family, and for our other daughter, Carolyn, in LA, and her sixteen-year-old son, Owen, who stayed in constant touch. Our relatives and our friends were a source of comfort. A special thank you to the Wellesley friends who remembered us. I surely remember and thank all of you. Here is my COVID-19 reading list—it took me to another time and place as did Bach: *The Mirror and the Light* (Hilary Mantel); *Lady in Waiting* (Anne Glenconner); *The Splendid and the Vile* (Eric Larson); *Mudlark* (Lara Maiklem).

This was an experience like no other. If this had happened when we were home, I don't think that we would have had a positive outcome. The beginning of a great COVID-19 surge was in the nearby area and the White Plains Hospital had patients in the parking lot. We are so grateful to the personnel at the Mid-Coast Maine Hospital. They did not put Peter on a ventilator—thankfully—he would not have survived. Good luck means so much. And I can't praise Diana too much. She took care of it all—her husband, her father, her mother, the dogs—and the on-line learning that was very new at that time and did not go smoothly.

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# Making A Body of Work

There is one terabyte of digital images on my PC's external hard disk, a lifetime of photographs. I majored in music and did an MA in art history but did not think of myself as an artist, or photography as a medium of expression. Through the years of raising three children, living overseas, and travelling, I just kept making pictures because it was fun. I finally did an MLS degree as a license to practice something respectable after divorce in 1990. Retirement in 2000 gave me the chance to design a freer and more creative life. I stood blinking in the sunlight for a while, asking myself "Now what?"

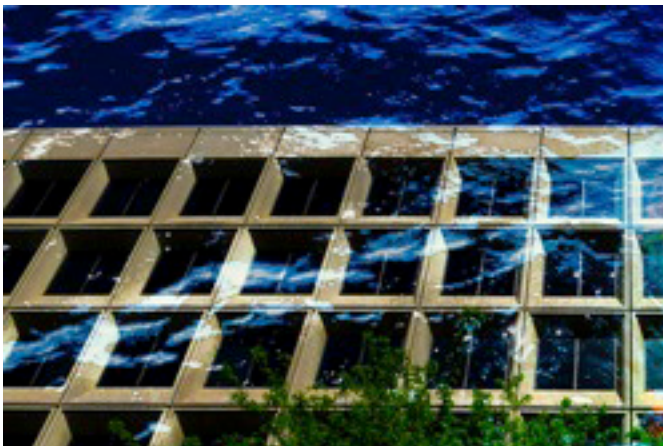
Photographers were "going digital" in 2000, so I took some workshops, scanned my slides and negatives into digital files, bought a digital camera, climbed the steep learning curve of Photoshop, and created a website. My picture-making continued as I dipped into the various areas of photography: stock, portrait, travel, wedding, you-name-it. The industry was changing so radically during that decade that nothing commercial really made sense to me. Now I am what the industry calls a "fine art photographer," which frees me to establish an artistic identity. "Follow your visual delights," said Sean Kernan. "Light, color, gesture," wrote Jay Maisel.

"Get close enough," said Robert Capa. "Make visual metaphors," writes John Paul Caponigro. "Sunlight is my paintbrush," I say.

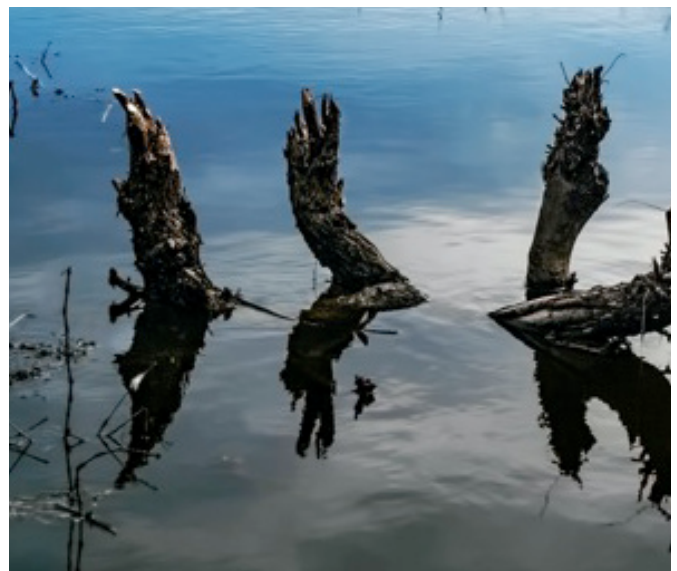
These thoughts drive me now in seeking form and feeling graphically expressed. These directions help me find a fresh personal viewpoint in exploring historic sites, notice touching incidents, labors, spiritual practices, and interactions between people, animals, and their environment; compose beautiful landscapes, seascapes, and cloudscape; and comment on current issues such as climate change. I am fascinated by an ambiguity that hovers between pure abstraction and hard reality, between two dimensions and three, between photography and painting.

Now that I'm eighty-six, I want to form this terabyte of images into a coherent body of work, a legacy I can hand over to one of my kids or grandkids. Remodeling that website is my focus now, in the hope that it might become a source of passive income, too!

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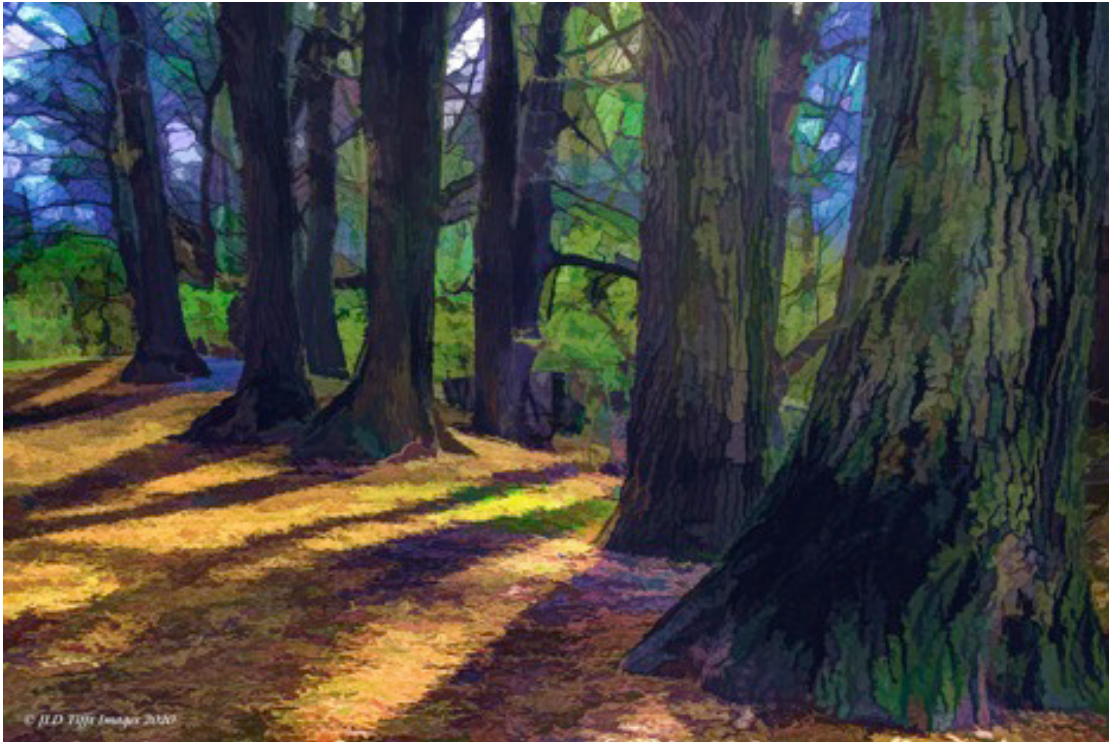


*Rising Seas*



*Emergence*





*Walking Wood*



*Dark Wine Seas*

## A Suite of Wellesley Poems, for the Record Book

(1)

It's September '52  
Getting homesick, feeling blue;  
I am like a fish out of water,  
I don't WANT to be Wellesley's daughter!!

(2)

Waiting on was a freshman assignment,  
To help us fulfill the work requirement;  
    With glassware and china,  
    Don't forget underlinahs!  
Which helped to define just what "to dine" meant!

(3)

Blue gym bloomers,  
Red chapped knees,  
Hair up in curlers,  
Baggy tees.

But Saturday morning,  
Not the same,  
Fur coats and heels  
To go to the game!

(4)

Walking home at the end of the day  
I love to hear the carillon play;  
It gives me a moment of peace and rest  
Before tonight's paper and tomorrow's test!

(5)

Sitting on bells on Saturday night,  
Alone and dateless is my plight;  
Not dressed up – no place to go,  
Feeling sad and full of woe.

Sitting on bells on Saturday night,  
Whatever happened to Mr. Right?  
I'd thought we made a lovely pair,  
But I guess he didn't care.

Sitting on bells on Saturday night,  
Try not to envy the happy sight  
Of couples going out the door  
To Harvard, MIT, and more.

Sitting on bells on Saturday night,  
The rush is over – but there's a light  
On the phone – it's ringing – so let's see. .  
"Good evening" (pause) Hey, it's for me!!!

(6)

"Port, take us up – starboard back us"  
Here we are after weeks of practice;  
Tree Day '56, and the Senior Crew  
Is going to show what we can do!

With Jane at stroke, and Jo in the bow  
And cox'n Dawn with her know-how,  
We find our rhythm, get into the race,  
And now it's time to pick up the pace.

And pull and pull across the lake,  
And pull some more 'til our shoulders ache;  
Now sprint, and pull, we're ahead by a hair,  
And we've beaten them all with seconds to spare!

(7)

As Sophomores we studied the Bible,  
The Prophets and wanderings tribal,  
    With Sodom and Gomorrah,  
    And a whale gulping Jonah,  
It's a plot line without any rival!

(8)

Naked and shivering we stood in lines  
To have pins glued up and down our spines;  
These posture pictures are going. . .where?  
To be circulated in Harvard Square??

Why didn't we scream and say "no way?"  
As girls in the '50's, we had no say;  
It wouldn't have done to be defiant,  
Say yes to Dean Jean and be compliant!

Years later, the photos turned up in New Haven,  
Kept by a guy who was trying to save 'em;  
Let's hope that forever they're locked away  
Unless an ill wind blows the wrong way!

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# Hand Work

I moved from my home of fifteen years in Watsonville, California (between Santa Cruz and Monterey) in October during the Covid-19 restrictions. It made for interesting times arranging to sell a house and get rid of so much so I could downsize to move to my new independent living apartment here in Oakland. I had lived in this neighborhood for many years before moving away, so it was like coming home and made the transition relatively comfortable. And one of my daughters lives about five minutes away

I had been a full-time volunteer at the Second Harvest Food Bank in Santa Cruz as manager of their donor database for a couple of years. Like so many other people, I had switched to working from home, so it was easy to bring that job along with me to Oakland. It keeps me busy at least twenty hours a week, and I am so grateful to continue my contribution to feeding those in need.

One of the first things I did when I moved in was to put up some of my embroidery pieces, which made this feel very much like home. As you can see in the picture of the wall, I have done many types of embroidery over the years, starting in the 70s and continuing still. One of my favorite pieces, and possibly one of the most difficult and demanding, is the Russian folk piece. Another fun one was the green and silver piece which is really an alphabet if you look closely. And I am still at it; the unfinished piece is a sampler that I am working on now and hope to complete soon. I have just the place here I want to hang it.

In addition to embroidery, I also knit and crochet. The two knitted pieces on the couch are from my needles and I just completed a crocheted wrap for one of my daughters.

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*Ann's Living Room*



*Russian Folk Embroidery*



*Alphabet*



*Sampler*