Notes

A dedicated space for alums to share news about life after Smith. Major milestones and everyday moments equally welcome.

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Everyone has a story—share yours by writing to your class secretary. Secretaries compile columns for the *Quarterly* by the following deadlines: Aug. 15 (winter issue), Nov. 15 (spring issue), Feb. 15 (summer issue), and May 15 (fall issue). You may also submit news or photos online at smith.edu/submit-class-note or by emailing classnotes@smith.edu. By submitting a class note, you agree that the *Quarterly* can publish your note in print and online. Please be advised that the digital *Quarterly* is searchable by Google and other search engines.

1938

At the time of writing, **Clara Taplin Rankin** says she was getting along quite well, with plenty of help to cover necessities. "I am not in touch with any 1938 classmates, if there are any. As for me, I read a lot, use the local library, and have frequent visits with friends, some of whom join me in working on jigsaw puzzles. My favorite TV programs feature detectives Poirot and Maigret on BritBox. I enjoy every time I can visit the Cleveland Orchestra and Cleveland Museum of Art; those two are among my favorite institutions in Cleveland."

1939–44

● Smith Quarterly *office, Northampton, MA 01063, classnotes@smith.edu*

1945

● *Sec., Virginia Krolik Auster, vauster13@gmail.com*

1946

Elizabeth (Betsy) Sargent Ford celebrated her 100th birthday on March 20. She says Smith has always been an important part of her life, and she still enjoys reading the college's magazine. "The values I learned at Smith became lifelong principles for living, which I embodied in raising six children and participating in multiple social causes and organizations."
● Smith Quarterly *office, Northampton, MA 01063, classnotes@smith.edu*

1947

Sarah Robinson Bagg '57 remembers the late **Alice Parker Pyle** with fondness, saying, "We're lucky to have had her presence. She made it clear that music was a gift for all to partake in. She composed and arranged music suitable for everyone to enjoy. She was a wonderful person, too."
● Smith Quarterly *office, Northampton, MA 01063, classnotes@smith.edu*

1948

● *Sec., Barbara McClelland Collins, b_mc_collins@yahoo.com*

1949

● Smith Quarterly *office, Northampton, MA 01063, classnotes@smith.edu*

1950s

1950

We extend condolences to the families and friends of those who have recently died: **Mary Cowen Jeton, Margaret McKillop Lamitie, Lorraine Lyman, Lucy Elmer Townsend**, and **Judith Baron Zucker**.

Margaret (Peg) Stair Anderson reports from Tucson, Arizona, that she enjoyed watching the inauguration of President Sarah Willie-LeBreton online. She was also impressed with former President Ruth J. Simmons' book, *Up Home: One Girl's Journey*, and highly recommends it. I, too, read Simmons' memoir and found it to be a masterfully descriptive account of a remarkable life.

Helene (Lanie) Zimmermann Hill, her husband, and daughters spent two weeks in France in late 2023. While in Paris, they went to Reid Hall, where Lanie lived with classmates from 1948 to 1949. She says the residence hall is now owned by Columbia University and has been beautifully restored. They had lunch at Le Dôme, a restaurant that Lanie admits is far more elegant now than it was in the 1940s.

Jane Kruger Hochberg writes that her granddaughter was a student at Tel Aviv University when the Israel-Hamas war began but "thankfully agreed to return home." Her grandsons are getting engaged and married, and Jane says, "It's lovely to have more women in the family."
● *Sec., Ann Field Coxe, 125 Clover Leaf Lane, Asheville, NC 28803, afcoxe@charter.net*

1951

At the time of writing, your secretary had not received very much news. However, Sarah Kish writes that her mother, **Marcia Toll Saunders**, and her daughter, **Emily Kish '24**, are doing well. She says Marcia is still living at home near Albuquerque, New Mexico. While it is a little much for her mother to make it back for Reunions, Sarah notes, Marcia enjoys the connection of having a granddaughter nearby in the Southwest. Emily also had a great-grandmother at Smith, **Cyrena Martin Toll** (class of 1912)—their classes separated by 112 years!

I am sorry to report these deaths: **Anita Bradshaw Barker** (Capen House), **Grace Goss Cooper** (Gardiner House), **Rosemary Rice DeCamp** (Talbot House), **Patricia Glenn Insko** (Cushing House), **Phoebe Reese Lewis** (Washburn House), and **Nancy Reilly Schultz** (Cushing House). Nancy's daughter, **Catherine Schultz McFarland '74**, writes that Nancy traveled the world in the last six decades of her life and became an artist. I appreciate the letters I receive from the family members of late classmates. Although the magazine will no longer be publishing obituaries, I shall strive to add to our departed classmates' stories when I can.

As for myself, I have nothing new to report except that I have been asked to be in a fashion show again. This is wild at my age—but fun! Please send me news of your activities.
● *Sec., Agnes (Stevie) Stephenson Cappin, PO Box 1158, Anna Maria, FL 34216, stevieflies@gmail.com*

1952

It is with sadness that we report the passing of **Edith (Teedy) LaCroix Dabney**. Prior to her death on Feb. 20, 2024, Teedy wrote that she had recently downsized to a smaller house in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. She enjoyed practicing yoga, playing golf, taking daily mile-long walks, and spending summers with her family in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Teedy's mantra was "keep moving."
● Smith Quarterly *office, Northampton, MA 01063, classnotes@smith.edu*

1953

In December, **Blossom Willinger Miller** called me with sad news that **Cynthia (Cynnie) Olsen Smyth** died. Blossom said she met Cynnie when they both lived in Cushing House. Cynnie spent her junior year in Canada, Blossom noted, adding that the two of them became close friends while living in Sarasota, Florida, during the winter months. Blossom said that Cynnie served for years on the board of the Smith Club of Sarasota; was active in her church ("where she was proud to become the bell ringer"); and, despite being ill, marched in the Alumnae Parade at our 70th Reunion in 2023.

I also got this lovely reminiscence from the late **Grace Woodbury Stone**'s roommate **Ann Safford Mandel**: "Grace spent her junior year in Florence, Italy, where she found *amore* with a handsome Italian man, but came back to write her thesis on Botticelli and graduate Phi Beta Kappa." Ann says Grace won top prizes in dressage with her horse, Merlin, and met husband Al while working at the Yale University Art Gallery. **Nancy Keck Smith** remembers Grace as a fabulous roommate and friend during their wonderful experience in Florence. "In our senior year in Northrop House, we heard many *ciaos* in hall phone conversations between [Grace and Nancy]," Ann adds.

Jane Cowen Pafford reports that she moved to Pocasset, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod to live with her sister, **Katharine Cowen Weldon '55**. "Cleaning out a house where I lived 37 years was a challenge, to say the least. I've found some bridge players and have joined a bell choir. It's been a good step," writes Jane. Thank you for the update, Jane, and best wishes on your move.

Judith Miller Childs writes that the exhibition *Americans in Paris*, which opened on March 2 at New York University's Grey Art Museum, includes two paintings by her late husband, Bernard.

Recently, I traveled to the lovely campus of Fairfield University in Connecticut to see the exhibition *Walking in Antarctica* by my daughter, Helen Glazer, and watch her present a slideshow about her 2015 sojourn under the auspices of the National Science Foundation's artists and writers program.

Please send me your news. Are you traveling to visit friends or family? Relocating your current place of residence? Reading any good books? Your classmates love hearing from you.
● *Sec., Judy Lager Rayno, judithrayno@msn.com*

1954

Many thanks go to co-chairs **Marcia Nance Atcheson** and **Carol Traylor Henderson**, who planned a fun yet relaxed "Nifty Nineties" weekend for our 70th Reunion. **Roo Herty Brown, Nancy Painter Criscitiello, Ann Pearce Roberts, Janet Salter Rosenberg**, and **Anne Backus Wanzer** were also involved in the planning. Thank you, everyone! Hopefully, there will be lots of good photos coming our way, particularly for those who were unable to attend.

Jane Nichols Fogg couldn't attend Reunion but was recently on campus. She emphasizes the donations she and several classmates—including **Joan Lebold Cohen, Celia Stone Gilbert**, and **Carol Osuchowski Selle**—have made to the library's rare book collection and the art museum. Following her donation of 18th-century books about exploration, Jane attended a reception at the Mortimer Rare Book Room. "I am told that there is much new interest in the subject," Jane notes.

An Education That Liberates the Mind



Sarah Willie-LeBreton is the 12th president of Smith College. In this quarterly conversation, she'll address the big ideas and issues shaping higher education, the college, and her presidency.

Illustration by Kate Copeland

By John MacMillan

Read the news lately and you're bound to come across an article or two diminishing the value of a college degree or questioning the relevance of colleges and universities in general. President Sarah Willie-LeBreton isn't having any of that. A staunch defender of higher education and the ability of the liberal arts to open minds and transform lives, she sees the burgeoning mistrust of colleges and universities as part of an attempt, driven largely by ideology, to change the face of leadership in this country. Here, Willie-LeBreton discusses the real benefits of education and how the liberal arts can set you free.

In your inauguration address last fall, you said that it's a challenging time to be in higher education. Talk about some of the headwinds that colleges and universities are facing these days.

There are so many. But let me first say that colleges, including Smith, are doing a great job of actually delivering an extraordinary, multidisciplinary, multiexperiential education. What we haven't done particularly well is tell that story to counteract the propaganda against higher education that is out there today—for example, that we're more about indoctrination than education; that the value of education and the liberal arts, especially, has diminished; that applications to colleges have fallen off because we're no longer relevant. All of this distracts people from the real benefits of college. I invite anyone who doubts the value of education or the liberal arts to our campus to sit in on our classes, to see how devoted our faculty are to scholarship and how seriously they take their charge to share their expertise with our students, and to see how engaged our students are with multiple issues and perspectives. It's truly inspiring.

Do you think the propaganda you spoke about is being directed at liberal arts colleges in particular?

There seems to be a mistrust of institutions of higher education in general. But, unfortunately, I do believe that a lot of people think liberal arts means liberal politics. When we talk about the liberal arts, we're really talking about an approach to higher education in which we privilege the breadth of disciplinary learning that takes place when you study widely. Inherent in this approach is the belief that the study of the arts and sciences offers us perspectives that set us free. And who wouldn't want to be liberated in this way?

That would seem to be the purpose of an education, to liberate you so you can think freely.

Yes! It liberates one in so many ways. It gives one confidence in one's own thinking. It gives one the curiosity to question one's assumptions. But it isn't only about freedom. It's also about exposure to the limits of what's come before, learning the assumptions of a disciplinary approach and the walls and guardrails that direct certain lines of inquiry. The liberal arts require other people's points of view. They offer exposure to the human-centered skills needed to understand the world, and they may also suggest a passionate lifelong endeavor. And there's unequivocal evidence that liberal arts graduates choose their own jobs rather than being chosen by them.

As we talk, students are protesting on campuses around the country. What role do you think civil discourse and dialogue play within the liberal arts?

They're central to the liberal arts approach. For example, faculty, in their preparation as scholars, learn to familiarize themselves with the literature of those who came before them, even if they disagree with it. They have to advance an argument that is sound and backed up by evidence and previous scholarship. Today, more and more scholars are doing work at the intersection of various disciplines. This naturally leads to conversation and discourse that is more productive and leads to the creation of more knowledge and understanding if it is civil and mutually respectful.

What about students? Does engaging with the liberal arts better prepare them to deal with conflicting ideas and opinions responsibly?

I would hope so. They get that model by observing faculty and from living together in community. If you're taking a variety of classes, as a liberal arts education requires you to do, then you're getting multiple perspectives. You also see that faculty aren't insulting each other in the halls when they disagree. Rather, they show a tremendous amount of respect for each other. The great thing about college is that you come to see how rich the world is when you include and encounter different perspectives. Sometimes students don't absorb that right away, but they eventually get it.

If you had 90 seconds to pitch the liberal arts to a doubting student or parent, what would you say?

I would say three things: First, when you graduate and go into the workforce, you are likely to have between one and two dozen jobs over the course of your career, whereas your grandparents probably had one or two jobs. The changing landscape of work means that our students will need to know how to learn, collaborate with others, and do research. The liberal arts approach prepares you for all of those things. Second, over the course of your career, you are more likely on average to have a higher salary with a liberal arts degree. Students who graduate from programs that are narrower may earn more at first jobs, but over time the liberal arts approach pays off. Data backs that up. Third, as I said earlier, you are likely to have many different jobs during your career. If that's the case, the narrower your degree when you graduate, the fewer your options. If you've been exposed to several different disciplines and have learned the basics about collaboration and research, you'll be set for life. The liberal arts offer students more choices, a greater likelihood of a job that they choose, the ability to pivot and be collaborative, and the capacity to find a position that allows a comfortable standard of living.

Return on investment is a big topic of conversation among students and parents. What is Smith doing to ease some of those concerns?

We've invested targeted resources to improve our academic advising and our career advising. We're inviting students to begin thinking about their careers when they arrive in their first year instead of the spring semester of their final year. We are pairing our career advising office with our leadership center so that students appreciate that we expect them to be leaders in their fields. They've gotten into Smith, so we know they're leaders. They just need to see themselves that way.

Along with advising, students have access to an array of co-curricular opportunities that help them have a more satisfying college experience and maybe even fuller and more satisfying lives after college. We know, for example, that when students participate in co-curricular activities, particularly club and varsity sports, they tend to do better in the work world because they're used to working with people on a team, managing their time effectively, and collaborating with people with whom they may not share politics. These are all skills that will serve our students well over their lives and skills that employers seek when hiring.

"The great thing about college is that you come to see how rich the world is when you include and encounter different perspectives."

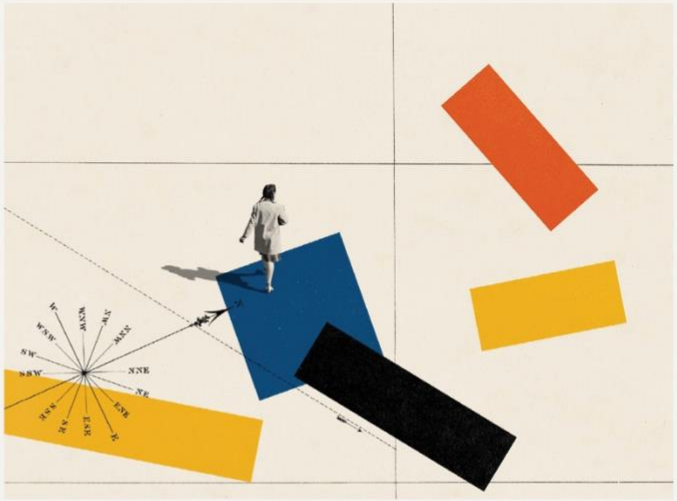
Illustration by Cristiana Couceiro

What's the danger to society if we lose faith in the liberal arts?

I think we become much more siloed. If you're only being educated to check off a list of skills to perform a specific job, then we've lost the wonderful co-mingling that takes place when you have people with different skills, expertise, and viewpoints working on something together. Really successful engineers know how to bring a full creative team together. Successful diplomats are multilingual and understand peace and conflict studies as well as world history, art, and economics. Extraordinary poets and writers bring different cultures and values to their work to illuminate the specificity of their experiences in ways that have a universal impact. These skills are exactly what the liberal arts prepare students for.

When we're separated from others with different perspectives and ideas, we are more likely to become self-righteous, less curious, and despairing. And that combination can lead us to distrust each other and disinvest in community. It can also make us more vulnerable to a party, person, or idea that promises to save us.

The liberal arts, and education in general, teach us to invite multiple perspectives, listen to the ideas of others, and assume we have much to learn. I believe that the multidisciplinary teaching and learning that occurs at places like Smith is crucial to our progress as a species and the planet we call home. ●



One student who appreciates Martineau's care is Gavel Award nominator Tallulah Costa '25. Toward the end of her first year at Smith, Costa was struggling with a spate of medical issues that made it difficult to eat safely at other campus dining facilities. She was eventually diagnosed with small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, a condition that required a restrictive diet and careful management as she reintroduced foods into her meals.

"No yeast, no legumes of any kind, no raw fruit, no raw vegetables, no garlic, no onion—the list goes on," Costa recalls. "My meal every day would be rice and a cooked meat, and then I had to steam my vegetables for a certain amount of time so they were cooked enough so my body could digest them. That was rough, and I was really concerned about going back to school."

That's when Costa met Martineau. "I had to say, 'Hi, I'm Tallulah. I have this chronic illness that's causing me to have this horrible diet. Is there any way you can make me something separate off the line?'" she says. "I was only met with kindness."

Martineau and the other Dawes cooks prepare a main hot buffet of food for every lunch and dinner service, labeling ingredients that students with allergies or dietary restrictions need to avoid. Students like Costa speak directly with the kitchen staff when they arrive, ensuring they receive a meal they can eat safely.

"What ensued was a beautiful friendship between myself and my chefs," Costa says. "Whenever I'd go into Dawes, I'd always stick my head into the kitchen." This simple act of checking in turned into a ritual, with Costa bringing friends to meet the kitchen staff and even introducing her parents to Martineau during a campus visit. They were happy to meet one of the people keeping their daughter safe as she attends school far from her Virginia hometown. "He's like an uncle to me at this point," Costa says. "Julian did so much for me, and I am so grateful for him."

The feeling is mutual, Martineau says. He describes the bittersweet annual tradition of streaming the Commencement ceremony in the Dawes kitchen while the staff prepares the school year's final meal, cheering when "their" graduates' names are announced. "It's really sad every year, and this year will probably be the toughest," he says. "I was literally there when they started college." ●

The Perks of Having a 'Weird' Brain

"At age 40, I thought I knew myself. I was so very wrong."

By Sadie Dingfelder '01

I had very few friends in middle school, so when one of them went missing, I was bereft. In those pre-internet days, I just assumed she had moved away. It would be decades before I figured out what had happened: She had cut her hair—which, in my eyes, turned her into a stranger. Day after day, I accidentally snubbed her, and my former friend responded in kind.

In 2019, I discovered that I am faceblind—and always have been. This neurological disorder is known as prosopagnosia, and it means that everyone looks pretty much the same to me. When I wrote about it for *The Washington Post*, where I worked at the time, people started coming out of the woodwork, telling me stories about myself that were both hilarious and heartbreaking. Suddenly, a lifetime of loneliness and missed connections made a lot more sense.

As I worked on the article with my editor, I cried. A lot. And no one cries at *The Washington Post*! All around me, other reporters were stoically dealing with real tragedies while I was sobbing for the 14-year-old version of myself. I felt ridiculous, and I was so relieved when the story finally ran. "I'm never doing that again," I told my husband, Steve. "From now on, I'm only writing about other people."

I kept that promise for about a year. But after being laid off and then trapped in a tiny apartment because of the pandemic, my idle mind kept coming back to the same question: Why am I faceblind? Prosopagnosia is largely genetic, but my family of politicians and Rotary Club presidents tends to be exceptionally good at face recognition. So, what the heck happened to me?

As I did all the usual pandemic things—baking bread, learning TikTok dances—I couldn't stop thinking about this question. One day, I army-crawled past my husband (to avoid making a pantsless cameo on his Zoom meeting) and disinterred a bag of studies that I'd stashed in the back of a closet.

I sat in that closet, in my underwear, for hours. The more I read, the more I began to realize that prosopagnosia is just the tip of my neurodivergence iceberg. At age 40, I thought I knew myself. I was so very wrong.

The smoking gun was a 2012 study which found that kids with both amblyopia and strabismus—also known as lazy eye—are in for a lifetime of face-recognition issues. Like many kids, I had surgeries to "fix" my misaligned eyes. But the underlying neurological problem remained: My brain never learned to integrate information from my two eyes into a single 3D image. As a result, I am stereoblind. And I always have been.

Once again, I found myself reevaluating my entire life story. No wonder I hate ball sports! No wonder I was always too scared to learn to drive! If you could beam into my head, you'd find my world to be very, very flat. People who have learned to see in 3D as adults describe seeing familiar objects inflate before their eyes. Hung coats take on the depth and richness of paintings by Dutch masters; trees become living sculptures; the spaces between



Illustration by Dror Cohen

things become almost palpable. The more I read, the more I wanted that experience for myself.

As I began looking for studies to join, it occurred to me that I was having quite the nerdy midlife crisis. It also occurred to me that my weird brain might actually be a gift. I'm a science writer, and my own personal cortex was turning out to be quite interesting. I began emailing neuroscientists and taking online screenings, and the study invitations began rolling in. Scientists at Harvard, the University of Chicago, and the University of Toronto all wanted to scan my brain. The invitation I was most excited about came from California. Scientists at Berkeley wanted me to try a not-yet-FDA-approved, virtual reality–based treatment for stereoblindness.

How was I going to pay for all that travel? With some reluctance, I lifted the writing-about-myself ban. I got myself an agent—Dara Kaye '09—wrote a 100-page book proposal, and landed a book deal. It took another two years before my nerdy midlife crisis took corporeal form: a 304-page book called *Do I Know You? A Faceblind Reporter's Journey into the Science of Sight, Memory, and Imagination*.

In the course of writing my memoir/popular-science mashup, I've learned a lot—about myself, but also about neurodivergence in general. I'm increasingly convinced that all of our current categories are garbage, and diagnoses like autism and ADHD are soon going to sound as vague and old-timey as having the vapors. I've also learned that, after ignoring the question of subjective experience for more than a century, scientists are beginning to come up with clever new ways to verify, disprove, or at least triangulate what we claim is going on inside our heads. And they are finding that there are a lot more flavors of human consciousness than anyone ever realized.

I now know that, in addition to my perceptual differences, my inner life is quite unusual. I can't visualize, I have no inner monologue, and I can't relive important moments from my past. This sounds like a litany of deficiencies, but I've come to appreciate my weird brain. I see the world differently from other people—literally and figuratively—and my perspective is valuable because it's so rare. I've learned to embrace the peculiarities of my brain because they're what make me *me*. It's not always easy to live in a world built for and by brains that are quite different from your own, but at least it's never boring! ●