

Contents

Wellesley Alumnae Magazine
Volume 70, Number 1, Fall, 1985

Alumnae Associations Board of Directors: Barbara Butterfield Bodine '48, president; Janice Lane Hunt '52, first vice president; Phebe Ballou Gregorian '34, second vice president; Ellen Gill Miller '73, treasurer/secretary; Ann Hayden Hamilton '67, campus committee chairman; Henrietta Holsman '70, clubs chairman; Susan Asher Calechman CE '78/'60, class officers chairman; Virginia Guild Watkin '46, class fund programs chairman; Diane Speare Triant '68, alumnae/student communications chairman; Karen Hunzicker Putnam '71, academic programs chairman; Regina Montoya '75, alumnae admission representatives chairman; *ex officio*s: Anne Mitchell Morgan '57, Phyllis Méras '53.

Alumnae Trustees: Barbara Reade Levings '47, Claudine Malone '63, Mary McPherson '83, Katherine Curtis Rigler '61, Estelle Newman Tanner '57.

Alumnae Association Staff: Anne Mitchell Morgan '57, executive director; Laura Lobenthal Katz '53, associate director for clubs; Jean MacKinnon Perkinson '62, assistant director; Caroline Canterbury Riem '53, associate director for classes and reunion.

Staff assistants: Barbara Bordenca, Ann Hayden Hamilton '67, Leigh Maccini, Leeanna Hunter Mottern CE '85/'58, Mary Porazzo, Catherine Rentz, Francine Rothenstein.

Editor: Phyllis Méras '53

Associate Editor: Mary Jane Ertman

Editorial Associate: Joyce Dauley

Printer: W.E. Andrews Co., Inc.

Wellesley (USPS 673-900)/Published Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer by The Wellesley College Alumnae Association. Editorial and Business Office: The Wellesley College Alumnae Association, Green Hall, Wellesley, Mass. 02181. Telephone 617-235-0320. Second class postage paid at Boston, Mass. Contributions and changes of address must be received six weeks before mailing. Postmaster: Send Form 3579 to Wellesley magazine, Green Hall, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass. 02181.

Wellesley Policy:

One of the objectives of *Wellesley*, in the best college tradition, is to present interesting, thought provoking material, even though it may be controversial. Publication of material does not necessarily indicate endorsement of the author's view point by the magazine, the Alumnae Association, or Wellesley College.

- 4 **Whither South Africa?** by Gertrude Richards Russell '56 *A visit to South Africa this past summer, at the start of the "state of emergency."*
- 10 **Race and Religion: Only the Robes Were Black** by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip '59 *There were only two black students in her class.*
- 12 **Race and Religion: 'Wellesley is Xanadu . . . please come and be a part of it'** by Twinkle-LaTrail Shipes '86 *On being black at Wellesley in the eighties.*
- 14 **Race and Religion: Annals of an Orthodox Jew at Wellesley in the '60s** by Molly Myerowitz Levine '64 *Her prayers were answered when the boathouse roof fell in.*
- 16 **Race and Religion: Jewish Life at Wellesley—a Current Perspective** by Sheri Elissa Steisel '85 *She worked to make a difference on campus.*
- 18 **On and Off Campus** by Jennie Nash '86 *Coming back from Amherst.*
- 19 **Trustees of Wellesley College 1985-86**
- 20 **From Alumnae Kitchens: Outstanding Young Chef Cindy Black '78**
- 21 **Candidate for Alumnae Trustee 1986-1992: Henrietta H. Holsman '70** by Beatrice Strand MacDonald '60
- 22 **Clubs . . . Around the World** by Henrietta H. Holsman '70 and Laura Lobenthal Katz '53
- Insert: Report from the National Development Fund Council 1984-1985**
- 33 **Sports Center Photo Section** by Mark Lennihan
- 38 **A Message from the Associate Dean**
- 40 **Wellesley Notebook**
- 44 **Class Notes**

On the Cover: "The Flower Pot" is part of an exhibition of tapestries from Isla Negra, a Chilean coastal village where the combination of green fields and the blue Pacific has long attracted artists. The exhibition will be on display until December 1 in the Corridor Gallery at the Wellesley College Museum, in the Jewett Arts Center. The wives of local fishermen and farmers have created the colorful tapestries on flour sacks. The work has previously been displayed in Santiago, London, Paris, Sao Paulo, Miami, Geneva, and Neuchatel, Switzerland. The exhibit at the College is under the auspices of the Isla Negra Foundation, established to distribute, preserve, and expand the work of the tapestry embroiderers; the Wellesley College Museum; and the Spanish Department.

Annals of an Orthodox Jew at Wellesley in the '60s

The rabbi favored a Christian college; the student felt he had made a mistake.

by Molly Myerowitz Levine '64



Molly Myerowitz Levine '64 as a student entering Wellesley.

I came to Wellesley in 1960 expecting simply that I was going to school to learn new things and to fulfill my dream of becoming a fine Latin scholar. That is all I ever wanted from Wellesley, all I ever bargained for. Today my Latin scholarship is alive and well—thanks in no small way to the training I got at Wellesley—but my heart still bears the scars of my unbargained-for experience with the peculiarly polite yet inhumane brand of Wellesley anti-semitism in the early sixties.

Ironically, I came to Wellesley on the advice of an orthodox rabbi who felt that *Yiddishkeit* (Jewishness) was more likely to survive intact at a Christian college than at Brandeis, that "den of assimilation" in nearby Waltham (so he put it). I chose Wellesley for its academic reputation and its proximity to Boston. Bryn Mawr, my first preference, had turned out to be geographically impossible in terms of obtaining kosher food, while Barnard, the logical choice in those days for an observant Jew, depressed a farm girl who couldn't survive without a minimum of space and natural beauty. Certainly, I was prepared for practical difficulties at college (any college) because I was a strictly orthodox Jew with peculiar dietary requirements and physical restrictions on Sabbaths and holidays. Nonetheless, I assumed that these obstacles were surmountable and well worth the rewards that a Wellesley education offered. What I was unprepared for was the discovery that my personal restrictions paled in comparison with the obstacles put in my academic path by the Wellesley administration's utter lack of flexibility, tolerance, and understanding.

Here, I am particularly moved to respond to those trustees of the College who recently claimed that although a discriminatory admission policy may have existed at Wellesley in the past, Jewish students were made to feel welcome at Wellesley once they got by the admissions board. In the case of assimilated Jews who differed in no visible practical way from their fellow non-Jewish students or from the Wellesley ideal of a morality of service based on a Christian ethos, there could be little reason for discrimination after admission.

I, however, was a highly visible Jew. In many significant ways, I was precluded by my intense commitment to Judaism from simply

Molly Myerowitz Levine '64 teaches classics at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

blending into the Wellesley environment and all that it entailed. It is my case that in fact should be the test for any claim that Jews were made to feel welcome at Wellesley, since I believe that I must hold the dubious distinction of being the first (and probably last) strictly orthodox Jew to attend the College. By "orthodox" I mean not simply traditional, or kosher, but totally committed to the scrupulous observance of all aspects of *halacha* (Jewish law).

It comes as no surprise that assimilated Jews would feel at home at Wellesley, since their integration puts the institution to no test of its principle of "dedication to diversity." The true test of Wellesley's liberalism can only be if Wellesley made a visibly and undeniably "Jewish" Jew feel welcome. Wellesley failed the test miserably in my case.

For years I thought that I had failed some sort of test (despite a record of high academic achievement at Wellesley). I was certain that something must have been wrong with *me* for being unable to come to terms with Wellesley. It is only recently that I have come to realize that the failure was Wellesley's and not my own.

I have neither the heart nor the patience to chronicle every depressing episode of my Wellesley experience—from the financial burden of paying for food that I could not eat and which I had to buy all over (in kosher form) a second time to the total lack of facilities for handling exams scheduled on Sabbaths and holidays.

When exams fell on the Sabbath or a Jewish holiday, she was 'incarcerated' in the infirmary.

In regard to the latter, the solution devised for me was to incarcerate me in the infirmary for a day or days as necessary, with all books and human contact forbidden lest I reap some advantage from my "infirmity." I was escorted to the bathroom by a watchful nurse, brought trays of food I could not eat at meal times, and finally—depressed and ravenous—permitted to take the exam when my "three stars" had appeared.

It was only years later that I realized that there were other, more humane ways of dealing with the problem. At Yale, for example, I was simply given a make-up exam at a date convenient for both me and the instructor. Since my student days I have certainly personally given enough make-up exams for reasons far less serious or significant than mine once were to realize now that all that was required to solve the exam problem was a modicum of humanity and flexibility on the part of the administration plus, of course, the willingness of the instructor to go to the trouble of making up another version of the test.

Nonetheless, these were problems that I had anticipated, that I, in fact, cheerfully endured and would have continued to endure. What I perceive, in retrospect, as peculiarly cruel, unfair, and extraordinarily illiberal was a particular form of mental cruelty practiced by the administration in those days. Deans and other administrators, so sweetly reasonable in conversation and high-flown in intellectual aspirations, were, incomprehensibly, unwilling to entertain the slightest deviation from what they apparently regarded as a norm for the Wellesley girl which was to be maintained above all. I limit my examples to three.

1. The first of these examples now belongs to ancient history. For the unenlightened there once was a rule, since abolished, limiting "overnights" or "one o'clocks" permitted to freshmen to a total of seventeen (I believe). The obvious purpose of this now archaic-



Molly Myerowitz Levine and her son, JJ, at their Rosh Hashana table.

sounding rule was to protect the freshman neophyte from getting her head turned by the heady swell of Boston suitors and then discovering her first report card a shambles as a result of her hectic social whirl.

No such danger existed in my case. As I explained to the dean, I needed to use those overnights and more—not for partying at Harvard Law School but for getting out of Wellesley and into a Jewish environment for Sabbaths and holidays. My plea for extra overnights was of course refused amidst a polite murmur of sym-

Her biblical history instructor could barely read and write Hebrew.

pathy and commiseration for my plight. The result was that I was compelled to spend an unnecessarily depressing series of Sabbaths and holidays in starkest isolation on a campus with absolutely no facilities for any form of Jewish observance. Today this seems to me an extreme and gratuitous form of mental cruelty and an illustration of the administration's lack of flexibility in meeting the needs of the diverse elements the College claimed to want to attract. Certainly, some sort of permission for me to have left campus might have been arranged contingent upon my maintaining a high academic average.

Continued on page 27

2. My second example concerns the Bible requirement which I understand has also since been abolished. Paradoxically, Bible proved my nemesis. Although I was excited about the prospect of studying the Gospels with a Christian minister, I could see no point in a required semester on what was termed the "Old Testament" when I, at the time, knew the text and commentaries in the original Hebrew with a degree of skill that far surpassed that of the professor who was to teach me. It was not simply that it was a waste of time for me to take the first semester of Bible (wasting time would have been easy!), but that it was emotionally painful and religiously insulting for me to be "taught" the five books of Moses by a professor who could barely read and write Hebrew. (It is hard to recall who was more miserable that semester, the professor—who was a pleasant, well-meaning man—or I.)

Again, the verdict of the dean was that no exception could be made for me, although I was certainly eligible for an exemption on the basis of my background. No reasons were ever offered. And I, of course, accepted the verdict without demure. In retrospect, it seems to me that if the point of the Bible requirement was to ensure that every Wellesley graduate be acquainted with the work then I had certainly proven my familiarity with the text with a transcript showing nine years at a *yeshiva* where the five books of Moses had been studied for five hours a day in the original Hebrew and with the classical commentaries.

Furthermore, I certainly would have been willing to prove my familiarity with the text by taking any exemption exam that the professor might have devised. If, however, the point of the requirement was to ensure that every student be indoctrinated in the *Christian* interpretation of the text, it would have been more intellectually honest to simply say so rather than to hide behind a spurious facade of liberalism.

3. My last example evokes a bittersweet memory, tragi-comic in profundity and its absurdity. This was the unlikely matter of the gym requirement. Due to schedule conflicts, it came to pass that the second-semester gym requirement for my sophomore year could only be filled by taking crew, which met on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Once again I found myself trembling at the desk of the dean with a tearful explanation of the fact that my religion forbade my rowing a boat on the Sabbath. Once again

the dean listened "liberally" and then reasonably and sweetly explained that no exceptions could be made. Distraught, I left her office in utter despair—loath to see an "F" on my report card, but with no practical alternative in view. This time I resorted to the only solution I knew—the time-honored Jewish recourse *in extremis* of prayer, fasting, and charity.

For the rest of the first semester of 1961 I prayed daily, fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and gave as much charity as I could afford—all in desperate hope of somehow averting the evil (crew) decree. And it came to pass in the winter of 1961/62 just before the second semester (and my crew class) was to commence that the crew house collapsed, smashing all of the shells stored within it! Crew was suspended until shells and building could be repaired. Yearly in midwinter I recall the date and my experience of salvation with the fervor that the Jews of Shushan must have felt when news of Haman's hanging got out.

So much for Wellesley's "dedication to diversity" in the early sixties.

It is difficult for me to conceive of a different Wellesley. Still haunted by my sad memories of the College, I often catch myself uncontrollably pressing down hard on the accelerator when I pass the Natick/Wellesley exit on the Mass. Pike. Although officially an alumna, I was never able to experience any feeling of identification with an institution so reluctant to identify with me in any way. This was true of my feeling for the College until the Jewish issue came up and it seemed for a moment that change might be a possibility. At least some people at long last were articulating the anti-semitism that I had only dimly sensed in my eighteen-year-old innocence. (I grew up in the only orthodox Jewish family in a small New England community.) Until coming to Wellesley I had never once experienced any form of anti-semitism.

Ironically, soon after receiving last year's issue of the alumnae magazine with its open discussion of the problem and its prospect of change, I received an advertisement for an alumnae tour of the Mediterranean featuring a visit to the holy places of Israel (all Christian, with the telling exceptions of the Holocaust Memorial and the Wailing Wall) and scheduling travel for Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, on which it is absolutely forbidden for Jews to travel.

Once again, I found myself disqualified for a Wellesley experience because I was a Jewish Jew; once again I found myself in the position of having to miss the Wellesley boat even if I had desired to climb aboard.

The difference is that this is simply what the experience of Wellesley in the early sixties has taught me to expect. No longer eighteen. I am no longer surprised.

I conclude with a footnote to this personal history: In 1962, at the end of my sophomore year, I transferred from Wellesley to Radcliffe College. As I later learned, there had been several hundred applications that year for the two vacant places in the Radcliffe junior class—the lion's share from a multitude of disgruntled denizens of various Ivy League women's colleges. It also turned out that I was one of the two students accepted. When I asked the Radcliffe dean why I was so fortunate, she explained that indeed I had not been the very best student of them all but that I "had given the best reasons for wanting to transfer." What I had given as a reason for wanting to transfer was a cursory recital of my religious problems at Wellesley. Radcliffe proved to me that there was no reason for a great women's college to treat me in the inflexible and insensitive way that Wellesley had.

Since leaving school (Radcliffe, B.A. 1964; Yale, M.Phil. 1971; Bar-Ilan, Ph.D., 1980—all in classics), I have taught at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, and the Radcliffe Seminars, and am currently teaching at Howard, an all-black university in Washington, D.C. While at Howard I have once again had the experience of being a true minority and a highly visible one. Not only am I a white in an almost entirely black world, but I am also a Jew at Howard. As such I am a member of a community which has recently experienced serious public conflicts with the black community. Furthermore, there is also the fact that I come to Howard directly from a university in Israel, a country which is currently a major focus of the friction between blacks and Jews.

Despite these potential sources of friction, I have never once yet experienced a moment of discomfit at Howard because of my religion. Howard has enabled me to feel at home and welcome in its community by accommodating whatever practical adjustments my religious practices required with no fuss. It is to the credit of Howard that my experience at this all black institution should be so utterly different from my years at Wellesley. I can only hope that the alumnae tour advertisement notwithstanding—Wellesley is changing. □