

## **50th Reunion Report - Class of 1971**

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**September 24, 2022**

As the academic year began in September 2018, we began planning in earnest for our 50th Smith Reunion. A milestone for all classes, but especially for ours whose years on campus had been far from conventional.

Returning to campus in April 2019, our class officers and several classmates were hosted at President Kathleen McCartney's house where we participated in a lively discussion ably facilitated by first spouse Bill Hagen who asked each of us present to participate.

In thanking Kathy, I noted that our years at Smith had been especially tumultuous, as we navigated our way through a period of social and cultural turmoil that affected every aspect of our lives. We were the first generation to watch the horrors of war on our living room televisions. And Smith could not and did not shield us from those terrible realities, but watching together with our housemates forged friendships that for many of us were deeper than those we had with our families. The world of our 1971 graduation was profoundly different from the one we knew as freshmen in 1967. It was exciting, but also frightening to understand that we were entering an era that we ourselves had shaped. We had stopped that war, through the activism of thousands of young people. We had prompted fundamental social change. But we reminded ourselves that in 1971 we could not get a credit card in our own names, we could not obtain birth control legally in Massachusetts, help wanted ads were listed as male or female, and Smith had never had a woman as president. For us, old traditions had been shattered, but new ones had not yet taken their place. Many of us were reluctant to marry since we did not want to be 1950s housewives like our mothers – most of whom had never worked outside the home, even if they were highly educated. Few of us had professional role models in the fields that interested us – where were the mentors who could help us to juggle the competing roles of being working mothers as we entered professions like law or medicine that had heretofore been almost exclusively male?

We were energized by our visit to campus where we met faculty, students, and administrators committed to addressing the most pressing of today's problems. We left full of enthusiasm and ideas for a reunion that would express our appreciation of all that Smith had meant to us.

Over the summer of 2019 and with the start of the fall semester, our plans began to take shape. We outlined key programs and appointed organizers to develop them. They included staging a

student performance of *Gloria: A Life*, and inviting Gloria Steinem, an honorary class member and our commencement speaker to participate; organizing an exhibit at the Neilson Library of the art books of our late classmate Martha Smith Hall; launching a mentoring program Connect'21 with students who would be graduating at the time of our reunion; identifying speakers to host interactive discussions throughout the weekend. We commissioned a logo and adopted the theme of *Making Waves*. We recruited volunteers for fund raising and to be house representatives to encourage attendance. And of course we appointed an editor and began work on a class reunion book.

We had been advised to expect a large number of participants - typically in the 250 range for past 50th reunions, and been assured that the Smith staff would do everything possible to make sure our weekend was a success. We developed a communications plan, refreshed our class website, wrote newsletters, fine-tuned our mailing lists, and revived a dormant class Facebook page.

But the world changed as 2019 ended and the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020. Smith entered an era of remote learning with students sent home, campus buildings closed, and every aspect of college life disrupted - including plans for commencement and reunion. Little did everyone know that this disruption would continue through 2020 and into 2021 - the date of our 50th reunion.

In a message sent on March 10, 2020, as students were preparing to leave campus, President Kathleen McCartney cited the Smith community's determination to "meet this challenge with resilience, creativity and abiding care for one another."

### **Learning How to Pivot**

As the 2020-21 academic year opened, it became increasingly clear that the watchword of the year was to become "pivot" followed with the oft repeated references to contingency planning and exploring alternatives. Fortunately having spent the previous 30 years as a professional planner, these terms had long been part of my working vocabulary, so we pivoted and explored and made use of our creativity as we adjusted and readjusted our original plans, still hoping that we might be able to gather in person in Northampton in May.

### **The Book**

Having made the decision to produce and edit our reunion book ourselves - as opposed to hiring an outside firm - co-editors Sandy Cate and Margery Goldman had organized a robust reporting and writing effort that included a custom-designed website for classmate submissions, a team of essay writers and editors, a graphic designer, and a communication plan that intentionally reached all known classmates, whether or not they had all graduated with us in 1971. This was especially important and challenging because 125 classmates had left Smith to attend previously all-male institutions when they began admitting women in 1969 and 1970. We wanted to hear from everyone, and the book team made considerable efforts to do that, sending post card reminders and enlisting a team of volunteers who contacted their housemates.

An added challenge presented itself as it became likely that our reunion might in fact need to be virtual. The book production costs had been budgeted with the assumption that the class would

generate its estimated \$20,000 share from reunion registration fees, supplementing the \$10,000 allocated by the College. When the decision was made to pivot to an all-virtual reunion late in 2020, we realized that we would need to find another source of cash if the book was to be printed and delivered by spring 2021. By this time, we had received hundreds of personal entries and photos, edited a half dozen essays on themes pertaining to our era and Smith experiences, and designed a handsome publication. And we realized that it only made sense to send copies to all known classmates -- increasing the print run to 500 copies -- rather than trying to take orders and sell copies to an unknowable but smaller number. As the number of class entries reached 300, the original page estimate of the book increased accordingly.

We solved this dilemma together. Each member of the reunion team made a personal contribution to the project budget which had grown to just over \$45,000, each according to her own capacity, and with small and large donations we covered the \$16,000 short fall in our small class treasury so that the book could be sent on time.

With a format resembling an issue of Ms. Magazine, the book paid tribute to one of its founders - Gloria Steinem '56 - an honorary member of the class of 1971 and our esteemed commencement speaker. Thanks to designer Jackie Noble, a core member of the team though not a classmate, the book is beautiful and conveys the irreverent spirit of our unconventional class. The 50 or so classmates who put it together found the experience invigorating and many reported that it helped them cope with the stress of living through the Covid-19 pandemic. Classmates were thrilled with the book and said it was the highlight of the reunion.

### Gloria: A Life

When it became impractical for the Smith Theatre Department to stage *Gloria: A Life* we learned that the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) had recorded a live performance of the show during its Broadway run. Written by Emily Mann, sister of our classmate Carol Mann, the play's third act is done as a participatory "talking circle" where the audience is invited to reflect on the stories presented in the first two acts. For the performance recorded by PBS, Gloria Steinem herself led the session, providing all involved with a memorable live experience.

Our pivot idea was to provide a free showing of the broadcast, to be followed with our own talking circle - led by playwright Emily Mann and Carol Mann. But as the date approached, we found PBS to be an impenetrable fortress of unanswered telephones, unstaffed mail boxes. Surely we knew there must be a way to get access to the recording. So at the suggestion of a Smithie from another class, we searched the alumnae database and found a PBS staffer working remotely from the west coast who knew just what to do. Within a day she had located the right person to set us up with a special link and permission for any alum to watch the play in advance of our talking circle. We held our session on the last day of the virtual reunion and thanks to the superb campus tech staff were able to double our originally allotted time. The 100+ classmates who took part were most appreciative.

## Other Class Sessions

We convened each of the four reunion days for class sessions in addition to offerings from the College that included virtual versions of reunion traditions like the Ivy Day parade, Alumnae Association meeting and the Memorial service. Some highlights are described here.

### Thursday Class Program

Day one class programming included greetings from President McCartney, a class meeting, a report from our outstanding fund team, a video of our parade signs, a preview of a future Neilson exhibition of the art books of the late Martha Smith Hall '71 organized by Jan Golann. Featured was ***Making Waves: Then and Now*** a presentation on "Smith Now" led by Pinki Fontein and classmate and faculty member Kiki Smith with professor Carrie Baker and graduating senior Yacine Fall and a presentation on the class book by Sandy Cate and Margery Goldman, followed by an overview of the rest of the weekend and how to participate by the reunion team.

### Parade Signs

We were especially proud of our parade signs celebrating our class theme of *Making Waves*. Set to music and featuring photos of classmates and a few other notables over the years, the sign headlines included: *Raising Consciousness, Fighting for Equal Rights, Owning Our Bodies, Powering Up, Shifting Culture, Tripping Through the Tulips, Striking for Peace, Sharing Our Sisterhood, and Celebrating New Waves Breaking.*

See Attachment/Appendix for slides.

### Virtual Friday Tea

Many classmates signed on to an all-reunion virtual Friday tea session that featured multiple break out rooms for smaller conversations for each class. We were invited to suggest topics for break out rooms and compiled a long list. Conversations in our 1971 rooms varied -- some stayed on the suggested topics but others became free-flowing sessions where people chatted about whatever came to mind.

## **Results**

Although we were disappointed not to be able to convene in person on the Smith campus -- a place so rich in powerful memories for us all -- we made the most of an unusual time in history. Through the efforts of a dedicated Reunion Team, we are proud to report that we had participation rates that were remarkable for our class. Some statistics:

218 people participated in our live virtual events - many attending all four class programs

330 people submitted personal biographies for the class book - 70% of reachable classmates!

500 class books were printed and mailed to all known classmates

Over 5 years our gifts to Smith totaled \$9,293,915

57% of the class made donations

We gave over \$1,000,000 to launch a Class of 1971 Endowed Scholarship

We raised over \$71,000 for Soxs for Scholarships -- the most raised by any class

## Thank You

We are extremely grateful to the capable and kind Smith staffers who supported us throughout two eventful years. Of particular note was Jody Fallon Fern, our class liaison, who was magnificent and indefatigable through all the twists and turns of this unusual time. We are indebted to her. Special thanks also to: Ashley Keedy, Annie Croteau, Rebecca Washut, Maria Held, Amanda Lopez, Samantha Pleasant, and Sam Samuels.



### CLASS OFFICERS/REUNION TEAM 2016 - 2021

Co-President	Cheryl Winter Lewy
Co-President	Pinki Fontein
VP - Reunion Chair	Sarah Peskin
Treasurer	Betsy Gardner Johnson
Co-Secretary	Karen Osar
Co-Secretary	Jan Fullgraf Golann
Co-Fund Team Chair	Angelica Didier Light
Co-Fund Team Chair	Suzy Ross McDowell
Planned Giving Chair	Deb Lans
Special Gifts Chair	Kathy Kelly Spear
Co-House Rep Chair	Annie Nickel Curtin
Co-House Rep Chair	Susan Brundage
Web Chair	Connie Herrick Weiss
Memorials Chair	Jane Tower Gunnison
Book Team Co-Editor	Sandy Cate
Book Team Co-Editor	Margery Goldman

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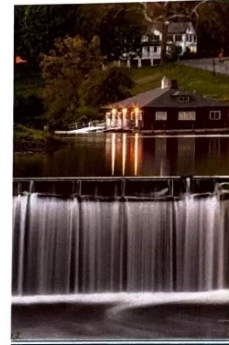
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