FROM OUR CLASS PRESIDENT: CELEBRATING JOY & COMMUNITY

Joy and Community. Sarah Willie-LeBreton, Smith’s 12th President, shares these words repeatedly with the Smith community: joy brings community and community brings joy. President Willie-LeBreton’s words resonate with the Class of 1977. We are thrilled to welcome Smith’s new president and look forward to seeing how the college grows and evolves under her leadership.

Last spring, we continued to build COMMUNITY and bring JOY through Virtual Living Rooms, giving classmates opportunities to re-connect over Zoom. This was the second round of Virtual Living Rooms; we had used Zoom to bring classmates together in “living rooms” as part of our 45th Reunion. This year, 16 houses, plus one junior year abroad group participated, with over 130 classmates finding JOY and COMMUNITY connecting with friends who they may not have seen in 45-plus years. We will be offering another round of Virtual Living Rooms in March/April of 2024. And we can always offer one for any group of classmates earlier if requested. Just email Competent1977@gmail.com.

JOY and COMMUNITY are also reflected in the Class of 1977’s generosity. Thank you to everyone who donated to Smith in fiscal year 2022 - 2023, and helped ensure that talented students from all walks of life have access to all that a Smith education offers. As you will read in the Fundraising Update, we want to continue to build COMMUNITY by increasing Class of 1977’s Smith Fund participation, and create more JOY by providing record breaking support to current and future students! We are asking for your help to do this! Please, make a plan to give monthly, quarterly or annually to The Smith Fund!

Lastly, it’s hard to build COMMUNITY among classmates that brings all of us JOY if we do not know how to reach you. Please help us stay in touch: join our Class of 1977 Facebook page, and be sure changes to your name, address and/or email are updated with Smith by sending an email to smithierecords@smith.edu.
CLASS SPOTLIGHT

Do you remember Wren Withers—perhaps from intramural sports, biology or religion classes, her omnipresent camera, or late nights in the Hillyer Hall photo lab?

In September 1973, Wren arrived at Smith from Cleveland and moved into Lamont. “My parents had to scrimp to send me to Smith, and I am so very grateful to them for that.” Unconventionally, she double-majored in Environmental Biology and Religion and minored in Photography. Wren recalls having to both study and work hard. “Every day wasn’t a picnic, but the friends I made at Smith, are still my friends.”

“I was a kid who always liked science,” Wren recounts, “I always loved animals and nature, so Environmental Biology was a good fit.” Favorite courses included general and plant ecology taught by Mr. ‘s Tilley and Burke, respectively, along with their requisite nature hikes. Elizabeth Horner’s animal behavior classes stood out, culminating in Wren’s senior seminar report synthesizing countless hours of chinchilla watching. Foreshadowing her scientific writing career.

Introduction to Buddhism was the first course that Wren signed up for. Hooked, Wren continued taking religion courses, deciding to add a Religion major. Wren also fondly remembers photography classes, “Peter Johnson opened my eyes to many facets of photography, including composition, color theory, notable photographers, and photographic history.” Again, foreshadowing her current passion.

Wren’s favorite memories include laughing and sharing over Lamont meals, Yorkshire pudding, watching All My Children after lunch, perusing the art museum (more foreshadowing), and ambling along Paradise Pond.

Wren worked washing dishes and cleaning a professor’s house to earn pocket money. Another favorite memory was spending that money listening to Stevie Wonder’s Tuesday Heartbreak on the Davis jukebox while eating French fries.

Fellow housemate Martha Steenstrup introduced Wren to squash. “At the Davis House, Wren worked in the freezing cold Alumnae Gym. After graduation, Wren took up the sport with a passion, eventually ranking 25th at the US Amateur Ladies C level.”

Wren’s love of fast-paced teamwork, challenge, and science that was nurtured at Smith played out in her career as a technical writer in the nascent biotech and software industries. Her ability to lead and follow at Chiron, Siebel, Salesforce, CA Technologies/Broadcom handling rapid, high-stress, deadline-driven product development were keys to her success. As Principal Information Engineer for Broadcom’s application performance management software, Wren managed her international writing team’s projects and content. She simultaneously wrote and delivered the most complex documentation until her 2022 retirement.

While Smith’s Buddhism classes intrigued Wren, she wasn’t profoundly moved until meeting a Buddhist nun. That 2005 meeting and further education opened Wren’s eyes to the lack of support for Buddhist women dreaming of becoming fully actualized nuns. Impassioned to quell the institutional injustice within the Buddhist monastic system, Wren began supporting the Saranaloka Foundation, with a mission to bring Buddhist nuns at an English Thai “Forest-Tradition” Buddhist monastery to teach and establish a training monastery for nuns in the United States. Upon joining the Saranaloka Board, Wren was elected Secretary, later becoming President. She describes her Saranaloka work as demanding, work of the heart; and immensely satisfying. As Wren shared, “The world needs more meditation, mindfulness, and spiritual guidance from women.”

Wren moved to San Francisco in 1981, and currently lives in Novato, California, north of San Francisco. Wren came out as gay after college. She had a 25-year relationship with her female partner until they separated. As a stepmom, Wren helped raise her partner’s son and daughter, now adults.

Recently Wren has reconnected with her love of art. Starting with a few flea-market finds, her condo has become a revolving art museum of originals by Robert Capa, Lonnie Holley, Robert Maplethorp, Mize & Annie Tolliver, Cindy Sherman, and Misia Kayama. Wren cherishes her Smith friendships. “Smith friends invite me to visit, and I DO. I welcome classmates to come visit me—I have an extra bedroom!”

CLASS NOTES: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM & ABOUT YOU!

Please keep the submissions for Class Notes coming. We want to hear what you are up to! The SAQ column limit is 750 words so try to limit your entry to a paragraph or two. And be sure to include your name while at Smith, nickname, and current last name. Written submissions should be sent to Competent1977@gmail.com. Please do not embed photos in your email! Send JPEGs directly to classnotes@smith.edu. Upcoming SAQ Submission Deadlines: November 1 for spring issue • February 1 for summer issue