Postscript 1961

In Praise of Creative Classmates: David Rehfuss and John Frederick

By Bill Richter
Manhattan, Kansas

Life can take unexpected turns. For two 1961 Willamette classmates, those changes have led to enriching social and cultural contributions.

David P. Rehfuss completed his degree at Willamette and joined the United States Foreign Service. For most of the next three decades he served in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. While serving in Jakarta in the 1970s, he began collecting what he calls “glorious pots.” Hawkers on bicycles would bring beautiful, inexpensive pots to his home and he began to collect them. “I found my muse,” he says, “studying, collecting, writing and speaking on antique oriental ceramics and their trade routes, including the Maritime Silk Road that crisscrossed Southeast Asia from Japan to the Ottoman Empire from the 9th to the 16th centuries – the Golden Age of trade before the arrival of the Europeans.” He credits a Willamette art history class (Professor Pauling) with sparking his initial interest.

While serving in Washington in 1985, David co-founded the Washington Oriental Ceramic Group, which he now leads. After leaving the State Department, he was able to devote more time to his “glorious pots” and their trade patterns. He has lectured on ceramics in Malaysia and the Philippines as well as in this country. From his 1979 book, Japanese Porcelain from the Seventeenth Century Found in Indonesia, to his current work in the Sackler Museum’s web-based catalogue (http://www.seasianceramics.asia.si.edu/), David’s expertise on this rich cultural and historical tradition has enriched the lives of many.

John Frederick graduated from Willamette in history and was commissioned in the United States Navy. In his ten years of active duty he served in the Pentagon as executive officer for the Office of Information for the Armed Forces and other public affairs posts. His last tour was as motion picture and television officer for the Navy in Hollywood. Upon release from active duty, John began a career as film writer and producer for such talents as Rod Serling, Dick Van Dyke and Glenn Ford. In 1976, Frederick and two partners formed FMS Productions, which created breakthrough films in such areas of human need as alcohol and drug addiction. In 1975 he produced the first “recovery” film, Living Sober, The Class of ’76. Over the next 25 years John produced and wrote films on such topics as addiction, child abuse and domestic violence. Still in the Naval Reserve, he wrote a film for John Wayne entitled Home for the Seabees.

John’s work has helped thousands of individuals and their families throughout the world. He left FMS in 2003, traveled widely, and formed a new company, Better Times Productions, to “show the way to all who want to know better times.” In reflecting on his life and career, John writes, “I have been amazingly lucky in life.” He can also take satisfaction that his films have changed —indeed saved — lives.

Who else (authors, poets, artists, others) should be profiled as “creative classmates” in future newsletter issues? Please submit information concerning yourself and/or others to Bill Richter, wrichter@ksu.edu.
Part One: Marcia

Perhaps I was just gifted with a good memory from the start. Platitudes, proverbs and clichés have always come quickly to mind to answer almost any situation. “A stitch in time…” “A rolling stone gathers no…” All very useful truths.

If “all I needed to know I learned in kindergarten,” then what was my subsequent education about? Quick answers and memorized slogans served me very well…until college. At Willamette, I found that my truths needed tweaking — or scrapping completely! For example, Dr. Charlie Derthick, back in 1958, suggested I re-examine “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” Go instead, he said, with “If at first you don’t succeed, try a different method.” Words of pure grace! I ran right out the classroom door that day and changed my major from pre-med to psychology.

My well-learned slogans did not work in Dr Paulin’s art history class. When he asked me to integrate my understanding of depth psychology with 20th century art, I simply stared blankly: Not even a mindless platitude came to mind (it was 8 a.m., for one thing).

And Prof. Gillis got no response from me about yesterday’s economics assignment. Again, a blank stare, maybe a helpless shrug. I knew that “a penny saved is a …” just wouldn’t cut it.

Remember “comps” and “orals?” At this final hurdle of my four years of study, I was expected to verbalize thoughtfully on my feet and integrate information from several disciplines. I had no opportunity to relate memorized material, even age-old truths of my life!

But I did graduate, then studied some more and went on to a counseling career accompanied by marriage and family — all very fulfilling. I have discovered that I can think and act creatively; I can contribute original ideas to my community. But I still love to slip out a cliche now and then — and watch Eldon’s eyes roll!

Part Two: Eldon

Now that Marcia’s contribution to this joint essay is finished, after weeks of anguished labors to reduce 10,000 cliches of wisdom-gems to fewer than 300 pithy (yes, pithy!) words, let me add a few thoughts, since the deadline is tomorrow morning.

Willamette is where I first met Marcia and thought about having a life partner; Willamette is where I first thought of having children who would mature into delightful adults; Willamette is where I began to frame dozens of life questions which remain unanswered; and Willamette is where I learned that learning is a lifetime experience, for which one is forever indebted.

The list of those educational institutions, learning experiences, seer-friends, hard-knocks, and serendipitous moments has gotten rather long, leaving me with the impression that, although I’ve had a lot of lifetime learning experiences, the accumulation has been sparse. I nonetheless think back with humble gratitude for all that I have learned (and probably forgotten). Somewhere back there, Willamette contributed to the sheer bulk of lessons I’ve excised.

The point of this is: In that vast fog of forgotten information and neglected instructions, there is a “glow” of memories, a distinct aura of a wonderful time of my life that informed, shaped, and sustained all sorts of other “glows” and auras.

I sometimes wonder, as I still occasionally enter public arenas where one is supposed to inform, teach, instruct, or pontificate (although the opportunities for pontificating are deliberately evaporating) whether what it’s all about isn’t to create some sort of fascination with the fog, an intrigue over the numinous of the mind’s storehouses. Marcia has a far better understanding of the specifics. Me? I’m more comfortable floating along on the ambiguity and confusion that Willamette somehow allowed. Some very good professors left a distinct confusion in my life. Some very treasured friends contributed to a strange sense of wonder. Some profound experiences continue to baffle me.

And that’s very good! Thank you, Willamette!
Introducing the 2009 Class of 1961 Scholar: Jessica Walker

By Loretta (Ray) Milnes
Hillsboro, Oregon

She is an outgoing, accomplished Willamette junior who, as an only child, has spent her time growing up in places as disparate as Ohio and Prineville, Ore. In moving she attended three high schools — Estacada, Crook County, and finally (when she moved to Portland) Lincoln, from which she graduated.

While Jessica likes the cities where she grew up, she thinks that she won't return to them. She really wants to experience new things.

While growing up, Jessica Walker was able to travel to Amsterdam, Germany and Mexico. Looking ahead, she would like to eventually travel to other countries and hopes she might some day be able to study abroad.

Jessica learned about Willamette from her high school counselor at Lincoln High and chose the university in part because it offered her the most complete financial package. She is financing her education with grants, loans, and scholarships — including the Class of 1961 Scholarship. She is supplementing this with her four-year employment by the City of Beaverton — mostly during summer and winter breaks. In this job, she has done record keeping, City Hall telephone coverage, work in the mayor's office, and this past summer has helped with the recycling program — a highly educational experience. She has also worked part-time on campus for Willamette Integrated Technology Services, Atkinson Graduate School of Management and for the undergraduate biology department.

Jessica will major in biology, with a chemistry minor, and also hopes to have a minor in art history. After Willamette, she hopes to go to a graduate school and earn her PhD in biology. Eventually, she would like to work in that field.

But her efforts in her chosen fields will be counterbalanced with other concerns. She observed a childhood friend, whose parents were dedicated professionals, who had little time to be with their family. She would not want to put herself in this kind of situation. Family will be very important to her.

At Willamette she is an active, live-in member of Alpha Chi Omega, planning to reside there through her senior year. She speaks fondly of their activities and is currently serving as vice president of fraternity relations. In this position, she coordinates activities with alumni, parents and the national sorority; she also plans philanthropic projects, works on publicity and keeps the chapter informed about the traditions of Alpha Chi Omega.

When I asked her what she liked about Willamette, she responded that she has met many great people. She likes the Greek traditions and believes that Willamette professors really care about the students. But at Willamette, she reports, she has discovered that she is growing as a person and she wants to continue to grow. She believes that young people can learn a lot from the problems they've faced. She says that she has learned how to handle various problems and situations, and that she is a better person because of it.
As always, we extend a call for full (300-500 word) feature articles or shorter (one or two paragraph) class notes on the topic of your choice. Contact Erik Schmidt, associate director of alumni communications, at eschmidt@willamette.edu or by mail at 900 State St., Salem, OR 97301.

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