

Smith Renaissance Society News Fall/Winter 2008-2009

Come celebrate 10 years pursuing truth in the company of friends!

In April, during Alumni Weekend, Chancellor George Blumenthal and his wife, Kelly Weisberg, a law professor at Hastings College of Law, with a particular interest in family and children's legal issues, will join the Smith Renaissance community to celebrate ten remarkable years, a bright spot on the horizon. What started in 1999 as a modest idea for a scholarship to honor historian Page Smith, Cowell College's founding provost, and his artist wife, Eloise, grew steadily from three students and a handful of volunteers into the Smith Renaissance Society, an exceptionally loyal community of friends – donors, mentors, volunteers, and university faculty and staff – who currently share supportive fellowship with sixty-eight current students.



George Blumenthal and Kelly Weisberg

As you know, Smith students, Collegiate Fellows, are veterans of the foster care or delinquency systems, orphans, or others who are on their own. The latest compilation shows that an amazing 83.7 percent of one hundred and sixty-six served have graduated or are on track to graduate, a much higher percentage than that of college students nationally, foster kids who go to college generally, or the UCSC student body as a whole. Five are on leave but expect to return. Nine transferred to another university. One joined the military. Seven are within ten units of graduating, but for one reason or another have not completed final requirements. A mere five have dropped out!

Mark your calendars: Smith Renaissance ten-year anniversary celebration. April 26, 2009, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Stevenson College Fireside Lounge. Please let us know before April 17 if you plan to attend. Call locally (831) 459-2530, toll-free (800) 933-SLUG; or sign up online at <http://alumni.ucsc.edu/reunions/>

Profile of a heroine

Many factors go into our Collegiate Fellows' remarkable success, starting with the students themselves. But most who know her say that Amy Hamel, our part-time student advisor, is right up there. Ask any gathering of our students how many have been helped by Amy, and in a roomful of smiling faces most hands shoot up.

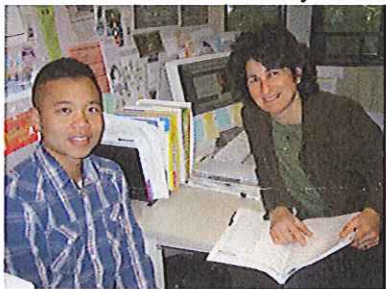


Amy hosts birthday bash

Amy is deeply rooted in the soul of our little venture. She spent formative years as a kid on an Israeli *kibbutz*, later returning to Israel as an early Merrill student. Married to long-time Cowell Fellow Gildas Hamel, she gave birth to one of her two sons in Cowell's Morison House, where the Hamels were residential preceptors. It was Amy who made the happy suggestion that we borrow from Cowell our motto, "The pursuit of truth in the company of friends."

Says Amy, *"The pursuit of truth is an on-going goal made exciting and enjoyable (and perhaps even possible) by being part of a community of friends. Many of our Collegiate Fellows will, perhaps for the first time, be experiencing this, being part of a group of friends working together towards a common goal: higher education, their own dreams, and a desire to help others achieve their dreams as well."*

Professor Gary Miles, who, with Professor John Jordan, coordinates our volunteer mentoring effort, says Amy is indispensable to their work, providing up-to-date information on university rules, regulations, requirements, and deadlines that few mentors would be likely to have, freeing mentors to focus on their distinctive role: to



Amy Hamel with Collegiate Fellow

develop personal relationships, confident that there is someone to whom they or their mentee can turn for specific information that they do not have. Notes Miles, *"Amy has an extraordinary commitment to our students, and they know this. Because of their great confidence and trust in her, they willingly turn to her for help. They are never disappointed: she knows UCSC and our students as do few others in our community."*

Profile of a graduate

Fernando Mejia (College Eight '01), an early Smith scholarship recipient, was an orphan from Nicaragua. In 1991, his father, a university dean at the national university, was about to report to the media on illicit drug manufacturing on university property. The family home was bombed, killing both parents and seriously wounding Fernando. Brought to this country for medical care, he stayed. After attending Skyline Community College, he transferred to UCSC, where he earned a degree in Computer Engineering.

After graduation, he worked as a math and computer tutor, bank teller, computer technician, and systems analyst consultant to the Nicaraguan government. Today he is a senior Java developer at a software development company in Costa Rica. He is also a Sun certified Java programmer and expects to soon become a fully certified Sun enterprise architect, which he reports is the highest possible certification in the world of software. He is married and has two beautiful children.



Fernando Mejia and family

"It was like we all had been to war."

Kristen Santora, another early Smith student, was part of the determined small group that gathered around the dining room table of Stevenson Pioneer David Brick and his wife Professor Mary Male to weave a shared vision of what we wanted to become. She left



Madison Grace

school several years ago, ten units shy of completing the work for her degree. Now the mother of two beautiful daughters, she is developing a completion plan with Cheryl Perazzo, our large-souled Smith rep in the UCSC Financial Aid Office. Topping Kristen's list of reasons for finishing: she wants to be a proper role model to her girls.



Kaylie Skye

Writes Kristen, "I am proud to have been part of such a wonderful group of people, and even now, several years out of college, I knew it would be Cheryl who would show me the way to get back in and finish my degree. When I attended our Smith meetings I wanted to hear the stories and feel the camaraderie that kids without parents have. It was like we all had been to war even if it we didn't fight the same battles. It's unique and special and it's a bond that is so different than with people who have parents. We are no better or no worse with or without parents as long as we have someone and I feel like at the time I needed it the most I had the Smith Society."

College Camp and Music Day Light the Way

Deutron Kebebew (Kresge '03) our first student leader, set aside the electrical engineering career for which he trained to work with foster kids in Santa Cruz County. Several years ago he launched what he called a college camp to provide pre-college foster youths with a taste of college life. Every November kids (primarily from Santa Cruz) come to the campus to spend a couple of nights in a dorm, go to class with Collegiate Fellows, learn about the admission process and financial aid, and – unlike many of us alumni – take delight in plentiful dining hall food.



Deutron Kebebew

They get to see that people like them go to college and hear that they are welcome to join our community of friends. This year, for the first time, determined not to let this be just another fleeting experience, like so much of what they have known throughout their young lives, the kids made a pact to return every two months.



Music Day

Six years ago, Matilda Stubbs (Porter '05), another Smith student leader, created an outreach event she called "Music Day." Casting a wider net, this popular event brings kids from as faraway as the Bay Area to offer a glimpse of college, experience the joy of music, buddy for a day with Collegiate Fellows, and have a taste of community.

Now a Northwestern University PhD candidate in Cultural Anthropology, this year Matilda acted as consultant to fellow Smith graduate Synthia Payne (College 10 '05, MFA in Digital Arts and New Media '07) who took the lead in creating a day-long event that began with a moving community-building drumming circle, moved on to song-writing, guitar, and salsa workshops, led by current and former Collegiate Fellows, and culminated in an open mic session at which the more daring of the one hundred and fourteen participants got to and be celebrated.



Drumming circle

Boston Chapter Adopts Smith Scholarship

The Boston chapter of the Alumni Association (B-Slugs), home base to Smith founder Bill Dickinson (Cowell '68), Page and Eloise's son, Carter, (Crown '69), and several other members of the Pioneer classes, gathers in a member's home each December for a holiday feast. This year, continuing what has become an annual tradition, the B-Slugs used the event as a fundraiser for the Smith Scholarship, raising more than \$2,000.

Says Pennie Weinberg (Cowell '70), *"Our B-Slug group, an ever-expanding group of warm friends, shares more than common memories, most of us also share some very important values. As a member of the Pioneer class I am particularly pleased when we gather for our winter holiday gathering that we combine our celebration with a fundraiser for the Smith scholarship. It's an important way to give meaningful expression to those shared values. It has been especially delightful over the years to include a few Smith Collegiate Fellows in our gatherings."*

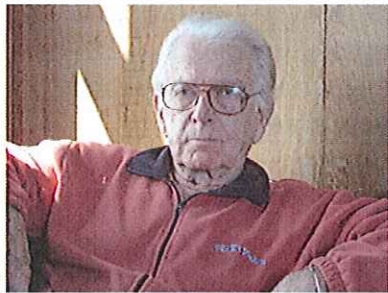


Penny Weinberg seated at end of table

(For many years Sloan Nota (Stevenson '73) hosted the holiday gathering in her art-filled Newton, MA home. It is with sadness that we note the recent passing of Harriette Cohn, Sloan's delightful mother and a loyal Smith scholarship supporter.)

California Artist Helps Grow the Endowment

Ending where we began, on a sunny note, we are pleased to report that California abstract



Jerrold Davis

expressionist Jerrold Davis has donated a Berkeley hills lot to a Charitable Remainder Trust, a long-range planning vehicle that provides the donor with income now and will support the scholarship in future years. Davis has been a mentor and friend to Bill Dickinson since his undergraduate years. A long-time Smith scholarship supporter, over the years he has donated art works that now grace some of your living rooms.

We also want to acknowledge and thank the rest of you loyal donors who are very much at the heart of our community of friends.

Bill Dickinson, Presiding Senior Fellow, 617/671-8009

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