

The Wellesley College Class of 1956 Presents

SCARLET LETTERS

Number 31 - April 2024



Sandra Buck Douglas (see pages 4-5)

President's Letter December 2023

Greetings to you all at this busy and happy time of the year. Your class officers met via Zoom on Nov. 27 for a delightful conversation in which we reviewed past events and began to plan for the coming year.

Scarlet Letters continues to inspire us, thanks to the tireless efforts and talents of Claudia Bushman and Sheila Monks. They are willing and eager to continue in their editorial roles, but they need material to work with. Please send them your writings, drawings, musings, critiques, photos, anything that you know or even suspect may be of interest to our classmates. Or even if you don't know or suspect, let them be the judges! Email addresses are claudia.bushman@gmail.com, and smonks341@gmail.com.

The same must be said of our website. Toni Liebman has been, and still is, a tireless and talented Web Manager but needs updated news to keep the website fresh and interesting. Please send your news and photos to her at toelieb@aol.com.

Our secretaries, Bev McCoid and Toni Caviness, are continuing to send notes of condolence to the families of deceased classmates. This can only be done, however, if they have a verified notice of the classmate's death from the college. This is where we can help. If we have verifiable information about a death, such as a local obituary notice, or a local organization's notice, please notify Emily Carey in the college alumnae office, ecarey5@wellesley.edu, or by telephone at 781-283-2398, and she will get in touch with Bev and Toni.

It is wonderful to report that our two scholarship funds are healthy and helping to support students who need financial aid. The following figures were reported as of June 30, 2023:

Coretta Scott King Fund: Market Value, \$2,199,228.32; Estimated Income Distribution available for FY24, \$84,840.87

Maud Hazeltine Chaplin '56 Endowed Scholarship Fund: Market Value, \$432,485.32; Estimated Income Distribution available for FY24, \$16,693.88

44 classmates including 10 Durant Society Members have made gifts to Wellesley since the start of FY24 (July 1, 2023) totaling \$92,483.00. Our donor percentage stands at 20.7%. Thanks to you all.

We had a lively and productive discussion about planning another series of Zoom mini reunions next spring. There was a very positive response to the Zoom minis of '23, organized by Vice-President Maya Percy, and hosted by her and Webmaster Toni Liebman. We hope to build on that enthusiasm in planning the next round over the months of March and April, 2024. Current thinking is that we will spread the Zooms over more time, perhaps the entire months of March and April, and provide plenty of advance notice and clear directions for signing up. Watch for the first notices which will come to your email addresses, and make your plans to join in. Several classmates participated in more than one session last year, and that may be possible again, but with preference given to those who can attend only one session.

Please let us know what we can do to help you feel more connected to our class and to our college. That is the purpose and commitment of your board of officers. You can contact me directly at djasmoore@gmail.com, or by phone at 603-998-6484. I am always happy to hear from a classmate!

With all best wishes for a healthy, happy holiday season and new year.

Anne Sinnott Moore, President, Writing for your Board of Officers:

Below is a proposal from Toni Holland Liebman for a class Zoom meeting. How do you feel about this? Send comments to the editors.

To: Board of Directors, Wellesely College, class of '56
From: Toni Holland Liebman
RE: Monthly Class Zoom

Based upon the huge success of my husband's monthly "lunch zoom" for Yale 1956 I am proposing that we adopt this idea for Wellesley 1956.

For many years, Yale '56 was holding monthly luncheons at the Yale club for those in the metropolitan area. They were very successful!! Came the pandemic and they switched to zoom, which opened those "lunches" to the whole class! They are regularly attended by about 20-25 classmates (not ALWAYS the same ones) who absolutely love them!

This is how it works:

Classmates who are interested in joining a lunchtime zoom (third Wednesday of each month at 12:30 EST) send their names and email addresses to Ken. He **sends each of them an announcement** of the upcoming zoom about two weeks ahead of time. Those who think they might attend, write back to him and he develops a list from which he then **sends each of those classmates a zoom link** the Monday before the Wednesday zoom. He often hears from a few that they will not be able to make it. So while the initial number who seemed interested may be 20-30, the actual attendees usually number around 20-25. And then there is always someone who totally forgets to sign in on THE day!

There is no formal agenda for their discussion, though it usually focuses on current events or class issues (i.e. Last week's or upcoming football game or reunion). Of course there are always one or two who speak more than the others, but that does not seem to be a major problem.

My Suggestion for our class:

I would schedule it for **1pm** as an accommodation for our west coast classmates.

I think that we would need a moderator at least for the first few sessions...to lay out the ground rules (about making certain that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak...how to signal that you want to speak, etc.) Also, the moderator may assist those who might have technical difficulties at first.

I also think that having a topic for the first few sessions would be helpful...just to get the momentum going. After that, it might not be necessary. The group could make a decision about that after the first few sessions.

A Conversation with Sandra Buck Douglas and her classmate Anne Moore in Sandra's studio/apartment at Riverwoods, Exeter NH

"Art has to give you a hug – it has to reach out to you, and pull you in at the same time."

When Sandra said this to me, at the beginning of our conversation, I thought it was a wonderful, emotional way of describing her profession. Only after talking and looking, for a while, did I begin to understand what she meant. But only begin. My conversation with Sandra Buck Douglas '56 was a mind-opener to a world I know nothing about. Walking up to "A Buzz" I stopped in my tracks, and said "I love this, but I don't know why!" Her answer? "You don't need to know why!"

"All great art is about movement and light," she explained. "In nature, light creates the color, as in a rainbow. But in painting, the color has to create the light. The old masters knew that and developed ways of building up color so as to create light. All good painting emits light."

Sandra's thinking and process began with a childhood and college education exposed to great art. Growing up in New York, she spent weekends and summers at her grandparents' home in Greenwich, Connecticut. They had given her the use of a little "schoolhouse" on their property as a studio, and works of art hung on the walls of their home. She knows that she was given "a wonderful gift", and always knew that she wanted to be a painter. At Wellesley, she majored in History of Art where she was exposed to the work of the masters.

After visits to the major museums in the United States and travel in Europe, she began studying life drawing and watercolor. As she quoted from Lao Tzu, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." She studied with prominent artists close to Boston, among them sculptor George Demetrios and abstractionist Samuel Feinstein who was a colleague of Hans Hofmann. She also taught at the Pingree School in South Hamilton, Massachusetts while raising three children. As her career developed, she started using acrylics.

Sandra has been invited to exhibit in galleries and shows in New York and Boston, as well as in many other cities, and to several biennales in Europe. As we talked, my eye kept fastening on a rather messy-looking large white board propped up in a corner of her room. Attached to it were swirls of the colored theatrical gels used in film, and leaning against it were a tree limb and sticks, an orange hose, dried hydrangea blossoms in a tin watering can, an old palette, and other colorful pieces. I got up the courage to ask her if this was a work in process.

"That's a motif!" she explained. "It's a piece of art in itself. The motif can be anything – it has color, forms and movement."

"In the study of abstract painting, there are two exercises. First is a "wild one" – covering the surface as fast and freely as you can with color. You throw your mind in the corner. You work very fast so as not to think. You're in the creative zone. And the next exercise is painting the motif, following the colors as closely as possible. The human mind can keep only a certain number of colors in it, but there are so many more in nature. This broadens the mind's color vocabulary. Over time, the two exercises come together."

Sandra names her paintings, although several featured on her website are unnamed. Looking at them, and having her explain why she chose their names, gives the viewer another eye to see with and another avenue to appreciation. Go to her website sandradouglas.com for a visual treat, and more information about her life and work. She is one of four '56 classmates who live at Riverwoods. We are inspired by her energy and talent, and grateful for her friendship.

Anne Moore



"Forewarning," 24" x 30"



"Wave of Light," 32" x 36"

William Russell, a very talented young actor, is the grandson of our classmate Margaret Daniel “Maggie” Russell. *Scarlet Letters* is happy to publish pieces about the accomplished relatives of our classmates.

Theater Bio for William Russell

William has always had a dramatic temperament. He liked to entertain from a young age, and his family has many recordings of him singing and dancing. He also liked to enact some of the many ballets he heard and saw, especially “Petrushka” and “The Nutcracker.” William began dance lessons at age three and especially loved the performance aspect, but his parents can pinpoint the moment they knew he was destined for the stage.

In the 5th grade, William played the lead role in a school production of “Willy Wonka, Jr.” He was so poised, so at home, and enjoyed himself so much that his mother and father suspected he could have a career as an actor. This impression was strengthened when, the Monday after the show had closed, William expressed feeling a bit low. Why was that? “When we were doing the show, everyone paid a lot of attention to me. When I came into a room, they said ‘Hey, Willy Wonka! How’s it going?’ Now, I’m just me again.”

That was it. His parents could see he not only thrived in the spotlight, he *needed* it. It would be either acting or politics for William.

The next step was starting voice lessons with Eva Kendrick, whom William credits with introducing him to a larger and wider world of performing. He made rapid progress, and Eva suggested a connection with a New York theater teacher and acting coach, Denise Simon. William took a few workshops with Denise, who then found him an agent in New York. He was launched!



William’s first large role was Michael in *Peter Pan* at the Norwood Theater, where he got to harness up and fly over the stage. Next came “Turkey Boy” in a production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Hanover Theater in Worcester, a larger venue. William’s first fully professional job was as a member of the ensemble and understudy

for Winthrop in *The Music Man* at the Goodspeed Opera House, an important regional theater in East Haddam, Connecticut. William held his own in a cast headed by Broadway actors, and, for two memorable performances, took on the role of Winthrop himself. The show ran, eight performances a week, for over 80 performances, giving him a real taste of a working actor's life.

Having acquitted himself well in *The Music Man*, William was asked back to Goodspeed to be in the ensemble and understudy the role of Michael in "Billy Elliot," again for over 80 shows. For both Goodspeed shows, William attended online school and lived in Connecticut near the theater, accompanied by his mother as chaperone. Yeoman work on both their parts.

Having completed almost all of middle school online, the pandemic shift to online schooling was no change at all for William, but he dearly missed performing for a live audience. He used the time to double down on his training, continuing his voice and dance lessons, and adding acting classes and some screen work to the mix.

When the world finally opened up again, William was ready for high school, in-person, and he dove back into performing immediately. He also began participating in the annual vocal competition of the National Association of Teachers of Singing in the Musical Theater category, placing in the top three in his category each year, and winning first prize at the national level in 2023. That year, he also earned one of only forty spots in the summer intensive at The Great American Songbook Academy, founded and run by renowned New York cabaret performer, Michael Feinstein. There he worked with top-notch instructors, one of whom guided him in developing an arrangement of "New York, New York" that made the song his own.

Leading up to and during all these heady events, William played a variety of characters at Westwood High School and with the Ensemble Performing Arts Studio: Harry in *Mama Mia*, Philo Farnsworth in *The Farnsworth Invention*, Billy Flynn in *Chicago: Teen Edition*, Sebastian in *Twelfth Night: The Musical*, The Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, Davey in *Newsies*, The Dentist in *Little Shop of Horrors*, and the French Prince in *Game of Tiaras*. He is currently in rehearsals for *Anything Goes* as Billy Crocker.

Now a junior in high school, William has his sights set on a BFA in Musical Theatre and ultimately hopes to make a life for himself on the stage. Making a living as a musical theater performer is a tough row to hoe, but we're rooting for him. PS If you want to see pictures and video of what William has been up to for the last few years, you can check his account on Instagram: @spotlightonwilliam.

Two Wellesley Poets

Richard Wilbur, winner of the National Book Award for Poetry, was a member of the Wellesley English Department our senior year. He was tall and handsome and usually wore a cowboy hat. My most vivid memory of him was seeing him walk around the campus followed by a pack of girls.

Boy At the Window

Seeing the snowman standing all alone
In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.
The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare
A night of gnashing and enormous moan.
His tearful sight can hardly reach to where
The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes
Returns him such a god-forsaken stare.
As outcast Adam gave to Paradise.

The man of snow is, nonetheless, content
Having no wish to go inside and die.
Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.
Though frozen water is his element,
He melts enough to drop from one soft eye
A trickle of the purest rain, a tear
For the child at the bright pane surrounded by
Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

Poet David Ferry also taught at Wellesley, but his was a tenure of many years. He was there for forty years, part of which coincided with our time. He wrote a number of books, both of his own work and translations of Horace and Virgil. Here is one of his poems, written in honor of his wife, Anne Ferry.

Lake Water

When, moments after she died,
I looked into her face,
It was as unfeeling as something natural,
A lake, say, the surface of it
unreadable,
Its sources of meaning unfindable anymore.
Her mouth was open as if she
had something to say;
But maybe my saying so is a
figure of speech.

He recently died, aged 99.

Letters to the Editors

I read Scarlet Letters. I especially like the obituary segments and articles on subjects such as handling grief, life in a continuing care community vs. staying in one's home. Also the many stories of classmates' vocations, hobbies, childhood memories. This publication has been especially meaningful the past several years because we have not seen one another for such a long time because our reunion was canceled in 2021 because of COVID.

On a more personal note, I want you to know that I took to heart the message put forth in the workshop at one of our reunions. I have journaled for the past seven years and have completed a 300 page Story of My Life for my children and grandchildren. You made me realize that our stories need to be told by us. Thank you!!!!

Cecily Sesler Parke

I always look forward to receiving SL and it helps to unify our class. Even somewhat limited content is better than nothing. You might ask how reading habits have changed and what gives us pleasure or reward at this time of life. For example, a ferocious WC English major says that now junky mysteries work for her. That brings up another possible point of discussion. I was a history major and that has interested me throughout my life. How have others benefited from their majors—did they make the right choice?

Sheila, as we age your poems become more and more meaningful.

Laura Ginsburg Straus