

The Wellesley College Class of 1956 presents

Scarlet Letters

Number 18 January 2021



*Top Row: Toni Holland Liebman, Janet Sommers Isenberg, Carolyn Montgomery, Jane Kentnor Dean
Bottom Row: Joan Ward Lasley, Pat McLaughlin Cavanagh, Betsy Cassel Stern, Nancy ten Broeck at
Wellesley College on the occasion of the bestowal of the “Sed Ministrare” award on Jane Dean
Toni Holland Liebman provided this picture but apparently was not the photographer, as she is in the picture.*

Record Book Update

Now that we know our 65th Reunion will be virtual, Executive Committee members are concentrating on ways to bring classmates together without actual physical proximity. Since our 60th, Class connections have been nourished by Scarlet Letters and Zoom teas. Thanks to Claudia Lauper Bushman and Sheila Owen Monks (and to classmates who respond to the questionnaire), we will also have a Class of '56 Reunion Record Book.

Ordinarily, there would be an opportunity on the Reunion registration form to contribute to the cost of the Record Book, which is mailed to every Class member gratis. In 2021, however, our Reunion will not cost anything: no registration, room, or meal fees. Still, the Class treasury needs an infusion to support the Record Book and ensure the continued mailings of Scarlet Letters.

If you're able, please send a check for \$25 or more, made out to WCAA, with notification on the memo line “Class of '56 Spirit Fund.” Mail to Wellesley College Alumnae Association, Rm 246, Attention: Jackie Fagone, 106 Central Street, Wellesley MA 02481-8203. Thanks in advance!

Sally Blumberg Linden, President
Wellesley Class of 1956
sallylinden@comcast.net

Comments, Contributions, Inquiries Invited

Claudia and Sheila, co-editors
claudia.bushman@gmail.com
smonks341@gmail.com
Jane Nieuwenhuis Baker, designer
jbaker651@woh.rr.com
Toni Holland Liebman, Web Manager
toelieb@aol.com

My Choice, Alone

Little did I know I was making the best decision in my life. It is another story as to the who, when, where, and how I was doing this, but it was upon me.

I was 75, and after giving myself a party with my family, I drove off to see high school friends to check up on them. It was an unsettling trip, as three of them were living in their homes, having health difficulties, arguing with their children about their situation, and confident everything was fine in their lives. For them, it wasn't. None would admit she needed help, although their children were pushing for a change in living circumstances.

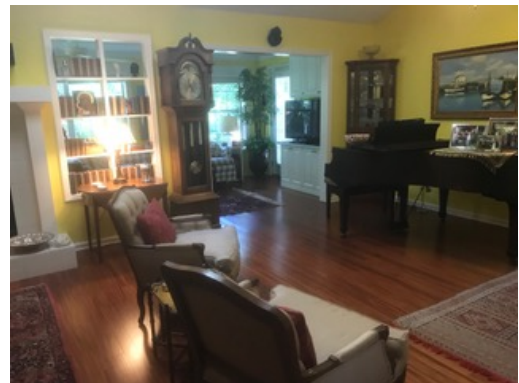
On my two-and-a-half-day trip back home to north-east Florida, I did a lot of thinking. While I loved seeing my pals, I was unhappy with how they were living. I certainly did not want to end up in the same position--unable to fully take care of myself and not admitting it. In warfare with my children and grandchildren. Wondering why life was getting a bit difficult.

I gave no thought to the current economy. It was 2009 with the housing market in precarious territory. I decided that I would sell my home and move into what is referred to as a CCRC, a Continuing Care Retirement Community. My neighbors felt so sorry for me, that I was in declining health. My friends thought I was jumping the gun going to an "old people's home."

Neither comment was true. I was fine. I wanted to get settled in a new environment on my own, making my own decisions about where I would live and how to decorate, without anyone else's opinion clouding my brain. I wanted to do this before my children would make those commitments for me. And I was just tired of lawn people, painters, handymen, and plumbers not keeping appointments and doing sloppy work.

My parents had moved into a CCRC when my father was over ninety, and Mother was almost there. They were way past move-out, move-in time. When push came to shove, they just couldn't do it. My sister and I had to make a lot of selections for them that they may not have been happy with. I didn't want that. So, I moved.

This is how a CCRC works. At least Fleet Landing, where I live, does. First of all, my community, unlike some others, is non-profit. That is important, because, in Florida, the state Office of Insurance Regulations oversees non-profit CCRCs with pages of statutes. There is no hanky-panky with sudden fees, and the



residents must be represented by their resident-elected peers to work with the administration regarding suggestions, concerns, and complaints. I have just finished a three-year term on our Residents' Council, the last year as President. While we are told by our Executive Director from the very start that the Council has no authority or control over the running of the community, management does listen to the residents. The residents get things done. They just don't make demands.

When I decided to move in to my CCRC, I signed a contract recognizing the buy-in amount I would pay, which was determined by the location and square footage of my cottage. I would also pay a monthly fee, which does increase each year, but the fee has to be justified, in detail, with full transparency. Included in the contract were all the responsibilities of the CCRC:

health care for life, including skilled nursing, assisted living apartments, rehab quarters after surgeries with physical and occupational therapy twice a day, meals, exercise activities, weekly housecleaning and an annual deep-clean, bed linens laundered, yard maintenance, common areas kept up, plus access to medical transportation, grocery shopping transport, buses to cultural events in town. I could go on and on, and each place is different, but you get the picture.

My CCRC has a monthly calendar with lectures, day-trips, exercise classes, special dining events, and OLLI classes. Actually, I found that there was too much to do. Activities every day made it impossible to get other things done. I realized I had to pick and choose. But that was great--many things for many different people.

Then we might come to a crisis--like a hurricane. In Florida we have those, and if we do not want to take ourselves to safety independently, Fleet Landing will take us to a prearranged hotel to ride out the storm. They take the Assisted Living, Health Care and Memory Care residents to a place where all can be accommodated and attended to by our skilled nursing and health care staff. All medications are moved with them. And supplies, six semi-trucks full. The kitchen staff goes with them to make sure they are properly fed.

Of course, when I moved in, nobody had an idea we'd have the coronavirus pounce down upon us. Our administration was on top of the situation, at the very start, closing our community to everyone except staff and essential vendors. Any of those entering the campus were temperature checked each day, along with other precautions. All our food was delivered to our homes/apartments. No social gatherings. They were watching out for us, their family.

There have been so many days when it suddenly dawns upon me that I am exceedingly lucky to be here. In "normal" times, I am free to come and go as I please, but I have the mental tranquility that if anything unforeseen happens, I will be in a safe place, with experts who know how to take care of me. I have no worries about myself at all.

Now, if my children and grandchildren would all do as I wish, it would be a perfect world, indeed.

Carolyn Evans

carolynaevans601@gmail.com

Travels in Africa

George and I are very fortunate to have been able to travel to many areas throughout the world. Among our most memorable places are South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, which we visited with twenty-one others in July 2011. In South Africa we enjoyed touring communities in Johannesburg along with museums and parks. In Zimbabwe we were able to visit an elementary school where the students in uniform were very well-behaved. Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe was also most impressive. Most of our journey was spent in three remote tent camps in Botswana. Two wildlife safaris each day brought us amazingly close to a wide range of animals in their native habitat. Some of our safaris were by boat and others by motor coach. Each night we had to be escorted to our raised tents with wildlife visible below us. One afternoon during a siesta our tent was covered by over twenty very noisy baboons. Luckily, we didn't have to go anywhere at the time and so could observe them at a close range. Our last few days were spent in Cape Town, the legislative capital of South Africa, located at the foot of the very scenic Table Mountain. Besides all the locations we visited, one of the main benefits of our trip was learning the fascinating history of all these countries.

Ann Cleminshaw Limbach

annlimbach@aol.com



At the far end of the garden
 Where fennel grows tall,
 I reached for a frond:
 Fresh, fragrant and frilled
 Only to find
 It wasn't mine!



A New Outlook

Last spring, when it became clear that our sons and grandchildren couldn't come for the summer, as they had always done, and that Charlie and I would be alone in our "bubble" indefinitely, my spirits plunged. How to cope with that huge disappointment?

One morning in the garden my toe stubbed on something: looking down, I saw a large, coiled garter snake: it was looking UP at me, as if to say "what is the matter with you?"

And I suddenly thought, this is the answer: Find surprises in unexpected places; welcome wonders; and share joy.

So I started a small journal to record some of them, and it has given me a new outlook.

Genevra Osborn Higginson ("Nessa")
 cedarledges@verizon.net



*Sleeping Snake
 Disturbed*

A small pivot
 And my sneaker's toe
 Disrupted the spiral
 Of a great garter snake,
 Coiled under the ginkgo tree.
 Who was more surprised:
 Snake
 or
 She
 ?

Picking Big Max pumpkins
in our patch
With a little boy of 88 ~
He lifts a curly leaf,
And there's a Renegade:
What stray seed grew
into
This small curlicue?



Frogs abound
In our small pond:
We see them basking ~
One by one
In the sun!
But now, today
They're satisfied
Sunning, two: side by side!

How I Spent My Covid Days

I am probably not the only Wellesley grad with shoe boxes of yellowed photos, many dating back to pictures of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and “who the hell are those other folks?”—all jumbled together. I planned to get around to dealing with those boxes . . . whenever. Whenever I didn’t have a luncheon, a party, a tennis game, or just something better to do.

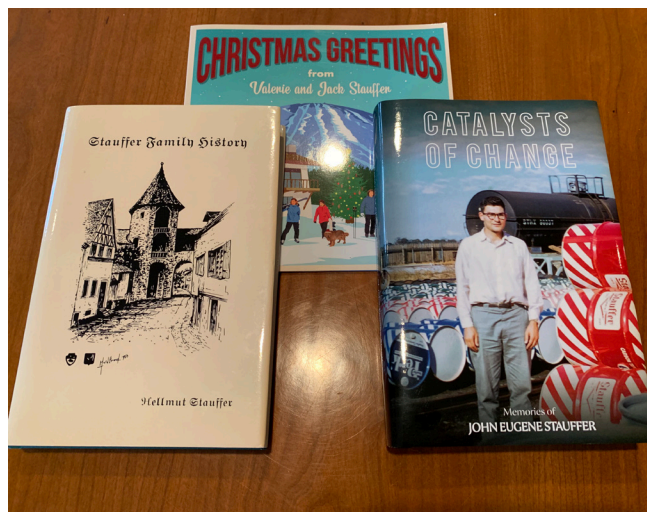
That was B.C. BEFORE COVID. Before our lives shut down. Before we were Sheltered in Place. Before we were homebound with nothing to do. Except maybe confront those yellowed photos and DO something with them.

In mid-March, as I contemplated whether to throw away the expired mayo and mustard jars from the pantry, an electronic document arrived. It was the translation of the Stauffer Family History, my late husband’s family history dating back to the 1400s. Three years ago, I had engaged a translator to deal with the original German text of this history. Serendipitously, the translation had arrived when I had no excuses not to turn the document into a book.

Editing the translation was more work than I had expected. I knew enough German to second-guess some of the translated phrases. Formatting was a challenge since the book company would print the book in the exact way that I submitted the material. I added a foreword and photos of my children and grandchildren visiting the village in Germany in which my husband’s dad had grown up. The hardcover was published, and I was ready to tackle the next and even more important task.

When my late husband Jack had been diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2016 and told that he had only a year or so to live, each morning during the summer of 2017 he recorded on his iPhone the memories of his life. The 60 hours of memories required editing to become readable chapters in a book.

Now, six months later, the book is printed. It has 84 short chapters and over 100 pictures. Those chapters recount not only his early years during World War II, his career in the chemical industry,



and also his work as an inventor who received over 70 technical patents and as a speaker who, with me, attended UN and other conferences around the world.

Because he recounted the lives of his grandparents, I found, among the yellowed photos, wonderful ones of his mother with her ten siblings and his father with his brothers in their German home before World War I. Sons and daughters edited—adding and subtracting commas, formatting the photos, and revising the text. A grandson designed the dust jacket and helped me engage a remote Pakistani to design the graphics of the family trees. Definitely a family project!

As I and my family searched through scrapbooks for photos, a daughter suggested that I put together a picture book of all the Christmas cards that I had sent over sixty years. Now done, in time to give as holiday gifts!

The pandemic is a tragedy, but if the virus had not struck, I would never have published these books.

Valerie Brown Stauffer
stauftek@aol.com

“222”

Reminiscences for this piece were provided by Claire Brooks, Sheila Monks, John Russell, and Blair McElroy, Class of '55, who is no longer with us.

When we graduated, we longed to experience “the real world.” So, when we landed jobs in Boston, a few of us rented an apartment in a brownstone at 222 Marlborough Street in the Back Bay, known ever after in our families as “222”. In the beginning, there were five of us: Sheila Geary, Claire Wilkinson, Maggie Daniel, Sheila Owen, and Blair McElroy, who had graduated a year ahead of us. Exactly what happened there seems to have been lost in the mists of time, with some remembering one thing and some another. However, it was an important enough time in our lives that all of our children know exactly what we mean when we say “222”!

Today, that part of Boston is quite elegant. In those days, not so much. There was a rickety old-fashioned elevator, essentially a box with open grating—nothing up to code—that got us (barely) to the third (or whatever) floor we lived on, but the elevator was usually threatening to quit. Often the door refused to either open or close. There was a dark layer of black Boston soot on the window-sills—which we more or less ignored. There was no shower, so we took baths, washing our hair in the sink or by lying back in the tub. There was a huge, endless parade of undies hanging in the bathroom at all times. The landlord turned the heat off at ten—which meant an early bedtime--and he didn't turn it back on until morning, so that if you ate your breakfast early, you turned the oven on and opened the oven door to warm up the kitchen. That oven, by the way, was so old that when it stopped working and the repair man was called, he indicated he could no longer get parts for it. (He made a part!)

There was a steady stream of young men coming through the door, and lots of parties to go to. Sheila and I met our future husbands while there (Claire was already dating hers). We usually ate dinner together, and John, my husband, remembers

there always being what he calls great “merriment” at the table. Shopping and cooking chores were on a rotating schedule. How well this worked is unknown, although there are memories of up to seven jars of mustard in the refrigerator at any one time. There was usually coffee after dinner. One person, and probably more, learned to drink her coffee black and unsweetened, because no one was willing to get up from the table to get the cream and sugar, and we really couldn't afford cream, anyway. There were occasional cocktails, and it was suspected that the janitor helped himself from the liquor stash.

It's very possible that dishwashers were brand new at that time—but no matter what, there certainly wasn't going to be one in our antiquated space. The person assigned to washing the night's accumulation of dishes often piled them up in an astonishingly high tower of pots, plates, cups, measuring spoons, you name it. Blair was truly the queen of this, always with the highest stack. One night she left a triumphant note on her pile, claiming victory over the rest of us, and daring anyone to retrieve anything from her Leaning Tower of Pisa.

One year there was a very tall Christmas tree (the living room had enormously high ceilings) which we decorated entirely with home made ornaments, popcorn and cranberry chains, etc. Unfortunately, no photograph of it remains—nor for that matter, of anything, except in our minds. This was long before cell phones. We didn't really think anything we were doing was unusual or worthy of recording. Certainly, we never dreamed that our children and grandchildren would want to know all about what happened there.

Blair sometimes put out a “222” newspaper named “The Marlboro Gazette” whose masthead claimed “Takes the ough out of Marlborough”. There actually was very little ough in Marlborough, though the story is told that the group once raised the ire of an elderly neighbor, for reasons unremembered. In response to her complaint, we drew a fierce dragon on the windows facing her apartment, using soap. Since a total of seven or eight windows faced her, it was a very long dragon.

Ah, youth!

Maggie Daniel Russell
maggierussell@comcast.net

Paintings by Jean Fairgrieve Granum

The staff of Scarlet Letters grievously regrets misspelling the name of artist Jean Fairgrieve Granum in the previous issue. Hers were the pictures illustrating the poetry of Sheila Owen Monks. We here present a selection of portraits of the dogs and cats she has encountered. The artist can be reached at jeangranum@gmail.com.

