

GRADUATING SENIORS

William Gschlecht

I look upon my time at Queens College as a time of significant growth and reevaluation. I entered Queens in 2003 without a clear sense of purpose or direction and, after one semester, decided to leave. When I reentered Queens in 2007, I was unsure if I was making the right decision, but was willing to give it another try. Now, having reached graduation, I know that it was indeed the right decision—not only to return to school, but also to return to Queens College.

My professors made coming to Queens something I looked forward to each and every evening. The interesting and informative classes offered by the History Department were made even more appealing by the knowledgeable and engaging professors who exposed me to a myriad of ideas and opinions I might never have considered otherwise. They introduced me to an array of essays and books, enabling me to continue research in a number of interesting fields. I credit this with stimulating not only an interest but my enjoyment in reading about a number of intriguing topics, some of which I hope to continue researching as I look to continue my education as a graduate student in history.

I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the professors to whom I owe my renewed interest in and dedication to the study of history—professors like Carol Giardina, Harriet Davis-Kram, Premilla Nadasen, and Mark Simon. I would like to thank them as well as the History Department for making my experience at Queens College not only thoroughly enjoyable but, more important, truly enlightening.

Jenn Polish

I entered Queens College as a wide-eyed human rights activist with an intense love of biology

but little comprehension of how essential historical studies are to the kind of nonviolent, reflective (and effective!) activism that has increasingly become the core of my life. In my sophomore year, I stumbled into Professor Premilla Nadasen’s civil rights class, and my life proceeded to warp around everything I learned there. It was that year when the STAND chapter at Queens College (our branch of the national student antigenocide coalition) took off.

Since then, I’ve explored the essence of connections between historical studies and contemporary social change with Professor Davie; the importance of nonviolent antiwar activism with Professor Vellon; the intricate relationship between feminism and nationalism with Professor Sen (which shaped my understanding of so many global issues); and the powerful implications of historical analysis for contemporary peacemaking with Professor Rosenblum (which affects every aspect of my activism).

The advent of my most intense period of activism—coinciding with taking Professor Nadasen’s class and deciding to double major in history and biology—was no coincidence. Nor is it a coincidence that, as I’ve engaged in deeper and deeper studies with the professors mentioned above, my activism has become richer, deeper, and much, much more effective.

The gratitude that I feel for each of these professors in the History Department cannot be overstated. I will be an activist my whole life, and thus, my studies here will have a huge impact on my entire life.

Brian Smith

Not having set foot in a classroom since I dropped out of high school at the age of 17, my 30-year-old self entered Powdermaker Hall full

of trepidation. I had my doubts as to whether I would be able to succeed and feel welcome in academia. My concerns were quickly addressed by Queens College as a whole; however, no one at Queens reassured me in my decision to go back to school the way that the History Department did. Now that I am about to graduate with honors, I cannot help but look back fondly at the department that helped turn this former high school dropout into a Phi Beta Kappa inductee.

There are many professors who contributed to my success, but the first I really made a connection with was Dr. Scott. It was in his class that I knew I wanted to focus on American history. Dr. Scott has a way of taking our nation’s earliest history and showing how it has affected who we are as Americans today.

My love for early American history, developed by Professor Scott, was quickly challenged by the passion that grew for 1920s–1940s America, fostered by Dr. Warren. Studying the historiography of the Sacco-Vanzetti case was the most fascinating undertaking of my studies thus far.

Being a person who tries to regret very little in my life, it means a lot when I say that I regret something, and my biggest regret as a History major is that I never found time to work with Professor Wintermute on his World War II project. I believe that oral histories are invaluable and need to be collected, and that what he is accomplishing is as honorable as the service those men rendered our country.

There were many other faculty and courses that helped turn me into the student I am today, and I thank them all. Each and every one of them was responsible for not only cultivating my love of history, but ensuring my success.

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Alumnus Arnold Franco and Professors Frank Warren and Helen Gaudette, Franco Prize Luncheon, November 2009.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear History Alumni,

I hope everyone has had a successful year. In these times it may be more than one can ask for, but the hope is still there. From my perspective, despite budgetary problems, national attacks on teachers, and our own difficulties with a transition to a new CUNY computer system, the History Department has had another good year. Professor Amy Chazkel’s book is just out from Duke University Press. Professor Arnold Franklin’s book will be out in Spring 2012. And four other members (Professors Katherine Antonova, Elissa Bemporad, Kristina Richardson, and Peter Vellon) have had their books accepted. Professor Satadru Sen will be publishing a revised collection of his essays, and others will have book proposals out over the summer. We also have a strong teaching department that continues to attract students, including many of the strongest academically. We have just had our Honors Party, and there were more honors students than there have ever been.

One big change in the department was the retirement of our long-time secretary, Francine Kapchan. After twenty-five years, Francine retired in November, an occasion marked by a wonderfully warm retirement luncheon. Francine’s greatest strength was in assuring that we were a student-friendly department. Luckily, Marilyn Harris, a rock of strength and dedication, is still with us to main-

tain this tradition. And doubly luckily, Francine’s replacement, Alex Vickery, is also student friendly and, in addition, brings to the department his excellent computer skills.

Another change for next year is the retirement of Professor Edgar McManus. Ed successfully resisted my efforts to say something about his retirement at the Honors Party, but he can’t prevent me from saying some words in print. I have been chair for a long time, stretching back to the 1990s. For every professor, I have received at least one student complaint—except for Ed McManus. I am sure there must be one of Ed’s students who was disgruntled about his or her grade. But not one crossed the entrance to my office to register unhappiness. I take this to mean that there has been unanimous approval of the manner in which Ed McManus has taught his Constitutional History courses over the years. Students have appreciated his knowledge, the clarity of his lectures, and his dry, sardonic humor.

I will miss these qualities, too, but I will also miss—because there are so few of us left who date back to the 1960s—the joint reminiscences of past professors (with all their quirks) and the sometimes crazy episodes that took place in Powdermaker Hall. In those early years, Ed and I were not always on the same political side, but I always appreciated that whatever our differences, it was never personal and we both had the abil-

ity to laugh at life. And I certainly have appreciated his support over my terms as chair.

Although news of some of our retired professors is lacking, I do keep in touch with several. Ralph Della Cava came out this year to lunch with Francine, Marilyn, and me. Jon Peterson stops in occasionally. I see Vivian Gruder several times a year and, in between times, she peppers me with e-mails to help restore justice to the economy. Michael Wreszin remains my closest friend and, though I don’t see him as often as I would like, his presence is always there, especially when I experience or read about bureaucracy stultifying humanity.

I appreciated and enjoyed your responses to my reminiscing about my first year at Queens in last year’s *Alumni News*. I am printing a response from alumnus Gustav Person, who was led to remember his own experience. Also in this issue you will find short pieces by our three new professors, although Carol Giardina is really not new; she just has a full-time appointment now. There are also short pieces by three of this year’s graduates. These pieces demonstrate the variety of experiences and backgrounds of our student body. One is by a former high school dropout. Another is by an ex-policeman. And a third is by someone who has dedicated her life to the struggle for human rights. Their pieces also demonstrate the fine interaction that occurs between faculty and students. Jenn, Brian, and William are among the many who inspire us to keep teaching, and I think we have inspired them in their intellectual and personal development.

Frank Warren

REMEMBERING

In the late 1960s, I was a somewhat unusual student in the History Department at Queens College: a military historian. Fortunately, two of my favorite professors, Vivian Gruder and Sol Lutnick, allowed me to further my own interests and study in this area. Both taught on the top floor of the old Powdermaker Hall building, in the classrooms by the departmental office.

After graduating in 1969, I went off to serve in the Army for three years, and



Franco Prize winner Michael Akis, alumnus Arnold Franco, and runners up Jessica Sanchez and Brian Smith, Franco Prize Luncheon, November 2009.

then returned to undertake employment with the New York State Civil Service, along with many other Queens College graduates. My work with the Division of Parole was unrelated to history, but I always promised myself that I would actively work in a history-related field upon retirement.

In the meantime, in the autumn of 1990 I returned to graduate school at Queens College to obtain an M.A. in History. I had just arrived after a six-week tour of duty at the Pentagon, having begun to write a history of the role of the National Guard in Operation Desert Shield/Storm. My first interaction with the faculty was an interview with Professor Frank Merli, the graduate advisor. This encounter expanded over the next three years into lots of course work and advisement. Professor Merli always challenged his students and set high standards, and he taught with a great measure of wit and insight. He considerably broadened my appreciation for the role of diplomacy in American history. It was my pleasure a few years later to write a

very favorable recommendation when he was being considered for a full professorship.

Graduate studies in the History Department were certainly a challenge. Professor Jay Kinsbruner required a full-length book review every week in his 13-week Historiography course. No one came out of that course without being able to write coherently and succinctly. I was able to take two courses with Professor David Syrett (one at the Graduate Center of CUNY in midtown Manhattan), which enlarged my interests in military history. He also set high standards, and I'm sure that numbers of his previously uninitiated students came away with a much greater appreciation of the role of civil/military relations in society. Professor Jay Gordon taught a memorable course on the Era of the World Wars. It impressed me that he could always expound considerably on very detailed subjects without any notes whatsoever. Finally, I took two courses in Independent Readings with Professor Stanley Hirshhorn, who also served as my graduate thesis advi-

sor. Dr. Hirshhorn allowed me great latitude in researching subjects of my own interest, and we spent many enjoyable hours over coffee in his office on Tuesday afternoons discussing not only my seminar or thesis topics, but also the military biography books on William T. Sherman and George S. Patton that he was in the process of writing. It saddened me greatly to learn of his death a few years later.

I must have impressed some of the faculty, because Professor Jon Peterson, the department chairman, selected me to serve as an adjunct professor, teaching two undergraduate courses on history to students at Con Edison. I even filled in for Professor Frank Warren one semester—although most of that work involved showing a film every week to his class on the American Labor Movement.

Graduate studies in history prepared me very well. When I retired from civil service in 2002, I obtained employment as the Installation Historian at Fort Belvoir in northern Virginia. Previous service in the U.S. Army and the New York Army National Guard plus my M.A. from Queens College gave me the edge in beating out all the other applicants. At Fort Belvoir, I currently present briefings and classes, continue to research and write the history of this notable and venerable Army post, and conduct historical Staff Rides to the numerous Civil War battlefields in the area. I couldn't have asked for more.

Gustav J. Person

disclosure: not all of what follows was “first year.” I have already been an adjunct, a visiting professor, and a substitute assistant here.)

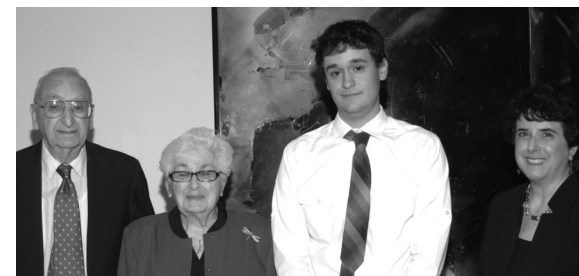
Class is about to start. It's Contemporary U.S. History: 1945 to the Present, and we are up to the movements of the 1960s. Panelists take their seats in the front of the room. Professor Warren, Emeritus Professor Michael Wreszin, and Queens alumnus Barry Goldberg (in the sixties, a student activist) offer reflections on campus protest. Students can barely believe that their chair, Professor Warren, the grey-haired Professor Wreszin, and Barry Goldberg, now a professor at Fordham, were a part of the demonstrations. In awe, they question Professor Warren about his leadership in the 1969 Counter Commencement Ceremony that brought Dr. Spock to campus to deliver an antiwar graduation address. Professor Wreszin fumes at the questioners for the seeming apathy of today's students. The video camera records the event for the College Archival Collections

while I, beaming, gratefully witness the complex, vibrant, intergenerational exchange among history makers, teachers, and students as it unfolds in Powdermaker 158.

U.S. Labor History since World War I. Students switch on a PowerPoint presentation of their research on the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which is now a part of the merger between the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE), called UNITE HERE. One of the presenters, a young Latina student, explains the high points of immigrant organizing in New York City. Suddenly loud talk erupts in the back of the class and two men walk down the center aisle of the room. One of them is the presenting student's father, a fast-food worker. With him is an organizer for UNITE HERE who has just signed him up. The student proudly introduces them. Her father, an undocumented immigrant, and the organizer, share experiences with the class. History-as-past joins history in the making.

In addition to history, I teach Women's Studies courses and supervise its interns in community placements. I am an interdepartmental appointment, and therefore have the great good fortune to have another chair, Joyce Warren, Chair of Women's Studies and Professor in the English Department.

Where else could I work, I have often thought, where I would be paid for the opportunity to meet people I admire as much as those whom I have helped recruit for the annual Virginia Frese Palmer Women's History Month conference? One of them, Rita Schwerner Bender, was a pioneer of the Southern civil rights movement. Ms Bender, a worker for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was married to Michael Schwerner, who, along with coworkers James Chaney and then Queens College student Andrew Goodman, was murdered for civil rights work in Mississippi in 1964. Our campus clock tower is dedicated



Elmer and Flora Beberfall, Beberfall Prize winner Cory Tischbein, and Susan Beberfall, History Awards Ceremony, May 2010.

in their honor. Other civil rights organizers I helped recruit for the conference were Queens alumnae Dottie Zellner, editor of the then left-oriented student newspaper, *The Crown*, and Lucy Komisar, a history major who was editor of the *Mississippi Free Press*, in Jackson, from 1962 to 1963.

I am privileged to have helped bring Lilly Ledbetter to campus. She fought a case for equal pay for equal work all the way to the Supreme Court in 2007, and she was instrumental in creation and passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the first piece of legislation signed into law when President Obama took office in January 2009.

As for my own background, I was born and raised in our diverse borough of Queens in a milieu not unlike that of many of our students. I am the daughter of working-class Italian Americans for whom high school graduation was an achievement. My father often had reason to despair over whether I would prove to be “college material,” as he put it. In this spirit, *mille grazie* to my chairs, Frank and Joyce Warren, for their support for my first book, *Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953–1970*, which came out last spring. My personal journey parallels our students' and, for me, supports confidence and investment in them.

Evan M. Daniel

To say I was excited when I received the telephone call informing me I had received a tenure-track position in the Department of History would be a gross understatement. I was ecstatic. Teaching courses on radical political movements and revolutions at a prestigious public university like Queens College is a dream come true.

I arrived with four years of teaching experience at various colleges and universities in New York City, including at CUNY. The CUNY colleges always held a special appeal for me because they truly reflect the diversity of the city's population. I was hired as a joint appoint-



Professor Bobby Wintermute, History Awards Ceremony, May 2010.

ment in the Department of History and the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) Program.

The History Department provides an opportunity for new faculty to design courses according to their research interests and expertise. Hence, during the fall I taught a course on empire, war, and revolution. The reading was a stretch for some, but class discussion proved illuminating and lively. In particular, I recall intense discussions regarding the motivations of combatants in the Spanish Civil War. During that portion of the class, students also visited the International Center for Photography, where they wrote descriptions of five Spanish Civil War photos of their choice and thereby had an opportunity to interact with and analyze primary sources on their own.

The History Department is incredibly supportive in navigating all the bureaucratic hurdles one faces as a new employee. My colleagues are equally generous, offering their advice on everything from tenure to where to find good dim-sum. I could not ask for a more collegial scholarly and work environment.

The SEEK Program was created to provide comprehensive academic support to assist capable students who otherwise might not be able to attend college due to their educational and financial circumstances. They are what used to be known in a less politically correct age as “remedial students” or students from “challenged backgrounds.” However, these sorts of generalization do not do justice to the diversity of the students.

Having taught a SEEK summer course at Baruch College, I had some inkling of what the position would entail in terms of working with students who had difficulty writing at a college level, who doubted their ability to express themselves in a concise and clear manner, and who were challenged by college-level reading. However, I was not prepared for the growth and development I would see in my students after following their progress over the course of a year.

In many cases, students who started the program in the fall showed marked improvements by the spring—in areas ranging from academic writing and public speaking to their willingness to think critically about the assigned writing. I would like to think most of this is due to the hard work of the faculty, but recognize that a large measure of the support that SEEK students receive is from their counselors, SI's, tutors, and other staff. Without their help and assistance, these students would have great difficulty achieving academic success.

MY FIRST YEAR AT QC

Aaron Freundschuh

Given the opportunity to share my first impressions of Queens College, I think of our staff, whose importance is obvious from the moment one arrives on campus as a new hire. Marilyn, Francine, Alex, and the student office aides have made my transition easy. They've processed piles of paperwork, patiently answered questions, kept me abreast of deadlines, received numerous book orders, assisted with CUNYFirst, and proctored makeup exams. (On occasion, they've even had to separate me and the departmental photocopying machine before things turned ugly.)

My new colleagues have welcomed me warmly. Discovering their research interests and teaching methods has been a real highlight of the past months, and I look forward to much more collaboration with them. Frank has been a wise and helpful guide.

My first encounters with the students at Queens have been overwhelmingly

encouraging. There are some fantastic students currently majoring or intending to major in history; I hope to meet them again in future courses. Moreover, I'm pleasantly surprised by the degree of student interest in French history—more than 50 students registered for a course on the French Revolution this spring—and I hope to maintain momentum next fall in a colloquium on the history of Paris.

Carol Giardina

What a desirable dilemma—I am perplexed at how to open this first-year impression with the best of the best of the all-around delightful experience of being on the History faculty at Queens College. Should I begin with our brave and bright-eyed students; the peerless congeniality of the department; the persistent encouragement/nudging of our chair, Frank Warren, without whom my book might never have made it beyond my hard drive? I will go with a few snapshots of my life and times at Queens. (Full