Turkey: The Crossroads of Civilization
Travel with Associate Professor of Political Science Andrew Davison and also witness a total solar eclipse.
March 25 - April 1

2005 Trips

Under the Tuscan Sun
A Journey through Italy with Professor of Art Nicholas Adams
October 15 - 22

Ancient Lost Cities
Libya & Tunisia with Professor of Art Eve D’Ambra
October 30 - November 11 (SOLD OUT)
Second departure added: November 20 - December 1

Maya & Colonial Treasures of the Yucatan
with Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies Colleen Cohen
February 15 - 21

The Netherlands & Belgium
A River Cruise, Flemish Landscapes & Family Collections
April 19 - 29

Machu Picchu & Manu
with Professor of Anthropology Lucy Johnson
June 8 - 18

2006 Trips

A Journey to India
Majesty of the Maharajas with Professor Emeritus of Political Science Glen Johnson
January 3 - 16 (SOLD OUT)
Second departure added: January 18 - 31

Waterways of Russia
with Professor of Russian Alex Klimoff
July 26 - August 6

Wine Country
Sonoma Valley, California with Professor of Physics Mort Tavel
August

Galápagos Family Trip
with Professor of Geology Jill Schneiderman
August 11 - 20

Italy’s Magnificent Lake District
with Associate Professor of Music Brian Mann
September 12 - 20

Impressions of a Changing China
Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, and the Yangtze River with Associate Professor of Geography Yu Zhou
October 9 - 23

Elizabeth Bishop’s Brazil
with Professor of English Barbara Page
October 13 - 22

Currents of Culture
An Expedition to Ancient Centers of Culture by Private Jet
October 26 - November 17

For more information, contact AAVC Program Coordinator Kathy Knauss at 800.546.7282 or kaknauss@vassar.edu, or visit www.aavc.vassar.edu.
features

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On May 22nd Vassar’s largest class graduated. Intermittent showers didn’t dampen the celebratory mood as the class of 2005 listened to commencement speaker and Vassar father Tom Hanks.
photography by Will Faller

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For some, this summer’s launch of the space shuttle Discovery has been controversial. Physicist and College of the Holy Cross Professor Matthew Koss ’83 shares his views on manned space flight.
by Sarah O’Brien Mackey ’89

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by Micah Buis ’02

18 Reunion 2005
Under sunny skies, alumnae/i, family, and friends made themselves at home once again on Vassar’s campus.
photography by Will Faller

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on the cover  Illustrations of the space shuttle Discovery launch of 1999, the lunar module Eagle from the Apollo 11 mission, July 1969, and the Mars Rover 1 in February 2003
MISSION STATEMENT
Vassar, the Alumnae/i Quarterly is to keep alumnae/i in touch with the living, working Vassar so that even the most distant alumnae/i know of the changes in equipment, in curriculum, in regulations, in student thought and life, and may thus realize that the college is not static but progressive, meeting new problems as human beings do, and that on its success in solving them depends its value to the coming generations. Its mission is also to give to alumnae/i a meeting place in thought, a place where we may learn of each other’s interests, opinions, and achievements, and through them of the world’s work and thought, and so judge of the dynamic value of the Vassar spirit.
1975, reaffirmed 1992

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Articles reflect the opinions of the writers and not those of the magazine, AAVC, or Vassar College.

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Vassar's Presidential Search Committee has placed the following announcement in national newspapers and various publications specific to higher education. For more information about the search for Vassar College's 10th President, please visit http://www.vassar.edu/president/search.

PRESIDENT
VASSAR COLLEGE

Vassar College, a leader in innovation in liberal arts education, announces the search for its tenth President, who will succeed Frances D. Ferguson, who has led the College with distinction during the past two decades and who has announced her retirement at the end of the 2005-2006 academic year.

Founded in 1861, Vassar College is a residential, undergraduate coeducational institution, with approximately 2,400 students and 245 faculty members. For more information about Vassar College, consult its website at http://www.vassar.edu.

The review of credentials will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. Applications and nominations should be directed, in confidence, preferably electronically and before September 15, 2005, to:

William A. Flapinger, Chair
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We are being assisted in this search by Shelly Weiss Storbeck, Managing Director, A.T. Kearney Executive Search. 333 John Carlyle Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; 703-739-4513 (phone); 703-518-1373 (fax); shelly.storbeck@es.akearney.com.

Vassar College is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and is strongly and actively committed to diversity within its community. Applications from members of historically underrepresented groups are especially encouraged.

A new Vassar Website (http://innovators.vassar.edu) celebrates Vassar's pioneering spirit by telling the stories of Vassar innovators, movers and shakers, inventors, founders, and discoverers. Visitors to the site also can participate in this ongoing project by submitting nominations online.

In Memoriam

It is with immense sorrow that I inform the Vassar community that Professor Emerita of French Ilse Hempel Lippschutz died in her sleep on June 22, 2005. Ilse embodied all that each of us strives to be. Devoted to her family and profession, she leaves behind Lewis, her husband and life partner, their children Elizabeth ’76, Marion ’80, Marc, and Margaret and their families, and innumerable friends throughout the world.

When I started my career, it was for her that I returned to Vassar. She had been my teacher and now I had the opportunity to continue to learn from her but this time as a colleague. She was the ideal teacher and mentor.

Ilse was a brilliant scholar, an eminently fair chairman, and a tireless teacher. From the outset, she
advised me not to enter this profession unless I could live without guilt. “You will never feel you have done enough for your family, students, and colleagues. You will always have to juggle.” Late at night, Ilse returned to Chicago Hall to write letters of recommendation, lengthy comments on students’ papers, and departmental correspondence.

Thirty minutes before each class, she would hang up a “Do Not Disturb” sign: she was busy putting finishing touches on a lecture. Otherwise, students and colleagues knew they could disturb her, and she would give the impression it was no disturbance at all.

Ilse juggled well. Over and over again, she broke new ground in her scholarship on French literature and European art history. She lectured at the Met and the Prado, but always remained loyal to Vassar. Fluent in four languages, she opened her home to foreign visitors, new faculty members, students in need of a break from dorm life, and French department seniors eager for a year-end celebration. She was a life force, and those of us who knew her will continue, as best we can, to be worthy of her example.

**CYNTHIA B. KERR ’72**
Vassar Professor of French
Poughkeepsie, New York

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**ISE LIPOSTZCHT WAS WELL KNOWN**

**NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

**LIPSCHTZ WAS WELL KNOWN**

**FOR HER INTELLECTUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS.**

One of her favorite memories of Ilse concerns neither of these accomplishments. Ilse and Lewis and their four children lived around the corner from us, and I greatly valued her advice on child raising. When my three-year-old son dropped a glass and gashed his foot, who did I call for help but Ilse? Two minutes later, the Lipschutz car drove up. Wrapping a dish towel around my son’s wound to stanch the blood, I climbed into the front seat next to Ilse and started giving her directions to the emergency room. She stopped me with a laugh. “This car can find the way on its own.” I still marvel at how, with quick wit and common sense, she did it all: teacher, scholar, wife, mother.

**NANCY WILLARD**

**VASSAR LECTURER IN ENGLISH**

**POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK**

**EDITOR’S NOTE: A MEMORIAL SERVICE IS PLANNED FOR LATE SEPTEMBER AT THE ALUMNAE HOUSE. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND, PLEASE CALL ELIZABETH LIPSCHTZ ’76 AT 773.871.6434. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A STORY OF LISET, CONTACT THE VQ.**

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**MISCELLANY NEWS**

**A FORMER EDITOR IN CHIEF, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EDITOR, AND CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF THE MISCALLANY NEWS (1995 – 99), I HAD MY SEX.**

She had me share my style of my life — how I was meant to be in this world, what I might do with my brains, what I might do with my hips. (Yes, she lent me her fashion magazines.)

This tiny woman, this incredible energetic whirl — surviving the virulent anti-Semitism of mid-century Europe, outlining four or five Harvard thesis directors — passionately engaged with the intersection of Spanish painting and French romanticism, training generations of Vassar students — in French — in style. Adieu, chère Ilse.

**JUDITH MILLER ’69**
New York, New York

**WILLARD IN IRAQ**

**AS USUAL I FOUND MANY VERY INTERESTING ARTICLES IN THE MOST RECENT VQ, ALL IN A WELL-DESIGNED PACKAGE.**

The most interesting, however, appeared in the Class Notes. Several recent alumni (John McCary ’98, Peter Snodgrass ’03, along with military wife Megan Melanson Cooke ’03) wrote in about their military service in Iraq. As participation on the battlefield itself in such numbers may be a new experience for Vassar, I would be very interested to learn more about those alumni, with the focus on Iraq, who have experienced warfare firsthand.

**STEVEN MILLER ’97**
Washington, DC

**EDITOR’S NOTE: THE VQ IS PLANNING A STORY ON ALUMNAAI WHO HAVE SERVED IN IRAQ IN MYRIAD CAPACITIES. IF YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE, PLEASE CONTACT THE VQ.**

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**CORRECTION**

**THE CORRECT TITLE OF LECTURER IN ENGLISH NANCY WILLARD’S NEW CHILDREN’S BOOK IS SWEEP DREAMS (LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY, 2005).**
It's a Picasso

When President Fergusson announced that she will retire at the end of this academic year, her close friend and supporter Virginia Herrick Deknatel '29 decided to honor her with a splendid gift to the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center — the major Cubist painting by Pablo Picasso, Glass, Guitar, Musical Score.

"This gift has immense personal meaning for me," said Fergusson. "Ginny Deknatel and her husband Fred, with whom I studied art at Harvard, together collected with brilliant eyes for quality and importance. Since I became president of Vassar in 1986, Ginny has been a kind, witty, and good friend to me and to the college, sharing generously her intelligence and savvy. I am so honored to have this magnificent work — which I have admired frequently and avidly in her home — here at Vassar."

The painting is the fourth Picasso to enter the art center's collection and the first at Vassar to represent the artist's Cubist period. A studio-bound still life, Glass, Guitar, Musical Score is an expression of the pastel-toned style of Cubism that Picasso practiced after the First World War. Serene and harmonious, the painting reflects Picasso's immersion in the high-society world of dance and theater, both through his marriage to ballet dancer Olga Koklova and through commissions for stage, costume, and curtain designs for various companies, notably Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

— Emery Bernhard
Multidisciplinary Collaboration

They call themselves “the bone gang,” and a glance around the anthropology lab tells you why. There are dozens of specimen boxes on the tables and shelves, and on the floor — carefully arranged on a sheet of canvas — are the skeletal remains of “Baby,” the sea otter fondly nicknamed and meticulously studied by biology majors Brittany Murray ’05 and Jillian Sprance ’05.

For three years, Murray and Sprance analyzed sea mammal bones with Professor of Anthropology Lucy Johnson (pictured) to study the diet and adaptations of the prehistoric hunter-gatherers living in the Aleutian Islands of coastal Alaska from 3,000 to 500 years ago.

By analyzing thousands of bones from an archaeological site in Alaska, Johnson and her students determined which species of mammal the Aleuts are as well as how they butchered them and even the ways they used the bones as tools. “Our work revealed that the prehistoric hunters we were studying had focused their efforts on sea otters,” Johnson says, “and we had to have a way to calculate this prey’s food value.”

That’s where Baby comes in. Officials in Alaska had confiscated the sea otter because it was illegally killed by a hunter. It ended up at Vassar after Johnson contacted colleagues in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ask if they had a sea otter she could study.

The bone gang doesn’t just operate out of the anthro lab. For the last three summers, Murray and Sprance participated in 10-week summer sessions through the Vassar Ford Scholars Program (funding collaborative scholarship with faculty) and the Undergraduate Research Summer Institute (URSI — where Vassar students work one-on-one with Vassar scientists doing original hands-on scientific research). They attended research conferences in Seattle and Washington, DC, and over spring break they returned to the Northwest to present the results of their nutrient analysis at the annual meeting of the Alaskan Anthropological Association in Anchorage.

Murray chose Vassar to study science in part because she wanted to really participate in hands-on research and “not just wash test tubes or put numbers into a computer.... Being a science major at Vassar has allowed me to get fantastic research experience and to interact with faculty on a meaningful level so that I could get the most out of my science classes.”

Sprance’s enlistment in the bone gang was a fluke. As a transfer student from Mount Holyoke, Sprance realized that she had requested the wrong courses two days before classes started for her first semester at Vassar. “I had to pick mostly new classes, and — while I was looking — happened to get an email that Lucy Johnson had sent out seeking student researchers interested in identifying mammal bones. Since I’ve always been fascinated by bones, I decided to take her ‘Function and Evolution of the Human Skeleton’ class, and I’ve been coming to ‘bone class’ ever since.”

Sprance says that Johnson has been her most influential professor. “Her willingness to involve students in research has truly transformed my experience here. There are so many opportunities to get involved with research in different sciences at Vassar. And biology here is not just a place full of narrow-minded pre-meds who only want to learn about vertebrate biochem or structure and physiology. There are professors here who work on things like bioinformatics, robotics, biomechanics, genetics, and microbiology, to name a few. Also, as Brittany and I can attest, there is ample opportunity to do in-depth study of a field outside of your major!”

— Emery Bernhard
**FALL LINEUP**

Women's volleyball and tennis begin their fall seasons as the heavyweights inside the Liberty League. The league, formerly known as UCAA, sponsors championships in 24 sports and includes institutions such as Clarkson, Hamilton, Hobart & William Smith, Skidmore, and RPI. Both teams have won an unprecedented four straight league championships and have the type of returning nucleus that will keep them in the title hunt for a fifth straight time. Now women's volleyball coach Jonathan Penn has six returning players, five of whom were starters last season. Penn's Lady Brewers capped off a sensational junior year by being named MVP of the Liberty League Tournament and selected First Team-All League. She is joined by fellow senior hitters Amber Gus, a Second Team league selection, and super sophomores, hitter/setter Ali Alkhilji, hitter/setter Carly Foley, and setter/oppper Amanda Howard.

Women's tennis coach Kathy Campbell welcomes back junior Debbie Sharman and Kelly Graham, two dominating players at first and second singles who are even more potent as the doubles pair that went 22-2 in 2004-05 and were named to the ITA All-America team. Last season, junior Anna Will had a terrific season playing third singles and the sophomore duo of Kelly Barnett and Elvia Kliman help form a formidable lineup that also looks to defend its New York State title. Prentiss Field will showcase not only some of the finest soccer and field hockey playing fields anywhere in the country, but three teams that are led by excellent coaches and have the talent to make some noise this fall.

Vassar's soccer coach Andy Jennings has a strong group of returning players, led by All Liberty League performer senior defensive back Nate Mandelsohn, junior midfielder Court Seinert, and sophomore defenders Rees Fox. The Brewers were the Liberty League champion in the fall field. Jennings shows that his team has been an impressive accomplishment in the Jason Whittaker era of the program. Jennings will be looking for senior Nick Huchard, who led the Brewers in goals last season. With the addition of two new recruits, the program is looking to break through this fall.

Vassar's field hockey team has a dozen returning players led by junior Jessica Wu, an All Liberty League field hockey performer. Wu has been a key part of the team since 1997 (New York State, ECAC), and was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. On the tennis courts, longtime men's coach Roman Cauda led VC to the league title and was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. The team followed up that season with another successful campaign, winning the five-straight title.

Vassar's all-sports program, the Vassar Women's and Men's Sports Council, has been a key part of the school's success in recent years. The council is responsible for organizing many of the events that take place on campus, including the annual sports banquet and the annual awards ceremony. The council is also responsible for raising funds for the school's athletic programs.

**NEW COACHES JOIN STAFF**

Four new coaches join the athletics staff this year. Former coach Rich McGowan '99 returns to the All-American roster. McGowan was named the Liberty League Player of the Year. The All-Amercians' records were for single season batting average: .444, at bats 144, runs 49, hits 40, doubles 18, RBIs 45, and career marks in doubles (33). McGowan's Steve Gilhool '99 finished his impressive career on a high note. Gilhool, who carried a triple major of physics, Japanese, and anthropology, was named a Division II Academic All-American by ESPN the Magazine and CASLFA, the organization of the nation's college sports information directors. McGowan was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. On the tennis courts, longtime men's coach Roman Cauda led VC to the league title and was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. The team followed up that season with another successful campaign, winning the five-straight title.

The Men's sports program has been a key part of the school's success in recent years. The program is responsible for organizing many of the events that take place on campus, including the annual sports banquet and the annual awards ceremony. The program is also responsible for raising funds for the school's athletic programs.

**Syllabus**

History 384: Islam, Social Movements, and the West

Assistant Professor Joshua Schreier

**Course Objective**

This class explores power and ideology in the production of knowledge. Students will trace how Middle Eastern history has been understood in the last century and in the future, along with methods for finding, recording, and synthesizing historical information. In the first part of the course, students read a number of important historical texts in an effort to contextualize and understand the birth and development of Orientalism and its intellectual legacies. The second part of the course will cover a selection of theoretical and historical studies from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s that have reimagined the "genders" of the discipline of Orientalism into double, while establishing the field of postcolonial studies. The final part takes a more focused approach to questions of Middle Eastern history, allowing the class to evaluate how (or if) recent scholarship on Islam and the Middle East has benefited from these theoretical debates.

**Recommended Reading**

Cultural Consequences: Contending Visions of the Middle East: From Ethnocentrism to Postcolonialism - A Very Short Introduction by Robert Young

Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Postcolonial Predicament, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon by Elizabeth Thompson

Culture and Imperialism by Edward Said

Middling Renaissance in the Arab Middle East by James Jankowski and Israel Gerhardi

**Vassar Athletics**

Summer is at its close, which for Vassar student athletes and their coaches means the slate from last year has been wiped clean. For the team, this is time for players to step off the coaches’ Worth of mental and physical training. This is also time for off-senior's worth of mental and physical training. This is also time for getting ready to compete on a volleyball court, soccer field, hockey rink, rugby field, cross-country trails, and golf courses.

Bruce Gillman, a noted college football coach, instructor, and referee, has been named head coach of the men's and women's fencing teams. He has been an assistant coach at Sacred Heart University, owner and chief instructor at the Fencing Center of Long Island, and a longtime referee examiner for the USA Fencing Officials Commission. Gillman is a top official on the collegiate and scholastic level who has worked NCAA and ECAC Championships.

**RECAP**

After a season that saw him single-handedly rewrite the Vassar record book, Krisips Alkins '05 was named the Liberty League Player of the Year. Alkins' records were for single season batting average: .444, at bats 144, runs 49, hits 40, doubles 18, RBIs 45, and career marks in doubles (33). Volleyball's Steve Gilhool '99 finished his impressive career on a high note. Gilhool, who carried a triple major of physics, Japanese, and anthropology, was named a Division II Academic All-American by ESPN the Magazine and CASLFA, the organization of the nation's college sports information directors. McGowan was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. On the tennis courts, longtime men's coach Roman Cauda led VC to the league title and was named Liberty League Coach of the Year. The team followed up that season with another successful campaign, winning the five-straight title.

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In a commencement address that ranged from highway gridlock to The Beatles to global politics, actor and Vassar father Tom Hanks continually referenced the vast changes that a small number of people can effect and exhorted the graduating class to be among the people that make those changes.
"A simple choice will make a jaw-dropping difference to our world...
if merely four people out of a hundred can make gridlock go away by choosing not to use their car, imagine the other changes that can be wrought just by four of us — four of you — out of a hundred."

"Help publicly. Help privately. Help in your actions by recycling and conserving and protecting, but help also in your attitude. Help make sense where sense has gone missing. Help bring reason and respect to discourse and debate. Help science to solve and faith to soothe. Help law bring justice, until justice is commonplace. Help and you will abolish apathy — the void that is so quickly filled by ignorance and evil.

"Life outside of college is just like life in it: one nutty thing after another, some of them horrible, but all interspersed with enough beauty and goodness to keep you going. That's your job, to keep going. Your duty is to help — without ceasing. The art you create can glorify it. The science you pursue can prove its value. The law you practice can pass on its benefits. The faith you embrace will make it the earthly manifestation of your God." — Tom Hanks, 2005 commencement speaker

To read Hanks' and President Fergusson's commencement remarks, visit www.vassar.edu/commencement.
Matthew Koss '83 takes on NASA — and cancer

Lying on his bed, hobbled by a backache that had been nagging him for months, Matthew B. Koss '83 turned on the TV just in time to hear the devastating news: the space shuttle Columbia had broken up somewhere in the skies over Texas — just 40 miles from Mission Control at Johnson Space Center and only 15 minutes from its scheduled landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. All seven astronauts aboard had died.

The news hit Koss hard. A condensed-matter physicist, he had participated in three previous Columbia missions, conducting research experiments on the fundamentals of how liquids turn into solids. Koss knew the Columbia; he knew its capacity for scientific experiment; he knew the intense bonds that formed among the scientists on the ground, like himself, and the astronauts in orbit; and he knew one of those astronauts, Kalpana Chawla, who had been aboard the doomed flight. "In a curious way," he said, "I felt that the Columbia was my shuttle."

At the mercy of his back, Koss remained on the bed, watching news reports all day. As the hours went by, he began to feel a growing dread. The Columbia had been a dedicated science mission, the very same kind of mission on which his own experiments had been performed, and the kind that had long given him pause about the risks they posed to the astronauts who flew them. He could not help turning a single question over and over in his mind: was science to blame for the shuttle disaster?

GO OR NO-GO?

Now an associate professor of physics at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, Koss first participated in a shuttle mission in 1994 as a research scientist at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. “The experience was both thrilling and painful,” he recalled. “Watching the launch was almost surreal. Everyone obeys what is called a ‘loop protocol,’ in which the flight director asks all of the launch critical stations, ‘Go or no-go?’ To be there, to listen to them say ‘Go!’ one after the other, was incredibly exciting. Once the shuttle launched, however, it hit me that in 12 hours I would find out if the experiment I had been working on for four years, that was costing millions of dollars, would actually succeed. That was painful.”

Koss’ projects were classified as “payload” experiments. (Mounted in the payload bay — the wide open space in the back of the shuttle — payload experiments are controlled by scientists on the ground, via computer.) During the nine days the shuttle was in orbit, he and his colleagues would analyze the data they received at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Not wanting to waste an hour, they would work around the clock, often forgoing sleep all together. They would also talk amongst themselves about the extraordinary risks the astronauts took to bring their experiments into space. “We were always thinking about the astronauts. They were not strangers. In fact, they were the ones who were telling the American public what we were doing.”

Even as his own experiments yielded new understanding, Koss began to feel uneasy with the way science was used to justify sending astronauts into space. “The truth is that scientists are like hitchhikers on missions. NASA is not taking the trip for us — they would certainly be flying without us. But we make a nice way to sell the program. If you look closely, however, you’ll see that while NASA’s manned program has dominated the funding, the unmanned program has dominated discovery with projects like the rover mission to Mars, the Hubble Space Telescope, and the Cassini mission to Saturn and Titan, and the Deep Impact Encounter with the comet Tempel 1.”

A TERRIFYING DIAGNOSIS

In the days following the Columbia disaster, Koss continued to follow the news coverage closely. He also found that the pain in his back was growing steadily worse. On Valentine’s Day 2003, Koss was working in his office at Holy Cross when he realized that he could not stand up from his desk. His back had given out. Koss spent the night in the emergency room of a local hospital, where a CAT scan revealed a suspicious growth. Rushed to Massachusetts General Hospital, Koss received a terrifying diagnosis: he had multiple myeloma, an incurable cancer of the blood and bone marrow. Koss’ cancer was so close to his spine that his doctors recommended an immediate round of radiation treatments. With his wife Betsy, daughter Frederica, and many friends, family members, and colleagues by his side, Koss spent the next two weeks at the hospital.

Sadly, Koss was no stranger to cancer. The disease had claimed the lives of his father, who had died a decade earlier, and his sister, who had lost a battle with ovarian cancer at the age of 39. Still, he spent the first week in the hospital in a state of shock. “As I was lying in bed, dealing with my own mortality, I also began thinking more and more about the Columbia, of the seven people who died aboard that mission, and their families. I decided that I wanted to help set the record straight about the purpose of these missions and lay out the risks. And I wanted to do it now.”

While undergoing his first round of radiation, Koss began writing an op-ed piece in his head, a welcome distraction from the discomfort and anxiety of the treatment. He also heard from several Vassar friends and classmates, including Betty Anderson Dworschak ’82, his faithful term-paper editor during their college days. “When I told Betty about my idea for an editorial, she said, ‘Write it! And then send it to me for comments.’ For a moment, it was like we were back at Vassar again.”

Over the next two months, between rounds of painkillers, treatments, and research, Koss wrote his editorial and collaborated with Dworschak on revisions. He submitted it to the New York Times the day before he returned to the hospital to undergo his most aggressive form of treatment — a massive round of chemotherapy followed by a stem-cell transplant.

“I didn’t have any connections to the Times, so I simply sent it using their electronic submission form. I had little expectation that it would be published.” The very next day, as he was lying in his hospital bed, Koss received a message from one of the students in his lab at Holy Cross, saying “someone from the New York Times was trying to get in touch with me.”

The Times wanted Koss’ piece, but asked him to shorten it by half. Exhausted from the chemotherapy, he worked on the article for 15 minutes at a time over the next week, letting the Times editors know that he was in the hospital but not giving any hint as to the severity of his condition. The editorial, “How Science Brought Down the Shuttle,” was published the following Sunday, June 29, 2003.

In it, Koss argued that the vast majority of scientific experiments conducted in orbit, including his own, did not require astronauts and in most cases they could be performed more safely and effectively by remote control from the ground. He urged NASA to come clean with the American public and to stop lying science-based missions with the more romantic notion of astronauts exploring space. “If NASA is not able to convince the public of the importance of science in orbit without astronaut involvement, then so be it,” he wrote. “At least America’s refusal to support science would be honest, would not needlessly endanger human lives, or compromise the integrity of science and scientists... We need to separate the goal of scientific experimentation from the desire for space exploration. I hope the unfortunate deaths of the Columbia astronauts will sever forever the false link that has been created between the two.” Koss also wrote openly about the heartbreak and personal responsibility he felt for the loss of Columbia’s crew.

Response to Koss’ editorial was immediate and passionate on all sides. He heard from a number of scientists who agreed with his argument and many NASA officials who were angered by
his expression of personal culpability. Requests for interviews flooded in, and Koss conducted those he could from his hospital bed. One of Koss’ most surprising audiences was his very own doctors, who had no idea he had been writing at all.

“When the piece came out, I really surprised my doctors. It was definitely the first time anyone had written an op-ed piece during a stem-cell transplant! It helped them to deal with me as a person with an outside life and career, not just as a patient who looks terrible and has lost all his hair.”

The editorial also caught the attention of U.S. Representative Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), chairman of the House Science Committee, who asked Koss to come to Washington, DC, to testify before the committee during its hearing on “The Future of Human Space Flight.”

SAYING HIS PIECE

Still battling the effects of chemotherapy, Koss went down to Washington for the hearing. One of five expert witnesses, who included the current NASA chief Michael Griffin, Koss described the experience of testifying as “one of the most pleasant of his life.” It certainly got off to a rousing start when a representative asked Koss if it was true that he was a Red Sox fan. Koss answered in the affirmative, prompting chairman Boehlert, a Yankee fan, to bang his gavel in mock indignation and declare, “The gentleman’s time has expired.”

Koss shared with the committee his view that the cost of using astronauts to perform science experiments in space was too high both in terms of dollars spent and lives lost. “My message, though not a popular one, was heard,” he said. “I had no illusion that it was going to win the day, but I felt like I had to do it. I really believe that part of my determination to testify came from the freedom I experienced at Vassar to express my views. I wasn’t afraid that it would ruin my career.”

Aided by Vassar in spirit, Koss was also supported by Vassar in person as Maren Hesla ’82, a campaign consultant who lived in nearby Alexandria, Virginia, sat in the audience. In her email account to several classmates and friends she wrote, “Matt was 30 years younger than the next youngest witness. Everyone around me was assuming that he was some sort of genius prodigy. He was both funny and honest — and he’ll almost certainly never be invited back. (On at least one occasion, he answered, ‘I don’t know.’ You never hear that around here). Bottom line is that Matt was incredibly smart and relaxed and funny. He did Vassar proud. Next time he testifies, we should have a party and show up in funny hats.”

HOPE, AND CONCERNS, FOR THE FUTURE

Today, Koss continues to advocate for a smaller manned program as well as a commitment to basic science research that can be performed in unmanned spacecrafts. “There are experiments I’ve worked on developing that need flying but have been grounded along with all shuttle activity for more than two years,” he said. “We need to keep science in space so the skill set doesn’t disappear. If NASA stops doing things like basic physics altogether, then the best ideas have no place to go.”

Hubble Telescope taken by space shuttle Discovery, 1997

He also has kept his eye on NASA’s Return to Flight program, which began with the somewhat troubled launch of Discovery in July 2005. While the Discovery experienced the same foam debris problems that caused the Columbia accident, the shuttle returned home safely. “With the launch of Discovery, NASA has shown that it will not repeat the proximate mistake that doomed the Columbia,” wrote Koss in a Boston Globe editorial titled “NASA’s Failure of Vision,” published August 2, 2005. “Unfortunately, this scenario also shows that we as a space-faring nation have not learned enough from the Columbia accident.... The great shame with all the hoopla surrounding the ‘return to flight’ and the inherent risk is that much science has already been cancelled in favor of far riskier moon-Mars missions, whose intent and rewards are not sufficiently envisioned or articulated.”

Koss stresses that while he believes the manned space program at NASA remains out of balance, he understands the human impulse for space exploration. He is not, however, a believer in the near-term future of space tourism, a burgeoning industry led by billionaire entrepreneurs like Richard Branson, who are championing the commercialization of space. “I love the enthusiasm and creativity of organizations like Mars Society, but their ambitions are not realistic. They have many wonderful ideas, but once you analyze the costs, their plans are exposed. I guess my current response is still: build it, prove it, show it. The burden of proof is going to be on those who make the fantastic claims.”

As for his illness, Koss employs a gallows humor to keep his spirits up (“I tell people I never should have pursued a terminal degree”), but knows there may be difficult days ahead. The median life expectancy for those who have multiple myeloma is only three to five years, but Koss is responding well to the stem-cell treatments and visits an oncologist every month to see if the cancer has returned, or if there are any new avenues to pursue in delaying its return. “Since there is no cure for multiple myeloma, my goal is to be as healthy, happy, and productive as I can until the day the cancer returns.

“Until then, I will keep talking about what I think the future of NASA should be — even though it’s become starkly clear that it’s a future that may not include me. But I’m really asking everyone else to do the same, to look at NASA and a future that they won’t be able to participate in either, be it one hundred or even one thousand years from now.”

Sarah O’Brien Mackey ’89 is a freelance writer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Between Vassar and Holy Cross, Dr. Koss earned his Ph.D. from Tufts University in experimental condensed matter physics. Besides being involved in the publication of over 50 articles, Koss is an active member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the American Association of Physics Teachers, and Sigma Xi. He also develops and teaches science outreach programs for elementary schools.
Vassar's quad dormitories—Davison, Raymond, Lathrop, and Strong—appear so externally similar that Vassar students themselves sometimes have a difficult time remembering exactly which is which. Most alumnae/i can remember at least one disorienting moment standing in the shadows of these imposing, red-brick buildings, when reciting "Dear Robert Louis Stevenson," the mnemonic device created to help keep the names and locations in order, might have come in handy. For those attending Vassar after 1969, however, one of these dorms, Strong House, isn't nearly as easy to mix up. Designated as an all-female dorm at the beginning of coeducation, Strong maintains this distinction today. And on a campus where housing with coeducational corridors and bathrooms is much more typical—and popular—Strong's women nonetheless often have particular memories of why they chose, or stayed in, the dorm.

Take Cecilia (Chechi) Mendez Hodes '72, for example. After attending coeducational schools all of her life, Mendez Hodes wanted specifically to attend a women's college, recognized at the time for their academic excellence, she remembered, and applied early decision to Vassar. "I think that I became aware that Vassar would become coeducational only after it was too late to apply elsewhere, and in any case, I thought that having applied early decision and been accepted, I could not renge," she said. Happily, though, she enrolled, "not expecting that [her] life would be affected very much by the addition of men to the school in the first years of the change."
Mendez Hodes spent her freshman year living in Raymond House. But men began to arrive at Vassar in the spring of 1969, and some of the first were assigned to Raymond. She found that “living in a coed dorm was a bit of a rambunctious experience in the early days in a way that, I believe, would not now be the case. There were some exuberant characters and some turmoil, not involving me personally, but it was just part of the package, as having men there was so new.” Because she’d had a bit of experience living in the all-female Raymond, Mendez Hodes eventually moved to Strong, where she liked the “peacefulness and coziness of an all-female house” and had the opportunity to focus more intensely on her academic and extracurricular pursuits.

Despite the abrupt transition to coeducation that would forever change residential life at the college, maintaining an all-female dorm helped connect the old Vassar to the new. Mendez Hodes remembered: “I have a general memory of a certain sweetness to living in Strong, and everyone sitting on the floor in the living room after dinner (all meals took place in individual houses), playing bridge, and having demitasse (we were assigned turns cleaning the coffee urns) for a while before going off to study or an evening activity. It felt like our home.”

Residents of Strong in the late ’60s and early ’70s were likely raised in an era when interactions between the sexes were more structured. When Mendez Hodes first entered Vassar there was a dress code: “You had to wear a skirt to go into town, and if you were meeting with a professor.” Therefore, the informality of living exclusively with other women was a draw. Appearance and demeanor seemed less important when men, often in the parlors on Strong’s first floor, couldn’t appear unannounced on the upper floors. The desk messengers — called White Angels during Mendez Hodes’ time at Vassar — “had a code when they rang the corridor phones to tell us someone was waiting for us downstairs,” she recalled. “The White Angel (or your fellow student if she was doing work duty or relaying the message upstairs) would say, ‘You have a visitor,’ if the person was female, but, ‘You have a guest,’ if the visitor was male.” This practice applied to all men — even males enrolled at the college — Mendez Hodes said, so that “you’d know not to run downstairs with rollers in your hair and wearing a bathrobe. . . . I liked the relaxed feeling of being able to flop around in our pajamas and underwear...in our dorm rooms and bathrooms.”

In addition to the home comforts of Strong, Mendez Hodes cherishes the bonds she developed with other women, and the direction these relationships provided for her future endeavors. “Some wonderful women lived in Strong...[Something I did not appreciate while living in Strong, that I understand better now, is how college is a time — perhaps the last such period for many people — where one’s principal job in life is to explore ideas and experiences in a way that may not be possible thereafter. How many opportunities will there be for most women, after Strong House, to experience living in an all-female context?” She continued: “Living in Strong gave me a chance to gather my wits and be..."Living in Strong gave me a chance to gather my wits and to be encouraged by other women to listen to my own voice. It fortified me to weather mistakes, to try to do the right thing, and to set priorities that make sense for me, in later life. I learned the importance of doing things for others in community."
encouraged by other women to listen to my own voice. It fortified me to weather mistakes, to try to do the right thing, and to set priorities that make sense for me, in later life. I learned the importance of doing things for others in community.

Mendez Hodes’ next community after Vassar was Harvard Law School, where she was class of ’75 and one of only about 80 women in a class of 580. Living in a coed dorm there, and sharing a suite with two other women, she remembered, “The sheer amount of homework each night was challenging, but Vassar had prepared me well enough for that. We had not, however, anticipated the continual calls from fellows, asking girls out, which was simply a function of the ratio of men to women…. I remember women feeling sort of irked that we were trying to get all our cases read each evening, and there was all this other stuff going on, too.”

Evaluating the benefits of Strong as an all-female residence, Mendez Hodes concluded, “Having been immersed in a predominantly male environment thereafter makes me particularly grateful to have lived those enriching years in Strong and at Vassar College. I would not exchange them for anything that I can imagine.”

Built in part by money donated by Trustee John D. Rockefeller and named in honor of his daughter Bessie Rockefeller Strong, special student from 1886–88, Strong House opened in 1893 as the first residence hall for students outside of Main Building. Obviously single-sex at its opening, Strong maintained this designation even after the transition to coeducation in the early ’70s.

Professor of English and former Dean of the College Colton Johnson remembered that it was decided to retain one single-sex residence “not as a symbolic gesture on the college’s part” — not as a constant reminder of the college’s history — “but more likely for two pragmatic reasons: a fair amount of the women already in the college had enrolled because Vassar was a women’s college, and they wanted their housing arrangements to stay that way. Also, there was no great pressure from the numbers of men in the early days [of coeducation], and thus no reason not to reserve a quad dorm for women.”

The decision to keep Strong single-sex hasn’t gone without debate, though. Johnson says that he recollects times in the ’80s and ’90s when suggestions that Strong might turn coeducational became more prevalent, owing to full enrollments and lack of interest in single-sex housing from enough women. As recently as 2002 — when Jewett House was closed for extensive renovations, and many women were placed in Strong despite not wanting to live there — the argument for a coeducational Strong surfaced. Lindsay Dawson ’05 said, “Many of the older girls supported Strong’s tight-knit female community, while the freshmen were largely in favor of abolishing it. Since few incoming students volunteer to live here, they argued, a single-sex dorm had become an antiquated, obsolete experiment.”

Dawson did encourage residents to be patient and give Strong a try, since many, herself included, come to love the dorm — if only for its cleaner and quieter atmosphere. (Dawson’s father had required that she live there for her freshman year when he heard of Vassar’s coeducational bathrooms, and she remained thereafter.) But the anti-Strong sentiment amongst many of the newer women harmed the chance for fostering much of a sense of community in the dorm. Notwithstanding her positive experience living in Strong, Mendez Hodes commented: “The future of Strong is for the students of today and tomorrow to choose…. I think that if all students are offered an opportunity to live in the house arrangements they prefer, whatever that choice might be, then the community is probably happier, because all individuals have a chance to express themselves.”

Building community in the dorms is a priority for Vassar, and especially for the Dean of the College J. J. Jackson. Jackson, in cooperation with Dean of the Faculty Ron Sharp, has a plan for community building in the dorms that began this summer with renovations to common areas — sprucing up parlors and multipurpose rooms, and adding up-to-date audiovisual technology. This, she hopes, will provide an “appropriate and pleasing atmosphere” for the reintroduction of more activities — whether discussions, lectures, or movies — to individual dorms to help correct the “dissonance between where students live and learn.”

Focusing on the “whole life of the student” has strong backing from the students, who have provided input not only on programming they would like to see in the dorms, but also on which physical changes would be most in line with student use and expectations. The faculty as well have embraced the idea, which will include a strengthening of the house fellow program. “We are building from past experiences,” Jackson said. “The faculty has commented that there were aspects of residential life they remembered that were now absent, and they missed them.”

For Strong in particular, Jackson said, “We are not destroying community” by preserving an all-female dorm, but rather “allowing community to happen. Strong speaks to one lifestyle our students like, and represents one preference within the larger Vassar community.”

Indeed, Vassar takes pride in honoring student preferences by allowing students to choose this single-sex housing option within an otherwise fully coeducational environment. So whether for purely practical reasons, like Barbara Safranek ’82, who remained in Strong after being placed there freshman year “mainly as a strategy to get the largest single possible”; whether by parental mandate, like Dawson; or whether to be in a supportive and peaceful environment living only with women, like Mendez Hodes, Strong House provides some Vassar students the residential options they need.
COMING TOGETHER

Vassar Reunion 2005 by the Numbers...
150 fireworks lit up the sky above Sunset Lake.
13 golf carts shuttled alumnae/i around campus.
93 Vassar students worked 'round the clock.
13 tents, 598 tables, 2,532 chairs, 5,450 meals,
and 3 unforgettable days.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL FALLER
Equation for Success

What do you get when you combine stints at NASA, Enron, and MIT with a penchant for weight training? Some might say the makings of a Renaissance woman. And Iris Mack ’78 fits the bill, merging real-world risk-taking in several arenas with a rigorous theoretical background to support them. Since graduating from Vassar, she has gone from academia to investment banking and back again, and cites her belief that “life is an adventure” as the reason for her ever-evolving résumé.

Mack was born and raised in a family of 10 in a housing project in New Orleans’ inner city, and worked as a high-school summer intern at NASA’s local branch, Michoud Operations. At Vassar, she furthered her prestigious record of internships with a position at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, California. Her budding interest in engineering led her to create her own major, and she graduated with degrees in math and mathematical physics.

After graduation Mack headed to Harvard (via a detour at University of California Berkeley to pick up a master’s in math), where she was the second African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. in applied mathematics. Mack accepted a teaching position at MIT, but yearned to leave the ivory tower behind, at least temporarily. Mack moved on to work for Salomon Brothers in New York, Charles Schwab in San Francisco, French Investment BNP Paribas in London, Enron in Houston and London, and founded her own high-tech and management consulting firm whose clients included Lockheed Martin, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Schwab.

A turning point in Mack’s life came when she was invited by NASA to apply for the astronaut candidate program. (Astronaut Roland McNair, before his death in the space shuttle explosion of 1986, had encouraged her to pursue this program.) Out of 2,000 applicants, Mack was one of 100 to be interviewed. She endured a battery of physical, psychological, and academic tests at NASA’s headquarters during a week of intense evaluation — all while teaching at MIT, taking flying lessons, lifting weights, and running several miles a day. Although Mack was not chosen to be a finalist, she said, “I don’t dwell on disappointment in my life. Just to get to that point was a huge accomplishment because all the applicants seemed superhuman. I told myself there are a lot of other things I want to do.”

Indeed, Mack progressed to several “other things” — most recently her own company, Phat Math Inc., which publishes “edutainment” books to excite students about math. The inspiration for the series came, she said, from being “invited to speak to kids, especially girls in inner cities, to try to motivate them. I like to do it in a backhanded, sneaky way — I’d use the stock market, the space program, sports, and music to teach them math concepts. Kids want to read books like them, international and multicultural, in the books they read.” In 2004 Mack’s first book, Mama Says, “Money Doesn’t Grow on Trees!” was published by Xlibris/Random House Ventures and became its top children’s book royalty earner. Phat Math, sponsored by the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, will soon be providing math tutoring for Florida schools.

Mack’s life continues to be an adventure, as she runs her company during the day and teaches business classes at night for Florida International University. She said, “It has been a dream of mine to make applied math more palatable. I try to show people that it’s both fun and useful, and if we remain ignorant about it, it will be detrimental to America’s economic health.” In her rare moments of downtime, Mack is working on the manuscript of her next book, a warning to consumers based on her time at Enron and tentatively titled Strategic Weapons of White-Collar Crime. Mack is understandably eager to educate others, calling her own education “a ticket to see the world” — a lifelong journey that began at Vassar.

— Lindsay Dawson ’05
AAVC Service to Vassar Award

Institutions such as The Wildlife Trust, American University, Washington National Cathedral, and the National Symphony Orchestra have all benefited from Virginia Cretella Mars' considerable energy and enthusiasm. And for the past 35 years, Mars also has shown a consistent commitment to Vassar College and her ’51 classmates. “Ginnie is the consummate ambassador for Vassar,” said AAVC Awards Committee Chair Meg Venecz Johnson ’84. “She embodies the best of the college, whether it’s as a lively presence on AA VC trips, a thoughtful chair of a board of trustees committee, or an enthusiastic fan on the sidelines of her granddaughter’s Vassar lacrosse game.” Graduating from Vassar was, and continues to be, a life-enhancing experience for Mars. “The importance of my education has grown with me over the years,” she said. “Vassar opened up new horizons and gave me a feeling of empowerment.”

After graduation, Mars volunteered for the Vassar club in her hometown of New Haven, Connecticut. But it wasn’t until 1970, after raising four daughters and living overseas for many years, that she reconnected with Vassar. Mars chaired her 50th reunion class fund, served as a trustee for 12 years, and currently sits on the President’s Advisory Council. Perhaps her most notable achievement was leading the college’s capital campaign from 1989–97. “The Campaign for Vassar in the mid-1990s could not have succeeded without Ginnie,” recalled Vassar President Frances Fergusson. “She was always there, traveling tirelessly for the college, eloquently evoking the reasons that people should give, and convincing them personally that this was exactly the right thing to do.” For Mars, advocating for Vassar is a privilege. “Vassar made a tremendous difference in my life, and I felt that I had received so much that it was important for me to give back to allow other students to have the opportunities I had.”

AAVC will present Mars with the 2005 Service to Vassar Award at this fall’s Volunteer Leadership Conference. “I am very excited to receive this honor, but also am a little bit surprised and certainly humbled, knowing the people who have gotten this award before and what they have contributed,” said Mars. “Even now, I receive more from Vassar than I could possibly give back. A Vassar education defined my life. It is a remarkable place.”

—Samantha Soper ’91

A True Underdog Story

Before I actually spoke with Justin Long ’00, I had — through repeated failed attempts at reaching the busy actor — become acquainted with the unsettling outgoing message on his cell phone. After a few rings the loud, abrasive voices of Beavis and Butthead boom out of the receiver, informing the unsuspecting caller that, “Uh... heh heh, Justin’s not here right now.” I thought it was one of the better impressions I’d heard.

As it turns out, just a few months ago Long spent a couple days on the set of Idiocracy, the new Mike Judge film to be released later this year, playing a bit part as a doctor. After the day’s shooting was finished, some of the cast and crew went out for drinks, and Long got to ask Judge the one question that had been on his mind all day: “Hey, do people ever ask you to do their outgoing message on their phone?” He tried to broach the subject casually. “Yeah, sometimes. Why — do you want me to do yours?” “Yeah, if that’s cool with you.” And that’s the story of how Long got the actual voices of Beavis and Butthead on his phone message.

Such is life right now for the 27-year-old actor who, after winning a part in 1999’s Galaxy Quest, left Vassar before he graduated and has since appeared in a string of movies, including Jeepers Creepers (2001), Dodgeball (2004), and this year’s Herbie: Fully Loaded, playing opposite Lindsay Lohan. He also had a recurring role on NBC’s Ed.

Despite his aborted college career, Long still calls his days at Vassar “the cliched best years of [his] life.” His time here “was more about what I learned outside the classroom. Most of my effort was concentrated on social life and plays.” Though he never earned a degree, Long credits Vassar with increasing his “confidence...as an actor.”

He left to concentrate on his career, always thinking he’d come back. “But things kept happening,” he says. Long, for instance, found himself playing romantic roles opposite two of the biggest young sex symbols of the last five years, Britney Spears (Crossroads) and Lohan (Herbie).

Crossroads ended up being a lesson in fame for Long. He had no experience with the kind of notoriety Spears possessed and didn’t realize that “any little bit of news about her was instant fodder for the tabloids.” He soon found a joking comment he made off the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66
he term visionary is inadequate to describe Professor Emerita Winifred A. Asprey ’38. Almost four decades ago she wrote that computers would “have a cultural impact that will cut straight across the curriculum” and predicted “with certainty” that interaction with computers would “soon be regarded as an essential part of a liberal arts education.” Her forecasts have proved true, as “computers have become vital to all aspects of cultural life on campus. Witness the Media Cloisters in the library and the fantastic computerization in the Center for Drama and Film.”

Dr. Asprey — known as Miss Asprey to generations of undergraduates, and as Tim or Winnie to friends — had a Vassar mother, grandmother, aunts, and cousins. Her destiny seemed intertwined with the college’s from the very beginning. In fact, she recalls, “I almost got kicked out of class in the eighth grade, because we were given an assignment to write about the three colleges we would aspire to, and I wrote only about Vassar. For me, there was no other choice!” It was a good one. Despite Girl Scout summer camps and a postgraduate year at Brownell Hall in Omaha, Nebraska, she remembers herself as “a very young, naive, shy girl from Sioux City, Iowa, who had never been as far east as Chicago, and faced Vassar with excitement and a certain trepidation.

“... she adds. “Upperclass students welcomed us so warmly that I felt at home from the beginning. I landed in a triple on the first floor of Main South. One roommate, a graduate of the Dalton School in New York City, impressed me with her sophistication — she was allowed to walk the streets of New York on her own! My other roommate, from upstate New York, invited me to her home over short vacations and provided dates for dances. Three kind and understanding professors I shall never forget: Mathilde Monnier in French, Inez Ryberg in Latin, and Louise Duffield Cummings in math.”

In the spring of her sophomore year Asprey chose her major, with mathematics barely winning out over French. On returning in the fall, she met the two professors who most profoundly affected her: Mary Evelyn Wells and Grace Murray Hopper ’28. Wells, chair of the department of mathematics, taught advanced calculus, required of all majors. “I fell completely under her spell,” Asprey recalls. “Never had I experienced such a dynamic teacher who made a 50-minute class go by in three minutes. She was, and remains, the strongest influence in my professional life, the reason I later returned to Vassar.”

“I elected Dr. Hopper’s course, “Probability and Statistics” — a dauntingly illuminating experience. My senior year, I began to realize that my opportunities to explore more and more mathematics were closing down; the Great Depression put graduate study out of my reach. So I audited every class Grace Hopper taught. “Somehow we became friends. I considered her my ‘middle-aged friend,’ although we were only a decade apart in age. Not only did she open my mind to the world of beauty in mathematics, but she also taught me how to write papers (and how to smoke — a habit I gave up for good in 1954).” Hopper left Vassar in 1943 to join the U.S. Navy. After her death the Navy christened a destroyer in her memory. All of us at Vassar continue to enjoy the harvest of her remarkable scientific brilliance.”

During her senior year, Asprey was “one of the lucky ones,” with a job as a student teacher at the Brearley School in Manhattan. “As an undergraduate I had often proclaimed that teaching was not for me, that I was too impatient; but the scarcity of jobs combined with the lure of New York City was irresistible. Brearley changed my mind; teaching was for me.” After two years, Asprey went on to the Girls Latin School in Chicago, teaching...
Latin and algebra to "spirited eighth- and ninth-graders." Her mother suggested that she might want to try teaching at the college level, which meant obtaining advanced degrees. "I enrolled in an eight-week summer session at the State University of Iowa — and went on to earn an M.S. degree in theoretical statistics while still teaching in Chicago, simultaneously passing the oral exams required for pursuing doctoral studies."

Asprey moved to Iowa in the fall of 1943 to pursue her Ph.D., and in 1945 she returned to Vassar to teach, at the invitation of Mary Evelyn Wells. "I was able to settle into life back at Vassar very easily," she says. "I had a head start; it was like coming home."

At Vassar, Asprey became an early, indeed prescient, advocate for computer science. "For some time I had been urging upperclassmen to look into a career in computing, a field I knew nothing about. On impulse I called Grace Hopper. My question: 'Should Vassar get into the computing business?' Her answer: 'I've been waiting for you to wake up!' I did. At her invitation I spent four days with her group, Eckert-Mauchly Computer Corporation, in Philadelphia, watching her teach the monster to do calculus. As I was leaving, she offered me a position for a year if I could get a leave from Vassar. On the train back to campus, I wondered if IBM, being located in Poughkeepsie, might make a similar offer. They did, and I became the first recipient of an IBM Post-Doctoral Industrial Research Fellowship, spending the next year at the IBM facility, then located on the Vassar Farm. A firm relationship developed between IBM and Vassar, which lasted many years. Without their help and expertise, we might well have never achieved our goal of a computer — certainly not within 10 years."

"The greatest thing for me was the final establishment of the Computer Center in 1965," Asprey continues. "There was faculty resistance, a fear that 'numbers would take over the world.' Most of the faculty practically dragged down to see it. But the students' enthusiasm won over the professors." Asprey was named the Computer Center's first director; and when she notes that "Vassar took a lead in computer science in undergraduate liberal arts colleges in the nation," she is too modest to add that she, more than anyone else, was responsible.

Asprey cites "enormous support" from IBM; from the National Science Foundation; from universities and colleges long engaged in computer research, notably Dartmouth and Wesleyan — and, above all, from Vassar itself. She notes that Vassar's sabbatical plan allowed her to do research not only at IBM, but also at the famed atomic laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico, as well as at Cal Tech, Pomona College, and UCLA. Outstanding support also came from the administration, specifically from President Sarah Gibson Blanding and her assistant Sydnor Walker '13, and later from President Alan Simpson. Retiring from Vassar in 1982, Asprey continues to live in her Vassar campus home, originally built by Grace Hopper in 1939. Somewhat immobile in the last few years, she tremendously enjoys visits from former students and remains actively engaged in Vassar's present and future. Her dream of "seeing computers become as vital to the campus as the Vassar College Library" has been realized. "Vassar has been good to me," she says.

Indeed, this relationship is a two-way street. "

— Lance Ringel
WHAT'S GOING ON IN THIS PICTURE? VASSAR GIRLS WITH A STRANGE ARRAY OF FACES on a stage with a festive backdrop? As this picture from 1942 proves, Vassar has long been at the forefront of experimental theater. That tradition continues today with the yearly Powerhouse Theater program that each summer attracts award-winning playwrights and recognizable faces to the campus, and, of course, with the many student productions that appear each term. In this picture, a group of students act in a play called Your Number's Up. — D.S.
When Laura Young received her diploma this past May she was 22 years old, but her commencement robe was nearing 60. Laura’s grandmother, Vera Cooper Rubin ’48, a renowned astronomer credited with proving the existence of dark matter, was the robe’s first owner.

Rubin got the robe at the beginning of the fall semester of her senior year, as was the tradition then. “We hung them on our doors and wore them all year long,” said Rubin. “We used them as bathrobes. Of course, we also wore them to academic functions — convocation, things like that.”

She continued to wear the robe to academic functions during graduate school (M.A., Cornell University; Ph.D., Georgetown University) and afterwards when she was on the faculty at Georgetown. Then the robe became something of a journeyman, serving not only Vera but also her husband Robert (a physicist/mathematician), the Rubins’ friends in academia who couldn’t afford robes of their own, and the Rubins’ children, who wore the robe at Halloween time as a witch’s cloak.

Having heard that Rubin’s granddaughter was graduating from Vassar, a friend called Vera to let her know that he still had the robe. Rubin brought it up to Laura when she was on campus to attend the lectures celebrating Vassar’s acquisition of the Einstein papers and the torch, or robe, was officially passed. — D.S.
At Last

In the spring of 1962, I was 21 years old and a drama major in my senior year at Vassar. I became pregnant and, during spring vacation, requested permission to get married, stay in college, and graduate with my class. The Warden told me that I could under no circumstances continue at Vassar, and that I could “never consider myself to be a cultured woman” after what I had done.

During the intervening years, I married and gave birth to a beautiful daughter, became a systems analyst, programmer, and, finally, a manager of many programmers at a Silicon Valley company. Later, with my present husband, I sailed over much of the world. Whenever I could, I took courses in math, chemistry, biology, and computer science.

Last year, I wrote President Ferguson to inquire whether I might complete the requirements and graduate. She was immensely supportive and encouraging. The registrar discovered that I had accumulated more than enough credits, and so I found myself, at age 64, marching up to accept my diploma amid the awesome class of 2005. I was thrilled beyond words to have graduated, and still am.

Today’s Vassar seems a far more vibrant, elegant, and inspiring place than the college I remember from the early 1960s, with brilliance, taste, and intellectual energy evident everywhere. I take tremendous pride in being a Vassar alumna — at last.

—Holly Hobart ’62, ’05
Nothing says "college" quite like a group of friends singing covers of popular songs without the aid of instrumentation. *A cappella*, they call it. For 25 years now, the Accidentals (or "the Axies") have been one of the most popular *a cappella* groups on the Vassar campus.

To celebrate their silver anniversary, the Axies threw themselves a party, a reunion bringing together nearly 20 current and former members of the group, spanning 10 classes of Vassar graduates.

According to Tito Crafts '06, the current pitch for the Axies, the reunion was a complete success. "The older graduates had an opportunity to catch up, and we current Axies had an opportunity to see recently graduated group members again." The highlight of the day was a special reunion concert in Rockefeller Hall, which, for Crafts, exemplifies what the Axies are about: "producing high-level musical results with a group of guys you love." — D.S.
Each year, Vassar clubs raise money for student scholarships by hosting benefit fundraisers or selling Vassar-related items. Listed are this year’s offerings from area clubs. Pricing and ordering information can be found at www.aavc.vassar.edu or by calling the numbers listed below.

Enamel Box and The Vassar Spoon
Handcrafted enamel box depicting Main Building and a Sterling silver spoon engraved with VC monogram — Vassar Club of London, AAVC, 800.546.7282

Boston Rocker and Captain’s Chair
Made of northern hardwoods and available in several finishes and Vassar seal — Vassar Club of Boston, Ryan Dunn ‘01, 617.697.6838

Historic Vassar Print
Museum-quality color print of 1861 Renwick-designed perspective of Main Building — Vassar Club of Boston, AAVC, 800.546.7282

Needlepoint and Cross-Stitch
Vassar or other college's seal handpainted on canvas, kit complete with yarn for pillow or picture — Jersey Hills Vassar Club, AAVC, 800.546.7282

Tennis Racket-Shaped Pasta
A lined, recycled tennis ball container filled with quality pasta — Vassar Club of Fairfield County, June Ross Marks ’49, 203.531.7159

Pecans
One-pound packages marked “Vassar Club Scholarship Fund” — Poughkeepsie Area Vassar Club, Phebe Townsend Banta ’61, 845.454.4484

Cleveland and Anderson Back in Print
The 1940s classics with humorous on-target drawings of campus life — Class of 1948, AAVC, 800.546.7282

Florida Citrus
Citrus fruits, nuts, jams, jellies, and gift baskets — Vassar Club of Palm Beach and Martin Counties, Cushman Fruit Company, 800.776.7575

Vassar Root Beer
Spicy, Vassar (root) beer made by Old Dominion Brewing Company — Vassar Club of Washington, DC, 301.299.4855

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A True Underdog Story

record in the headlines of gossip publications on both sides of the Atlantic. Long felt terrible, but as it turned out Spears had never even been aware of the controversy until Long apologized to her. “My first taste of public exposure,” quips Long.

When pressed on his role in Herbie, and the amount of time his character spends convincingly talking to a car, Long amiably jokes, “I’ve known some people that were not too far off personality-wise from a Volkswagen beetle.” But he knows Herbie is not ground-breaking cinema, conceding that “you have different reasons for making different movies.”

His main reason for making Herbie was that most of the characters he has played have been remarkably similar to each other — the goofy, nerdy, lovable underdog. “At Vassar,” says Long, “you could do tons of plays. It was your chance to explore the entire spectrum...The reality of Hollywood is that there are so many actors out there you just end up getting typecast. I was just happy to be working.” Long says turning down such roles would have been “biting the hand that feeds you. The hand being my natural, nerdy self.” Still, he now hopes to expand a bit.

He is currently shooting a big-budget, major-studio film called Accepted, directed by Steve Pink, who worked on the screenplays for High Fidelity and Grosse Point Blank. It will be Long’s first attempt at being the “star” of a movie. As he focuses on that task, his thoughts are still not far from Vassar, which he has revisited a few times over the years to reminisce and fill the “Vassar void” created when he left early. He comes back because he’s “still not ready for the real world,” he speculates — “which is why it’s nice to be in Hollywood.”

— Daniel Steckenberg ’06
announcements

Deer Valley, UT Comfortable 3-bedroom, 4-bath townhouse within walking distance to lifts and lodge at lower Deer Valley, 5-minute shuttle ride to downtown Park City. Snow play, sledding, hiking, biking right out front door. Fully equipped, hot tub, two decks, private, quiet. For more detailed information, visit deervalleyfamilycondo.com, or contact Matthew Drake ’81 at mbldf@dreadco.com.

Blue Ridge Mountains Lake Summit in western North Carolina, 30 min. east of Asheville. Weekly or monthly rental available year round. 4 bedrooms, 3 baths, large living room/dining room, TV room, family room, 2 fireplaces, deck, screen porch, boat dock. Sleeps up to 16 or a wonderful quiet getaway. Contact Katie Barnett ’07 or kbarnett@vassar.edu.

Painted Pets If you love your dog and would love to see him or her in watercolor check out www.touchingsenses.com. Mark Weissman ’90 would love to paint your pet. He works off of photos so no matter where you are, your pet can be a work of art.

Rome, Italy A nice painting by S. Gilford in the Vassar Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center shows Roman aqueducts around 1850. This intact peaceful view, and the related archaeological area of Rome, is still possible to visit nowadays by walking 10 minutes from our apartment in Rome, which is also well connected to the center of the city by metro, 13 minutes to Central Station, 18 minutes to Spanish steps. Available from September to May for short periods, see also https://vspace.vassar.edu/caruso/aqueducts. Contact Professors Francesco Caruso or Miriam Rossi at caruso@vassar.edu.

Be a Mentor Sign up to be an e-mentor at www.icouldbe.org and make a real difference in kids’ lives! icouldbe.org, founded by Adam Aberman ’94, steers underserved teens toward careers they never imagined and toward their futures — by linking teens electronically to mentors in a wide range of careers. As an e-mentor, you’ll spend a minimum of one hour per week communicating with several underserved teens. You can split that hour as you wish throughout the week. All mentoring is completely virtual. Go to www.icouldbe.org to sign up today!

Washington, DC/Capitol Hill Rent our spacious, furnished 3-story townhouse in vibrant, historic neighborhood on the Hill’s premier boulevard. 4 bedrooms, 2.5 baths. Short walk to Capitol, Library of Congress, Supreme Court, subways, Eastern Market, restaurants, cafes. $4,000/month. Available January or February 2006 for 1-year lease. Contact Barbara Black ’71 at 202.547.3044 or barbarablack@hotmail.com. Digital photos available upon request.

Fairfield Seven Sisters Alumnae Seminar presents “Ethics in a Troubled World: Issues in Politics, Journalism, Business, and Education.” The event will be held Wed., Oct. 19, from 9 am – 1:30 pm in Stamford, CT. The panel of speakers includes Attorney General of the State of Connecticut Richard Blumenthal; Stephen Fuzes Jr., vice president, chief counsel, and secretary, Newsweek, Inc., publisher of Newsweek magazine; Jane L. Wexton, chief compliance officer and counsel, GE Capital Global Consumer Finance, Stamford, CT; and the Reverend Janet Cooper Nelson, chaplain of Brown University, director of the Office of the Chaplains and Religious Life, and a member of the faculty of the university. The program will be moderated by Denise Taft Davidoff ’53. For further information and reservations, contact Barbara Leffler at 203.329.8330 or alumnaseminar@optonline.net.

Florida Looking to share winter rental time for 2-bedroom condo on ocean and intracoastal waterway between Boca Raton and Del Ray Beach, 2-week minimum. Details upon request. Contact Bab Levitt ’60 at 609.734.9015.

Santa Fe House for Rent Beautifully restored adobe in the Santa Fe countryside. 20 minutes from Plaza, easy hour to Taos. 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, viga, gourmet kitchen, furnished in Santa Fe style, views of Sangre de Christo Mountains from yard. Available December, holiday season, off-season rates apply Sept. through Nov. 2005 and mid-Jan. through May 2006. Contact Professor Daniel Peck at peckd@vassar.edu, and visit us at http://faculty.vassar.edu/peckd.

Vassar’s Time and Transformation Exhibition will travel to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, FL (Aug. 20–Oct. 30) and the J. B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY (Jan. 15–March 15).

Graduates of the Last Decade (G.O.L.D.) A nationwide, AAVC-hosted event in several cities on Saturday, Nov. 12, which serves to reconnect and celebrate our alumnae from the class of 1996 to 2005. Visit www.aavc.vassar.edu for more information.

Eymet, France 400-year-old stone farmhouse in the Dordogne for rent. Sleeps 5. Exquisite details throughout. Contact Erika Yost ’94 at yostierka@hotmail.com or visit frenchnrural.net.

Vassar faculty, students, alumnae/i, and staff are invited to submit items to announcements. Publication is as space permits. Submissions may be edited for length and style. Deadlines for announcements are Dec. 20 for spring, March 20 for summer, June 20 for fall, and Sept. 20 for winter. Fax: 845.437.7426; email: vg@vassar.edu. More listings can be found or posted to AAVC’s Online Discussion Board at www.aavc.vassar.edu.
Miles From Home

This is a story about how sometimes the things that make us different actually bring us closer together. Lisa Flores ’82 arrived at Vassar in the fall of 1978 after traveling 10,000 miles from her home in Guam.

All of her siblings had gone to school on the East Coast, and her sister was living in Connecticut, providing a safety net just far enough away to be unlike parental supervision. By all accounts, Lisa adjusted to Vassar just fine. She currently lives in New York City and remains active in AAVC. “I never regretted my decision,” she says. “Vassar was always a second home to me, and I always thought of my close college friends as extended family.”

Lisa’s fond memories influenced her niece, Maria Quinata (pictured), to apply for entry into the class of 2009. She was accepted, so Maria will fly the 10,000 miles from Guam to Vassar this fall, just like her “Auntie Lisa” did 27 years ago. And just like her aunt, Maria will do so with the knowledge that, though she is in a completely unfamiliar place, she has family close by (but not too close).

Despite Vassar’s distance from her home, Maria says her decision was an easy one. Her Aunt Lisa’s stories made Vassar Maria’s “dream school ever since [she] was a little girl.” When she visited the campus, her expectations were “exceeded.” According to Maria, “everything about Vassar seemed to fit me so perfectly.” She was impressed by the “beautiful” library (“definitely one of the deciding factors in my decision to attend Vassar,” she says), Vassar’s proximity to New York City, and the tour guide’s assurance that at Vassar there were “personal relationships between professors and their students.”

Though Maria is surely the only student coming from Guam, extraordinariness is fairly typical among the class of 2009. Maria will be joining 42 other students from outside the United States, representing 26 foreign countries. Her classmates will speak Bengali and Bulgarian, Hebrew and Hindi, Mandarin, Siswati, and Urdu (among others). There is a two-time contestant in the National Spelling Bee, two licensed pilots, and the winner of five consecutive blue ribbons for baking the best biscuits at the New Mexico state fair.

Maria and her classmates prove that the experience of going off to college is a great leveler. Whatever one’s own circumstances were upon entering school, Maria’s thoughts now will sound familiar: “The months of waiting for my rejection or acceptance letter were some of the most stress-filled months of my life.” And now that she is in, she says she fears “having to start all over and meet new people...I was so afraid of turning in the forms of acceptance because it meant that I was really going to leave everything I’ve ever known and start a new life in a completely different environment. But the anticipation of beginning something totally new overpowers all my fears.”

We didn’t all go to college 10,000 miles from home, but most of us remember what it was like to leave our family and go somewhere new, full of strange people. This fall, the girl from Guam, the baker, and the pilots will mingle with their classmates, and though they have never met and grew up worlds apart, they will suddenly find themselves equals, united by a common challenge. Vassar welcomes the class of 2009, who will arrive with only their hopes and fears in common, but who will soon find that they are more alike than they could ever imagine.

— Daniel Steckenberg ’06
"I give devise and bequeath unto Vassar College ... forever"

The last Will and Testament of Matthew Vassar of the City of New York, in the County of Dutchess, State of New York. I, Matthew Vassar, do hereby make and publish this to be my last Will and Testament:

You don't have to be a millionaire English brewer to leave a lasting gift to Vassar College. Each and every bequest that the College receives helps us to sustain the richness of the Vassar experience for future generations of students.

Bequests have played a crucial role in maintaining the excellence that is Vassar since the days of the College's founder. In drawing up his will, Matthew Vassar did all that he could to ensure his Magnificent Enterprise would continue healthy and strong.

Our Gift Planning Office stands ready to help you learn about the many ways you can include Vassar in your estate plans. We can also provide you with sample language for making a bequest. Call us at 845.437.5487, or email giftplanning@vassar.edu.
The Fergusson Years: Celebrating a Vassar Legacy

SAVE THE DATE

October 29  Cleveland
November 9  Chicago
December 5  New York City
February 16 Washington, D.C.
March 14  Los Angeles

For more information:
call 888.328.8528
or visit http://www.vassar.edu/president/fergussonyears