

**The Way We Were and Who We Are Now**  
**Further Thoughts on the Class of 1963 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Survey**  
Susan August Rubinstein May 25, 2013

Since the Reunion book is out and many of you have read all or part of the survey, I'm not going to cover old ground. Instead, I'm going to focus on how we compare to the women leaders of today in our perceptions of ourselves, the roles we play and our views of the world and, finally, some thoughts on the value of Smith and of a women's college.

Not long after we graduated from Smith, the role of women changed in two fundamental and significant ways – from the primary role of wife and mother (“working” or not) to a person who had a “career,” opinions, a voice, rights of her own, and someone who no longer had to be bound (practically or psychologically) by the sexual mores previously imposed on women. Upon leaving Smith, 83% of us married within five years of graduation, more than a third planned to have a job or career consistent with marriage and motherhood and a third expected to work until they found a successful husband. Only 18% planned to go to graduate school.

Considering the magnitude of the changes we faced, we navigated them with remarkable ingenuity, courage and fortitude. More than half of us went to graduate school, in many cases later in life and in more than one field, 76% worked full time and persevered in finding careers that were stimulating and rewarding. Almost two-thirds of us changed careers one or more times, with one of us progressing from grad school in math, to grad school in musicology, to professional performer, to music professor and finally to OB/GYN physician. We worked for personal satisfaction rather than just for financial reasons, with intellectual stimulation, a desire to use our Smith education and/or to have an identity outside of marriage and motherhood leading the list. Most of us

had supervisory roles, half had careers traditionally associated with men and a number emerged as recognized figures in their fields.

Those who chose to stay home with children improved their communities, the lives of others and often worked to solve problems in the broader world. Most important, no matter how difficult or how many mistakes we made along the way, virtually all of us felt we learned and grew from whatever path we took and whatever adversities came our way, of which there were many – cancer, divorce, the death of spouses and partners and in a few cases, children.

Many of us (probably more than half in total) also took advantage of our newfound sexual freedom before, in-between and during marriages. Here, too, almost all of us were content with whatever we chose to do.

And just as we had adjusted or almost come to grips with a vastly changed world, along came a new challenge – technology, which now seems to be “updated” every five minutes. We seem to have adapted quite well here too – although we embraced it a bit slowly at the start. Ten years ago, a third of us hand wrote our reunion surveys, a quarter of us did this five years ago, but this year only six out of 338 were hand written and almost all of us feel comfortable using a computer. Although many of us also have iPads, iPods, Kindles and CD/DVD burners, I neglected to ask whether we had signed on to Facebook, Twitter or consulted Smart Phones or Blackberries every 30 seconds throughout the day. Now’s a good time to find out. How many are on Facebook? Hold up your hands (a majority)... Twitter (hardly any)... Smart phones/Blackberries (hardly any)? You’ll like what I have to say later.

There is one area, however, in which we cannot keep up. No matter how young we look, feel, think or act, we are saddled with

first names from the 1940's. Sylvia Mason discovered that our most popular names were Susan, Ann, Nancy, Mary, Barbara, Margaret, Judith, Carol and Jane versus those in 2012 – Sophia, Emma, Isabella, Olivia, Ava, Emily, Abigail, Mia and Madison. Only Elizabeth made it into both eras. Based on the resilience we have shown in the face of real adversities, we're not about to let our names hold us back.

## **How We Compare with Today's Women Leaders**

I recently listened to the speeches of two accomplished women who appeared at Harvard Business School on its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of admitting members of our sex: Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and author of "Lean In," who graduated Harvard College in 1991 and received her MBA in 1995 and Ann Moore, the former Chairman and CEO of Time, Inc. who graduated Vanderbilt University in 1970 and received her MBA in 1978.

Thoughts and advice from the two were quite different.

Sheryl focused on how difficult things still were for women in business and I thought is it possible that so little has changed! But she was thinking on a higher scale. Very few were CEO's or on major corporate boards. She suggests that this was due in no small way to psychological barriers within ourselves. In many ways we just weren't enough like men. We didn't think we were sufficiently qualified because we either couldn't fulfill every criterion required or were afraid we just couldn't handle the top job. We worried too much about balancing a job and children, were concerned that we wouldn't be able to "have it all" or put a premium on making something "perfect" rather than on getting it done. She also mentioned some concrete problems – women still did more than men at home and not everyone wanted a career, much less to become a CEO. We had to choose our own path.

Ann emphasized how important it was to take time to discover your passion/what has meaning for you, to stay involved in the world, to believe in yourself, work hard, adapt to changes and not to expect instant gratification.

She also spoke about the importance of balance/family and personal time in her life and expressed a real concern over the direction in which we were headed individually and as a country. We are too addicted to computers, smart phones and Blackberries, with too little personal contact, too little reading and thinking in depth, too little accidental discovery and too much stress in our lives. Our infrastructure is crumbling, public education is failing, there's poverty all around in the midst of billionaires, Washington is polarized and there's little objective reporting in the media because so much "content" is free. Self-interest, greed, neglect and deferral of responsibility are becoming dominant values among those in power.

It made me wonder whether one had to be retired in order to focus on the larger, long-range issues confronting society as a whole.

This notion was quickly dispelled when I read Arianna Huffington's commencement address to our 2013 Smith College graduates. She's almost exactly Ann Moore's age and expressed many of the same views, but she's definitely not retired. Here's the substance of what she said, which I will quote at length:

"Commencement speakers are traditionally expected to tell graduates how to go out there and climb the ladder of success, but I want to ask you, instead, to redefine success. Because the world you are headed into desperately needs it. And because you are up to it. Your education at Smith has made it unequivocally clear that you are entitled to take your place in the

world on equal footing, in every field, and at the top of every field. But what I urge you to do is not just take your place at the top of the world, but to change the world. What I urge you to do is to lead the third women's revolution.

The first was led by the suffragists over a hundred years ago, when brave women like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton fought, among other things, to give women the right to vote. The second women's revolution was powerfully led by Smith alumnae, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem” (and I would add, our own Judith Gingold who fought for equal pay for women researchers at Newsweek in the 1970’s and WON). “They fought -- and Gloria continues to fight -- to expand the role of women in our society, to give us full access to the rooms of power where decisions are made.

And while the second revolution is still in progress, we simply can't wait any longer for the third revolution to begin. And I can't imagine a place where I would be more likely to find the leaders of that revolution than right here at Smith.

At the moment, our society's notion of success is largely composed of two parts: money and power. In fact, success, money and power have practically become synonymous.

But it's time for a third metric, beyond money and power -- one founded on well-being, wisdom, our ability to wonder, and to give back. Money and power by themselves are a two legged stool -- you can balance on them for a while, but eventually you're going to topple over. And more and more people, very successful people, are toppling over. Basically, success the way we've defined it is no longer sustainable. It's no longer sustainable for human beings or for societies. To live the lives we want, and not just the ones we settle for, the ones society defines as successful, we need to include the third metric.

Wherever we look around the world, we see very smart leaders - in politics, in business, in media -- making terrible decisions. What they're lacking is not IQ, but wisdom. Which is no surprise, since it's never been harder to tap into our own wisdom. Because in order to do so, we have to disconnect from all our ever-present devices, our gadgets, our screens, our social media, and reconnect with ourselves. Your very own, very wise Smith sophomore, Erin McDaniel, wrote in the Sophian about her decision to disconnect from all her social media. "We have eschewed real social connections in favor of superficial, technology-bridged ones ... We have become, in many cases, nearly as (socially) robotic as our computers." (End of Huffington quote.)

We have discovered and practiced much of this advice on our own - that no one can have it all, that balance is important in our lives, that we have to work to make the world a better place, empathize with our fellow human beings and that we have inner strength and value precisely because we are WOMEN!

When asked what were our greatest sources of pride or satisfaction, most of us cited three - children, marriage/partner and career in varying orders, followed by helping other people or making our community or some part of the country or world a better place as part of a career or volunteer work.

President Christ also spoke of the need to “dispel the myth that success and ambition look like a straight line.” We have certainly dispelled this myth in the lives we led.

### **The Role of Smith in Our Lives**

It was apparent from our work histories and our varied interests and activities in retirement that we derived a number of benefits from quality and breadth of the liberal arts education as

well as from the less tangible experiences we had at Smith. As one of us wrote:

“The most important value I developed at Smith was intellectual curiosity and a love of learning. I see many young people today for whom college has been a career training ground and who have never experienced the joy of learning. What a loss! Another significant legacy of my Smith education was striving for excellence. This was very useful in my career — although I finally figured out that it was less important in such areas of daily life as dishwashing or ironing! Other habits I developed at Smith that have been important to me were a willingness to work hard to accomplish goals, the belief that I have the capability to solve difficult problems, and an appreciation of differences.”

It gave another: “A new feeling of sweet pride in being female.”

And a third cited: “The ability to encourage young women to persist in a meaningful career.”

There were some complaints about the limited career choices we were led to believe would have as women, the lack of focus on science and math (a third of today’s Smith graduates are science or math majors), the lack of a social life, and the intellectual and practical drawbacks of classrooms without men.

Nevertheless, most of us feel the college should remain all women, even though many of us wouldn’t choose an all-women’s school now for ourselves. We feel that other young women could benefit from the experience.

I can cite two examples of why Smith might still be relevant even for high achievers like us.

In a study conducted a few years ago that compared women who graduated from the five sister colleges with those from the Ivies, Stanford and other top co-ed schools, the five sister graduates outdid their co-ed peers in self-confidence and leadership skills and were more likely to become CEO's, have executive level positions and enter politics.

Finally, in a bit of evidence that is about as anecdotal as it can get because it's based on a sample of two, I was listening to Jennifer Palmieri, President Obama's Communications Director addressing his current problems and trying to put them to rest. A graduate of American University, with extensive experience in Washington, she hesitated at every question and could hardly get a sentence out straight. All I could think was "bring back Stephanie Cutter" the 1990 Smith graduate with a Georgetown law degree who was Obama's Deputy Campaign Manager in 2012 and never minced words or was at a loss for what to say. She was described by Steve Schmidt, the Republican strategist, as "arguably the strongest player on either side now." And she's just started her own political consulting company.

In the end, perhaps we were actually lucky that most of the Ivies were all men when we went to Smith.