



## A Festschrift for our faculty



*Festschrift are usually created in honor of one living person, but as some of us on the host committee talked together during our 50th Reunion planning, it seemed clear that all of us were profoundly affected by our teachers more than fifty years before. As a daughter, wife, and mother of academics, I know how difficult it is to teach respectfully and responsibly, and I also know how deeply gratifying it is when past students recognize and acknowledge the debt they owe to their teachers, and the lasting influence they have had.*

*Thus came the idea of a collective Festschrift, violating Festschrift norms because it's collective rather than individual, and only some of its subjects are here in this world to read it,*

*We sent out a call for entries, and the response has been incredibly rich and wonderful! Some are funny, some profound, some focus more on the experience while others focus on the subject. Together they form a kind of snapshot history of our time at Bennington, reflecting the experience of being the last (small) all-women class, the turbulence of the late sixties, the privilege of being respected and encouraged as earnest students and practitioners. To me, what comes across more than anything else is the seriousness of our endeavors, and the respectful seriousness with which our efforts were seen by our teachers. We were very very lucky, and we are extremely grateful!*

**Deborah Shapiro Krasner**

## **Susan Paris Borden**

### *President Edward Bloustein*

We were exceptionally lucky to have Ed Bloustein come to Bennington along with our class and we knew it when he told us, at our first meeting in September of 1965, that we weren't women *FROM* Bennington, we were women *OF* Bennington. He invited Jacob Bronowski to speak at his inauguration, elevating and extending what he understood could be his particular contribution to Bennington's mission and *raison d'être*. He said that symbol and metaphor were as necessary to science as they were to poetry; that science, like art, is not a copy of nature, but a re-creation of nature; and that discoveries, which are the work of science, are like works of art — explorations and then explosions of a hidden likeness, a relationship. He believed that at Bennington we already knew and practiced this and wanted to be sure that student and faculty artists and scientists had facilities commensurate with the work they undertook together.

### *Harry Pearson*

Harry Pearson invited a few of us to carry on the work of the great Karl Polanyi (who wrote a seminal book called, "The Great Transformation" while teaching at Bennington in the 1940's), analyzing data in the 1960s that market fundamentalism would eventually result in manifest failures such as persistent under-employment, widening inequality, and severe financial crises, undermining governments, and yielding anti-democratic tendencies among increasingly aggrieved populations.

### *Louis Calabro*

Lou Calabro played the drums like a dancer, composed like a poet, and taught me, among so many, that making music is making holes in silence.

## **Kathryn Girard**

### *Pat Adams*

In my senior year I had a drawing class with Pat Adams. I was terrified. This was, after all, Bennington and I could think and write but certainly not draw! We were drawing a model and I was doing my best to draw what I saw. I knew it was a foot but what was on my paper looked nothing like a foot. I was embarrassed. Pat came around, looked, complimented me and had others look. In that brief moment – completely forgettable for Pat and the class - my embarrassment and self-judgement evaporated. A small seed of some future possibility sent down a gentle tentative root. Thank you, Pat.

### *Stanley Eskin*

Harold Kaplan was my wonderful advisor – both fascinated and concerned by my active LSD and other 'flower child' adventures. He told me I needed the influence of a father

figure. Taking his counsel to heart, when Stanley Eskin arrived on campus I promptly informed him of my need and asked if he'd like the role. While he demurred on the father front, he was perfectly willing to guide me in other ways. Under Stanley's tutelage I learned to read du Bellay and Ronsard and to embrace the Petrarchan sonnet. More importantly, at the age of 20 I learned that even if you're 40 and your mother lives abroad, your mother will never think that you write, call or visit frequently enough. A valuable learning benefitting me for the next 5 decades.

Stanley was generous and kind across our decades divide of experience and maturity. I don't read 16<sup>th</sup> Century French poetry these days, but Stanley's elegant perspective on and acceptance of the realities of life and love have stayed with me.

*Barbara Herrnstein Smith*

I had no idea when I sat down in my first class with Barbara Herrnstein Smith that I was about to have a transformative experience. I had no expectation that a read lecture could be completely compelling – week after week, time after time. I fell into Renaissance poetry because that's what Herrnstein Smith taught. I would have followed her into any subject she thought worthy of her time and attention. I entered thinking I understood the importance of language and word choice. I learned from her the magic that could arise from the resonance between words in a sentence and sentences in a paragraph. The beauty and power of her words startled and transported me. I wanted time to pause phrase by phrase so I could drink in the richness and texture. This luxurious sensuous form is how I learned formalist methods of analysis and Explication de Texte. Those practices are somewhere in my integrated set of skills, but Barbara's true gift was allowing me to find my own deep response to beautifully constructed, energetically dynamic language.

*Arnold Ricks*

I can still see and hear the quietly thunderous question, "And when was the Peace of Augsburg?" 1555. I know this singular fact (though not, with apologies to a dedicated and wonderful teacher, its importance) due to Arnold Ricks' dramatic pedagogical style.

I never found my way into a serious study of history, but I have never forgotten Mr. Rick's voice or presence. His gestures lent themselves to affectionate mimicry. His spirit, kindness and dedication modeled a character worthy of emulation.

**Barbara Ross Greenberg**

The situation at Bennington, with five months off (summer and the NRT) for teachers, drew many who were both active and prominent in their field – we were lucky to be in a relatively isolated spot, with no distractions, with an extraordinary group of talented people who were passionate about their metier and willing to do what they could to show us the way. It was a bit like being in a greenhouse, full of energy and joy.



### *Pat Adams*

Pat Adams helped many of us learn to see, mark by mark - her classes were foundational in so many ways. She was serious, caring, totally focused on helping us to find how a shape is defined, and then all the rest of it. She also provided the only art history available at Bennington, asking us to present short surveys of various art movements as part of her drawing classes. She was a shining presence; she showed me what it was to be an artist, and to live an engaged life, both in work and personally.

### *Isaac Witkin*

I'm also grateful for the time spent in Isaac Witkin's classes – he took us up to David Smith's estate, which at that time still had much of his work on the grounds, and showed us his studio there. Isaac also showed us how to make a plaster mould of a clay model – something I often do to this day, although I never intended to be a working artist. I was a literature major. I've come to realise that being an artist is not actually something you choose, more something that finally you can't avoid.

### *Stanley Rosen*

Stanley Rosen showed us what it was to be engaged with the material, and with the moment. In our first class he said nothing, but started making long coils of clay, working on the floor, and then winding them round, until he had the beginnings of a pot. When it was maybe six inches high, he said – 'This is the coil method. I want each of you to make a pot as tall as you are, and connect it to someone else's pot', and then we didn't see him for two weeks. I also remember him leaving class for some minutes to give a very demonstrative goodbye to one of his young children as she left for school – Stanley called her name and waved enthusiastically as she made her way, looking back. Stanley's performance was a lesson in not holding back.

### *Irene Hasenclever and Nora Montesinos*

Irene Hasenclever and her sister, Nora Montesinos, had gone to a German boys school where their father was teaching. The sisters were the only girls in what must have been a rigid environment, but they had an excellent education, and were also schooled in independence and finding internal resources. I didn't know Nora, but Irene was thoroughly grounded and deeply involved with German letters; when she invited Gunter Grass to come and have tea with us he came.

So lucky we were to have the benefit of working with these searchers.

## **Lavinia Hall**

As a member of the Class of 1970 there are many teachers I would want to remember and whose teachings I live with. The three I remember here were not only terrific, engaging and fascinating to me, but people who helped my life immeasurably after the deaths of my father and mother within six months of each other during my freshman and sophomore years: Georges Guy, Leonard Rowe and Stanley Edgar Hyman.

### *Georges Guy*

Monsieur Guy, as he was called, was tall and dressed as if he'd just stepped out of a Paris department store window. This was figure/ ground in the Barn where we students and faculty often looked like we'd just rolled out of bed. I don't ever remember him having mud on his shoes even if he'd just come off the path from Jennings in mud season. Georges, as those of us who hung around came to know him, smoked Gitanes, lectured, and then discussed literature while we stared at the very long ash on his cigarette; he knew when to finally tap it into the ashtray that he held in his other hand while he moved around the room. We classmates would confer with each other when he returned assignments... "look- M. Guy has written more (in red ink) than we did." He corrected, suggested and rewrote our not very enlightened and agrammatical scribbles. He took us more seriously than we took ourselves.

For those of us who continued to take more courses with him, sitting around a table in the Barn, the atmosphere changed. The formality receded and his wicked mimicry came to the fore; we revelled in his humor while he subtly corrected our mistakes and guided us towards better syntax and thinking.

He was my thesis advisor after I had studied with Roland Barthes and other structuralists (later some deconstructionists) in Paris during the spring of 1969, just a year after the Evenements de Mai. It was a heady time on both sides of the Atlantic and although many of the egalitarian dreams fostered by my studies in Paris and at Bennington still remain that - dreams- they set me on a path to mediation and conflict management work around the world.

Georges and I became dear friends and when he died in 1997 I organized a memorial service for him in New York at the church of his longtime companion Bill Mowat. Former and current Bennington faculty and other friends including Richard Tristman, Nick Delbanco and Kenneth Koch spoke; there were stories of how attractive he was as a young man; his creativity and helpfulness to generations of students at Hunter, Barnard and Bennington; how fastidious and dedicated he was. The predominant theme was Georges' generosity and benevolence to his colleagues and students for whom his greatest wish was a "normal" life, a decidedly eccentric wish for a Benningtonian.

### *Leonard Rowe*

Leonard Rowe, in my memory, is a man in motion. Hobbs to Marx was a classic year long seminar which we soon learned was really Machiavelli to Dewey. Leonard and Wally Scott taught together and were endlessly patient with our meandering interpretations of the great works we were reading and discussing. They kept us on track and got us to write more coherently about ideas that had more than one interpretation (as they kept reminding us). While Bennington's curriculum ignored survey courses,

studying Machiavelli to Dewey offered a window on diachronic and evolutionary social thought and was a window on the field to social policy.

Following that course I took the Constitutional Law seminar Leonard offered with Ed Bloustein. We sometimes met at Ed's house or on the lawn and Leonard and Ed facilitated discussions about the protests and social movements that we were all living through. Leonard himself went to DC several times to join protests and at one point had a threat made on his life by a kitchen staffer who thought it un-American to oppose the Vietnam War.

Sometime around then I learned that Leonard had come out of the Warsaw Ghetto and survived as many of his family and friends had not. In our time, he was helping Yad Vashem collect histories of survivors and those lost in the Holocaust. I began to understand his quest for justice and his need for political engagement.

Leonard played violin and went to a retreat every summer to play music all day for a couple of weeks. Both his sons, David and Daniel became gifted musicians; Muriel, his ever-generous wife accompanied whoever needed it with her skills as a pianist.

When my mother died in my Sophomore year, Leonard drove his Triumph down to NY where I was working on NRT and took me to lunch. It should be noted that this was in January, right after a snowstorm and that ice, snow and slush had not deterred him. He wanted to let me know that I would get a significant scholarship as a Noyes Scholar and that Bennington wouldn't want to lose me. You may imagine his kindness.

When I went to study in France, Leonard wrote and kept me up on what was happening at the college and in the world of political action. I was out of the country in 1972 when he collapsed at his music camp and was diagnosed with a cancer that killed him just a few months later. I can hear his voice yet, encouraging and exhorting others to action for social change, and remember him, arriving at different doors with an invitation to lunch, a seminar or a political campaign.

#### *Stanley Edgar Hyman*

Stanley taught Myth, Ritual and Literature like an improvisation but ever so carefully orchestrated a performance with us, his student devotees. We all knew his eyesight was terrible but he knew exactly what groove he wanted to set an LP on, which quotes from the Childe Ballads or the bible he wanted to read. He was prepared: terse, succinct, wanting us to love the music and writing he loved.

He was definitely the teacher I was most in awe of and it took a while to nerve myself to make a comment, hoping I could contribute to his class. When he offered to read James Joyce with me in a private tutorial I was thrilled; I would come to his Barn office once a week where we discussed Joyce and other things. One of those was his love of baseball

games which he listened to on a transistor radio during the World Series. Baseball, he said, was a “real” game with scores like 3- 0 that really meant something akin to Greek tragedy with each play or point having significance and fitting into a structured whole. This was in contrast to a sport like basketball where one could have scores of 102-97 that were meaningless.

His sarcastic sense of humor and timing were terrific; was this because he really was playing his own game in his own world of limited vision? He warned us all that he was self-protective of his time as he was writing reviews and editing books. I think this made those of us who spent time with him feel honored and that we had to not waste his time. And as it turned out, he didn't have time to waste; he died a month after my 1970 graduation just as he and his wife Phoebe were about to move to SUNY Buffalo where he would be paid handsomely as a full professor, too much to refuse, he said.

I can hear his smoker's chuckle behind the cloud of smoke in his Barn office and his warm, enthusiastic voice: “come in, come in where I can see you. What have you been reading?”

## **Jean Holabird**

It is difficult for me to assess the Art Faculty (1967-69) as so many members of it became my friends in “real life”...notably Bob Cronin, Dick Haas, Peter Stroud, Sidney Tillim and Isaac Witkin....we all went to the same openings, bars and parties in The 70's and 80's in NYC. I once “auditioned” to be Jules's studio assistant, and printed Haas etchings, as a job, for a while. Poons, too, was a pal. The “Art World” was so different back then - everyone knew everyone and it wasn't all about money.

I made huge minimalist standing (hinged) pieces for the senior review by Clement Greenberg (who also became a friend) which were later dismantled by Phillip Wofford when he took over my studio - he and his wife Carol Hearer are not listed, but I got to know them as well.

I took lit classes, too...and, ah, youth, cannot believe I had the temerity to write a paper called “Time in Proust, Joyce and Mann” - not sure whether that was with Michael Dennis Brown or (wonderful, funny) Dick Elman. Francis Golfing was memorable...under his tutelage I discovered an unpublished chapter of Alain Fournier's “Le Grand Meaulnes” “The Wanderer” one of my favorite books. He helped me construct aforementioned huge pieces (in his backyard, I think) and I treasure a drawing of his.

I was quite amused to find that the history text I had from Barnard (from which I transferred) was being used by Arnold Ricks – and will never forget his insistence that

behind every great man was a woman: we knew that was true because he was married to Pat Adams-the gold standard of art teachers.

## **Katharine Holabird**

### *Claude Fredericks*

Working with Claude Fredericks on SILO was one of the great experiences of my four years at Bennington. Claude was a wise and compassionate soul, sensitive, deeply caring, and quietly brilliant. He created the Banyan Press and became a master printer in his twenties, printing exquisite books for almost fifty years. Yet he had all the time in the world for his students, and made us feel we too could create something of real value. SILO meetings were great fun, but Claude expected us to take our editorial work very seriously, and so we did.

Claude lived in Japan for some years and he was as open and unassuming as a Zen monk. As the Zen texts say, he was 'a man of no status,' without pretension, but with a great heart.

Like many fellow students, for me Claude Fredericks exemplified all that Bennington stood for, and to this day I'm grateful for his friendship and guidance, and the precious time we spent together.

## **Maren Hassinger**

I was always searching for parents I could trust. In Pat Adams and Isaac Witkin I found them.

Pat and Isaac, in their separate and very different ways, gave birth to Maren the artist. Frankly, without them, I wouldn't be the now me.

When I wanted to leave sophomore year after the dance department rejected my application, I remember like yesterday walking across the "rise" of Commons and Pat Adams, my counselor and drawing teacher asking me to stay and major in art. I wasn't convinced. But, I know she saw something I didn't and I am forever grateful.

I became a sculpture major because in a comment Isaac Witkin said, "my head piece was well-executed." And, Issac walked into my final show in the garden enclosure adjacent to Jennings and was pleased. He said, "You should be proud." But, more importantly, I remember the moment down at the sculpture studio when he came along with a rasp of some kind and filed off a quarter inch of overhanging wood. He said, "you've got to watch out for this kind of detail."

Yes, a man of few words. But, boundless generosity of spirit. Like Pat, a humanist of massive proportions. These are my art parents.

### **Anna Cronin Ormsby (Anya Liffey)**

*For Howard Nemerov*

My heart was so light it could only flutter and suggest  
A thought that traveled like blood,  
Sustaining a smoke girl who drifted  
And apologized to herself.  
His words on my poems like answered prayers.  
And mysterious blue eyes that fed me  
With collusion.  
And we survived.

### **Annice Jacoby**

*Stanley Edgar Hyman*

Myth, Ritual and Literature was offered every other year. Literature students jockeyed for a seat in Stanley Edgar Hyman's fantastical investigation of ideas, across disciplines – history, music, anthropology, linguistics, popular culture, etc. He was a larger-than-life myth himself, Tiresias like in bent bearing, almost blind yet with Talmudical devotion to reading and schmoozing.

Myth, Ritual and Literature covered the classical canon, the bible, and the blues. Stanley illuminated stories and practices, superstition and imagination. He was funny, brilliant, erudite and prone to laughter.

Stanley was my counselor for a year, and he steered me through adolescent sloth and turbulence. He understood all my rebellions and naïve passions, indulging my peripatetic interests and inspiring literature as a way of life.

For our special project I drove the back roads of New England to gnarly old cemeteries and made life size rubbings of Memento Mori epitaphs on Puritan gravestones. I mounted the rubbings and set them up in his office as a surprise graveyard. He delighted, only half joking said "I already have one foot in the grave." His children were part of my life at Bennington as teachers, theater students and friends. His wife was legendary, already a haunt from reading *The Lottery* in junior high school.



Stanley was a lauded critic, vanguard of New Criticism, now eclipsed yet still valuable. The tenet that a text creates its own critique may return. I suspect Stanley would mock “trigger warnings” as way to fear instead of grapple with the literature’s messy offerings. Like Penelope, Stanley Edgar Hyman wove and unwove the text every night, amused and vigilant for new meanings. All I absorbed from his tutelage remains alive for me.

*Barbara Herrstein Smith*

Mrs. Smith was the most erudite, dedicated, richly engaging teacher I ever had. She was my Language and Literature professor. Every book, every class was full of deep insight and thick smoke. Everyone smoked, including Mrs. Smith who, tiny and reminiscent of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in stature and invincible intellect, integrity and grit. She opened class with a superb lecture, read slowly with unsteady hand flipping pages, or she stopped to light another cigarette. She opened worlds of the work in front of us and the worlds outside the Barn. When she stopped reading, she looked up and asked questions, hard questions. Why did the Underground Man hide? We reached for answers. When the groping fell into discourse she beamed. She asked, “so, what are you going to grow up to be? A sensitive reader?” If that’s her gift, it is flourishing. Maybe not practical, but a passport to life seeking good books.

*Catherine Osgood Foster*

Kit Foster carried her class assignments in a garden basket and wore the kindest soft cotton clothes. Her eloquence was crisp, fierce and good naturedly learned. She was generous and patient, crossing out whole pages of my meandering essays. She unknotted Shakespeare, prosody and parody, made us smell the herbs in the garden of verse. She was really retired and I was disappointed when she stopped teaching but happy when she started publishing passionate gardening books, pioneering organic, environmental awareness.

*Christopher Koch*

Chris Koch came to campus as a hero who had testified before Congress, violating prohibitions to travel to North Vietnam as the war was expanding in 1965 and jumpstart immersive journalism. He was young, charming and inspired. His class on Culture and Communications influenced my work in the mix of art and media, activism and news preoccupation on every platform. Chris mentored my year-long project on children’s literature, pushing me to see the connections between Dr. Suess and George Orwell.

### *Claude Fredericks*

Claude Fredericks was the most marvelous person, spectacularly whimsical and talented. He was an accomplished poet and printer (and we knew of his attachment to Robert Merrill, lifting higher Claude's literary aura) and rumored he worked at the college for a dollar a year. The pay was quite meager for the rest, yet Claude managed on no pay, an apartment in Leigh House and a spot for his convertible Karmann Ghia. Claude was best outside the classroom, looking at a poem you just wrote, or reviewing options for Japanese papers. He shone as the faculty advisor for SILO. Editorial meetings were merry and free flowing happy afternoons debating content, form, technique, material, full production with freedom and support.

### *Richard Elman*

Richard Elman was a writer of creative non-fiction, new journalism. His book, *Ill At Ease in Compton*, stands in the body of literature waking up civil rights, zones of endemic poverty and racial injustice. He patiently tutored my thesis, finding spots of energy to polish and find voice beyond coming of age clichés. He was shrewd about the turbulent times and balanced a drift to cynicism and disillusion with an exuberant joie-de-vie. Times were dramatically different. Relations with professors structurally paternalistic. Like Stanley, he fanned the fire of my enthusiasms.

There's a terrific photo of Stanley Edgar Hyman by Phillip Halsman, jumping in the air in a stylized suit. Hard to believe he was ever so agile. I learned when I was looking he was only 51 when he died



**Christopher Koch**



**Richard Ellman**

**Carol McGuirk**

*Barbara Herrnstein Smith*

Barbara Herrnstein Smith was my teacher from first semester of my freshman year, a piece of incredible luck. I took a Smith course every subsequent year as well, though I lost out in Spring 1967 when she was on maternity leave. Her Fall Term freshman class was a survey covering some dozen texts across a historical span; the highlights for me were Barbara's pyrotechnic commentaries on *Medea*, *King Lear*, and Shakespeare's sonnets. We had deep discussions on timeless issues, yet Barbara's classes also taught close reading skills—a respect for each author's particular wording and style. From our first paper we were assigned a text but otherwise were on our own, with no hints, prompts, or further instructions. It was a challenge to say something new about a Shakespeare sonnet (in my case, "When I consider everything that grows"), especially when the bar had been set so high by the lively class discussions. I'd come to Bennington from a Catholic high school with very good English teachers who nonetheless tended to tell us what to say. Paper by early paper, I began to enjoy the creative element in scholarship.

That first class was exhilarating, what with the teacher's intense guidance and feedback and a lively group of hyperarticulate classmates who plunged into the material. To a student who marveled at the evil creepiness of *King Lear*'s elder daughters, Barbara nodded vigorously but fine-tuned the observation to the scene we were discussing: "Yet they're not the same. Shakespeare writes them differently here. Goneril is oily. Regan's a bitch." Later courses I took with BHS included "Shakespeare" and "Milton, Pope and Keats." During the Shakespeare class Barbara developed laryngitis and invited Stanley Edgar Hyman to teach the *Othello* class; he was then completing his book on Iago's motivation. She attended the session, at one

point jumping out of her chair in disagreement with one of Hyman's readings. Emitting faint but indignant rasps and squeaks, she finally started to jot down her rebuttal points on the blackboard, almost brandishing the chalk. This ended with mutual smiles; both teachers seemed braced and refreshed by the skirmish. In the "Milton, Pope and Keats" class—as she pointed out in the first meeting, the grouping is counterintuitive as the three writers' styles and world-views are poles apart—Barbara again covered milestones in poetic tradition while modeling precision as she guided our discussions of individual poetic style and form. She was my senior thesis advisor for a project that included sections on Sir Thomas Browne, Andrew Marvell, and Cold War science fiction. She mentored the science-fiction component with the same meticulous care as the other two, with exactly the same combination of pointed critique and generous praise. Her comments were extensive, sometimes full paragraphs in her tiny writing, squeezed into a one-inch margin. The learning process under her direction was a gradual refocusing for me, a bit like getting fitted for new glasses. Just by myself, I could only get to a certain point—but with the slightly different lens provided by her feedback, I could eventually see a new path going forward. Barbara's painstaking work with all her students—paper by paper, critique by detailed critique—fostered higher aspirations, in part just by acquainting us with her own high standards. She never talked down to students.

In my first term at Bennington, Barbara's office door in the Barn displayed a N.O.W. poster: this was the first time I had ever heard of the National Organization for Women, formed just a few months earlier. She was, as a feminist, a role model in a number of ways even beyond mentoring students like me who had decided, by senior year, to go on to graduate programs in English. I did pursue an academic career after Bennington and can think of a dozen of Barbara's other students who did the same. At least as many from that era have made their mark outside the academy as professional writers and editors. Barbara's coaching (and her example) had their effect, increasing her students' awareness of what literary professionalism looks like. I think it was she who first proposed thesis readings by groups of graduating seniors.

Her ground-breaking scholarship—*Poetic Closure* (1968) received the Christian Gauss Award while she was still teaching at Bennington—has moved on to ever broader theoretical issues, taking in the intersections of literature and value as well as the links among science, literature, and faith. At least to Barbara's former students, however, her inspiring work in the classroom has been just as important an accomplishment. John Milton's "Areopagitica," which dramatizes the ills of a strictly controlled press and the benefits to culture of a populace free to debate, calls near its conclusion for an unabated and vigorous exchange of divergent opinions: "Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion ... is but knowledge in the making." Barbara's Bennington teaching invited students to immerse themselves in this heady Miltonic process of

“knowledge in the making,” fostering an abundance of argument, critique, debate, opinion, and “much writing.”

### *Stanley Rosen*

I was a double major (Art/Lit) and the teacher who drew me into art studenthood as a freshman was Stanley Rosen. Assigned at random to the ceramics studio when I enrolled in the “Introduction to Visual Arts” class, I knew within a week that I had lucked into something marvelous. I loved the whole process—working with the clay, learning about glaze chemistry, firing the kiln (each firing could produce different results depending on the temperature, the presence or absence of smoke, and the properties of the glazing material). Stanley was an unforgettable teacher, an insightful, intense, inspiring mentor with a contradictory approach to ceramics. He saw it both as a humble art-form—everyone uses dishes and cups—and as a global and universal practice that has conveyed the aesthetic values of cultures throughout human history. (In some cases, pottery shards are all that have survived.) His coaching of students was necessarily personalized, because there were advanced potters even in my Freshman class, learning alongside neophytes like me. He urged all students to venture out of their comfort zone. To technically adept potters, he suggested new forms. Students who were just beginning received comments on *where* to improve. (*How* was up to the student.) He encouraged hard work and once quoted Picasso on what Stanley called “putting the time in”: “Inspiration exists, but it must find you working.”

The studio spaces themselves were a place of collaborative fellowship, though I don’t mean we sat around talking. We sat around working on our projects, hunting for tools or supplies, thinking things over. I don’t remember ever finding the ceramics studio locked; visits in the evening were especially tranquil and productive. This idyllic realm that Stanley created and fostered consisted of two former chicken houses over by the nursery school. The smaller one held the electric and gas kilns and the materials for glazing; a longer, narrower structure contained the potter’s wheels, long tables for coil construction, and dampened barrels of ripening clay. Ceramics, a liminal form in the Bennington artistic hierarchy, was carried on in liminal spaces: these studios at the edge of campus seemed far away from the clamor of Commons and its upper network of lofty painting and drawing spaces. The studios were a little downhill from everywhere else, more connected to the trees, birds, and snowdrifts than to the houses or classrooms.

Stanley Rosen’s teaching raised issues both practical and esoteric. His advice was often phrased with gnomic brevity: “Well, yes but . . .” He could infuse visionary ellipses even into instructions for throwing pots or devising glazes. I think that he distrusted words but also that he respected students’ instincts and ability to work out problems in their own way. Anyone could see that he was a perfectionist who respected traditional methods but also kept an open mind about the avant garde. He

did point out that in ceramics, one person's vision is seldom as central as in painting or drawing. Chinese potters of the Ming period buried the porcelain clay body—it took years for kaolin to become workable, being stiff and hard—for use by their descendants. There were some unique twentieth-century studio potters—Bernard Leach, Isamu Noguchi, and Alberto Giacometti were all in Stanley's pantheon of eclectic clay artists. Yet more often in history, ceramics has been a family and community enterprise. When discussing Asian cultures, however, Stanley would point out that even when looking at a traditional Chinese or Japanese form, "sometimes you'll see, under the glaze, just that single thumbprint." His cross-cultural way of teaching ceramics covered more art history than I ever learned at Bennington until Sidney Tillim came to campus during my junior year. Many of Stanley's recent clay pieces have the look of archaic artifacts, striking forms whose exact function is no longer known. These elusive forms pursued in his stoneware sculptures remind me of his enigmatic way with language: of how, when I would ask a question, he would respond with an implicit challenge to come up with a better question.

People who think that ceramics is therapeutic have never had the kiln blow up when it was loaded with items for their end-of-term critique. This happened to me, yet when we opened the kiln after cooling next morning not a single piece had broken. When working with pots, it is never clear what will happen next. The clay and glazes are transformed and finalized across two firings at least, with each reveal exposing a new dimension of the potter's foibles, vainglory, technical limitations, moments of inattention. I was always trying to rescue pieces I cared about from utter incoherence, but seldom succeeded. Yet I loved the earth smell in the studio. I loved the clay even before it was touched: fresh, flexible possibility in a mound about the size of a bread loaf set to rise.

Late in my college career, I remember Stanley grimly watching me work a cylinder on the wheel until the side was too thin and the walls collapsed. He shook his head, muttering "Going out into the world and can't throw a 16" cylinder." I got it right later that week. He was absolutely honest about what he saw in a student's work and what he did not (yet) see. His own ceramic sculptures offer an open-ended invitation to reflection that is much like his style of teaching. In a review of a 2017 show in New York City, John Yau observed that "Rosen's ceramic sculptures are a revelation: they are like a country that many of us never knew was there until now." That is exactly how I felt about the collegial culture of the campus spaces where Stanley Rosen presided, and about his elliptical eloquence as a potter and teacher.

### *Richard Tristman*

As a graduate-student preceptor, Richard Tristman had been removed from his classroom duties after assigning grades of A to all his Columbia College freshmen, thereby refusing to comply with a 1965 escalation of the draft. (College student



deferments had been curtailed at the same time that Columbia students who had participated in war protests were targeted for conscription.) I was in touch with a draftee from my hometown, a kind-hearted schoolmate who was then in training and eventually was killed in Vietnam at age 19. Having read the front-page coverage of Richard's defiance in *The New York Times*, I admired him before he ever arrived on campus. I admit I expected a formidable person—unbending, austere, something along the lines of Henry David Thoreau or Thomas Carlyle.

So I was wrong. Richard Tristman was joyous, exuberant, and endlessly generous. He was probably the most spontaneously witty person I have known—much more like Thorstein Veblen (the name he gave his dog) than Karl Marx. His conversation was magical, in the literal sense of conjuring new ideas, new ways to consider texts and look at the world. He may have had trouble writing things down because he thought so swiftly and fluently, in fully turned paragraphs. It must have been hard to slow down enough to get ideas on paper. Each class was one brilliant improvisation after another. While he was unfailingly kind, his patience did have an outer limit, at which point his comments could become operatic. In a regrettably hasty paper I turned in for "The Concept of Romance," I'd begun a paragraph with the pompous transitional phrase, "To enrich the discussion . . ." In the nearby margin, Richard had responded, "Please! Please! Everything is rich enough already!"

He was around 24 when he began teaching at Bennington yet was already conspicuously learned in specialized sub-fields, among them medieval dream-vision and Menippean satire. The satire course was possibly my most important class at Bennington, for it inspired my decision to try for graduate school, under the mistaken impression that it too would be mesmerizing. Richard had a taste for science fiction that I shared, and he talked brilliantly of the strange writings of "Cordwainer Smith" (d. 1966), nom de plume of a Johns Hopkins PhD who headed the American Peace Society yet also worked as a Cold War CIA courier. Smith's allusive, equivocal tales, which often allegorize contemporary politics, radiated exactly the kind of erudition and slippery irony that Richard loved. When I published an article on Smith in the early 2000s, I was finally able to thank him in the acknowledgments, but it was too late to thank him in person. Richard had died in 1998 of a resurgent kidney cancer. We had been out of touch for some 15 years.

In 1997 he and Maura Spiegel published an anthology (*The Grim Reader: Writings on Death, Dying, and Living*; Anchor Press), whose jointly authored preface ends with a passage that for me recalls the nuanced irony of Richard's spoken style: "[W]herever the faces of death are rendered with passion and the accuracy of art, fate comes to a halt ... and to occupy that spot of timelessness is consolation. It does not make us less mortal, nor does it banish fear or grief. It leaves everything in the physical world unchanged. It cures nothing but our understanding" (*The Grim*

*Reader*, xvi). There is courage in this pursuit of “understanding” death; and that the Monty Python “Dead Parrot” skit is among the texts reprinted shows the editors’ acknowledgment that laughter is among the multiple valences of mourning and loss. Rabelais devotes a chapter to Gargantua’s veering mood when his beloved wife dies in childbirth: he weeps for his partner but laughs with delight at his newborn son. I only know the Rabelais reference because I studied that text in one of Richard’s classes.

He devised, c. 1970, a scenario for an s-f novel of his own, to be titled *Sad Planet*. This planet of ours provided much to encourage sadness during the last years of Richard’s life. Yet *The Grim Reader* shows that he could look “epistemic gloom” (a term he brought into Bennington currency) right in the eye. He could work with it, turning his grim prognosis into a text, a teaching supplement. He could have one last go at exposition of an intractably complex, difficult topic.

## **Robyn Newhouse**

### *Frank Baker*

I have to say that the faculty member who impacted me the most was Frank Baker, my voice teacher. When I told him I wanted to major in voice as part of my music major, he told me yes — but that I had to promise him that there was nothing about myself I couldn’t change. Maybe it was because I thought I was an alto, and he pushed me to sing soprano. When you sing, you are your instrument, after all. But my life since then has been full of changes, mostly not related to singing, and anything but a straight path. There have been so many changes, I found it impossible to write a brief bio. Frank inspired me to overcome trepidation and try things, to not be afraid to re-evaluate and change yet again. That has continued to guide me throughout my life.

## **Kathleen Norris**

### *Ben Belitt*

As a freshman in college it was my good fortune to be assigned to the literature class of the poet Ben Belitt. When he engaged us in a slow, meticulous line-by-line analysis of poetry and fiction it opened literature for me in ways I found compelling. I had no idea how much depth could be found in the spare words of William Blake’s “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience” until Belitt made us see it; as a result we had the key to Blake’s prophetic books. For weeks we slogged through James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* line by line, in excruciating detail, and found that we’d been given the key to *Ulysses*. Some of my classmates grew bored, but this way of reading fascinated me. I now realize that it was my introduction to the *lectio divina* of the Benedictines, a meditative way of reading in which you enter a text seeking not

information or even knowledge but in order to more fully experience it, both intellectually and spiritually.

Belitt also gave us little writing exercises; one changed my life. When he asked us to write a description of a person, place, or thing using no adjectives I threw myself into it. Belitt liked the result so much he told me he thought I might be a writer. I'd been a devoted reader since the age of four, but this was the first time anyone — let alone a published poet - had suggested that I should write. Write seriously, and not just for school assignments. I was inspired to begin writing poems — bad ones that I now use in workshops as examples of how not to write. I'm glad to say that my writing has improved over the years, and deeply grateful to Ben Belitt for pointing me in the right direction.

Now I realize that it was Belitt's probing of the spiritual depths of literature that allowed me, at least when I was in my twenties, to so effectively substitute literature for religion in my life. There's an inescapably spiritual aspect to writing, especially poetry, and this substitution worked well for me for years.

## **Janie Paul**

### *Pat Adams*

I remember Pat Adams' drawing class. We were drawing a female model behind the large gridded glass meant to help us with proportional relationships. I was trying so hard and felt I was so unsuccessful. I felt such tension. I started to cry from sheer frustration and hurried out of the room. Pat came out to find me in the hall and comforted me with some words that I don't remember, but in effect were about how it is very difficult and should be and she knew how I felt, and I could carry on. I think she hugged me. This experience held something essential about Pat that I treasured then and always have. She was demanding in her expectations at the same time that she saw into each person and their struggles. She communicated that we were all after something wonderful and exciting and at once difficult and accessible.

I learned so much about color from Pat and went on to teach color theory for about forty years. Every time I came up to a student intently working on a color aid collage or painting with gouache, I appreciated the absorption that I fostered in my students, an absorption that had been fostered by Pat.

### *Sidney Tillim*

Sidney was so quirky and brilliant. Fran Antmann and I loved sharing his art history class. I can't remember what it was called. But I remember how earthshaking it was when he told us that there were three major moments when the concept of space in painting was revolutionized. The first was with Giotto, the second with Cezanne and the third with Pollack. Fran and I were so excited about this idea. Now it seems almost commonplace and I'm sure some could easily argue with it. But at the time, it was as if a light went on in my head and I understood something about painting that I hadn't

comprehended in such a way before. Sidney was also very validating of my art work. I remember giving him an etching that he had admired. I remember him looking at it closely and knowing that he really appreciated it. I could see on his face how the small etching resonated with him.

It was important to know someone as eccentric as Sidney and someone so committed to what he believed, even though I could never understand his passion for Puvis de Chavanne.

#### *Isaac Witkin*

Isaac was my mentor (I don't remember the name of this official role. But just after I arrived, transferring in late in the fall semester of junior year, he was assigned to meet with me each week.) At that point, I thought I was going to major in sculpture. I remember sitting on a bench outside on a beautiful October day looking at pictures of Tony Caro's sculptures in a book. He explained to me how sculpture had come off the pedestal and could have many points of contact with the ground. It seems that we talked about this for many of those sessions. His feelings of liberation and excitement were contagious and I felt it too.

He was stern in our figure modeling class and told us, after a couple of classes, that we were so lacking in our sense of form, that we had to go back to drawing before we could even attempt to model the figure in clay. For weeks he taught us how to break down the body into geometric forms stacked on top of each other, with limbs and neck extending outward, to see in the round. It was difficult and he was very demanding. It was one of the best learning experiences I have had. Later in life, teaching figure drawing, I used this approach with my students and always thought of Isaac.

Though I became a painter, I absorbed a sense of volumetric form from his teaching. I was inspired by Isaac's sculptures throughout his life. Even the massive ones, weighty and grounded, have such lightness and grace. This quality has influenced my art and my life as an artist.

### **Wendy Perron**

#### *Martha Wittman*

Martha Wittman was a formative teacher for many dance majors. She was not only inspiring in class and onstage but was also a great choreographer who did not fit into any of the then-current niches. We, her students at Bennington from 1958 to 1994, were the lucky ones.

Martha was a true original as a dance artist. In class, she was disciplined and expansive. When she stretched her arms out to the sides, you saw a powerful wingspan. When she lowered herself in a parallel pli  , then curved her back into a crouch, I thought of an armadillo. She had a unique vision for the human body. In one favored combination, she lifted her right arm overhead and as she opened that arm to the right, she turned her head to the left. This one move—breaking up the usual coordination—floored me. I

loved doing it. I loved practicing how the body could be articulated differently from what is expected. It could be broken into parts, and yet it wasn't disembodied. In order to turn the head and open the arm in opposite directions, you had to soften the joints in your neck. It was very post-modern, and it defined the way I wanted to make movement later on.

In 1967 Jane Dudley, a former Martha Graham dancer and noted choreographer, joined the dance faculty. She set her acclaimed solo *Harmonica Breakdown* (1939) on Martha. This is a three-minute trek for a woman who is desperate to stride ahead but is always pushed down by hard times. As performed by Martha, to haunting harmonica music by Sonny Terry, it was a revelation. She inhabited the character of a run-down, Depression-era American woman (think Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother*), hope against hopelessness expressed in every stride. The spirit of it, the gravitas, pulled you in. You saw a human effort foiled, and yet it was uplifting too.

Martha's own choreography also exerted a pull. In the spring of 1966 her piece *Impressions After Rousseau, Le Douanier*, kept me in wondrous alert every time I saw it in rehearsal and performance. She extended several of Rousseau's paintings into colorful, almost surreal scenes.

From watching Martha work on the *Rousseau* suite, I learned that what choreography does is that it invites the audience into another world; it's not just a display of movement or craft. And that you could build that world on the real people who were dancing. For the painting titled *The Football Players*, Martha cast the four "dance boys" then at Bennington, each with a vivid personality, as the soccer players. The exact timing of when the ball would be kicked and who caught and who intercepted whom was complex, clever, and funny. For another scene, she used the childlike quality of Linda Wilder, the sensual quality of Anita Denckoff, and the mysterious quality of Harry Sheppard to give the paintings dimension. Her husband, Joe Wittman—we all loved his work and his presence—composed music that added to the sensation that you were entering a different dream with each picture. After I realized how much this choreographed work stirred my imagination, I became more critical of other work that I saw. Neither Martha Graham, nor Merce Cunningham, nor José Limón got under my skin the way Martha's *Rousseau* did.

A couple years later, I was cast in Martha's group piece, *Danger! Construction Area*. It was a spoof of *Giselle* in which a steam-shovel operator accidentally digs up a trove of Willis. After each rehearsal, while we were leaving the studio, Martha would sit quietly, staring into space, concentrating, envisioning where to take the choreography next.

After my sophomore year, Martha invited me to assist her when she taught choreography at American Dance Festival at Connecticut College. That summer and the following summer, when I assisted her again at UC Long Beach, I saw how carefully she weighed everything—not only in deciding what to teach and when, but also in deciding what grades to give. She pored over the list, making sure that each grade was fair to each student and to the students as a whole.

Martha's seriousness as a choreographer, performer, and teacher has been a lasting influence. One of the grounding, challenging things for me about returning to Bennington to teach (1978–84), was becoming a colleague with her. I thank Bennington for making all of the above possible.



**Martha Wittman in Jane Dudley's *Harmonica Breakdown* (1938), performed in 1967. Photo by Tim Tarnay.**





**Martha Wittman in Jane Dudley's *Harmonica Breakdown* (1938), performed in 1967. Photo by Tim Tarnay.**

## **Carol Jean Gerbracht Rose**

*R.H. van der Linde*

My counselor at Bennington was R.H. van der Linde, of the Math Department. Once a week, we met in his office to stabilize my re-entry, from high school in Rio de Janeiro, to America in the sixties. Very soon, our sessions moved to town, to a church where we played duets on an organ, which served us both better than talk.

Yet, there was one episode of talk I still remember. After second NRT, I returned with an assessment from my supervisor at Grover Cronin, a Boston department store. She said I was far from cut out for retail. It was the first evaluation that didn't praise my young intention to please everyone. In response to my evident dismay, Mr. van der Linde asked, "Did you hope to go into retail?" Before I knew I was to become a symbolist, I replied that I didn't like anything about it. He said, "Well then, you learned something!"

We returned, with delight, to Bach.

## **Doreen Seidler-Feller**

I've chosen a quartet of faculty---Blake, Malamud, Nemerov and Hyman---each of whom were important to a different aspect of my development as a person. The advice I have taken from their gestures, statements and general comportment in the world have aged very well. It's astonishing, staggering even, to think how profound small acts can be, especially to impressionable young minds. But of course, that's the magic of the college years.

I was a self-conscious, intimidated immigrant girl at 16 when I entered Bennington, still culture shocked from a very stratified life in a wildly different social world. As well, I was the daughter of an Auschwitz survivor mother whose education, despite a Buddenbrooks-like central European background, was choked in the European cataclysm and who, therefore, could never provide me with the cultural references in the new world that might have made me feel at home in the rooted world of the established elite I found at Bennington.

*Howard Nemerov*

Nonetheless, into the fire I leapt with Howard Nemerov, a man who struck me as a feral leopard with an impossibly intense and focused gaze. He was my literature teacher as a freshman and I recall being indelibly stung by a comment he made on my paper reflecting his incredulousness that I did not know who Brillat-Savarin was! Fifty years on, I still remember that comment, one which I'm sure would never be made in an institution of higher learning today because it was both shaming and elitist but which taught me the value of rigorously doing my homework. I learned to pursue every reference and footnote

for its capacity to illuminate the text and my understanding. There was more than a little masculine and/or cultural hubris in his remark, but it effectively and permanently altered my respect for every detail in the text, for careful reading and diligent research and it moved the needle on my scholarship. It served me very well in the graduate program I attended, which like Bennington, expected a great deal of independent navigation through one's chosen realm.

*Richard Blake*

Richard Blake--- the hidden Viennese psychoanalyst of my fantasy, a man who played all his cards very close to his chest, was my mentor about time. He balanced and challenged my youthful exuberance and insistence about "knowing" with certainty what I wanted to study, what I'd breathlessly been yearning to get to college to study, namely psychoanalytic psychology. Disappointingly, he steadfastly refused to allow me to take his course in my first year. It took me all of that freshman year to appreciate his wisdom about seasoning, adjustment and experience. The clinical material in his course was demanding and it prompted me, as a novice, to begin the project of probing some of the emotional dynamics in my own life as well as the lives of those on the page I was reading. It's a process which continues to this day and which has made me a much better clinician than I might otherwise have become. Slow learning like slow food speaks to the blessings of maturity in confronting human complexity and life itself.

He helped me to see that rapid immersion, characteristic of my family's parenting style, had trauma potential, and that taking one's time to meet new emotional and perhaps intellectual challenges in a stable, secure way was a luxury. If I didn't see it, he'd compel me to experience it and so I did. And so it was: not mere luxury but vital necessity. A kind of stealthy drive-by psychoanalysis which helped me realize that the norms in my family regarding precocious readiness for any life contingency need not be universally or reflexively employed. His firm stance has been an enduring guidepost in my work and my life: time, place, season wisely deployed enhance capacity, depth and outcome.

*Stanley Hyman*

Stanley Edgar Hyman continues to astound me, all these years later, with his brilliant synthetic mind. Whenever I speak of the excellence of the Bennington education, he comes quickly to memory. What an immensely creative person he was! Awed still am I by his penetrating ability to have seen the underlying structural similarities in "literatures" as distinct as those we studied in Myth, Ritual and Literature. His intellectual grandeur helped me understand why literary criticism is a bona fide field! And it was just thrilling to be exposed to such different literatures, so intrinsically interesting and wide ranging, booming with life and, in the end, deriving the intellectual satisfaction that comes from understanding something profoundly.

*Bernard Malamud*

And last but not least, an homage to a man, Bernard Malamud, who wasn't a teacher or

advisor of mine, but an important presence nonetheless. I was always very aware of him lumbering lightly, shoulders hunched, around the campus, seemingly brooding or deep in thought. I envied those women talented enough to be his creative writing acolytes and students. He seemed so kind, gentle and compassionate in his dealings with others. He also was important to me as a Jewish figure, a representative then for me of the absolutely new and American idea that, in the Diaspora, Jews had something worthwhile to say both about the human and the Jewish condition. It was a revelation!

The forceful protests in which Andrea Dworkin, I and others engaged to persuade Dr. Bloustein to maintain Bennington as an all women's college emerged, in part, from the view that men like these, who gave their full and serious attention to educating the minds of young women, contributed something rare and indispensable in the intellectual lives of women, especially 50 years ago. They believed that their teaching enterprise in a small women's college mattered, and they helped us believe that we mattered and merited a serious, intellectually daring future.

## **Deborah Shapiro Krasner**

### *Stanley Rosen*

I first met Stanley Rosen as an incoming student, when he was assigned to be my faculty advisor. He was the first member of the faculty that I ever spoke with at length, and he made an unforgettable impression on me. I was fascinated by him, and eager to know him better. I had long wanted to learn how to throw pots, and the fact that he was the ceramics teacher made him even more alluring. Even though I came to Bennington intending to major in theater, that first meeting with Stanley overshadowed everything. I immediately signed up for ceramics as one of my first classes.

As it turned out, I was deeply unhappy with Paul Grey's theater class, and moved and challenged by the difficulties of learning how to center clay. Part of the appeal of ceramics for me was its rigor - you couldn't fake good technique, the only way to get there was daily practice, lots of time and learning how to see in three dimensions.

None of this came easily to me - I was a natural writer, awkward physically, and not in any way a natural potter. But the opportunities to learn from Stanley and from clay compelled me in a way that nothing else has ever done. I will always be deeply grateful to Stanley for his teaching, his depth of knowledge, and his uncompromising clarity of focus.

### *Pat Adams*

Pat Adams taught me how to see! The best thing she ever said to me was: "Draw what you see, not what you know is there". It's kind of a motto for life actually, as well as for drawing. I took a drawing class with her every semester, and also took her incredible

Color Theory class. Learning to really see, to calibrate minute changes between shades of gray, to visually feel the color between the actual colors on the page was an extraordinary opportunity, and one that stays with me even after all these years.

I also used to take care of Pat's sons on occasion, and another lesson I got from being around her family was that looking carefully at things was not something that was confined to art making. I remember being there with all of them when the children were making ornaments for their Christmas tree and setting them in place. Each addition required extremely careful looking, tentative placing and then moving until the right site was found for each addition. That sense that everything matters, that visual balance and pleasure are essential, are practices that inform much of what I do. I don't think I would have known them without Pat Adams.

## **Barbara Sternberg**

Organic Chemistry: Or, How I Learned to Cook While Reading Philip Roth

In Honor of Professor Robert Coburn

Did you think that only drama, dance and art students spent their entire semesters at Bennington holed up in labs and studios, perfecting their craft? If so, that is probably because in 1969, Bennington was (and still is) a well-known magnet for serious students of drama, dance and art. Relatively speaking, there were many such students at Bennington. You could see them all over Commons.

But how many students chose to come to Bennington for its chemistry department? Did you guess: none? Well, there were five or six of us in Mr. Coburn's organic chemistry class my senior year, not counting the teaching assistant. (This was more than 50 years ago, and I just don't recall the exact number. But there were very few of us - I tell you that with confidence).

So, I bet you also didn't know that, in addition to three hour-long lectures by Mr. Coburn every week, we organic chem students also spent four hours, twice a week, putting our theoretical knowledge to practical use in organic chemistry lab. In other words, like our drama, dance, and art student counterparts, we organic chem students also spent our semesters holed up in lab, perfecting our craft.

Lab was a place where we slaved for hours, following elaborate procedures for turning innocuous chemicals (baking soda! alcohol!) into disgusting, foul-smelling compounds that burned holes in our clothing and caused us to retch from smells that exist nowhere in nature, but that permeated the room and our bodies. We couldn't get those smells out of our hole-ridden clothes or off our skin, no matter how many showers we took that evening. (At the end of the year, I incinerated everything -- we did that sort of thing back then, ecologically unconscious as we were).

I don't remember exactly when during fall semester I had my epiphany. But it was this: if I could prepare these elaborate, foul-smelling cocktails using convoluted methods of distillation, *I could cook anything!* Seriously, how hard could it be to follow any recipe, or cook any food, after faithfully following the frankly terrifying recipes we had to follow – *to the letter!* – week after interminable week? Where if, heaven forbid, we accidentally spilled a drop of our precious creation on ourselves, we triggered an automatic ambulance ride to Putnam Memorial Hospital Emergency Room: Poisoned! Third degree burns! Nuclear disaster!

Suddenly, I knew that I could prepare the most elaborate French quenelles, or cerise flambé, because I could faithfully execute the bizarre, incomprehensible instructions that culminated in a beyond- the -imagination -Dr. Frankensteinesque- concoction every week. I thought to myself: if I were cooking actual, edible food, it would even smell good! Better still, at the end of my toil I could sit down and eat the finished product. And enjoy it!! What a contrast with the unpronounceable (have you read a drug label lately??) fruits of our efforts to create monster chemicals from which all we wanted to do was escape.

So, while organic chemistry was not my favorite course, not by a long shot, it was the most useful course I ever took. Understanding organic chemicals, even only somewhat, makes you at least semi-literate with regard to medications and a gazillion other everyday products. (It is also a required pre-req for medical school, which is why I was taking the course in the first place.) And, chemical terms are very handy (who knew?) when you're wracking your brain over a New York Times crossword puzzle. Turns out that chemistry and chemistry terms pop up all over the place, making a course in organic chemistry great preparation for life. And yes, I did become a really good cook.

One last fond memory of organic chemistry lab:

It was fall semester of senior year, 1968-9. Philip Roth's early masterpiece "Portnoy's Complaint" had not yet been published. It had, however, been serialized in its entirety in "The New Yorker"; I had devoured it over summer break and been blown away. I decided to enliven our twice-weekly four-hour drudge marathons (aka organic chem labs) with a dramatic reading of this masterpiece. Cover to 400-plus-page cover. Twice a week. For four full hours. In particular, I was eager to share this hilarious, daring, and novel novel with my lab partner, Doreen Seidler. My idea was to pass the otherwise interminable afternoons laughing, lost in humor. (We also spent lots of lab hours happily imagining and pining for certain Cadbury chocolate bars Doreen had grown up with, but that were only available in her native South Africa. Boy, could Doreen conjure a vivid chocolate bar! How our mouths watered! Flaky Bars! Crunchy Bars!) Pass the time we did, doubled over in laughter with every off-color (especially back then) page of Portnoy, drooling for our longed-for Cadbury bars, as our lab mates tittered at us in muted disapproval.

I never did go to medical school, having chosen a career as a psychologist instead. But it was the freedom to select the courses you wanted to take, to study any combination of subjects, no matter how weird or wacky, that led me to Bennington. Psychology, sciences, music, literature – nobody could tell me there might be other interesting subjects, or that my choice of only four areas might be limiting. Not when I was 19.



Today, while in hindsight I wish I had taken a political science course or two, and maybe even an art course, I look back at what I learned at Bennington and I am deeply grateful. What my education lacked in breadth, it made up for in depth. And organic chemistry tops the list for most useful. (Turns out, learning to hum and play the flute at the same time was far less useful. I learned that, too, at Bennington).

These days, I spend my creative energies learning and performing the great choral masterpieces of Western civilization. I sing alto with the Chatham Chorale on Cape Cod. I totally love every moment. Let me know if you need a ticket.

### **Joanna Clark Swayze**

When I went to Bennington in the fall of 1965 I naively thought I might be a dancer. Four Bennington faculty members changed my mind.

Richard Haas talked me into taking a Graphics class. You'll be a better artist if you try a different medium, he said. He was right.

Pat Adams, my advisor, steered me into Drawing and introduced me to artists like Arthur Dove. She also showed me that being an artist and being a mother are not mutually exclusive.

When I graduated in 1970 Sidney Tillim's advice was to tell people that I am an artist. Don't spend your whole life trying to convince yourself that you are one.

Laurie Hyman made being a photographer a process about ideas versus simply craft.

Fifty years on and still making art, I can recall specific classes, hear their words, and almost quote them. Many thanks to Dick Haas, Pat Adams, Sidney Tillim and Laurie Hyman

### **Deborah Thomas**

#### *Viola Farber*

I remember in particular a class in choreography as part of Dance I, in the Carriage Barn. Viola Farber came up from New York and appeared before us layered in extraordinary shawls, tights, tunics, nothing all that unusual for Bennington- but the autumn shades of different textured clothes made her look like a piece of moving sculpture even when she walked across the Commons lawn. When she taught us, her face always lit up with possibilities .

What she gave to me was permission, for the rest of my life, to see defined space, whether in a room, a field, or on a piece of paper, as a launch pad for unlimited expression. She encouraged us to use up every inch of the room we met in, to hang

from the railings, to explore the corners for new ways to dance with angles, to feel free to stand still or to engage with other dancers as they each made use of every floorboard, wall, or balcony. Given my ballet tunnel vision, she was instrumental in my first discovery of how to dance outside the lines.

Last year, my husband built a house, one we designed fifty years after that one class with Viola Farber. Her influence gave me the courage to create a three dimensional canvas where I can climb up thirty feet to wash the windows, and look through the treetops, a place where the groceries get hoisted to the kitchen by a rope and pulley. There's enough space for every member of our family to visit and hide out with a book or watch Bald eagles circling above the skylights. Hammock chairs hang in the loft, my "studio".

I wonder if retired teachers, like myself, who aren't famous get to call their space a studio? This is the first time I have dared, but I think Ms. Farber would approve. I have wondered all my life how "good" at something I will have to be to identify myself, even if just to myself, as some kind of artist. Those who visit our house experience our space as some kind of museum. To me, it is an opportunity to move at any speed, in almost all directions, without feeling confined by the predictable long months of rain and wind on the Oregon coast. It is a place where I am able to respond to the impulse to move around, to climb the staircases knowing there will be something up ahead yet to consider.

We built this house in a forest that surrounds a village (Population 65) that has already given up three streets to the Pacific Ocean, a community some hundred yards from where another town existed until the ocean washed away the sand beneath it. We wait, at the foot of several active landslides for an earthquake and tsunami that will finish off most of the houses here.

Down in our basement, shelves hold hand tools, cots, food, blankets, books, and clothing, not to mention art supplies, instruments, and manuals on how to manage medical emergencies. There is a workbench there, with all the power tools my husband gives me for birthdays, anniversaries and Hallmark Holidays, the tools with which I built a backyard swimming pool, mostly because the ocean here is rough, and cold and eats people. There are no other swimming pools around here deep enough to dive in, close enough to walk to, and serene enough in which to float in a pool chair reading.

We seal up bins with practical necessities, aware that when the world as we know it literally falls apart, and the survivors must adjust to what we can't even imagine, we will know how to begin to breathe, and to begin to reinvent some new community.

When I arrived at Bennington, bewildered, overly protected, and for the first time out from under the x-ray vision of my parents, I found myself just trying to find my feet. All of my instructors, Leonard Rowe, Nick Delbanco, Lee Suppowit, Nora Montesinos, Stanley Eskin, Lou Calabro, George Finckel, and the rest of them who made it possible to get to know them even if I'd not yet had a class with them, gave me kindly an awareness of how much I didn't know, and patiently stood by me when I missed the point completely. Each of them, in different ways, gave me permission to be unsuccessful, often

embarrassingly so, and then helped me to recognize I could improve. I credit each of them for showing me, in different ways, that if you're learning, you can't possibly be failing at the same time. Viola Farber was the first to reach me when she helped me see the self-made limitations of my boundaries, that my rules need not be carved in stone, and that my expectations of how things should be need not define what could be done. I was trying to find my feet, and she encouraged me to find my wings. To all of my teachers, even those who didn't know they were instructing me, I have been, and remain, forever grateful.

## **Anelle Tumminello**

*Nora Hasenclever Montesinos*

*Профессор* Nora Petrovna Hasenclever Montesinos (1905 - 1999) earns a place in our memories. She has a place in the history of 20th century wars and revolutions. At Bennington, she was a Russian scholar. In Europe, she was a refugee and a freedom fighter.

Nora Petrovna was teaching at Bennington as early as 1952, as was her sister Irene Hasenclever. Montesinos taught Spanish and Russian, and Hasenclever taught French and German. I was fortunate to be Professor Montesinos' student from 1968 to 1971 and to work closely with her as her assistant. She took our class from the Cyrillic alphabet and rudimentary pronunciation to literary analyses of classic and modern Russian texts. She assigned papers frequently, read them closely and responded with appreciation and generous suggestions. She expected her students to demonstrate diligence, finesse and an ego tough enough to apply her exacting comments.

Nora Petrovna pushed me to work harder, achieve more and persevere. Until rereading all four years of her comments in order to write this Festschrift, I had supposed she had chosen me to be her assistant because I showed excellence; now I realize that it was to give me more coaching, force me to devote more time to study, and provide me with another on-campus job. I am beholden.

Nora Petrovna loved wit and a good story, especially with humor about the human condition. "Oh, but my dear," she would say, "there are only two ways to respond to a clothing compliment: either you say '*Do you like it? It is yours: please take it—from me to you.*' Or you say, '*Oh—but this rag! It is so old I do not even bother with it anymore.*'"

Or speaking of her long marriage to José Fernández Montesinos who taught at UC Berkeley, "Oh, but my dear, if you want to enjoy a long marriage, make sure

that he lives on the West Coast and you live on the East Coast. When you get together twice a year, it will be so delightful.” Great advice.

She was open and curious to the lives of her students outside of the classroom. When she heard my language lab tape of *разговоры*, conversations, with multiple characters in different voices, Nora Petrovna was first confused and then delighted to realize that all the voices were mine, and that, as a drama major, I brought playful expression to our practice of grammar and vocabulary.

Nora Petrovna was gracious. She gave me a beautiful Russian song book published in Leningrad (and then made me perform on campus) and a Simon Moselsio ceramic of a balalaika duo, made from hand-dug Bennington clay. She trusted me with several hand-written, heart-felt notes that I treasure.

Nora Petrovna shared a little bit of her youthful life with me. She spoke of fleeing tsarist Russia as a child with her parents, both physicists, to Germany, where her sister Irene was born. Then fleeing Germany, where Nora Petrovna had met Montesinos and accompanying him to Spain as civil war was breaking out. “Oh, but my dear,” she said, “There I was studying Cervantes in the midst of fighting, and I would go to bars to meet young men. ‘*Where are you from,*’ they asked, ‘*that when you flirt, you are speaking 17th century Spanish?*’”

She told me that she and Mr. Montesinos then had to escape Spain in steamer trunks with holes cut so they could breathe. And here comes another revelation: during the Spanish Civil War, in part a proxy war between the Axis powers and Soviets and others, Nora Petrovna Hasenclever Montesinos was an interpreter for the Brigades Internationals. She was a revolutionary. She was my Russian professor. She was my mentor and friend. *Спасибо, Нора Петровна, большое спасибо.*

## Eda Kristin Zahl

### *Richard Tristman*

Richard Tristman, who taught literature, was my first counselor, and neither of us knew what counseling meant, but he’d seen *Bonnie and Clyde* nine times, and I’d seen the movie six times, so we got along.

Still blank on what to counsel, however, Mr. Tristman said we could work together on the most important project at Bennington: replacing the fluorescent lights in his kitchen. There, once a week, I held the ladder while Mr. Tristman passed toxic tubes of poisonous gas down to me. We spoke only of light bulbs and the car chases in *Bonnie and Clyde*, which Mr. Tristman invested with Homeric importance. I thought this was

great counseling, but when I heard he died in 1998, I wondered if his fears had been correct.

In my second year, I had to leave the drama department, which pushed sexual boundaries way too far. Fortunately, I'd taken a class with Francis Golfing, a man of such superior intellect that I couldn't believe I'd asked him to help me change my major. He took me so seriously, I thought I'd posed a vital question about humankind when he suggested I major in literature.

I'd never even taken myself that seriously; I was the only one at Bennington who snuck a \$25 used TV into my room. Me and the late Susan Toepfer absolutely had to watch *Laugh-In*. So, when Golfing, this dignified European survivor dressed always in a suit, vest and tie, took me at my word, he changed my life.

#### *Nick Delbanco*

Cut to Nick Delbanco, my thesis tutor. He took me seriously too, but with a twinkle. I'd been Arthur Miller's assistant on an NRT, and spent many weeks with the playwright taking notes and typing rewrites on paper stacked with carbons. It made sense to do my thesis on Miller's plays, but it was Nick who suggested I also write a journal about my daily experience working with a legend. I saw that Delbanco was a handsome guy who courted very special women, but that was like some other country I knew nothing about. For two serious semesters, he gave me exactly what I needed: guidance, support, and friendship. Writing a thesis, and the prospect of endless drudgery, became a pleasure as Nick made the whole thing breeze along effortlessly.

While I didn't exactly cruise through Bennington, these counselors helped me design an education that developed skills I didn't know I had. After college and entry-level jobs that lasted a while, I learned how to grab hours in front of an office IBM Selectric to create material that sometimes got published.

"Sure, Eda, do whatever you want, as long as you answer the phones," said my boss who was also stealing office time to produce his own movies. Thank God it was Hollywood, where everyone knew that secretaries, accountants, and even bosses are really actors with manuscripts in their desks.

For a long time, I blew off four years at Bennington as a waiting room for life, but what appeared to be an easy school with no grades, and too expensive for way out in the country, Bennington taught me a valuable collection of skills, which are much harder than they look: avoiding fluorescence, finding great counselors who don't counsel, and writing for fun.

**Photos of Faculty (submitted by Joanna Swayze '70)**



**Pat Adams.**



**Frank Baker.**



**Eric Bentley, December 1970.**





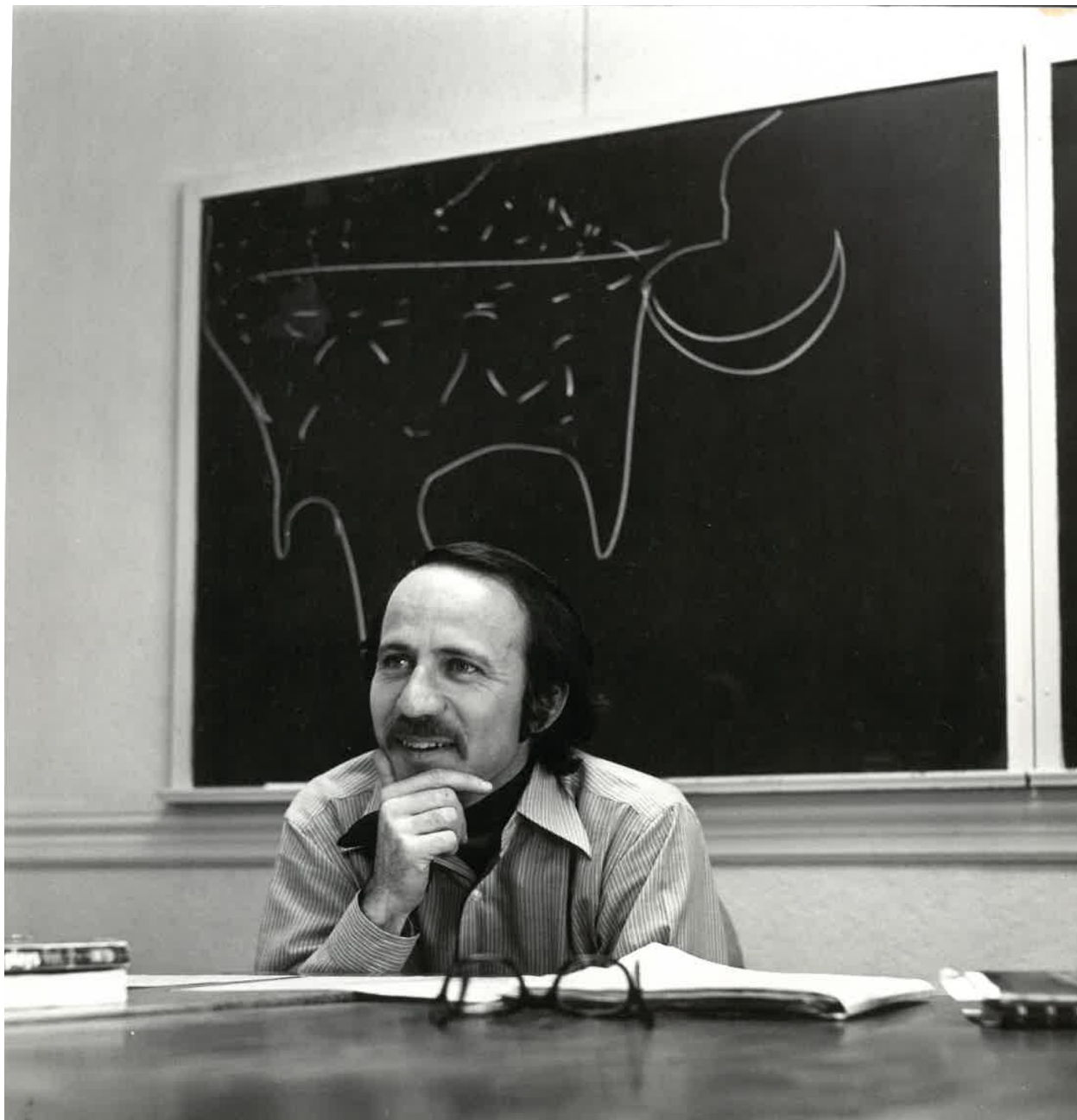
**Edward Bloustein.**



**Edward Bloustein.**



Henry Brant rehearsal.



**Maurice Breslow.**





**Tom Brockway.**



**Michael Dennis Browne.**



**Alan Cheuse. March 1970.**

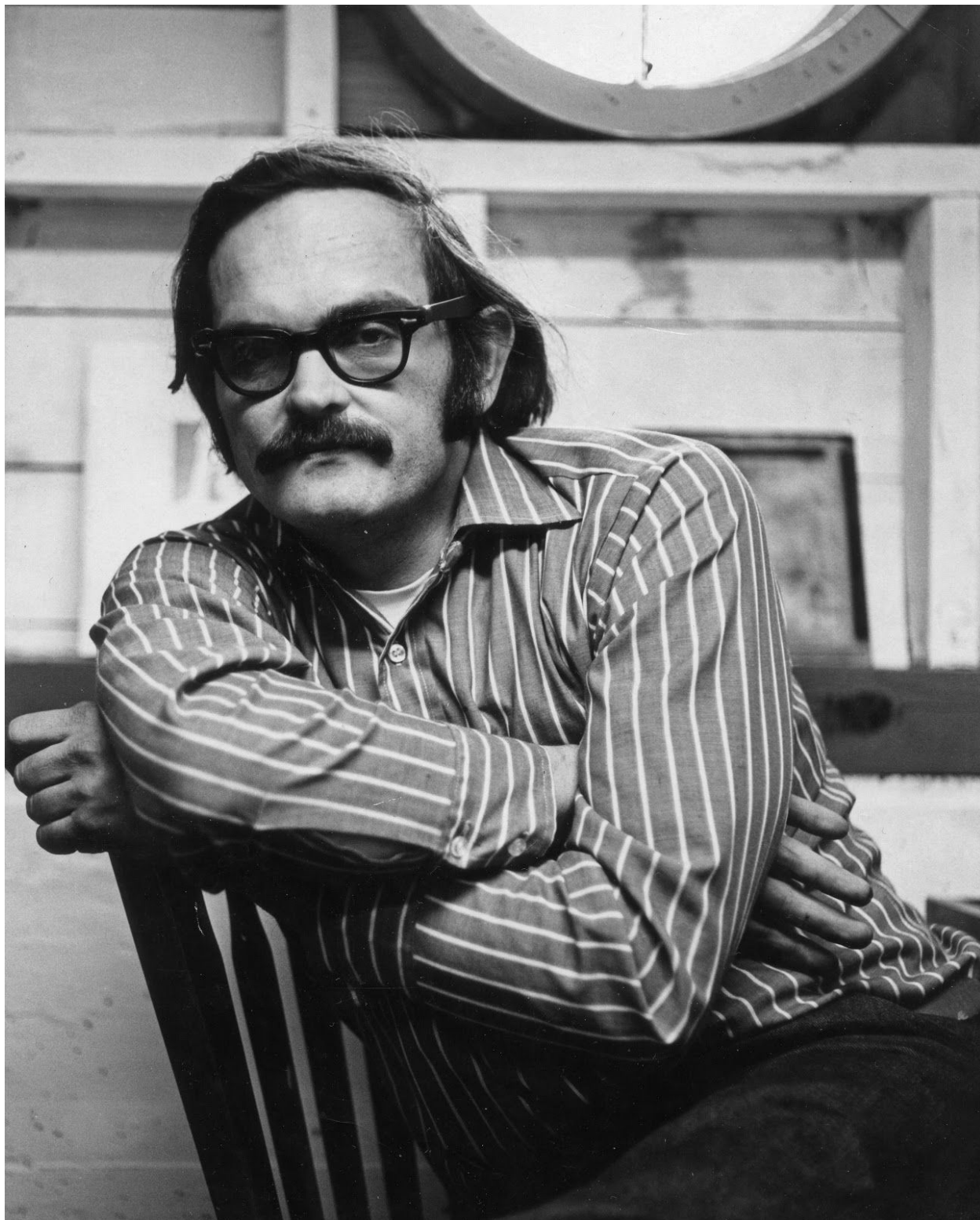


**Dance Class.**

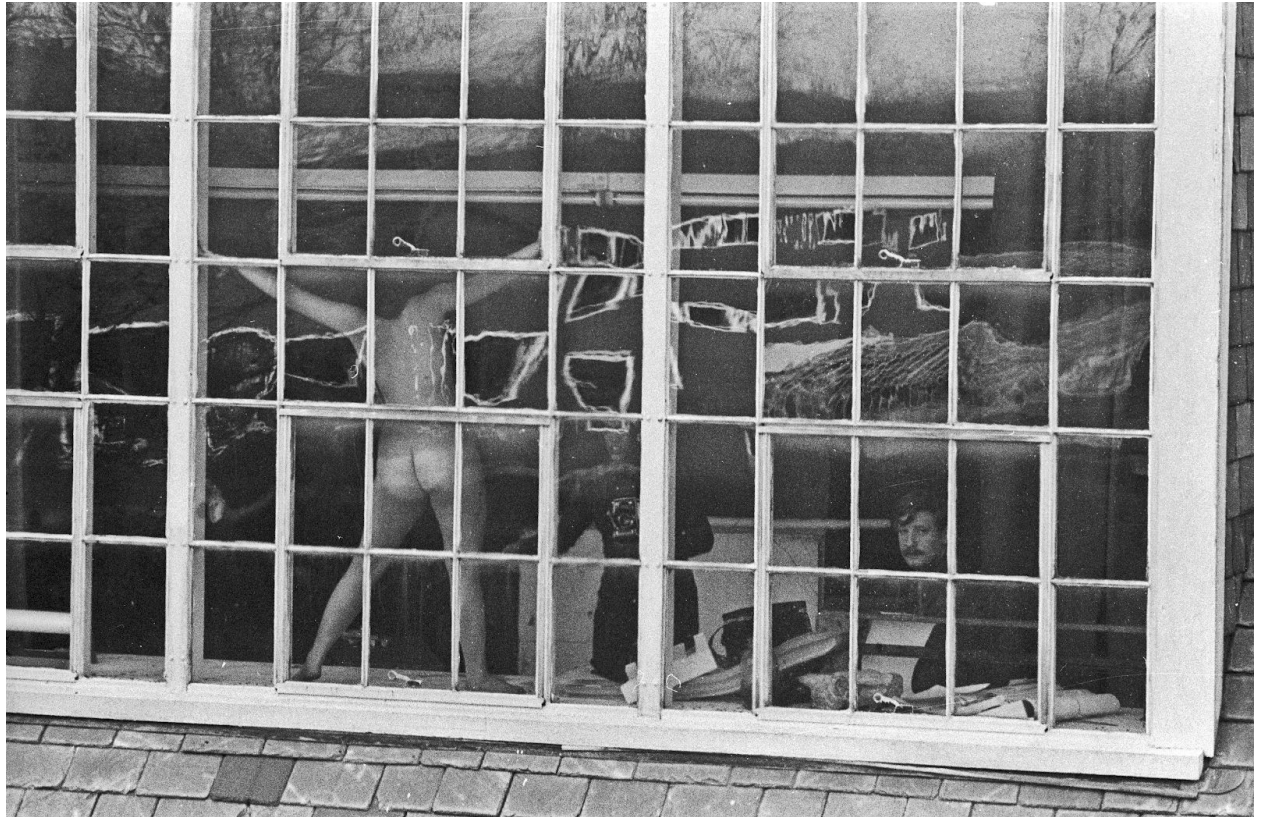




**Nick Delbanco.**



**Richard Haas.**



**Laurie Hyman (with model).**



**Music Faculty (L-R Frank Baker, Marianne 'Willie' Finckel, Jacob Glick, Vivian Fine, Henry Brant, Phyllis 'Flip' Pearson '61, Gunnar Schonbeck, Lionel Nowak, George Finckel).**



**Stanley Rosen.**





**Stephen Sandy.**



**Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Harold Kaplan, and Richard Tristman.**

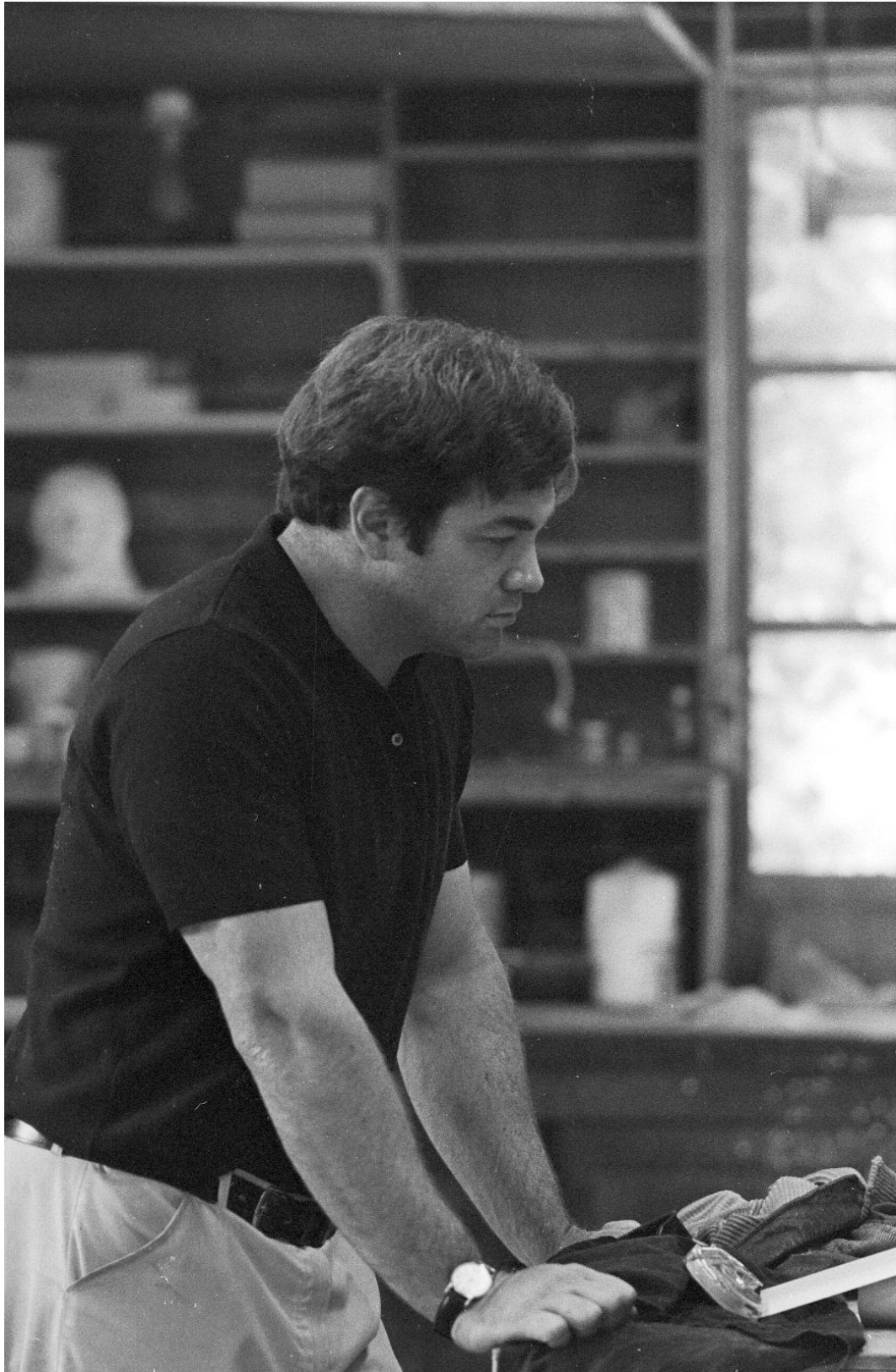


**Sidney Tillim.**





**Isaac Witkin.**



**Isaac Witkin.**