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I learned to do research using index cards—one topic to a card, with citations. When I had gathered enough of them, I sorted them out on the kitchen table, and the work progressed in prescribed order, from cards to outline to longhand draft to the finished work, which then had to be “copied over” to make it presentable.

My first research paper, in sixth grade, was about the Johnstown Flood. Other than the World Book, there wasn’t much to go on at home. But in the vast stacks of Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Library, along with a half-dozen old books about the flood, I discovered a cache of yellowed newspapers in giant flat binders. Here was the breathless writing of the first reporters on the scene, stories telegraphed to Pittsburgh and New York with every lurid and heroic detail. Though I borrowed several books to write my paper, it was turning the pages of those old newspapers that brought the disaster fully to life for me.

Doing the same research as a student today, I’d still end up in a library, but first I’d check out the World Wide Web. When I asked Yahoo!, the popular search site on the Web, to give me a list of pages containing the words “Johnstown” and “flood,” it quickly delivered more than 1,000 citations. Among them was the full text of Will’s Fletcher Johnson’s 1889 History of the Johnstown Flood and several of the same newspaper articles I had read as a sixth grader. The search also turned up visual materials, such as a map of the flood’s deadly progress down the Conemaugh Valley and photographs of the devastation. In less time than it took to ride a bus to the Carnegie Library, I had gathered on the Web all the salient facts of the flood—its causes, effects, death toll, and meaning to the city of Johnstown.

Yet there was more—and this is the real dividend of the Web. Beyond the data, images, and maps were dozens more links that a curious student could follow. Spending a few more minutes, I found information on urban hydrology, articles on dam safety, advice from the Weather Channel on surviving flash floods, poems about the flood, a brief history of the Pennsylvania Railroad—even the lyrics to Bruce Springsteen’s “Highway Patrolman.”

Was I veering off the track? Wasting my time on the Internet? I suppose, but I also remember wandering those library stacks as a child, browsing books and journals that were completely unrelated to my mission there. Though it regrettably lacks the physical connection with history that I experienced reading those old newspapers, the glory of the Web (as you will see in “Digital Dancing,” page 10) is the ease with which you can wander the stacks of hundreds of “libraries” around the world, seeing new relationships and making connections between people, ideas, and events.

Such connections are at the heart of a liberal education. The intellectual skills taught at Swarthmore—learning how to find information, asking critical questions, evaluating what’s important, making connections between ideas, and drawing conclusions from a range of resources and viewpoints—are essential in making sense of the vast amount of information available today. In a way, though we’ve given up writing in longhand, we still need to be able to sort our mental index cards. Without them, living in the information age can be overwhelming—but with them, a whole new world of ideas and possibilities opens before us.

—J.L.
GRADE INFLATION
To the Editor:
An item in the December 1998 Bulletin boasted that although “GPAs at other schools... have increased significantly,” Swarthmore has managed to “avoid grade inflation.” The article noted that Princeton’s grade-point average has risen from 3.08 in 1973 to 3.42 in 1997, and Swarthmore’s collective GPA in 1997 was 3.24.

In fact, there has been far more grade inflation at Swarthmore than at Princeton during the period mentioned. According to a 1974 Swarthmore report, cited in a Phoenix article written by Ann Cudd ’82 and Jonathan Franzen ’81 in 1979, the average grade at Swarthmore in 1973–74 was 2.83. Therefore, although the grade at Princeton has gone up 11 percent, the increase at Swarthmore has been 14.5 percent—nearly 30 percent greater.

If this trend continues, Swarthmore can expect to pull ahead of Princeton about the time the Class of 2020 receives its diplomas. That’s nothing to boast about.

RICHARD SLATTERY ’80
Vienna, Va.

Editor’s Note: The Bulletin article cited by Richard Slattery was a summary of a report that appeared in U.S. News & World Report last fall, praising Swarthmore for its low grade inflation. U.S. News relied on a different set of statistics than The Phoenix article mentioned. Information provided to U.S. News by the College not only included current Honors grades (there have been grades in the Honors Program since 1996) but also a control factor based on the number of students receiving Honors, High Honors, and Highest Honors in the past. This factor, which was added to previous (all-Course) GPAs, raised the baseline on which U.S. News comparisons were made and had the effect of flattening the slope of the increase.

The administration thought that it was important to control for this because the relatively high number of students in Honors in the past tended to lower the reported GPA of the entire College—which did not include their grades because there were none. The assumption was that had these Honors students been in Course, they would have raised the overall Swarthmore GPA. In fact, it seems clear that the precipitous decline in the number of students in the Honors Program in the 1980s and early 1990s (which has now been reversed) was a factor in the gradual inflation of grades in Course.

Swarthmore has experienced some grade inflation in the last 25 years, but we believe that the College has maintained its high standards and deserves the attention it got in U.S. News.

WHO BENEFITS?
To the Editor:
Here we sit, in the midst of hypocrisy (“College Ranks High With Black Educators,” Collection, March 1999), and we cry “freedom.” England wished to end the slave trade not to redress past crimes against humanity but to protect her economic interests. The North engaged the South and began the Civil War for the same reasons. Now Swarthmore touts its “increase of students of color” as an embrace of equality, liberty, and freedom for all. Nothing could be further from the truth. I ask you once again: Swarthmore, are Africans as fully human as everyone else? If so, why do you force us to act different just to be accepted by your “community”? Why can we not bring our own culture, our own values, our own desires? Why must we jump through the same statistical shenanigans that are designed to benefit white males simply to be invited to attend? Why, if Swarthmore is not designed for the sole benefit of white males, must we be more white male than the white males to attend? Why are you judging us by standards set up to judge white males?

Let’s compare numbers of African Americans in the 1960s, 1980s, and now. How many students and faculty are there? What is the economic makeup? How much money is spent recruiting middle- and lower-class individuals? We talk so easily of progress. I propose that the first step of “progress” must be an admission of guilt.

Swarthmore must publicly state that it treated Africans unjustly in the past—specifically because they were Africans. It is only after this acknowledgment that we can be invited to the table for meaningful discussions on change. Otherwise, what are we talking about redressing? Justice is not accidentally arrived at. It is not inevitable. It is not determined by fate. Justice must be worked at to redress past wrongs. Justice must be hammered out with solutions involving the offended parties. Justice is a process where the former aggressor must acknowledge the pain of its victims and attempt to make amends. Swarthmore must stop bluster ing its way along the course of dialogue for the sake of discussion among high-minded, unaffected individuals to solve some intellectually perceived guilt. Swarthmore is guilty, and it must say so. Only after stating that it committed past wrongs and inviting an open discussion on how to redress them can Swarthmore begin to claim that it is, in fact, a good place for African-Americans. Anything less is just a continuation of the past.

ULAN McKINIGHT ’87
Albany, Calif.

SINK OR SWIM
To the Editor:
I was pleased to see that Swarthmore now provides psychological counseling to students, as described in Dr. David Ramirez’s essay (“The Geometry of Change”) in the March 1999 issue. How I wish such services had been available when I was a student 20 years ago. At that time, a sink-or-swim atmosphere prevailed, and many of us were afraid of sinking. The damaging mentality Ramirez identifies—“I should be able to figure this out myself”—was mine in spades. I suffered terrible stress during my last two years at Swarthmore and never once sought help from anyone.

With a stubbornness that now seems merely immature but that I suppose was not unusual for an intense and insecure Swarthmore student...
Mike Wallace takes the heat

When CBS legend Mike Wallace arrived on campus in March, Assistant Professor Cindy Halpern’s political science Ethics and Public Policy class was ready, having spent the preceding week discussing euthanasia. Wallace, after 31 years on the air, was ready, having spent the preceding week discussing "mercy killing."

In November, Wallace aired a videotape of “suicide doctor” Jack Kevorkian administering a lethal injection to Thomas Youk, a Michigan man dying from Lou Gehrig’s disease, followed by interviews with the doctor and patient’s family. The program drew heat from Catholic leaders, and several television stations refused to air it. As a result of the tape, Kevorkian was convicted of second-degree murder.

Joined by CBS executive producer David Gelber ’63, Wallace’s visit kicks off the new Media Fellows program of Swarthmore’s Visibility Task Force, just a week before the trial begins. Wallace takes a seat in a Trotter classroom and loses no time in clarifying his own opinion of the controversy. Kevorkian’s decision to assist in Youk’s suicide was "appropriate," Wallace tells Halpern’s class. "He was in serious pain."

Physician-assisted suicide happens in hospitals every day, Wallace argues, whenever doctors quietly administer extra morphine or turn off the respirator—"But, shhh, don’t say anything. He could lose his license!" The recent backlash was due to people’s squeamishness about death, he maintains. "Some 1,400 pieces of coverage were generated by this piece, and there wasn’t an intelligent discussion among them. Where do we have a serious discussion of death?"

He is obviously hoping to have one here. "OK, have at me," he tells the students, after detailing the case. When no one pipes up, he teases: "What a namby-pamby crowd! Is this Swarthmore struck dumb? One of the toughest schools to get into?" Smiling mischievously, he adds: "Just thought I’d stimulate a little nastiness."

A heated debate then takes off, with Wallace putting the students on the spot as often as they do him. When Halpern cites the common criticism of the show—"using death to sell toothpaste"—Wallace brushes it off as "mindless crap," and when a student refers to the "commodification of suffering," he shoots back: "What the hell is the ‘commodification of suffering?"
Full swing

It’s Monday night swing dance practice at Tarble in Clothier. Royal Crown Revue is blasting from the sound system, and dance instructors are demonstrating the East Coast swing and the “half-moon,” a term that describes the arc made when the male tosses his crouched partner through the air.

Even with midterms in full throttle, 30 students have torn themselves from their books for a few hours of raucous twirling. Twice as many showed up for the previous week’s practice. Because of popular demand, a second weekly session has been added on Thursdays. Until student activities funding becomes available, students seem willing to pitch in for a sound system and instructors.

Stimulated by a Gap commercial that aired last summer featuring young couples lindy hopping to a popular tune, a jitterbug epidemic has swept the country. Swarthmore was not immune. When Yura Shubin ’99 called a meeting last October to see if anyone was interested in starting a swing dance club, a couple hundred students showed up. It immediately became the most heavily attended club on campus.

Tonight, men outnumber women, leaving female dance partners in feverish demand. Shubin makes a beeline for Olga Rostapshova ’02—but alas, she is usurped at the last moment, and he is stranded midfloor, watching longingly as the other dancers East-Coast and half-moon to Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

As the evening progresses, pairs form and reform, with quick breaks to complain about the music. A volunteer student DJ manned the controls last semester but quit because of a scheduling conflict. Tonight it’s a free-for-all. Taste seems divided between fans of original swing, those of the current electric swing, and at least one guy who prefers jitterbugging to salsa music.

Shubin finally succeeds at cornering Rostapshova and proves a very ambitious dancer. He frequently leans in to whisper in her ear. She listens earnestly, and soon after is hoisted onto his back, tossed through the air, or bent so far backward that her braid dusts the floor. Shubin is obviously interested in the big moves.

Allan Friedman ’02, on the other hand, boogies nonstop in his goatee and fedora, even when he has no partner. Friedman is a regular, having taken on the role of organizing practices. His dancing is uninhibited, with much cool-daddy gesturing and occasional Astaire-like kicks. At one point, he spins Lindsey Newbold ’02 so enthusiastically that her skirt goes completely horizontal. Caught without partners, the men try their more athletic moves on each other. One of these involves Friedman pulling Shubin through his legs, a move that leaves Shubin lying, repeatedly, facedown on the floor.

For the most part, the dancers are still in the experimental stages here, a little awkward at times but delightfully game. Now and then, a sublime moment occurs, grace and timing come together, skirts fly, and Tarble is suddenly transformed into a 1940s dancehall.

Venerable Clothier rarely enjoys a quiet evening these days, what with one dance club after another commandeering its hallowed hall. Some have bucked the swing trend, preferring to waltz and cha-cha at Tuesday-night ballroom practices. Others favor the hot-and-spicy samba of Wednesday-night Latin dancing. With all these flavors to choose from, this may be the first generation in three decades who will know how to dance cooperatively by the time they’re 21. Imagine: Women will be able, once again, to follow and men to lead—at least on the dance floor.

Tenure and promotion time

Spring is in the air—which means it’s promotion time. Amanda Bayer in economics, Syd Carpenter in studio art, Yvonne Chireau in religion, and Bruce Grant in sociology and anthropology received tenure and became associate professors. John Caskey of economics, Rachel Merz of biology, and Thomas Stephenson of chemistry became full professors. Professor of English Literature Craig Williamson (below) has been appointed associate provost of the College, to serve a three-year term. Williamson previously coordinated the Honors Program, steering it through a major revitalization that began in 1994 and has resulted in an increase in the number of students graduating with some level of Honors from 10 percent of the Class of 1996 to 30 percent of the Class of 1999.
Conservative rebel
By Hillary Thompson ’99

Due to what I now know was staggering ignorance, I was not aware of Swarthmore’s reputation for liberalism when I applied for early admission in 1994. I was also unaware that my own views would be labeled by many as conservative. I was quickly educated in both facts, and that education was harsh. I ran headfirst into discussions in which I was seriously outnumbered and hopelessly outargued. These episodes did not ease my transition to college. I requested transfer applications but realized that any place I was willing to apply (other small liberal arts colleges) would have the same “fault.”

When my despair was almost complete, along came a group offering salvation. I was taken to lunch by two representatives of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), the Wilmington, Del.-based conservative group that funds Common Sense, Swarthmore’s now nearly defunct conservative newspaper. They told me I was right, that the hegemony of liberal ideology is destroying the free exchange of ideas on college campuses. Then they offered to help me “fight back.” Along with a few other conservative students on campus, I inherited the bloated budget for Common Sense. I received invitations to all-expenses–paid conferences around the country. My mailbox was constantly stuffed with free conservative hardcover books, magazines, and journals.

I agreed with these people on what I thought was the only point that mattered: Swarthmore is diminished by a lack of open and diverse political dialogue. I will never forget approaching a professor, frustrated that class discussion on a controversial issue was so one-sided. I expressed concern that it was difficult to have a balanced discussion since all the assigned readings supported liberal positions. Her response was: “Yes, I know. I want it that way.” With opposition like this, I decided I needed all the help I could get. I began attending the conferences, writing articles, and editing Common Sense.

I always knew I was more moderate than my ISI benefactors. At first, I was prepared to deal with that. I tried to leave certain issues off the table during my conversations with their staff. I did this not because they would have stopped funding me but because the tactics they supported often angered and offended me. An ISI-supported conservative campus newspaper at another college, in response to the gay and lesbian group’s “wear-jeans-if-you-support-homosexual-rights day,” posted signs announcing “wear-shoes-if-you-support-the-agenda-of-the-Ku-Klux-Klan day.” Their goal was to show the absurdity of linking a common item of clothing to a political position—but their response implicitly associated them with the KKK. To make matters worse, a division of ISI sent Common Sense several editorial cartoons to run in the paper. One of them was a split box with the KKK on one side and an abortion doctor on the other with a caption reading: “Which one kills more blacks?”

After a while, I didn’t blame liberal students for hating conservatives. I hated them myself. I had hoped that I could take ISI’s money and perks and ignore their tactics. I rationalized that Swarthmore students would listen to me, one of their own, with consideration and seriousness, even if they could not accord the same respect to people from certain outside organizations. I wanted to have it both ways: to be a rational, thinking conservative and still have access to ISI’s resources. However, by my senior year, I realized that I could no longer associate myself with a group whose tactics were keeping me from achieving my own goals and, on a more fundamental level, were counter to the community values of respectful dialogue. I still believe that the conservative viewpoint is valid and that it should be expressed on this campus, but by working with the ISI to promote conservative views, I sold out my own principles.

It’s not easy being a conservative activist at Swarthmore. I have faced many hostile liberals, and I understand why a few other conservative students continue to accept the support of ISI, but I think there is a better way. For my views to really be a part of campus dialogue, I have to be a member of the community, not attack it from the outside. This has meant building relationships and trust with liberal students—even though this trust is initially frightening. Because I do this, I think I have been able to offer crucial balance to both academic and community discussions.

Going it almost alone has taken some personal strength, but good rebels have always needed strength to buck the status quo. What I don’t need is the support of conservative crusaders who want to change Swarthmore for their own purposes—purposes that are not what this college is about, or what I want to be about.
Inspired by Fred Astaire

Celebrating the publication of Following Fred Astaire, her first “complete volume of poetry,” English professor Nathalie Anderson reads to a room packed with students and faculty. Her poems, she explains, are divided into four sections: childhood/desire, aging/loss, isolation—and bad love. (The last one she drawls with a bluesy twang that makes her students giggle.) “I know that list sounds grim,” she tells the audience, “but I hope the poems are wry, bemused, even delighted.”

That they are—something that becomes obvious as Anderson reads, looking up frequently to smile, underscore a pun or metaphor, and all but wink at her audience. She brings down the house more than once, particularly with her ironic take on the mating ritual. In one poem, this take involves her blue eyes, “where every married man sees the wild blue yonder, the azure, the way out of there, and every bachelor the bone-rimmed blue pools at Labrea, the there to be out of...”

In a series of “phobia poems,” she explores bizarre obsessions like aulophobia (fear of flutes), nephophobia (fear of clouds), and pogonophobia (fear of beards)—“not so much of other people’s beards but of having a beard,” she explains, adding: “One of the things I’m attracted to about anxiety is not knowing if things are going to turn out spectacularly well or spectacularly disastrously.”

As one would expect of a book with Astaire in the title, many poems allude to hoofing. Anderson was taking ballroom dancing lessons while writing the poems and was struck, she says, by “how potent an idea dancing is—from Jane Austen’s novels to the movie Strictly Ballroom.”

Call me a doctor

Prognosis looks positive for seniors applying to medical schools this month—if last year’s results are any indication. Not a single med school applicant from Swarthmore was turned down for fall 1998 entrance.

Medicine continues to be a popular career choice at the College. This year, the Health Sciences Office worked with 339 students—a quarter of the school—as well as 45 alumni. Eleven seniors and 23 alums are med school applicants and 13 juniors, 12 seniors, and 16 alums plan to apply this summer.

The select ’03s

A total of 865 students were accepted into the Class of 2003, roughly 20 percent of the 4,200 who applied. Swarthmore expects this group to yield about 360 first-year students in September. Those accepted hail from six continents, 42 nations, and 49 U.S. states, with New York producing the most, 14 percent, beating out Pennsylvania and California, with 9 percent each. The median combined SAT-I verbal and math score for admitted students was 1,440.

Most of the international students accepted are from Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore, followed by Canada, Malaysia, and Kenya. “This year was the strongest international applicant pool we’ve ever seen at Swarthmore,” says Susan Untereker, associate dean of admissions, “both in terms of academic strength and geographic diversity.”

Now, let’s hear it

Gerald Levinson, professor of music, has received the 1999 Arthur Honegger International Prize for Musical Composition for his orchestral composition “Five Fires.” The nine-minute piece pays homage to the music of Bali, where he studied as a Luce Scholar and Guggenheim Fellow in the early ’80s. Awarded every two years by a committee of composers and conductors through the Foundation de France, the prize—FF 50,000 or about $8,000—honors contemporary music composition.

Though “Five Fires” was written four years ago and made the semifinals in another international competition last year, it has yet to be performed in a live concert. “It requires a professional symphony orchestra,” Levinson explains. “It also requires a music director who is excited by the idea of performing new music—and not all feel that way.” Recognition like this probably won’t hurt.

Anyone can wear the fresh face, bat the lashes, make the goo-goo eyes, playing at first love, calf love, true love. What’s tricky is to get the deep sunk tug, the wrench infinitesimal, that makes it right, that makes it clear it’s meant, and meant to last, to be. Then you can walk on air, dance on ceilings, swing your many partners: then it’s love, again. Any school girl knows that in the right arms the kitchen maid turns queen so if the shoe’s bloody, you keep it to yourself.

—Excerpt from “Cheek to Cheek” by Nathalie Anderson
Saturday morning what?

‘Saturday morning’ has long served as a shorthand epithet for culture judged to be juvenile, low-quality, moronic, mind-numbing, or cut-rate,” begins *Saturday Morning Fever*, the recently published book by Timothy Burke, assistant professor of history, and his brother Kevin. “We have two words to the folks who think this way: Piss off.”

Somehow, we suspect that actor Ben Affleck’s mother hadn’t read this book when she told *Harper’s Bazaar* recently that she wished her son had become “a history professor at Swarthmore.” Mrs. Affleck would probably expect something more high-minded from the College’s expert on African history. Unless, of course, she has visited Burke’s Web page on the Swarthmore site (www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/tburke1), which features a shot of the Johns Hopkins Ph.D. wearing a nun’s habit. The book’s deliberations on *Scooby-Doo* and *The Adventures of Jonny Quest* (Burke’s personal favorite) seem more in line with his Internet diatribes—like “geek chronicles,” “cranky restaurant reviews,” and “boiling oil: messages from the ivory tower”—than his earnest research on the tribal chiefs of colonial Zimbabwe.

But don’t let the irreverent language fool you. The Burkes believe those hours spent glued to the tube in the ’70s gave their generation a shared sensibility. “It gave us a common set of experiences, cultural reference points,” Burke says. “It’s the same thing really as radio shows or movies were to earlier generations.”

TV watching is not as harmful as many people think, say the Burkes. “What children really need is fuel for their rich imaginative lives, and that fuel consists of the same things that drive adults: sadness, loss, violence, ambiguity, desire, love, and death,” they write. “Kids aren’t robots who will learn ‘values’ merely because some Pod Person radiating unreality out of every pore stiffly voices such values.”

How does all this relate to Tim Burke’s other claim to fame? “Writing the book had an impact on what I do as an African scholar—which is not as different from this as you might think,” he insists. “It has made me realize the intellectual distance scholars keep from popular culture.” He has also become more critical of academic jargon. “This book required learning to write again in a mainstream, accessible, vivid way. I’m less patient with the halting, fairly dull quality of most scholarly work now. It’s striking that academics don’t take more chances. There’s a place for doing serious, controlled, scholarly work, but working on this book has made me rediscover a sense of fun, I want to continue with that in whatever subject I work on.”

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**STUDENT MIND**

Everyone has always suspected that there’s something a little disturbing about student volunteer firefighters. Yesterday the Psychology Department confirmed it by announcing that for the past four years, the fire department has been part of a massive, clandestine experiment based on Pavlovian principles. Each time the “honker” has gone off, the Psychology Department has been there, writing in their little books and looking smug....

Said Prof. Barry Schwartz, “We actually accumulated all the results we needed two and a half years ago, but now we all just get such a big kick out of watching them run down the hill in bad weather that we keep the study going.”

—Front-page “news” by Nick Attanasio ’00 in *The Phoenix* April Fool’s issue

Readers of plant labels (that’s just about everyone at Swarthmore) were surprised to find a few new species on campus the morning of April 1. Pranksters had simplified the identification of hundreds of campus trees, shrubs, and perennials. New plantings included “Green Plant,” “Round Bush,” and the ubiquitous “Short Tree.” Other pranks included 5,000 nitrogen-
Holly Baker is graduating in style, with a civil and environmental engineering degree in one hand and athletic honors in the other. As captain and top scorer on both the lacrosse and field hockey teams, Baker won the Gradys Irish Award for senior athletes and was voted to First Team Regional All-American in both sports two years running.

She finished with an impressive win-loss record of 66–17 in field hockey and 40–26 in lacrosse, placing third in Swarthmore history for goals and points (201 and 278) and second for assists (77).

To hear her tell it, Baker owes all this to her team and her coach. “You don’t play a team sport as an individual,” Baker says. You also don’t become captain and top scorer of two teams without being an exceptional player and individual. “She has tremendous skill and incredible game sense,” says Karen Borbee, her coach on both teams. “She knows what to do on the field, makes very good decisions—and big plays. She was our penalty stroker. She always came through in the clutch.”

But that’s not what sets Baker apart from other college athletes, Borbee adds. “Holly has a very mature perspective on the roll that sports play—not only in the life of a college student but in general. Holly plays because she loves to. Therefore, she’s had a much more positive experience than more goal-oriented people.”

Baker also found time to tutor high school students in math, assist at the Registrar’s Office, and serve as secretary for the student chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers. She has a job lined up in an insurance company and hopes to coach some day.

The accomplishment she cherishes most? “Making it to the NCAA tournament in field hockey,” she says. “That was great.”

Spring sports standouts

Jen Pao ’01 captured the Centennial Conference Individual Singles Championship in tennis.

The men’s tennis team made the NCAA Tournament for the 23rd year in the 25-year history of the tournament. The Garnet was ranked as high as sixth in the nation during the season. Greg Emkey ’99 qualified for the NCAA Individual Championships in singles play and in doubles play with Peter Schilla ’01.

The golf team posted a 10-2 record in quad-match play to equal the school record, set in 1987, for victories in a season. James Dolan ’02 recorded the highest Garnet finish in Centennial Conference Championship play with a ninth at this year’s tournament.

In club sports, the “Warmothers,” Swarthmore’s women’s Ultimate team, defeated Princeton in the eastern regionals to advance to the Ultimate Players Association’s 12-team national tournament in Boulder, Colo., in late May.

All-Centennial Roundup: Baseball: junior pitcher Steve Far...
Sasha Welsh ’99 powers up an iMac in the Beardsley Hall public computing area and starts her program. Seven tiny, rainbow-colored “human” figures come from all directions on the monitor, meeting in the middle of the screen, where they begin to dance to Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 8. The dancers glide across the cyberstage like ice-skaters; they perform somersaults and arabesques, pirouettes and grand jetés, and, as the music rises to its climax, defy gravity and begin to float through the air.

“They each have their own personality,” Welsh says of her virtual dancers. “This isn’t choreography for people, but as a choreographer, I find it fun to play with the figures. Using the computer, I have the opportunity to have my ‘dancers’ do three movements a second, slide across the floor, and even fly.”

Welsh’s performance piece, titled “Blue Moon Event,” debuted as part of the dance and art major’s senior gallery show in mid-April. A week later, the multihued figures took to the main stage of the Lang Performing Arts Center when the dance was projected onto a screen at the spring dance concert.

The LifeForms software with which Welsh choreographed her work was developed to allow professional choreographers to sketch out numbers before they begin rehearsal with live dancers. It also serves as a notation system that makes it easier to preserve and disseminate choreography, says Sharon Friedler, professor and director of dance.

Friedler first tested the software during its development stages in the late 1980s, and students in her 1991 dance composition course were the first college students in the country to use the groundbreaking program, which is now a routine part of some choreography classes. “LifeForms is a really wonderful way to teach the basics of choreography. It enables young choreographers to experiment with movement without the pressure of dancers waiting for them. It also makes rehearsal time more productive,” Friedler explains.
Computer technology holds the promise of transforming academic life in ways small and large. As student artist Welsh says, “Technology has become essential, no matter what field you’re in.”

Welsh and her computer-savvy peers share a passion for technology nourished by a childhood in which terms like byte, mouse, e-mail, RAM, and the Web have been a part of everyday vocabulary. The technology that can stymie or frighten their elders is simply a part of life for today’s college students.

On a typical Monday morning in midsemester, more than 20 students are using the computers in the Beardsley public computer center. Most use them as word processors. Others compose e-mail, read online course-related materials, or use a Web browser for research.

Access to the Web opens up a world of new research possibilities to undergraduates, making foreign and domestic newspapers as well as primary documents such as government reports easily retrievable. Each year, more professors are posting syllabi, homework, library reserve materials, and class notes on course Web pages.

As a senior on the job-interview circuit, Ani Hsieh is finding out how essential her computer skills are in the work world. Hsieh’s computer knowledge was limited to Windows 3.1 when she was an incoming freshman. After four years of work in data analysis and data acquisition, this engineering and economics double major thinks she can come up to speed quickly on most any software. “Every interviewer asks about computer skills,” she says. “You may not be a computer programmer, but you still need to know how to use software, to analyze information and calculations done on computers, and to be comfortable with a computer in general.”

But computers alone would not have so transformed the ways students—and others—work were it not for the series of connections that make up the Internet and the World Wide Web.

“The Web gives me a uniform way to give students a wide variety of educational materials—text, color graphics, and computer source code or software,” points out Erik Cheever ’82, associate professor of engineering. “Having all the course information on the Web allows students to access it wherever they happen to be.”

Easy Internet access has made e-mail the communication of choice among students at Swarthmore. “This is a very e-mail-happy school. People would rather e-mail than call on the phone,” says Maria McMath ’99. While Top: Students in Professor George Moskos’ French 1 class posted a class photo on the Web as part of a “virtual exchange” with a class in France that was studying English. A click on the number above each student links readers to a brief biography.

Bottom: Moskos prepared a series of Web-based “Dossiers” to teach beginning French students. On this page, students are asked to book a hotel room in Paris.
admitting that e-mail can’t convey emotion as well as personal interactions, students insist that it makes it easier to keep in touch with far-flung friends, is more convenient than voice mail for checking messages, and allows them to respond to letters and requests when it’s convenient, not when the phone happens to ring. Swarthmore students share their e-mail affinity with the one-third of Americans who now send 2.2 billion e-mail messages a day, according to a recent article in U.S. News & World Report.

Electronic communication has proved to be just as important to members of the faculty: U.S. News estimates that 70 to 80 percent of American university faculty now use e-mail to communicate with colleagues and students.

Steve Maurer ’67, professor of mathematics and statistics, was among the first to embrace the class use of e-mail, starting in the mid-1980s. His students routinely receive at least one e-mail a day from him. The topics range from each day’s assignment to ancillary information on careers and commentary on previous homework problems. He can thus provide additional information to interested students without using class time. He’s even posted his “mathematical autobiography” on his Web page.

Maurer no longer gives out a printed syllabus at the beginning of a course. Instead, he adjusts the material covered as the course progresses.
Prachi Patankar ’00 and Maria McMath ’99 (above) collaborated with Miguel Díaz-Barriga (left), associate professor of sociology, to make a film about the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the lives of Mexican migrant workers in Kennett Square, Pa. Díaz-Barriga likens the value of digital video-editing skills in the workplace to that of word-processing skills in the early 1980s.

As one of the top 100 wired colleges (according to Yahoo! and Peterson’s), Swarthmore has invested considerable time, money, and talent into outfitting the College for the information age. It was just 11 years ago, in 1988, that the College first purchased Apple and DEC hardware for faculty use, opened a 30-computer public area for students, and installed a fledgling computer network in the library and major academic buildings. Since then, more than $5 million has gone to providing centralized file servers, network infrastructure, and administrative computing systems, according to Tom Stephenson, professor of chemistry and associate provost for information technology.

By 1993, every dormitory “pillow” (one connection per student) had been wired for network access. Within the past two years alone, traffic going to and from the Internet has tripled, according to Mark Dumic, manager of networking systems and telecommunications. On-campus users “consuming on the Web” and outsiders logging onto Swarthmore Web pages account for more than 80 percent of traffic on the campus network, Dumic says. E-mail makes up the balance.

More than 125 computers are available to students from 8:30 a.m. to 2 a.m. in three academic buildings and a few remote residence halls. Nowadays, most students come to college equipped with their own computer. According to a survey taken two years ago, approximately 90 percent of Swarthmore students had a personal computer in the dorm room.

The popularity of the Web at Swarthmore reflects national trends. Among full-time students at four-year U.S. colleges, 90 percent use the Internet—half of them at least daily—according to a study reported in the May issue of Yahoo! Internet Life. “A college education without the Internet is now unthinkable,” writes editor Barry Golson.

“As academic fields and technology evolve, that has necessarily required more technical tools,” says Associate Provost Stephenson. “We try to provide the highest-quality educational environment and the best educational resources.”

That takes lots of hardware—and people. Staffing related to computing has nearly doubled in the past decade to 22 employees. The Computing Center also employs an army of 90-plus students at computer printout sites, help desks, and public computer areas. Student consultants are on call in every dorm to help hallmates having difficulties with their personal computers.

The Computing Center nonsalary operating budget has grown to more than $1 million per year. Computer technology advances so rapidly that within very few years an advanced hardware system becomes a relic, says Stephenson, who predicts that even more funds will be needed in the future to cover the cost of upgrades.

—T.G.M.
“I don’t want to feel hemmed in,” he explains. “I want to decide what homework problems to give out after class has taken place; that way, I can tailor the homework to what went on that day. The use of e-mail makes it a much better course.”

The increased presence of the Web in general has made Swarthmore students more accepting of e-mail assignments. A few years ago, students were hesitant about class use of e-mail, Maurer notes. “I now get incoming first-years sending me e-mail over the summer before I meet them. I always emphasize that students can choose to interact with me any way they like best. If you prefer to come see me and never send e-mail, that’s fine. Most students feel it makes the professor accessible 24 hours a day.”

Electronic submission of homework and projects has become more prevalent too. Math students no longer need to turn in hard copy; they just copy their computer file into a course drop box. The same holds true for some English classes. Tom Blackburn, Centennial Professor of English Literature, takes it a step further with some of his students, requiring them to submit a hypertext (Web-based) document as a final paper.

Hypertext allows writers and readers to go beyond the linear order of book and paper texts by providing links that serve as footnotes, cross-references, and gateways to tangential information. Blackburn explains. Photos, movies, and sound can all be incorporated into a text.

“Hypertext is becoming more and more a part of what professors will accept as work from students,” says Maya Seligman ’99. For students, it allows for more creativity and a greater variety of ways to explore a topic, she adds.

Some students cite their affinity for creative, nonlinear expression as their reason for having a personal Web page. Some 300 Swarthmore students, nearly one-quarter of the College’s total enrollment, have Web pages hosted on the Swarthmore College Computer Society (SCCS) server, according to SCCS president John Rieffel ’99. That doesn’t include the many student organizations that also have Web pages. (To visit a student Web page, enter the site at www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/studpages.html.)

Students can learn the basics of Web-page programming from their peers on the Swarthmore Web Enthusiasts Brigade. This spring, Seligman taught a series of HTML (Hypertext Markup Language, the programming language of the Web) classes, which attracted students of all majors and class years and an equal number of males and females.

“It’s not hard to learn the basics of HTML,” Seligman insists. “I encourage beginners not to be intimidated because it’s a computer language. Web pages are not just for people interested in computers. It can be a creative outlet for anyone.”

Students in George Moskos’ first-year French class have traveled on Air France and toured Versailles, been to the exclusive Paris restaurant La Marée, and kept up with the Le Henni family in France, all without leaving the campus. According to Moskos, every modern language course at Swarthmore incorporates the Web to some extent, but he has taken advantage of the Web’s potential more than most.

Moskos has incorporated the Internet into every aspect of the course.
The syllabus is online. Interactive grammar and vocabulary exercises allow students to get instant feedback outside of class. For in-class and homework assignments, students have taken virtual tours, sung along to nursery rhyme tunes, located their dream home using French real-estate Web pages, and listened to African and Caribbean music online.

In September, Moskos will be a faculty fellow in residence at the Center for Educational Technology at Middlebury College. He will use the rest of his upcoming yearlong sabbatical to complete work on his “Dossiers du Web” and interactive exercises.

“I find the Dossiers extremely helpful in learning a new language,” says Michael Arellano ’00. “Sometimes the vocabulary is not made completely clear by the text, and the Dossiers help weed out any vagueness in the manner words are used on an everyday basis… Like others, I love browsing the Web, so the exercises are far from boring.”

Swarthmore’s three-year-old computerized language lab has helped Moskos to exploit the available technology. It’s an incredible improvement over the previous lab, he says. The assignments are available from any Web-accessible computer, so students can complete assignments in their dorm rooms, too.

All of this is only the beginning for Moskos’ French classes. “My goal is to teach the whole course using the Web, with a grammar manual on the side,” he says. No more dry textbooks or boring workbook exercises. Instead, students will take oral exams on the computer, see and hear the culture they are studying, and do homework assignments that give them “real-world” exposure to the language.

Like Moskos, Ann McNamee, professor of music, has been an early advocate of the Web’s potential as a teaching tool. Her 1993 article “Grażyna Bacewicz’s Second Piano Sonata” marked the first time a full piece of classical music by a woman composer was made available over the Internet. Since then, she has created two Web sites: Analyses of Music by Women (http://mcnamee.agraham.com) and Women Composers: Music by Women Through the Ages (http://mcnameedia.com, under construction). She also helped to establish the journal Music Theory Online.

McNamee’s Web sites join text with audio music and the composition’s score, so listeners can see the notes as they are being played. She also includes a simplified analysis of the score that is highlighted as the song progresses. “Readers can listen to a piece of music repeatedly,” she adds, “something they can’t do with a print article.”

McNamee is visibly excited when she discusses the advances to the study of music made possible by the convergence of a high-quality digital recording, analysis, photos, and even a composer’s compositional sketches.

“How are you going to get more people to listen to music by women composers?” she asks. “It’s very expensive and hard to find. On the Web, we can put it all together and make it available virtually free, so that students all over the country can study women composers.”

In her fall 1996 class on women composers, students created multimedia research papers modeled after McNamee’s (http://ash.cc.swarthmore.edu:80/womuse). One student accompanied her research report with a Quick-time video of herself performing a traditional African midwife song-dance that she learned while studying abroad. Others included recordings of them-
GONE SURFIN’?

Nate Stulman ’01 created quite a furor on campus when his opinion piece was published in The New York Times on March 15. Not every student had read the article, but most were talking about it.

Stulman, in an essay titled “The Great Campus Goof-Off Machine,” warns that the great push toward wired colleges has been misguided. By making high-speed Internet connections and fancy computers readily available, he writes, colleges are inadvertently encouraging students to “spend four, five, even ten hours a day on computers and the Internet.”

He supports his argument that computers are “more of a distraction than a learning tool” with examples culled from his experiences at Swarthmore. “I have friends who have spent whole weekends doing nothing but playing Quake or Warcraft or other interactive computer games,” he writes. Others routinely stay awake all night chatting by e-mail or surfing the Web “aimlessly.”

Stulman’s article prompted an indignant response in The Phoenix from Brian Murray ’01. “Mr. Stulman’s piece was not representative of the vast majority of Swarthmore students,” he wrote in response. Murray especially feared that potential employers would develop the wrong impression of Swarthmore students based on Stulman’s op-ed piece. As evidence, he points to a subsequent letter in the Times in which the writer wondered, “What kind of educational institution is Swarthmore College if students can goof off on the Internet for four, five or ten hours a day and not flunk out?”

John Rieffel ’99, president of the student computer society, SCCS, did his own unscientific survey of students using computers in public areas. “I walked around several public areas,” he says. “Not one student was playing games.”

Even so, Rieffel argues that playing with computers is the best way to learn about them. “If the SCCS were to have an unofficial motto, it would be: ‘Come fool around with computers,’” he says.

Scott Price ’00 agrees: “Show me a person who’s just installed a fancy game on their PC, and I’ll show you someone who’s just learned more about their computer, and computing in general, than someone who’s used Word for three years to write papers.”

Maya Seligman ’00 acknowledges that computers have their dangers: “They can suck you in and just take the time away. People need to be careful not to waste time that way.”

Price admits that students play games. He himself did during his freshman year. But Stulman’s article was overstated, Price insists. “People do play lots of games. People also do lots of work—including lots of work that could not have been done without computers. Consider an engineering major who can plot a data set in 30 seconds rather than two hours by hand. Computer technology is letting us skip the time-consuming steps and get on with the learning.” —T.G.M.

With every advance in technology, the number of skills expected of students grows. Sociology and Anthropology Professor Miguel Díaz-Barriga likens the value of digital video-editing skills in the workplace to that of word-processing skills in the early 1980s. This year, Díaz-Barriga, whose current research emphasizes visual ethnography, has introduced seminar students to the College’s new Avid digital video-editing system. The multilayering of text, sound, and images that digital technology allows makes academic study much richer, he says.

“Ethnographic film is distinct from documentary film,” he explains. “We’re not teaching the students to be technicians or lighting experts, but digital technology allows for a much higher-quality film.” The real value of videography, Díaz-Barriga says, is as a communications tool. For students, that means both watching videos made by others and learning to communicate their own knowledge through images.

Anthropology student Maria McMath ’99 is convinced that “the power of visual imagery is immense.” As Díaz-Barriga’s research assistant, she is editing his film on the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the lives of Mexican migrant workers in Kennett Square, Pa. She’s also doing several films of her own, including a joint production with Prachi Patankar ’00 about the anitracism rally held by students in the fall semester.

It’s been more than six months since Patankar and McMath started using the Avid system. Already they seem quite adept at working with the two computer monitors, keyboard, television monitor, speakers, and rack of audio equipment that make up the editing system. They laugh when asked how much time they spend in the editing room, claiming that it is
The digital revolution has not been confined to math and science. The study of nearly every academic field has been enhanced.

impossible to calculate. “Just yesterday, we were here for three hours in the afternoon and then again from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m.,” Patankar says.

Patankar produced a 30-minute video, The Parityakta: Abandoned Women in Western India, for the Visual Ethnography seminar. The piece focuses on women who have been abandoned by their husbands or family and, in Indian society, have no place to go socially or economically. Many end up as homeless outcasts. Patankar directed filming in India last summer and then edited the video footage on the digital machine. The video premiered at Swarthmore in April. Patankar hopes to educate others about the plight of these abandoned women by distributing her video in the United States and India.

Patankar, like her peers, welcomes the computer as a medium for communication, research, creativity, and, sometimes, change. Indeed, computers have already had tremendous impact on the way learning takes place.

“In the sciences, computers have led to a major initiative in visualization,” says Tom Stephenson, professor of chemistry and associate provost for information technology. “Computers have allowed for three-dimensional molecular modeling as well as complex simulations that generate analysis results in easy-to-understand graph or model forms,” Stephenson adds. Likewise, they’ve eliminated much of the drudgery associated with these fields, allowing science and math students to concentrate more on conceptual material.

Yet the digital revolution has not been confined to math and science. In every discipline, the Internet allows students and faculty to communicate easily and cheaply with colleagues around the world, thus disseminating research more quickly and more widely—and making it more open to valuable critique.

Computer technology has even opened up entire new fields, Stephenson says. “A subject like African-American religions, for example, is not solely a text-based discipline, as it often relies on the study of rituals that have been handed down over the years as visual and oral experiences. Students have to move beyond a text to study and collect visual images to really engage the subject.”

The study of nearly every academic field has been enhanced by technology, and today’s Swarthmore students are exploiting this potential with confidence, skill, and enthusiasm. ■

Theresa Gawlas Medoff is a freelance writer from Wilmington, Del. She made extensive use of e-mail, Web pages, and the Internet to research this article.

Professor of Music Ann McNamee (right), an expert on women composers, has created a Web site where readers can follow the score while listening to a recording of the music. Her students have put together similar sites about music they have studied. McNamee also co-teaches a course called The Physics of Musical Sound with Carl Grossman, associate professor of physics.
A woman enters a tiny shop in a bad neighborhood, nervously fingering the engagement ring for which her husband paid $1,000. She pleads with the shabby man behind the counter, offering her most treasured possession as collateral for a loan that she needs to pay her rent and buy medicine for her children.

The pawnbroker examines the ring at length with a practiced eye and offers her $300.

These stereotypes come straight out of any hard-luck TV movie: the penny-pinching pawnbroker, the desperate mother, even the gritty detectives who know that pawnshops are frequent depositories of “hot” goods. The popular belief is that pawnbrokers serve the dregs of society.

How many Americans have ever entered a pawnshop? If the research of Swarthmore economics professor John P. Caskey is any indication, quite a few have. Although no official estimates of pawnshop activity are available, Caskey’s own research suggests that pawnshops in the United States make about four million loans, totaling approximately $3 billion, every year.

Pawnshops have tripled in number in the last 15 years, to around 15,000 pawnshops and check-cashing outlets supplying fast cash.
nationwide, and check-cashing outlets, which process $60 billion worth of checks each year, have tripled to 6,000 stores nationwide since 1986.

Think fast: If you need money, where do you go? Many of us might rely on savings accounts, credit cards, or consumer loans from a bank. But banks won’t make loans of $50 or $100—it’s not cost-effective for them because the same amount of paperwork is required for a $50 loan as for a $500,000 loan. Many people simply don’t qualify for a loan of $1,000 or more. What options are open to people with no savings and no access to consumer credit?

The answer is fringe banking—a cash-based system that provides consumers with small loans and payment services without requiring a bank account or a healthy credit rating. Pawnshops, title lenders, check-cashing outlets, and payday lenders are the big players in the industry.

“When I started doing this research, I thought this explosion in check-cashing outlets was due to bank branch closings. I read the newspaper and that’s what journalists kept telling me,” says Caskey. “I’m absolutely convinced now that that’s not it. It’s not that people don’t have physical access to a bank, it’s that they don’t have financial access—and that’s not by chance. Banks make money off of people having savings and using other products. These people [fringe banking customers] can’t pass their credit screening, and they have no savings,” so they’re not desirable customers. Many banks have instituted minimum-balance and other fees precisely to discourage people from keeping an account open with little or no balance.

This lack of financial access can be correlated with the stagnation or decline of real wages for lower-income households in the 1980s, says Caskey. The increased polarization of the economic well-being of American families, with the poorest families earning less while the richest earn more, is one factor that has led to a boom in fringe banking.

In a 1996 study of 900 households with annual incomes below $25,000, Caskey found that 5 percent reported using a pawnshop in the previous year, and 20 percent said they had used a check-cashing outlet. Although these companies provide some of the same services that traditional banks do, they serve a different set of customers, and there are important differences in the way the two levels of the financial system operate.

Pawnshops became a subject of Caskey’s research after he heard an interview with a pawnbroker on National Public Radio 10 years ago. Intrigued, he set out to write “a quick article on why pawnshops died out.” He discovered that pawnshops were actually thriving, but that no economist or academic had studied the pawnbroking industry or its place in the U.S. economy for several decades. In fact, two important studies of pawnbroking were directed by former Swarthmore economics professor Louis Robinson, who in 1922 was commissioned by the Russell Sage Foundation—the same organization that would later fund Caskey’s research—to study the business.

Caskey’s “quick article” has blossomed into an ever-widening field of
Fringe banks provide essential services to low-income consumers.

study. His work on pawnshops naturally led him to consider institutions serving the same customers, such as check-cashing outlets and payday lenders, and he is currently studying consumer education initiatives and researching credit unions’ efforts to serve low-income customers.

Puzzled by the total lack of academic interest, Caskey wrote a paper on the growth of pawnbroking for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and found that the topic left academic economists cold.

“I had to sell them on it,” Caskey recalls. “I was saying, ‘Look, here’s a part of the financial system that serves millions of people, it’s booming, and no one’s writing about it. Don’t you think that’s interesting?’”

Caskey applied to Russell Sage for a grant, which he received on the condition that he write a book on the subject. Fringe Banking: Check-Cashing Outlets, Pawnshops, and the Poor was published in 1994. It remains the only contemporary book on the fringe-banking industry and was one of Russell Sage’s better-selling titles.

“Actually, it’s had a much better reception with sociologists than it’s had with economists,” says Caskey with a chuckle.

The book points out that although banking is one of the most highly regulated industries in America, fringe-banking customers enjoy little government protection. Ordinary bank deposits are federally insured, truth-in-banking laws mandate disclosure of every fee and charge, and federal regulators perform extensive audits of each institution.

Not so in fringe banking. Pawnshops and check-cashing outlets are regulated at the state level. In many states, there are few government inspections, no mandatory insurance, not even a requirement to post fees and charges in uniform ways from shop to shop. Consumer advocacy groups periodically mount campaigns to legislate lower interest rates in one state or another, but public awareness of the entire sector remains low, and little federal interest exists.

An illuminating example of this...
huge national blind spot was Congress’s attempt to mandate the electronic distribution of government support payments. Under the Electronic Funds Transfer Act, this was to have happened by January 1999, yet Social Security checks are still being printed and mailed by the bushel. Why? “They passed this law to save the government money,” says Caskey. “What they did not think about was how electronic payments could be made to people who don’t have bank accounts.”

Indeed, in Caskey’s 1996 study, 22.1 percent of lower-income households reported that they did not maintain any type of deposit account. Other estimates of the total “unbanked” population range from 9.2 to 21.8 percent, with lower-income families much less likely to have a bank account than affluent ones. In fact, the government’s Survey of Consumer Finances indicates an increase since the early 1970s in number of households without deposit accounts. For many of these households, fringe banks serve as the primary financial institution.

It’s easy to suspect that these institutions are taking advantage of those who have no other option. Pawnshop and payday loan fees, when expressed as annual percentage rates, are often astronomical—200 percent or more is common in states that don’t legislate interest-rate caps.

Fringe-banking businesses are largely unregulated. In many states, interest rates can be 200 percent or more. “When I first saw these interest rates, my reaction was shock,” says Professor Caskey. But the small size and higher risk of most transactions drive up the price.

In a typical pawnshop transaction, a customer brings in an item of value, such as a watch, piece of jewelry, or stereo set, which the pawnbroker takes as collateral for a small, fixed-term loan. The customer can either redeem his property anytime during the loan period by paying the loan value plus interest, or not pay, in which case the pawnbroker can sell the item to recoup his costs. For example, a customer might bring in a piece of jewelry valued at $200 and receive $100 from the pawnbroker. To redeem the jewels, the customer would need to pay $120.

The newest twist on pawnbroking, the title loan business, works the same way, except that the collateral is the title to a motor vehicle. The customer keeps the car, whereas the broker keeps the title and can repossess the car if the customer doesn’t pay.

The check-cashing business is even simpler. A check-cashing outlet cashes checks for a percentage of the face value of the check or a flat-fee minimum for checks with a small face value. Most outlets only cash payroll and government support checks; those that also cash personal checks often charge more because of the greater risk that a personal check will bounce. A government support check can commonly be cashed for a fee of 1.5 to 2.5 percent of the face value. Many check-cashing outlets also sell money orders and wire transfers, enabling customers without checking accounts to cash their checks and pay their bills in one trip.

Many check-cashing outlets have recently branched out into the payday lending business, which involves cashing postdated personal checks for customers at a discount, in return for a promise to pay the face value of the check on payday. For example, a customer simply writes a check for $120, dates it two weeks in the future, and receives $100 on the spot. On payday, the personal check for $120 is cashed by the lender in payment.
It was difficult at age 61 to be sent to the back of the class. But on my first big birding trip, an excursion to southeast Texas for the spring migration, that was where I belonged. One other rank beginner was in the group, a retired sociologist from the University of Wisconsin gamely following his wife around. “Don’t ask the name of the brown ducks always floating next to those green-headed ones,” he whispered to me our second afternoon. “You’ll be told birds come in male and female.”

Although the sociologist found it an easy step to the classification of birds, my training as an English professor pulled me the wrong way, toward musing and inefficiency. I forgot to check for wing bars on the yellowish bird perched in front of me when an armadillo, which first appeared to be an ambulatory shell casing, shuffled across my path; and while the others distinguished six different species in a flock of nondescript brown birds flitting through a hedge, I mulled references to sparrows in Shakespeare in self-defense.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. My
initiation began with boots. As I sat in the San Francisco airport, my ankles encased in several pounds of snake-proof, water-proof leather, a tanned woman in leggings, sandals, and a loose page boy bounced up to me. “Hi, I’m Elaine, the leader for Peregrinations. You must be Judy, the new birder.”

“Yes I am. How could you tell?”

Elaine choked a giggle. “Instinct,” she replied, darting a glance at the floor. Nothing instinctive about it. My identifying marks were my boots. The less competent the birder, I soon learned, the heavier the footwear. The other birders wore Keds or high tops. Elaine stuck to her sandals in chigger territory as well as in swamps.

Next came binoculars. Sitting on the curb at Corpus Christi airport, I waited impatiently for our van so the birthing could begin. But while I was thumbing through Vanity Fair; the others had already whipped out their binoculars and begun scanning the sky. They had checked off laughing gulls and great-tailed grackles and were working on a hawk before I untangled my binoculars, which were twisted in my rain pants beneath a pair of hours of bird-watching before the birds hunkered down for the day; a long lunch break filled with chaise lounges, books, papers, and naps; another two hours of observation as the birds suddenly remembered all the things they had to do before nightfall; and then dinner, a good read, and early to bed.

In the eight days of the trip, I never opened my book bag. Serious birders run at top speed from dawn to dusk, often in flocks. In the built-up areas bordering the Gulf of Mexico, we jumped into our cars at dawn, drove off to some bare bit of sand behind a motel or between commercial docks, jumped out of the cars and scanned for birds, marked our lists, jumped back in, drove to a marsh behind the dump, jumped out, scanned, marked, jumped in, drove to a triangle of scrub left when a freeway exit was rebuilt, jumped out, scanned, marked, back in, and so on until lunch—not counting, of course, the several unscheduled jumps when Elaine spotted a hawk out the window or heard a warbler or pulled over to check on the whereabouts of a red-eyed vireo from another group of birders at the side of the road.

Some days, my bones ached so I resented these miserable jaunts. Fifty miles from Laredo, we took out our binoculars at a wayside consisting of a picnic table bolted to a concrete slab under a corrugated metal awning 12 yards from the highway. A few birds, blasted by exhaust, foraged in the surrounding mesquite struggling through a mulch of car parts, disposable diapers, and plastic, glass, and aluminum containers for every beverage ever made. Lighter items such as plastic grocery bags ascended and swirled overhead along with dust and dead leaves every time a truck passed. The sociologist calmed me down. “In an intense training session last year, I urged the executives to empty their minds a few moments and meditate,” he observed. “The director of operations for Arkansas objected. ‘If I empty my mind in that way, the devil may seize it,’ he declared.” For 30 minutes every day, I took the risk.

When our group traveled along the southern border of Texas, the landscape opened up dramatically, however, and we took long walks over ranch lands and through Santa Ana Refuge and Bentsen State Park. But even on these glorious days, the pace remained intense. Serious birders do not set out on a trail to see what they can see. Relying on word of mouth, checklists, and Park Service bulletin boards, all day long they stick to a strict schedule of appointments with particular birds in particular neighborhoods or even particular trees. I found myself involved in a more tightly structured world than the teaching schedule I had left behind.

At one ranch, the back pasture was pathless, the trees alive with the yellow and red of kiskadees and pyrrhuloxias, but we ignored them to patrol another group of birders at the side of the road.
Birding takes us out of ourselves and celebrates survival against odds.

the red-eyed vireo. All this was punctuated by regular comparison of our lists with other groups of birders who had flocked to Texas. “Yes, we saw that too—and that and that. No, not yet, but we’re headed that way. The red-eyed vireo was where?” And off we charged, not to be outdone by birders from Los Angeles. I feared that my friend the sociologist had joined the race until he showed me his list. It turned out to be a neatly printed record of Texas road signs: “Cow Patty’s Saloon”; “Guns—Liquor”; “Full-O-Pep Cattle Feed”; “This Is God’s Country—Please Don’t Ride Through It Like Hell”; “Corn Products Road”; and “Do Drop Inn.”

“Every group has its defining psychology,” my friend declared. For birders, I discovered, beneath the surface competition, it is the anxiety of loss. A birder in southeast Texas can stand among ancient oak trees while the sun streams through twining grapevines, Swainson’s hawks wheel overhead, alligators snooze under a nearby bridge, a crested caracara balances improbably in a bush, and a cardinal preens itself in full sunlight yet be preoccupied by the birds he missed. One morning, five of our group were out at dawn behind the motel 15 minutes before the rest. The first light sent steam rising against the dark band of foliage circling the pond. The stragglers did not say: “Good morning” or “Beautiful day” when they arrived, but “What did I miss?” Another time, we encountered a group of British birders at a lookout and compared notes. “We saw the Inca dove, the black-crested titmouse, the Carolina wren, all for the first time.” Why the long faces? “We missed the vesper sparrow.”

“Hurry, over here, a yellow-headed black bird,” or cinnamon teal, or bronze cowbird, or rail, Elaine might call to me, bent upside down over a wildflower or gazing vacantly at midges in the sun. I jerked to attention, swung my binoculars, but encountered only a blank space and the birders’ knell: “Oh, you missed it; it flew, just this second.” The sociologist and his wife had to leave the trip one day early. When the group met for a reunion a few weeks later, the first half-hour of lunch was devoted to detailing the birds they had missed.

If loss and longing permeate birding, however, so do revelation and surprise. Birding was different from what I’d expected, but a month after my first trip, I was planning a second and third and fourth. I list my reasons in the order in which I spotted them.

Car hopping dominates some birding excursions—true. But it put me in touch with the desperate journeys migrating birds make, searching amid combines and concrete for an occasional scrap of wetland on which to feed. If they want to observe birds, birders too must forage in the bits of wasteland left over after motels and shopping centers and industrial parks.
have sliced up the landscape. Industrialism consigns them both to the junk left in its swath.

A certain avidity can characterize birders and their lists, but that’s only half the story. “Human nature is what it is,” my friend scolded me. “So what if birders are hunters who carry pencils instead of guns. It’s a big step.”

Then he smiled. “By the by, did you know ‘modo at two o’clock’ means that a mourning dove is in the right top of the tree?”

Birding takes us out of ourselves. It’s a welcome break from the obsessive self-scrutiny of our psychological age. Why should I worry about the unexamined life when I can examine in-flying cranes that weave back and forth in long lines across the sky, then descend through each other like interlaced fingers until each bird rocks back ever so slightly as it lands? Such vivid otherness absorbs my curiosity.

Birding celebrates survival against odds. Charlotte Brontë had it right when she gave the young Jane Eyre a copy of Bewick’s History of British Birds for comfort; Bewick’s description of bleak arctic wastes, of the haunts of seafowl, of “the solitary rocks and promontories by them only inhabited” remind the unhappy child that life persists even in “death-white realms.” Birds signal survival in a deadly universe. They are cunning improvisers, like the pine siskin I saw last weekend who had threaded her way through barrier wire installed in the eaves of a National Park Service building, of all places, to reclaim her nesting site.

It is a pleasure to observe a bird. I don’t mean the rare bird I might glimpse once in a lifetime. Outside my window on a day when my printer is jammed and my fingers covered with ink, a common woodpecker drums on a telephone pole, declaring his nature in an instant and sweetening mine.

Finally, birds offer privileged moments. This spring in Marin County, Calif., on an excursion led once again by Elaine, we spent our lunch hour observing ospreys on a nesting platform built by Pacific Gas and Electric. PG&E had gotten tired of sending out crews to climb utility poles and knock down nests that were immediately rebuilt by the determined birds. A better solution, in places visible to the public anyway, was to build nestling platforms out of range of the wires. On the day we stopped, a heavy wind blew. Three large chicks were in the nest, one hunched over on the edge, his back to the blast, as was mine. His down was brownish-gray, about the color of the sticks forming the nest. Except that as the wind blew against his feathers, it lifted the outer layers to reveal a rust-colored glow underneath, which broke through like buried fire. “In a shapeless flame, / Angels affect us oft,” wrote John Donne. I’m sorry I was born too late for angels, but this was pretty close.

Judith Puchner Breen ’58 teaches English literature at San Francisco State University.

**Advice from Swarthmore’s record-setting birder**

Phoebe Burnett Snetsinger ’53 is the Sir Edmund Hillary of the birding world. In 1995, she set a world record when she became the first birder to achieve a personal list of 8,000 birds—which means she has observed 84 percent of the world’s approximately 10,000 species, all the bird families, and about 94 percent of the world’s 2,100-plus genera.

Since then, with the current changes in taxonomy, Phoebe has been running to keep up. “The more species that are split, the harder it is to maintain even my 84 percent,” she reports. “Unless I travel full tilt, I continue to lose ground every time I read another journal.”

When I learned Snetsinger was also from Swarthmore, I grabbed the chance to interview her. These excerpts are from an e-mail exchange between a birder who was just back from “views beyond my wildest imaginings” of the yellow-necked rockfowl in the Tai Forest on the Ivory Coast and a birder who has seen a few hundred species and specializes in robins.

**Q.** What advice do you have for a beginning birder like me?

**A.** Primarily—enjoy it. Study ahead of time to enjoy and appreciate the experiences as fully as possible. Pick the places and the avifauna(s) that appeal to you most, and go there—the sooner the better.

**Q.** When you spot an unidentified bird, what is the first thing you look for?

**A.** If obvious features are lacking, look at the bill. The size and shape of this is tremendously important and will often put a bird in the right family or even genus and gives you that all-important starting point.

**Q.** Do you have any memory tricks to offer? Your memory is fabulous.

**A.** Like anyone who has to absorb a great deal of factual information (medical people, for instance, or Swarthmore College students in general), I’ve just devised my own personal “memory handles” as I’ve seen birds over the years, including scribbled field notes. The more you can repeat experiences, the better.

Since she established the world record, Phoebe has relaxed her pace, concentrating more on the enjoyment of birds than on numerical competition. Just before our exchange, she had visited her daughter in Montana, where she spent an hour and a half observing northern pygmy owls near their nest hole. Though she’s still happy to “tick” the adequate split-second view when it comes her way, Phoebe wrote, “these are the kinds of birding experiences I’ve come to treasure most.” They are also the kinds of birding experiences that a champion birder and a beginning birder can share.

—J.P.B.
Join this summer’s “virtual book club”

The Alumni Council, led by Philadelphia Connection chair Jenny Rickard ’86, will conduct a “virtual book club” experiment in August. This new project was inspired by the success of Connection book clubs in the Metro DC/Baltimore and Boston areas.

Swarthmore alumni, students, and parents from all over the world, as well as faculty and staff, are invited to participate in an online discussion of Disappearing Moon Café by Sky Lee.

The Swarthmore Web site will provide a forum for electronic bulletin boards, on which participants may post questions and comments during the first two weeks of August. Frank K. Saragosa of the Department of English Literature will help to prompt discussion by posting background notes and questions about the Asian diaspora. A “live” interactive chat with Professor Saragosa is scheduled for Sunday, Aug. 15, from 3 to 5 p.m. Eastern time.

All that is needed to participate is access to the Internet. Those who don’t have access at home or work can try their local public library. Participants should use version 3.01 or newer of Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. To register or get more information, go to the Web site at: http://bookclub.swarthmore.edu.

DC/Baltimore book club to study “The Greek Tragic Vision”

This year, the Metro DC/Baltimore Connection book club will read Greek literature in translation with Gil Rose, professor of classics. A lecture on Sunday, Sept. 12, will prepare readers for Homer’s Iliad. For information, e-mail Sue Willis Ruff ’60 at sueruff@aol.com, or phone her at (202) 966-3521.

Alumni get back in the swim

Swim team alumni got back in the Swarthmore pool in April during an informal meet against the current men’s and women’s teams. The result was a tie between youth and age in the number of events won.

The star of Team Alumni was Jill Morrel Coleman ’52, who entered all but one event. Jill swims on a masters swim team in Baltimore and competes at national and world championships. Kendrew Witt ’96 headed the alumni cheering squad. After the meet, everyone gathered in Bond to celebrate the Swarthmore swimmers’ successful season and Sue Davis’ 25th year as head coach. Nancy Crickman ’81 and John McKinstry ’81 joined the others for dinner and a ceremony in which current swimmers received traditional awards and “bequests” from seniors. And they agreed to make the alumni meet an annual tradition.

Nominations sought for honorary degrees

The College welcomes nominations for recipients of honorary degrees at Commencement in June 2000. Criteria include the following:

• A person with distinction, leadership, or originality in a significant field, on the ascent in his or her career or at the peak of achievement
• Ability to serve as a role model for graduates and to speak to them at a major occasion in their lives
• Preference, but not requirement, that there is an existing affiliation with the College

The Honorary Degree Committee prefers to recognize less honored candidates over those who already have many honorary degrees.

Alumni who wish to make a nomination are asked not to inform the individual that they are doing so. All nominations will be kept confidential. Biographical information, and a persuasive letter addressing the criteria above, should be sent by Friday, Oct. 1, to the Honorary Degree Committee, c/o Vice President Maurice Eldridge ’61, by U.S. mail or e-mail to meldrid1@swarthmore.edu.
Upcoming Events

**Homecoming SATURDAY, SEPT. 25**

**Chicago:** In July, the Connection will attend a play by Carol Thompson Hemingway ’52, based on stories by Ernest Hemingway.

**Durham, N.C.:** The Triangle-area Connection will gather for its annual picnic on Saturday, July 17, coordinated by chair George Telford ’84.

**Metro DC/Baltimore:** The Alumni Gospel Choir will perform at the Heritage Fellowship United Church of Christ in Reston, Va., on Sunday, June 13, at 3 p.m.

**Philadelphia:** Larry Schall ’75 and Sam Agger ’75 invite all men’s soccer alumni to campus for an alumni game on Saturday, Sept. 25, which will be Homecoming Weekend. This is the 25th anniversary of Swarthmore’s participation in the NCAA soccer finals.

**NEW PITTSBURGH CONNECTION**

Chair Melissa Kelley ’80 kicks off the brand new Pittsburgh Connection with a Pirates-Phillies game on Wednesday, June 30.

**Recent Events**

**Boston:** Becky Morris Joseph ’81 and fellow Swarthmoreans sampled French wine and cuisine at Les Zygo-mates.

**Chicago:** Lois Polatnick ’74 hosted an international wine tasting at her Evanston, Ill., home.

**Durham, N.C.:** Connection Chair George Telford ’84 welcomed Provost Jennie Keith to a gathering at the Duke University Museum of Art, where she spoke about the College curriculum.

**Metro DC/Baltimore:** President Al Bloom and his wife, Peggi, greeted alumni, parents, and friends of Swarthmore at a reception at Baltimore’s Peabody Library.

**Metro NYC:** Alumni Council member Ike Schambelan ’61 invited the Connection to “critics’ night” at Theater by the Blind, which he directs, for a performance of Maxim Gorky’s Vassa.

**Philadelphia:** Martha Salzmann Gay ’79 organized a Connection Indian dinner at the Palace of Asia, and Bob Barr ’56 coordinated a walking architectural tour of Philadelphia.

Swarthmore athletes challenged alumni to men’s and women’s rugby and Ultimate Frisbee games on campus.

**Seattle:** Betsy Northup Presley ’43 and Deborah Read ’87 invited Swarthmoreans to a concert of 15th-century courtly love songs and dances by the ensemble Medieval Strings.

**Garnet Sages:** The Sages enjoyed a visit to the Gettysburg battlefields and the Pennsylvania capitol in Harrisburg, Pa. Vice President Dan West addressed the group on campus at the annual Garnet Sages dinner on Alumni Weekend.

Regional Swarthmore events are run by volunteers. If you would like to organize an event in your area, please contact the assistant director of alumni relations at (610) 328-8404.

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**The Alumni Association wants to hear from you!**

Please write to Elenor Reid ’67, president, Swarthmore College Alumni Association, in care of the Alumni Office, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore PA 19081-1397.

Candiates for Alumni Council: __________________________________________

Candiates for Alumni Manager on Board: ________________________________

Suggested alumni speakers for Alumni Weekend Collection and other campus events: __________________________________________

Name/class year: __________________________________________

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Applications sought for **Luce Scholarships to Asia**

Swarthmore has been invited to nominate three alumni for the Luce Scholars Program, which funds a nonacademic year in Asia that is spent in person-to-person communication between professionals. Candidates must be under age 30, with no previous career interest or academic concentration in Asian studies and little or no exposure to East or Southeast Asia. For more information, contact Joanna Nealon at (610) 328-7351, or e-mail jnealon1@swarthmore.edu.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ART MAJOR NIKYIA ROGERS ’99,
WHOSE WORK WAS DISPLAYED IN THE LIST GALLERY IN MAY.
A mother’s job

Child care policy is composed of a complicated set of state and federal regulations, tax credits, subsidies, and programs. These complications arise in part from the fact that we expect child care (including early education programs) to meet two goals simultaneously: We expect it to make it possible for parents of young children to work, and we expect it to enhance child development to ensure that children enter school ready to learn. Although it is possible to integrate these two goals, such care will be expensive—often too expensive for families to afford or for policy makers to support. But the complications arise from even deeper conflicts about whether we think mothers should be in the formal labor force or at home with their children—and the fact that society can have different expectations about whether we think mothers should be in the formal labor force or at home with their children—and the fact that society can have different expectations for women of different economic and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Elizabeth Rose’s richly textured case study of the development of day care in Philadelphia makes clear that these conflicts are not new. This important work builds upon Rose’s meticulous review of case records and writings from a variety of participants, including day care workers, social workers, and philanthropists dealing with mothers, fathers, and children involved with day nurseries, nursery schools, and other providers of child care. She highlights the conflicting perceptions about the roles of women in the family and in the labor force, how these perceived roles vary with family structure and income, and how these perceptions have changed—or not—over time.

Her work begins with the early development of day care as charity for poor single mothers in Philadelphia, which was a major center in the early development of day care. She traces day care as it grew and changed to include the developmental needs of children and, subsequently, to include the needs of married mothers working to meet the growing demand for labor and those seeking to improve their family’s economic well-being.

Simply tracking these transitions and transformations would have been an important contribution to our understanding of the process by which we reached the configuration of child care and early education services that are available to families today. Rose does much more than this: The story she gives us is in its own right a fascinating one. She uses the case records to develop a vivid, sometimes disturbing, and often moving picture of the lives of working women and their relationships with their own families, with the social workers and educators with whom they interacted to arrange for care of their children, with other women in the labor force, and with policy-makers who would determine whether child care would be available. This beautifully and movingly written book goes a long way toward helping us to understand how we have arrived at our current policies for meeting the needs of families and, more important, why it is so difficult to make these policies more rational, coherent, and consistent.

—Ellen Magenheim
Associate Professor of Economics

Spelunker

Even as humans explore outer space, vast mysteries remain below the earth’s surface. And there are great stories to tell about the brave explorers of America’s caves, even if they lack the celebrity of astronauts.

One of the boldest was an unlettered Kentuckian, who is the subject of this slim volume by William R. Halliday, past president of the American Spelean History Association. (“Spelean” comes from a Greek word for cave; some alumni will remember a campus spelunkers’ club.) Halliday takes us back to 1925 and “the remote Kentucky cave country when roads were few, schooling optional, and today’s science of caves was unimaginable.” Tourists were attracted to Mammoth Cave and others that constitute the world’s most extensive cave system.

Collins, dubbed “the human groundhog,” guessed correctly that most of the major caves were connected. He discovered and developed Crystal Cave on his family’s farm, but it was too remote to attract many visitors. So he set out to find an entrance near Mammoth. One
January day, he found a promising spot and started blasting and digging deep into Sand Cave—until his foot was trapped by a 27-pound rock.

Thus began one of those sagas that 20th-century media have turned into national melodramas. “Hopelessly buried alive,” Halliday writes, “yet where his brothers and a courageous young cub reporter could crawl to him, talk with him, feed and comfort him while mobs brawled overhead; America had never known such prolonged suspense.... America waited tensely by newfangled radios, eagerly sought out the latest newspaper extra edition.”

The would-be rescuers reached Collins too late, and it was deemed too dangerous to recover his body. The shaft was filled, Halliday writes, “memorial services were held, ballads sprang into existence, and Floyd Collins took his place in the folklore of America.” (One retelling is “Floyd Collins,” a musical commissioned by the American Music Theater Festival in 1994; it won an Off-Broadway Obie Award and was revived this spring in Chicago and Philadelphia.)

Halliday tells the rest of the story—how Collins’ family fought the decision to close the shaft and raised money to retrieve his body. The way they did this curiously anticipates today’s TV infotainment interviews: by recounting the tragedy on the vaudeville circuit. Even a member of the recovery team took to the stage.

Collins was buried above his beloved Crystal Cave, but the circus wasn’t over. The family sold that cave to an entrepreneur, with permission to move the grave to a spot where tourists could view the embalmed corpse. After some nasty court battles, at last Collins rested in peace.

Many of the publication’s historic photographs are from the author’s own collection, including real and fake photos of Collins’ trapped body and a photo of his lantern and boots—with one boot bearing the indentation of that fatal rock.

—Barbara Haddad Ryan ’39
Associate Vice President for External Affairs

Editor’s Note: Halliday’s privately published booklet is available for $4.95 from the author at 6530 Cornwall Court, Nashville TN 37205.

Other recent books


Lauren Belfer ’75, City of Light, The Dial Press, 1999. Set in Buffalo, N.Y., at the beginning of this century, this novel portrays city life at a time of great change.


Stephen Henighan ’84, North of Tourism, Cormorant Books, 1999. This collection of short stories explores the...
interactions of travelers crossing cultural boundaries.


Michael C. Hudson ’59 (ed.), Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration, Columbia University Press, 1999. Contributors to this scholarly analysis explore the historical and current forces shaping this conflict-prone region.

Richard Martin ’67, Our New Clothes: Acquisitions of the 1990s, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999. Martin describes more than 100 photographs of costumes, accessories, and fashion illustrations acquired by The Costume Institute during the 1990s.

Franetta L. McMillian ’83, The Sound of Light, Franetta L. McMillian, 1998. The author note in this volume of poetry, including “Naming the Monster” and “Unremarkable Child,” states that if McMillian “didn’t become a writer, she might have been an evil sorceress.”


Yopie Prins ’81, Victorian Sappho, Princeton University Press, 1999. This work examines Victorian poetry, focusing on the Greek poet Sappho’s lyrics.

David Rubinstein ’54, But He’ll Remember, William Sessions, 1999. Rubinstein weaves his life story, including leaving the States after graduating from Swarthmore and becoming a British citizen in 1964, with historical commentary.


Brenda (Schwabacher) Webster ’58, Paradise Farm, State University of New York Press, 1999. This novel, set in 1929, addresses the threat of Hitler, women’s changing roles, and the growth of the psychoanalytic movement.

Nancy Hope Wilson ’69, Flapjack Waltzes, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998. This children’s tale about a 10-year-old girl and the death of her brother explores the process of loss and renewal.

Attention authors
The Bulletin welcomes review copies of books, compact disks, and other works by alumni. (No magazine or journal articles, please.) The editors choose featured books for review, and all others receive capsule reviews. All works are then donated to the Swarthmoreana section of McCabe Library. Send your work to Books & Authors, Swarthmore College Bulletin, 500 College Ave., Swarthmore PA 19081-1397.


Rod Chronister ’67, VisionLAB, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999. This educational multimedia program is an interactive study of the experience of human vision. Each study unit includes natural scenes, classic visual illusions, and perceptual challenges.

Harry Schulz ’84, Havin’ a Ball, New Artists, 1999. Jazz singer Schulz has written some original tunes with Andy Fite. His vocals are recorded with guitarist Fite, bassist Rich Califano, and drummer Roger Mancuso.

Vaneece Thomas ’74, When My Back’s Against the Wall, Peaceful Waters Music, 1998. In this gospel collection, Thomas wrote songs including “Love Is Surrender,” “Say a Prayer,” and “We Thank You,” to “uplift, encourage, and soothe when life becomes a ‘daily grind.’”
Perceptions of herself as a “half-breed” haunted the childhood of Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, the daughter of an Anglo mother and a Mexican father. Parents of one neighboring family forbade their child to play with her because of that Mexican heritage. Although both of Martínez’s parents were respected teachers, she learned “to think of myself as inferior, which is one of the worst effects of racism.”

She attended all-white schools—an experience Martínez does not recommend. “I had been treated as weird, some kind of outsider, starting with the first day in school,” she said in a 50th-reunion speech in June 1996. “At the same time, I had my father and his stories of the Mexican Revolution, which he had witnessed as a teenager in Mexico. He told me inspiring stories of seeing thousands of campesinos from rural areas, where they were fighting for land and justice, ride into Mexico City on horseback. My mother also stood up for social justice, for human rights. So there were forces at work to give me self-respect.”

Martínez said: “When it was time for me to think about college, my family contacted a young man who lived on our block, who had gone to Swarthmore.” Richmond Paine ‘41, who died in 1969, and his family were her only cordial neighbors then.

Martínez’s ideas about tolerance crystallized at Swarthmore, where she was, again, the only nonwhite in her class. Those years were “a happy time when I was aware of my aloneness—but not lonely,” she said. Martínez does not recall much discussion about racism on campus. But “students were certainly aware of injustice generally,” Martínez said, “which is what saved me and helped me turn a lot of buried anger and pain into action.” Quaker ideals, including the lack of hierarchy, helped her survive and fueled her antimiilitarism.

In a 1991 note to Nancy Fitts Donaldson ‘46, Martínez wrote: “I’ve always had some very special feelings about my years at the College. In particular, I’ve associated it with a certain kind of social responsibility and even radicalism—Quaker style, but that’s no less radical than some other styles. Somehow Quaker courage blended with my father’s faith in the revolution.”

Martínez was “determined to work for international understanding and peace” after graduating. To her, that meant working at the United Nations, where she became a researcher from 1949 to 1954. After several other jobs, she blended her political concerns with the arts as an editor at Simon & Schuster from 1958 to 1963 and at The Nation from 1963 to 1964.

Her activism then exploded with the black civil rights movement, and she joined the full-time staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1964. She worked in the historic Mississippi Summer Project and also headed SNCC’s New York office. With the rise of the Chicano civil rights movement, Martínez moved to New Mexico, where she published a newspaper, organized young people, and launched the Chicano Communications Center—a major movement project in Albuquerque, N.M. The Center published her best-known book, 500 Years of Chicano History, a bilingual, pictorial history that is still a widely used teaching tool. Later, she co-directed a video based on it, Viva la Causa!

In San Francisco, where she has lived since 1976, Martínez continued striving for social justice as a member of the Democratic Workers Party. In 1997, she and a friend co-founded the Institute for MultiRacial Justice as a resource center “to build alliances among people of color and combat division.” A place for honest dialogue, panels, and cultural events, the institute is “a dream going back several years,” Martínez wrote to class secretary Sally MacLellan Councill ‘46 in October 1996.

Martínez herself served as class secretary in 1952. Although she enjoyed writing Class Notes, this 73-year-old who still rents—and longs for more bookshelves—felt like she didn’t “fit the conventional pattern.”

After resisting her parents’ profession for years, Martínez has been an adjunct professor at California State University in Sonoma and Hayward and lectured on more than 100 campuses across the United States as well as for academic conferences, high schools, youth groups, and prisoners. “My goal is to be radical—not to offer textbook information,” she said.

Martínez recalled with delight a football player squirming in a women’s issues class but later clipping news about a woman’s victorious discrimination lawsuit. “It’s thrilling when I receive notes from students saying, ‘You changed my life.’” Despite recent waves of reaction against women’s movement gains and attacks on affirmative action, she finds “one bright spot in the activism of Latino youth.”

Dedicated to “la juventud, the youth, and their revolutionary vision,” her recently published De Colores Means All of Us is a collection of recent and updated writings about Latinos. This book is “rooted in a basic demand for respect,” she writes in the introduction.

Martínez has published six books and numerous articles. Friends are encouraging her to write an autobiographical work next.

“It’s liberating to have a clear sense of identity now and to be among hundreds of thousands making changes in race and gender issues,” this vibrant activist said. Martínez no longer senses that “something is missing” and thinks of herself as a “resource person to move the struggle forward.”

—Andrea Hammer
The aesthetics seminar
Every writer needs an editor. Dan Menaker ’63 is both.

Even in 1959, Daniel Menaker ’63 had a finger on the pulse. Back when tuning into Swarthmore’s WSRN involved tying an antenna to a radiator, Menaker was the station’s first deejay to play rock and roll: “I had been listening to it since school,” Menaker tells me at his home on Manhattan’s Upper West side. “I had this stack of 45s that I brought to college with me. And what I liked more than anything else was picking which ones would be hits and which ones wouldn’t.”

Getting rock and roll on WSRN no longer takes much talent. But writing and editing fiction “hits,” which Menaker has been doing for the past 30 years, often does. And judging from his successes, Menaker’s literary antennae are tuned quite well. After an apprenticeship in The New Yorker magazine’s legendary copy and fact-checking departments, Menaker spent 20 years as a fiction editor there, working with such luminaries as Alice Munro and Norman Rush ’56 and discovering many others. In 1994, Menaker made the jump to book publishing, becoming senior literary editor at Random House. His first book there? Anonymous’ Primary Colors.

In his apartment overlooking West End Avenue, amid shelves of 45s and a foot-high manuscript (“a nonfiction book in disarray”), Menaker is modest about the role of an editor: “Any fame you get as an editor is really secondary because there really weren’t editors until 200, maybe 300 years ago. Writing and storytelling have been around forever. It was only when art and commerce intersected that middlemen developed. Today, the same holds true. Because if I wasn’t there, somebody else would be. But if Joe (Klein) wasn’t there, there would have been no Primary Colors.”

Although Menaker views the role of editor as secondary, he takes his taste, and his books, very seriously. The former he credits Swarthmore for helping develop: “I want three things as a reader. I want a book to surprise and hold me from the beginning. Then, the voice has to be interesting and unique. And then the third thing—and this is from Monroe Beardsley’s aesthetics seminar—it has to be complex.”

As a book editor, though, Menaker has to do more than exercise his aesthetic sensibilities. With 50,000 books published every year, he is the shepherd to his books, working to bring them through this vast sea of print to the right audience. Because of this, Menaker states, “most books don’t work. From a financial point of view, four out of five books don’t work. You publish for the sixth book.”

Menaker’s most recent effort was Amy and Isabelle, a first novel by Elizabeth Strout. He said the book will beat the odds: “It’s probably the high point of my career as an editor, publishing that book. It’s hitting The New York Times list a week from today at No. 9, which is very high, and it’s going to go up.” Menaker’s excitement over the book comes less, I sense, from the odds against such a phenomenon than from the sense that this is an important book and the author a special person: “It seems small. But, in fact, it’s not small. In fact, it’s quite grand. It’s about a lot of little things, but it’s about big things like love and tragedy and families.”

Being a writer himself helps Menaker understand his authors and better appreciate his relationship to the books he edits. “I get the pleasure of being a writer. It means I don’t need that as an editor.” Menaker is unusual among editors in this respect, having published two collections of short stories and a novel, The Treatment.


As might be evident from The Treatment’s plot line, humor has, and “always will be” a big part of Menaker’s writing. He may be the only contemporary novelist to cite comedian Mel Brooks’ 2,000-year-old man as an influence on his writing. Reading some of his early humor pieces for The New Yorker, the influence becomes apparent. One of them, “The Worst,” was a spoof of Peter Passell’s ’66 best-selling consumer guide The Best. It included the worst wine (“Switchblade, bottled by Ernest and Mario Volpone, of Modesto, R.I.—back on the market in zinc throwaway cans”) and the worst theory of the universe (“Jehovah’s cousin Scott faced toward the east, shook up a bottle of Diet Pepsi, and sprayed it into the void”).

In person, Menaker combines the nervous physical energy of Steve Martin with the neurotic “bloviating,” as he would say, of Woody Allen: “Allen was in the air in my 20s. You just sop that stuff up. All those early movies called sick comedies. Mike Nichols and Elaine May—very big influence. Hilarious stuff.”

Woody Allen, apparently, is still in the air. Twenty minutes before our interview, I ran into Menaker, who had just encountered two friends in the corner bagel shop. Like a scene out of an Allen movie, we had interrupted him thinking “about who had the most influence in life... whether it was Attila the Hun or Roosevelt.” Menaker pauses thoughtfully here. “I think it’s teachers. Because if they teach for 40 years, they reach thousands of people and share a little bit of something.” As evidenced in his own writing, and the writers he has developed and published, it is clear that Menaker is making no small ripple himself.

—John Freeman ’96
My mother dragged me to my first string quartet session when I was in junior high. I was mortified, of course. I knew with the certainty of a 14-year-old that if my mother wanted me to do this, it had to be totally uncool.

Despite my protests, I found myself one Saturday afternoon in the Veblens’ living room, holding my cello and eyeing Helen Veblen, a haughty 15-year-old violinist, with mistrust. Another violinist showed up and then a violist. I sensed that none of them wanted to be there any more than I did. Then Helen’s mother set a Haydn quartet in front of us. With no possibility of escape, we played.

How we managed, I’m not quite sure. I don’t think any of us had any great skill with our instruments. But when the mothers came to pick us up several hours later, we returned to our awkward adolescent selves with a shock. We had been transported, separately and together, to another world, one of emotion and expression, delight and transcendence. The four of us had danced and sung, fought, lost and won. “Can we play again next Saturday?” I managed to get out. I was in love, totally and forever.

I’d been playing the cello since I was 8, but before chamber music, I hadn’t guessed what music was actually for. Now everything was different. For one thing, I discovered that playing the cello felt physically wonderful. You rest the instrument against your chest, just above your heart. From there, it transmits its vibrations directly to the center of your body—almost into your soul. Just to draw notes out of a cello gave me pleasure. But to play with two or three other people, approaching some of the most beautiful works of art ever made—well, I didn’t know that much about sex in those days, but I did sense that this was probably one of the top two things you could do with your body.

All through high school, I played chamber music whenever I could. My cello had an old-fashioned wooden case that reminded me of Queequeg’s coffin in the old movie of Moby-Dick, and now that I think about it, it clung to it like Ishmael. Then I took it with me to Swarthmore, where I found some kindred souls and formed a string quartet.

Sometime toward the end of our freshman year, we decided to give a concert. Big mistake! We were reviewed in The Phoenix. Crushingly, I can’t recall now exactly what the review said—I think it touched on poor phrasing, lack of musicality, and bad intonation—but it was awful, and it killed our quartet. We were too embarrassed ever to play together again. I felt I had flunked out of paradise—clearly, I didn’t deserve a place in this other world. I put my cello away and decided I’d just have to live with reality because I had been found unworthy of transcendence and joy.

It’s tough for me to admit to having been so vulnerable that a single review could destroy five years of passion. Perhaps there was more to it. Like everyone else, I was busy. I had to study, and then I had to earn a living. For my first 10 years of adult life, I lived in Europe,
traveled a lot, and kept all thoughts of chamber music out of my mind. Then I got married and returned to the States. I thought vaguely that I might take out my cello again, but my husband put up bitter opposition. It appeared that he disliked classical music and couldn’t hear the very sound of a stringed instrument! I hadn’t the will to persevere. I sometimes attended concerts and caught a breath from the other world, but I never, ever entered that world myself.

Ten more years went by. The marriage ended. In the brief period of clarity that follows a major upheaval, I somehow managed to grasp how much I needed to get back to chamber music. My cello was still there (my mother had kept it), but when I tried to play it, I got a major shock. Instead of the thrilling sounds it used to make, I could only get it to creak or groan.

What had happened was that it had gone dead. This is actually the term that is used for what happens when an instrument isn’t played for too long a time. The varnish is designed to be constantly caressed by the vibrations of playing. In their absence, the varnish grows stiff, and the sound almost disappears. I held the cello against my heart, and both of us felt as stiff as old leather. Experts told me that the only cure was playing. My cello might or might not come back to life; all I could do was try. So I played, by myself, gently, fearfully, sometimes in tears, but with growing determination to find some way back to the other world. Little by little, its sound began to return.

One day, a friend happened to mention something called the Humboldt Chamber Music Workshop. It seemed that every summer a group of people gathered for a week at Humboldt State University in northern California and played chamber music from early morning to late at night. It sounded like heaven, but did I dare? Was I good enough? Would they accept me? Was my cello ready? Were there reviews? Well, never mind all that. I decided to go.

Once there, I knew from the first hour—no, from the first minute—that I had come to the right place. If my adolescent awkwardness had been transformed by music, now my adult problems—the divorce and all the challenges of starting again—faded. They were there, but so what? This was where I belonged! Reality might wait at the end of the piece—it’s always there—but the door to the other world had cracked open, and a healing light was coming out.

There at the workshop, every day was like that first day in Helen Veblen’s living room. You sit down with a few other people and some music. Your skill levels are whatever they are—of course, you always want them to be better, but it turned out not to be so overwhelmingly important after all. When you’re playing, you hear what’s on the page, or on your favorite recording, or in your head. You don’t experience your performance itself—you experience the music, directly and from the inside.

Listeners, conversely, hear what you actually play—which is why chamber music should be a participatory sport, not a spectator one. So I finally could put the review in perspective. What difference did it make what someone outside the group thought? We were playing for ourselves. We should have just skipped the concerts.

During my fourth summer at the workshop, I found myself one day playing Beethoven’s Opus 95 quartet with a violinist named Ralph Morrison. I admired his playing but found him personally a bit intimidating. However, it became apparent that he was more than a little taken with me. After our morning session, he followed me to lunch. After our afternoon session, he stayed on, making earnest conversation while I practiced my part. I felt annoyed. I was in the middle of my favorite week of the year. I didn’t want it to be about him—I wanted it to be about the music and about me.

But after I got home, what remained with me about him was how beautifully he’d played the Beethoven. So when he called and asked to see me again, I agreed. On our first date, we went to the home of another couple and played quartets. It was the best date I’d ever been on. Later, at our wedding, we walked in to the slow movement of Beethoven’s Opus 18, No. 6. At the reception, I took out my totally reborn cello, and we played Haydn’s Opus 20, No. 5 for our guests. He did make it a condition of the marriage that I learn all the late Beethoven quartets, which he lives for, but this was a prenuptial agreement I felt I could agree to.

Now we live in Eureka, Calif., quite near Humboldt State, and attend the workshop together each summer. We might look like a normal North Coast couple, but we’re not. We actually live in the other world! Do we have all the usual problems of life at the end of the 20th century? Sure. Do we wait in line at the grocery store and worry about the cost of health insurance? Yes. Have we found a way to enter paradise every Tuesday and Thursday evening and all day for a week each summer? Absolutely yes to that, too!

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**Editor’s Note:** *In My Life* features first-person essays. Readers interested in submitting an essay for consideration should first write for editorial guidelines. Address: Editor, Swarthmore College Bulletin, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore PA 19081-1397, or e-mail bulletin@swarthmore.edu.
From her sturdy chin to her articulate hands, the 30-inch-high sculpture of Sojourner Truth crackles with abolitionist fire. A few feet away, that fire is not yet burning in a 12-foot-high version of Truth just beginning to take form in plywood and wire mesh.

Give him a few more weeks, says Peter Kauzmann ’75, and it will.

Over the last two decades, the engineering major has carved out a nearly unique niche as a sculptural enlarger. Artists who are commissioned to create statues for parks and city squares—like the Truth sculptor, Tina Clark of California—generally render their concept at a small scale. Then they ship the piece to Kauzmann’s studio, where he spends weeks painstakingly enlarging every button-hole, every furrow of the brow or fold of the ear.

To do this takes precision, patience, and a passion for analysis—skills Kauzmann says complement most sculptors’ more conceptual approach.

“Artists have an idea of what an enlargement is going to look like, but they would never know how to do this,” said Kauzmann, standing in the woodstove-heated barn-studio a stone’s throw from the restored farmhouse he shares with his wife, Maria, and their children, Christopher, 8, and Sarah, 5. For example, he said, “Most artists don’t weld. They’re not thinking structure. They’re up in the air and esoteric.”

Kauzmann’s main instrument is an enlarging machine of his own design. What an enlarging grid does in two dimensions, his machine does in the third. The 10-foot-long device is like a compass that Kauzmann can set at any ratio (e.g., 4:1 for the Truth sculpture). As he traces a pointer along the jawline of the smaller sculpture, a pointer at the other end follows the same line on the big one. In this way, Kauzmann builds out the finished piece proportionally, roughing out the lines first in wood and wire. He inserts reinforcing steel into legs and shoes for stability. At last, he renders the outer surfaces in plastilene, a never-drying synthetic clay, and calls Maria, who works at home as a graphic designer, out to the studio. Together, they “point” the details; while he moves the compass over every curve and contour of the original, Maria sticks toothpicks into the corresponding points on the big one. The ends of the toothpicks let Kauzmann know exactly how far out to enlarge a nose, an eyelid, or a wart as he and an assistant work the final details in the clay.

For Kauzmann, the most gratifying stage is loading the finished work onto the back of his pickup truck (helped by an ingenious system of pulleys that hoists the finished product up on a steel I-beam) and “enjoying the stares of people, particularly toll takers,” on the two-hour drive into Manhattan. His destination is Sculpture House Casting, which makes molds and bases, restores old statues, and installs monuments around the country. Kauzmann’s work will be done at this point, but the Truth piece, like all his sculptures, still faces months of reworking by the artist, and several stages of casting, before it can be erected outside a museum in Battle Creek, Mich.

Kauzmann said he left Swarthmore clearly out of what he didn’t want to do: “I was petrified of sitting behind a desk!” That aversion guided him by default to his vocation. Returning to his native Princeton after graduation, he entered the employ of the hyperkinetic Alex Ettel, heir to a family that supplied materials and enlarging services to sculptors and, in his later years, a gentleman farmer. Ettel quickly saw that his farm’s young handyman had the strategic mind and steady hand of a born enlarger. Ettel died in 1992, but Kauzmann has carried on the craft and continued his freelance relationship with Ettel’s company, Sculpture House.

You’d think that, after all these years, Kauzmann would feel entitled to the epithet “artist.” That’s not a job he says he’s ever wanted.

“For 22 years, I’ve claimed to be a technician and a craftsman but never a sculptor,” he said. “Artists are always looking for things they want to change: The eye should go over here; the head could be over there. I have no interest in doing that—though after so long, when I look at a work, I do feel entitled to have an opinion.”

—Ali Crolius ’84
“When I first saw these interest rates, my reaction was shock,” says Caskey. In the course of researching the industry, he has moderated his views: “I’ve changed from shock to thinking about what was going on, talking to people, and trying to understand.”

Caskey concludes that many customers of fringe banks transact business there voluntarily; it’s not just desperate widows who pawn their wedding rings but couples who pawn their TV for the cost of dinner in a restaurant; come payday, the TV is restored to the living room.

Fringe banks provide essential services to those unable to get them elsewhere, says Caskey. But because of the small size and higher risk of most fringe-banking transactions, the price of those services is proportionately higher. This practice isn’t necessarily unjust, though it can be, especially where there is a local monopoly—though Caskey notes that it’s difficult to make a case for monopolies in fringe banking. Not only do fringe banks operate in close physical proximity to traditional banks, but both capital and regulatory barriers to entering the business are very low.

Should anything be done about fringe banks? Those who believe in a pure free-market economy would argue against regulating any financial institution; if buyer and seller both agree to the transaction, anything goes. On the other end of the spectrum, some consumer advocates argue that consumers should be protected from usurious fees.

Caskey says: “The easiest thing to argue is the free-market side. Why regulate these things? It’s harder to give the other side of the argument, unless you’re going to assert that poor people and people with bad credit records are dumb and can’t take care of themselves.”

He finds himself somewhere in the middle: “I argue in my work that these high prices are not the result of firms just ripping off the poor. The high prices are caused by the high cost of providing the service. But that’s not the end of the story—I also think that most people using these high-cost financial services would be well advised not to.”

He notes: “I think what’s interesting about fringe banking is that it raises difficult questions about what we regulate and what we allow people to do.” These questions have prompted Caskey’s current interest in consumer education programs. If consumers were more aware of credit issues, he wonders, would there be so many people with bad credit ratings?

Caskey, with fellow Swarthmore economics professor Robinson Hollister, is considering a long-term study that would examine a group of people who received a consumer education course and compare their financial behavior with a control group who received no consumer education.

“There are an awful lot of programs in consumer education—everyone sponsors them, from Mastercard and Visa to consumer credit counselors—but no one knows if they’re effective.”

Still, the most vexing issue surrounding fringe banking and low-income households is the distribution of wealth. “Forty percent of the population has essentially no net wealth,” notes Caskey. “A lot of attention has been paid to income distribution, but now some attention is being paid to asset distribution as well.”

The simplest way to increase net wealth among households with little or none, he says, is to make the earned income tax credit (EITC) more generous. “Let the market set the wage, but let the government subsidize it in the form of a tax credit,” he says, dismissing as less important the question of raising the minimum wage, which many economists believe leads to higher unemployment.

“Strengthening the EITC alone is the most important thing we can do to help low-net-wealth households,” says Caskey. “And the second most important thing we can do may be consumer education. But that’s going to take some research to determine.”

Wendy J. Cholbi ’94 writes financial articles as well as award-winning fiction. She lives near Boston with her husband, Michael ’94, and the world’s most extroverted feline, Jackson.
in the throes of late adolescence, I just kept trying to study longer and harder. I fainted the morning before my first Honors exam and graduated feeling let down because I “only” got Honors. It was only after I sailed through law school that I regained confidence in my intellectual ability. Although I had many wonderful times at Swarthmore, made lifelong friends, and loved the majority of my classes, my memories of those last two years are tainted by recollected depression, stress, and self-castigation.

I have always resented the College’s relentless cheerfulness about the wonders of its academic program and what has seemed to me to be its utter failure to acknowledge that some of its students, however talented they may be, carry crushing burdens of stress and self-doubt. The fact that one-third of the last graduating class had consulted Psychological Services confirms that the school is meeting a pressing need. I only wish it had started sooner.

SHARON CONAWAY RUTBERG '81
Washington, D.C.

Editor’s Note: The College appointed its first full-time director of psychological services, Dr. Leighton Whittaker ’54, in the fall of 1980.

DON’T FORGET MENTAL ILLNESS

To the Editor:
I read with interest the essay by David Ramirez. Although I am happy to hear that the wonders of its academic program and what has seemed to me to be its utter failure to acknowledge that some of its students, however talented they may be, carry crushing burdens of stress and self-doubt. The fact that one-third of the last graduating class had consulted Psychological Services confirms that the school is meeting a pressing need. I only wish it had started sooner.

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IN LOCO PARENTIS

To the Editor:
Your “Parlor Talk” column on Courtney Smith referred to the “now-quaint idea that colleges and universities should take on the role of surrogate parents.” You claim that the demise of these standards “made possible the freedom, openness, and diversity that characterize the best of higher education today.”

President Smith came to Swarthmore when I was a junior, and we still had curfews for women, restricted dorm visitation, a dress code for dinner, and a “no alcohol” policy. Although we may have chafed at the rules, none of us felt they prevented us from receiving the quality education Swarthmore has always offered.

The proponents of “no restrictions” believe that because most college students are no longer “minors,” they should be allowed to adjust to the freedom of the “real world” at the same time they are getting their formal education. But does a lack of restrictions truly enhance the educational experience? Or just add to the temptations that have always distracted adolescents from their studies?

Today, I see college administrators trying to deal with increased alcohol abuse, parents concerned over their children’s promiscuity, and employers coping with new graduates who aren’t prepared to accept their standards of behavior. Although colleges can’t be assigned all the blame, they should not brag that eliminating their social restrictions has led to “the best of higher education today.”

JACK HUGHLETT ’55
Lancaster, Pa.

BORN AT TAYLOR HOSPITAL

To the Editor:
I was born on Nov. 21, 1961, at Taylor Hospital in Chester, Pa., and given up for adoption. My adoptive mother (now deceased) told my aunt that my birth parents were
two Swarthmore College students. I would like very much to contact my birth parents. Persons having information may contact me in care of the Bulletin.

Jack Gorry
San Francisco

Editor’s Note: Correspondence addressed to Mr. Gorry in care of the Bulletin will be forwarded unopened and in confidence.

NOT APOCRYPHAL

To the Editor:
Jeffrey Lott’s warm and entertaining interview with Barbara Pearson Lange Godfrey ’31 (March 1999) brought back many good memories. I especially enjoyed her description of a committee discussion of dormitory open house hours. Actually, this wasn’t a special committee on that subject but, as I recall, a standing committee called something like the Student Advisory Committee, which considered a range of current College issues relating to students. The committee consisted of the deans, a couple of faculty members, and several students.

Given Barbara’s background in drama, Bulletin readers could be forgiven for thinking the story was apocryphal, but it’s not. On the occasion described by Barbara, we were indeed discussing the student body’s request to double the Sunday afternoon parietal hours, as they were then known. In a moment of frustration, I burst out with the unspoken thought that was certainly on the mind of several of us. Susan Cobb’s response was even better than Barbara remembers.

“Miss Cobbs,” I said, “what are we going to do in four hours that we couldn’t do in two?”

“Alex,” she replied in her Southern drawl (pronouncing my name Ay-lex), “I’m not worried about what you’re going to do. I’m worried about what you’re going to do again.”

Anyone as steeped in the classics as Dean Cobbs was obviously not going to be fazed by a smart remark by some puerile college senior. I momentarily wondered whether she thought that Swarthmore students lived so much in their heads that they really wouldn’t get in trouble in two hours (with the door kept open the mandatory six inches, another feature of parietal hours at the time). Of course, she’d have been wrong about that, but she had accomplished her real goal, putting an end to that discussion, at least for that day. Like the dress code for dinner, it does all seem part of another world, not just another generation.

By the way, Barbara Lange should also know that although she may have felt shackled by her role as dean, many of us in the 1960s still felt her presence as someone supportive of and engaged with the theater at Swarthmore and esteemed her for that.

Alexander M. Capron ’66
Santa Monica, Calif.

A TENSE MAN
IN A DIFFICULT CRISIS

To the Editor:
Jim Smith ’67, later president of the Student Council, was one of six black students (three male and three female) admitted to Swarthmore in the fall of 1962, a threefold increase from the fall before, when there were just two.

Jim told me at that time how President Courtney Smith went out of his way to make him feel welcome at Swarthmore by greeting him by name as the two passed on the walk between the president’s house and the campus during freshman orientation. After telling this to Al Chappell ’66, another black freshman that year, Jim said Al told him that the president had gone out of his way to greet Al too—only he was also greeted as “Jim.”

I thought at the time I heard this anecdote that it meant Courtney Smith, although well meaning, had trouble distinguishing between these two black students. I figured that those who said his death by heart attack during the black students’ takeover several years later was a result of this were probably right.

But then in the March issue of the Bulletin, you carried an interview with Barbara Pearson Lange Godfrey in which I found a different context for understanding Courtney Smith’s death. She told of being in awe of Smith and once, sitting next to him at the meetinghouse, getting ready for freshman orientation, she put her hand on his arm and suddenly “realized how tense he was. The calm he evinced was not real—it was just self-control.”

Could that have been in the fall of 1962, when he was trying so hard to welcome the initial vanguard of black students, however small in numbers? Or was it at a later orientation, when there were even more “Jim Smiths” to greet? Maybe his heart attack had nothing to do with race, and he was just a tense man in a difficult crisis. But maybe it had everything to do with it. Probably both.

Ellen Langenheim Lawson ’66
Arlington, Va.

CORRECTION

The Children’s Scholarship Fund, managed by new Young Alumni Manager Michael Kuh ’94, has $170 million in capital, not the $2 million reported in March. In addition, the fund’s scholarship awards are not necessarily restricted to children attending public schools.
It was 1957, and lightweight aluminum furniture was all the rage. Organic was not in (wood, after all, could rot, warp, and attract insects), and no one had heard of “ergonomics.”

Aluminum was the material of the moment. Durable, lightweight, and refreshingly unfamiliar, it was to the ’50s what plastic would be to the ’60s. Never mind that the Good Form chair—the basic four-legged version—was actually introduced in 1932 by GF Office Equipment. The chairs didn’t become part of the American landscape (or Swarthmore’s dining room, then in the center of Parrish Hall) until after World War II, when manufacturers began churning out suites of aluminum furniture.

By then, GF had mastered the technology and stockpiled mountains of aluminum in their Youngstown, Ohio, factory while manufacturing pilot seats for planes used in the war. Perhaps it was this connection to victory that made the sleek brushed metal look so right for the postwar office: lean, mean, and light enough for takeoff. Many a suburban den sported the swivel version of this chair, with matching aluminum desk and file cabinet.

At Swarthmore, the chairs became indelibly linked with memories of the dining room’s social whirl. Still found on campus but in semiretirement, they now rest quietly in a dark storage closet at the Lang Music Building, where the College orchestra brings them out for each performance—a noble duty for their golden years.

We brought one into the office of Barbara Haddad Ryan ’59, now associate vice president of external affairs at the College. “Remember these?” we asked. “Are you kidding?” she shot back. “They’re part of my DNA.” Nancy Lehman ’87, our managing editor, would agree, though her memories are not so fond: “Unless you were wearing jeans, they were pretty uncomfortable.”
By the 1980s, when Lehman attended Swarthmore, the horrors of a bad chair were coming to light. Woe to the spinal columns of those who failed to invest in lumbar support. Like most office furniture makers, GF discarded their aluminum tools and dies and began cranking out ergonomic wonders. “Everything is adjustable now, with endless levers and gears,” says David Carr, GF’s marketing director. “A stable, stark, nonmovable chair is not the correct thing to offer.”

Still, he admits, GF may have tossed the Good Form mold a little prematurely. “Dad’s Office Makes a Comeback,” announced The Wall Street Journal last October, in a layout peppered with furniture many of us left at the Salvation Army years ago. It seems that vintage galleries are hunting down and reselling that furniture, and chains like Crate & Barrel are cranking out knockoffs. No one is sitting in these chairs for hours on end, but they look just right around the urban-chic kitchen table. As the demand for ’50s decor rages on, the cost of vintage aluminum climbs. Current asking price for a Good Form on castors: $850. Swarthmore’s old stalwarts may have a second career yet.
Spain 2000: Old Treasures, New Glories

Swarthmore alumni, parents, and friends are invited to join the Alumni College Abroad for its first comprehensive tour of Spain. Next year will mark 25 years since the death of Francisco Franco and his dictatorship. Since then, the popular and progressive King Juan Carlos has helped guide his nation to an active role among the European democracies.

The Alumni College Abroad will visit cities rich in history and culture, from Bilbao and San Sebastian in the north to Cordoba, Seville, and Granada in the south and Barcelona in Catalonia, near the Pyrenees. In Madrid, the travelers will attend a briefing at the U.S. Embassy on political and economic issues. And they’ll explore such cultural landmarks as the Prado, with its unsurpassed collection of works by Goya, Velasquez, El Greco, Titian, and Rubens. Also in Madrid is the Reina Sofia Art Center, a showcase for such modern masters as Picasso (his Guernica now can be seen there), Dali, and Miro.

Architecture will be a special focus, including Moorish masterpieces like the Alcazar in Cordoba and the Alhambra in Granada, and the spectacular Spanish Renaissance cathedral in Seville. Among recent triumphs of design are Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum and Sir Norman Foster’s metro entrances, both in Bilbao.

Swarthmore’s faculty lecturer will be Maria Luisa Guardiola of the Modern Languages and Literatures Department. A Barcelona native, she was educated there and at the University of Pennsylvania. Among her seminar subjects next year are Cervantes, creator of Don Quixote, and Garcia Lorca, the revered poet and playwright who was shot by Franco’s soldiers at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Her scholarly interests include Spanish women writers of the past two centuries.

Reservation information is available at the College: (610) 328-8402.