

# CommonWealth

NEWS FROM BU AND BEYOND





## Master of Chaos

Students in the Master of Fine Arts in painting program get their own studios on the third floor of 808 Commonwealth Avenue, the former Fuller Cadillac building. Caleb Brown (CFA'07) was one of a dozen students who showed their work – his was paintings mostly of explosive car crash scenes or mob violence – as part of the graduate painting program exhibition at the 808 Gallery in late spring. “They were popular with younger people,” he says. Despite the afternoon light – his studio faces west on Comm. Ave. – Brown usually paints at night: “That’s when it quiets down here.”  
Photo by Kalman Zabarsky

# New Leader for Arts and Sciences

POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND  
WOMEN'S STUDIES SCHOLAR  
VIRGINIA SAPIRO  
SELECTED AS DEAN



**GROWING UP IN THE** 1960s, Virginia Sapiro says, it was almost impossible not to take an interest in politics, with both the antiwar movement and the contemporary women's movement taking form. It shaped her career.

"It wasn't just an interest in politics that I had — it was an interest in the world that I could integrate with academics," she says. "That's something I'm still interested in students doing."

Sapiro, now a political scientist and women's studies scholar with strong views about how a liberal arts education helps build informed citizens, becomes dean of the College and Graduate

School of Arts and Sciences on July 1. She was most recently vice provost for teaching and learning at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"Dr. Sapiro's outstanding accomplishments in research, her love of teaching and mentoring, and her breadth of academic and administrative expertise within a large university made her our clear-cut choice as dean," says Provost David Campbell. "We are confident that she will enhance the centrality of a liberal arts education for all Boston University students and lead CAS to still higher levels of excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship."

**"Liberal arts education is more important than ever, and far from being impractical, is absolutely crucial to people being able to function."**

— Virginia Sapiro, newly appointed dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Photo by Vernon Doucette

The appointment caps an eleven-month search process, initiated in June 2006 when Jeffrey Henderson, William Goodwin Aurelio Professor of Greek Language and Literature and dean of arts and sciences since 2002, announced that he would step down to return to teaching in the classics department. The college and graduate school together form the University's largest academic unit, enrolling approximately 7,600 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students.

Sapiro, the first female dean in the college's 134-year history, was the Sophonisba P. Breckinridge Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies at Wisconsin. Since joining the faculty in 1976, she has chaired both the department of political science and the women's studies program and served as interim provost and vice chancellor of academic affairs. She was the university's vice provost for teaching and learning from 2002 until December 2006.

A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Sapiro has been recognized for her research in political psychology and gender politics and her commitment to teaching and mentoring students. During her tenure, the University of Wisconsin developed undergraduate enrichment programs ranging from learning communities that bring academic topics into the residence halls to a campus advising network that emphasizes interdisciplinary academic and career resources. In the 2004-2005 academic year, 80 percent of undergraduates participated in at least one such program. "Research shows us that student development and academic success hinge on becoming well integrated into the university," Sapiro says.

The success of Wisconsin's enrichment programs, she adds, included breaking down the distinction between professional degree and liberal arts curricula. "We used to make a distinction between those students getting a liberal arts education and those getting a professional

education,” she says. “That’s no longer true — across this country now, the university-educated professional almost always has a basis in the liberal arts. A liberal arts-trained professional is an engineer, or a health-care worker, or a teacher who has that breadth of knowledge and breadth of approaches to be able to work in the world and to be able to be good at what they’re doing. Liberal arts education is more important than ever, and far from being impractical, is absolutely crucial to people being able to function.”

Sapiro’s research and publications have focused on women’s roles in American political development. Her first book, published in 1983, *The Political Integration of Women: Roles, Socialization, and Politics*, is a survey-based exploration of the balance between women’s personal lives and political involvement. Her subsequent book, in 1992, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft*, a study of the eighteenth-century feminist and political activist, won the American Political Science Association’s Victoria Schuck Award for best book on women and politics. More recently, Sapiro has written articles on the role of gender in perceptions of political candidates, and gender and race politics during the Clinton presidency.

As a professor and an administrator, Sapiro has been noted for her dedication to her undergraduate and graduate students, particularly for her role in developing Wisconsin’s women’s studies program, which was just beginning when she first arrived at the university. She received the university’s award for faculty excellence in teaching, research, and service in 2000 and awards for outstanding first-year advocacy and excellence in mentoring in 2006.

JESSICA ULLIAN

**WEB EXTRA:** Go to [www.bu.edu/bostonia](http://www.bu.edu/bostonia) to see a video of Virginia Sapiro talking about the importance of liberal arts.

## ART IMITATES LIFE SCIENCES

### CAMPUS DISPLAYS BRING VISIBILITY TO CFA CLASS

A dozen large, colorful panels grace the Metcalf Center for Science and Engineering atrium, their images — some like cascading cells, others like fractals — representing the mysteries of nature being studied by the center’s scientists. Called *Visual Entanglements*, the group of images gives “visibility and emotional tangibility to the research,” says Hugh O’Donnell, a College of Fine Arts professor of painting. It is the latest installation by his Site-Specific Art class, which is open to all BU students.

“It brings visibility to the talent that’s at Boston University,” O’Donnell says. Other art developed in the class is on display at the Photonics Center, on T signs at the BU West stop, in the FitRec Center, and in Sargent College, and more is planned. In one current project, headed by an art education student, high school students are making mosaic murals for Sargent College’s Ryan Center for Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation. “The people who go in there are broken in a way and will see things of beauty made of broken things,” O’Donnell notes.

*Visual Entanglements* was developed by two painting students, Brienne Rosner (CFA’05) and Holland Dieringer (CFA’05), “with the help of a whole bunch of physics, chemistry, and biology graduate students and faculty,” says O’Donnell. The concept was inspired by research on entangled photons, in which two light particles can act as a single unit but perform with twice the efficiency. “They looked at how you can cross-fertilize different kinds of imagery,” he says. “If it’s engaging enough, people can be led to discover the people working behind these things, in research.”

Future projects include more art for the Photonics Center and for the School of Medicine pharmacology department, as well as off-campus work for Red Bull, among others. O’Donnell’s site-specific art highlighting the collaboration between the arts and the sciences is on display on the first floor of the Life Science and Engineering Building and in the foyer of the Photonics Center.

TAYLOR MCNEIL

A view of the *Visual Entanglements* art project at the Metcalf Science Center, which was inspired by research on entangled photons. Photo courtesy of Hugh O’Donnell



# MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

## STEVE HALL IS NEW ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ALUMNI RELATIONS

**STEVE HALL** thinks his new job as head of alumni relations at Boston University is a great opportunity “because,” he says, “it’s clear that the alumni do care about the University. I think there’s tremendous potential. Alumni want to be engaged with the institution, and the University needs the alumni to be engaged. Our job is to find the terms of the marriage.”

In a sign of its increased commitment to alumni, Boston University recently named Hall to the new position of associate vice president for alumni relations. Hall, who started at BU on June 11, is former head of the University of Houston Alumni Association, a position he held for twelve years.

Hall says he’s going to “hit the ground listening,” trying to learn as much as possible about BU and its alumni before taking any major steps. He plans to talk to BU alums,

including members of the Boston University Alumni Council, and to look at the 90,000 responses to the recent alumni directory survey.

A 1981 graduate of the University of Houston, Hall spent his career there, except for one year at Washington State University. Prior to becoming president and CEO of the Alumni Association, he was executive director of development operations, executive director of development program services, and director of annual support at the university.

Alumni relations isn’t a one-size-fits-all endeavor, Hall says. “We’ve got to find out how Boston University alumni feel connected to the institution and to one another,” he notes. “It may not be in the traditional ways we’ve always thought of, things like class year or colleges or schools they graduated from. Those may be strong affinities for some alumni. But for others, it may



Steve Hall, new associate vice president for alumni relations, says that “it’s clear that the alumni do care about the University.”

be a student organization they were involved in, or it may be a faculty member.”

Moreover, he says, “you can’t simply have one big homecoming or reunion event and feel like that’s going to appeal to everyone. You can’t communicate with baby boomer alumni the same way you communicate with more recent graduates.”

“Steve’s appointment is especially exciting given the crucial role our graduates will play in the future of this institution, our strong desire to enhance alumni relations programs, and his reputation as one of the best advancement professionals in the country,” says Scott Nichols, vice president for development and alumni relations. “As the chief executive in charge of alumni relations, Steve will provide professional leadership for all programs, events, and activities that are sponsored by Boston University on behalf of its alumni.” **TM**

## Board of Trustees Names Four New Members

### SIX ELECTED TO THE BOARD OF OVERSEERS

**THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY** Board of Trustees elected four new members — two attorneys, a social worker, and an investment fund director — at its meeting on April 13.

Alan Leventhal, chairman of the Board of Trustees, says the election of Richard Godfrey (LAW’79), J. Kenneth Menges, Jr. (SMG’79), Carla Meyer (SSW’78), and Bippy Siegal to the thirty-nine-member Board of Trustees “will further strengthen the governance and leadership of the University during this remarkable time in its history.”

Godfrey is a senior partner in the Chicago office of Kirkland & Ellis LLP, an international law firm. He has been a trial and appellate counsel for various Fortune 100 companies in federal, state, and administrative proceedings throughout the

country. In 1995, he was appointed to the BU School of Law’s board of visitors, and he received the Silver Shingle Award for Distinguished Service to the School of Law in 1998.

Menges, a trustee from 1995 to 2002, is the partner in charge of the Dallas office of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. He also heads the firm’s corporate finance, mergers, and acquisitions practice. Since 1987, Menges has been a member of the SMG Alumni Association board of directors and has been its Dallas regional director.

Meyer is a social worker and a former lecturer in the School of Social Work. She and her husband, Vincent Ryan (CAS’63), are trustees of the Schooner Foundation, which supports organizations that focus on civil rights, peace, and security.

Siegal is founder and CEO of Raycliff Capital, a network of private equity and hedge funds that invests in multistage opportunities across diverse sectors. Through a private foundation, Siegal supports programs and research that demonstrate leadership, innovation, and effectiveness in the areas of health and education. He attended BU from 1985 to 1988.

The Board of Trustees oversees and is responsible for the University’s academic, financial, and business affairs and assists in long-range planning and development.

The full board meets at least three times a year, elects the president of BU, and reviews the strategies and performance of the University’s administrative team.

The trustees also elected six new members to the Board of Overseers: Jay Cashman (SMG’75), Edwin Fuller (SMG’68), Kathleen Healy, Robert Hildreth, Linda Kay (CGS’81, COM’83), and Raymond Killian (SED’59).

**CATHERINE SANTORE**

**The new trustees “will further strengthen . . . the leadership of the University during this remarkable time in its history.”**

— Alan Leventhal



## Student ID

**WHO: ANTONIA ROBERTS**  
**AGE: 20**  
**SCHOOL: CGS'07, SMC'09**  
**MAJOR:**  
**FINANCE AND ECONOMICS**  
**HOMETOWN:**  
**SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND**

### **Where did you grow up?**

I was born in Washington, D.C. When I was a few months old, my mom sent me to Sierra Leone to live with my grandmother. I returned to the United States around 1993 because of the civil war.

### **What do you remember about Sierra Leone?**

Because I was an American baby, everyone *loved* me. My aunt used to walk me around in a carriage, and everyone would come up to me and pet me and say, "She's so pretty." I remember the beach — beautiful, white sand — the beautiful water, people laughing, music, and dancing.

### **Do you have a favorite professor?**

I've loved every single one of them for different reasons. Professor [Robert] Wexelblatt is an amazing professor. He really cares about students. I'm a bubbly person, and when I'm not, he'll say, "What's going on?" He's one of those professors you never forget.

### **Where did you live last year?**

Sleeper Hall, West Campus. I like it. There are a lot of people, and I'm a very social person.

### **What do you like to do in your free time?**

I like hanging out with friends in their apartments, talking about life, and joking around. I like going to the GSU, singing — I'm going to join the Inner Strength Gospel Choir — talking, reading, listening to other people talk. Going to political lectures. I went to one, about how African women will change Africa. I was like, yeah, I'm going to change Africa.

### **Why do you want to study finance and economics?**

My dream is to work with the United Nations and to go back to Sierra Leone and work with my people, give back to my country.



The 2006-07 members of the Harriet E. Richards Cooperative House, which began at BU in 1928 and is thought to be the oldest all-female collegiate cooperative house in the country. Photo by Daniel Huynh

# THE MISSES CONGENIALITY

## CO-OP LIVING AMID FRESCOED WALLS AT THE HARRIET E. RICHARDS HOUSE

**DURING FINALS**, residence halls all over Boston University are strewn with end-of-the-semester debris, and the Harriet E. Richards Cooperative House is no exception. But if there is a downside to living in a beautifully appointed, lovingly maintained row house on Bay State Road, maybe it's the way scattered notebook pages stand out amid the green marble floors and frescoed walls of the Italian room.

"We're planning a big cleaning this weekend," says Mary Elizabeth Pike (SED'07), as she points out both the pink-papered French room, with its floor-to-ceiling windows with Juliet balconies and antique wooden tables, and the "take pile," where

one resident's outgrown clothes often supplement another's wardrobe.

The architectural finery of 191 Bay State Road and the breezy what's-mine-is-yours attitude of its residents have blended to create a success story in alternative college living. The co-op, also known as HER House, has existed at BU since 1928 and is believed to be the oldest all-female collegiate cooperative house in the country. Founded by former BU Dean of Women Lucy Jenkins Franklin as a resource for women who could not afford room and board in addition to the cost of a university education, it is now a housing

option for female students with both financial need and a different attitude toward college life. Rent is cheap — residents pay \$240 each month for room and board — but living there comes with responsibilities.

"I think our system to make the house work goes back at least thirty years," says Pike, this past academic year's house president. "Otherwise, it just wouldn't flow."

In fact, the system goes back more than fifty years — it was already well-established when Harriet Lane (DGE'55, CAS'57, GRS'61) entered as a freshman. "I don't know where it came from," says Lane, who was house president, vice president, and treasurer during her four years there. "You were just told."

The time-tested routine involves an executive board of leaders, which sets the budgets and keeps tabs on repairs and renovations, several committees that manage such things as organized fun and furniture

purchases, and a strict schedule of day-to-day operations. Everyone has assigned chores, and dinner is served at six o'clock. If you forget your chores, you have to pick from the "job jar," which contains a variety of penalty tasks that no one wants to do — disinfecting the garbage cans, for example, or cleaning the bath mats.

When Lane was a resident, there were a few small differences. The house had two phones — one for outgoing calls, one for incoming — and a nightly chore involved sitting by the phone from 7 to 11 p.m.



to answer calls and summon the lucky recipient. The unofficial chaperone was a "house mother," who has since been replaced by a graduate assistant from the Office of Residence Life. And the semester's cooking was assigned to one student, who received an additional scholarship for taking on the task — an incentive that often proved hard to stomach for the other co-op residents. "I remember one Sunday, the dinner was supposed to be roast beef, and it came to the table boiled," Lane says. "Doris didn't know any better!"

Despite the structure that keeps HER House running smoothly, a relaxed atmosphere has always prevailed. All but four residents live in double

and triple rooms — albeit with high ceilings and stunning river views — and none of the twenty-four keeps her door locked. If you want to borrow something, Pike says, you just leave a note. Conflicts are handled openly, and are settled right away, says current president Hannah Warner (SAR'08). "They're addressed more immediately than in a place you can just walk away from," she says. "Yes, you could go sleep somewhere else, but that would tear at our community, and I think anyone who's been through our application process cares about that."

In Lane's day, students were invited to join HER House by the Dean of Women's office. Now they must sit through interviews, answer essay questions, and supply personal references, all aimed at assessing things that range from their ability to schedule and prioritize to their ideas about tolerating different political and religious viewpoints. The idea isn't to homogenize the group, Warner emphasizes, but to make sure that the women won't let personal opinions affect their responsibility to the house.

What do students gain from the experience, besides the opportunity to share a room with two other students and take on partial responsibility for the cleaning and upkeep of a home? "I'm more patient now," says Warner, "and perceptive about how different groups of people function."

"The house really helps you work on interpersonal skills," says Pike. "It's made me more outgoing and more confident."

"I came from Norwich, Connecticut, a tiny little town," says Lane. "And instead of having to adjust to the big city of Boston, I had this wonderful, congenial, beautiful place to live."

After graduation, however, Lane, who had sometimes been assigned to assist the cook, found that there was a downside to the communal life. "I was married a year or so later," she says. "And I discovered that all the recipes I knew served twenty-four."

JESSICA ULLIAN

## BU Honors President Emeritus John Silber

The many sides of Boston University President Emeritus John Silber (HON.'95) — teacher, leader, politician, father, formidable foe, and loyal friend — were recognized and honored at an April tribute to the University's seventh president and his late wife, Kathryn (HON.'01).

The event drew nearly 1,000 dignitaries from the academic and political spheres and featured live and video tributes from friends and colleagues, including George H. W. Bush (HON.'89), Henry Kissinger (HON.'99), Boston Mayor Thomas Menino (HON.'01), and Silber's daughter, Rachel Silber Devlin. The speakers recounted Silber's decades of history with Boston University, his impact on both the Boston Public Schools and Boston politics, and his unflagging devotion to his family. And all noted that while his opinions have not always been popular, his role in transforming BU into a major research institution is unparalleled.

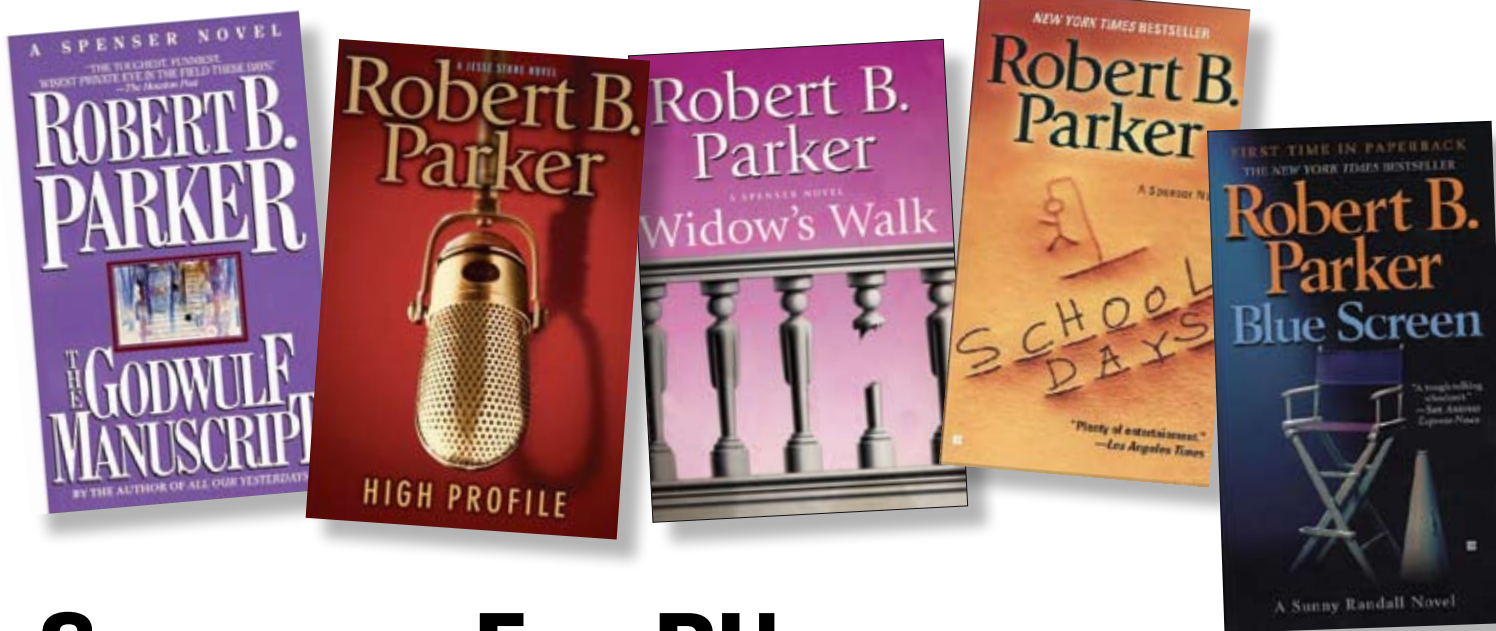
"During his leadership, this place was infused with a sense of urgency — what we could accomplish in a day, a week, a year," said University President Robert A. Brown. "We have come an extraordinary distance. John has led this transformation."

Silber — like Brown, a native of Texas — arrived at Boston University in 1971 after serving as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin. When he arrived, the University had a \$9.9 million deficit and was largely a commuter school. He balanced the budget in eighteen months and went on to hire distinguished new faculty, raise admission standards, expand the campus, and build the endowment. Silber served BU for more than three decades, first as president, until 1996, then as chancellor, until 2003.

JESSICA ULLIAN



John Silber with author Tom Wolfe (HON.'00) at an April gala honoring Silber's contributions to BU. Photo by Allan E. Dines



# Spenser: For BU

## MYSTERY WRITER ROBERT B. PARKER (GRS'57,'71) DONATES PAPERS TO GOTLIEB CENTER

WHEN A WORLD-FAMOUS author decides to donate personal papers documenting decades of output to a university archive, he might be expected to have conflicted emotions. But when mystery writer Robert B. Parker recently gave Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center his papers and drafts, a single consideration dominated.

"They were piling up in my cellar," says Parker (GRS'57,'71). "It's also true that the Gotlieb is rather widely known, so I said yes. The deal was that they could have the material if they'd come and take it away."

Parker's association with Boston University runs long and deep. He earned both a master's and a Ph.D. in English here. His doctoral thesis, *The Violent Hero, Wilderness Heritage, and Urban Reality: A Study of the Private Eye in the Novels of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald*, now sits in the collection at Mugar Memorial Library.

"I was desperately trying to get my Ph.D. by the time I turned forty," Parker recalls. "I made it, by just about a year. The actual writing of my doctoral dissertation took about two weeks — I know there are

people who have been working on their thesis since 1918 who'll want to shoot me for saying that. But I don't get better by taking my time. My second draft is not an improvement, so I don't do one. So in the summer of 1971 I went to the cellar of a BU building, and a woman took my diploma out of a box and handed it to me."

That summer, Parker says, he started writing a mystery about a detective who recovers a valuable manuscript for a large university in Boston. *The Godwulf Manuscript* was published two years later. Since then, he has written more than fifty books for adults, including the Spenser novels and two newer series, featuring Sunny Randall and Jesse Stone, all regular fixtures on national best-seller lists. He also was a consultant on the late eighties television series *Spenser: For Hire*, based on his books. In 2002, he received the Grand Master award at the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Awards.

Parker taught literature at Northeastern University after getting his doctorate, an endeavor he remembers as less than brilliant. "I just wasn't interested in it," he says. "I knew a lot, and some people



**"I was desperately trying to get my Ph.D. by the time I turned forty. I made it, by just about a year."**

— Robert B. Parker

said I was fun in the classroom, but writing was my primary interest, and I didn't want to spend any more time rereading *Paradise Lost*."

The many years Parker spent in academia are evident in the literary references that pepper his work. Not every hard-boiled detective quotes T. S. Eliot.

"A writer needs to have what Frost called 'ulteriority,'" he says. "Chandler called it 'the sound of music beyond the hill.' The background allows the characters to know more than they actually say. I've been known to pooh-pooh academia, but not the acquisition of a Ph.D. That didn't make me smarter, but it gave me a lot of useful information."

Parker continues to follow new directions. He ventured into the young-adult market for the first time with his recent book *Edenville Owls*.

"That was mostly a business decision," he says. "I'm trying to build a suitable estate for my heirs, and they're used to living well. In a young-adult book, the language has to be more careful, the subject matter more prudent. But I'd be a worse writer if I spent my whole life writing about the same guy."

BRETT MILANO

# THE SECRET LIFE OF OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

## GRAD STUDENT FINDS THE FAMILIAR IN CENTURY-OLD PICTURES

**WANDER THROUGH** many Boston neighborhoods — downtown, Back Bay, even the BU campus — and you can see the past peeking through the façade of the present. Tim Orwig compares the city to a Middle Ages palimpsest, reused parchment on which earlier writing has been imperfectly erased.

For the past five summers, Orwig (GRS'01,'08) has taught a course on Boston's architectural history at Metropolitan College, and when he leads his students on walking tours, he encourages them to think of the city landscape as just that: a palimpsest.

"The tour we begin the class with is of the BU campus," says Orwig. "I get them to think about the stores on Comm. Ave., about the automobile showrooms, the factories, and the printing plants that were here, and about BU's coming

and transforming it all."

That sense of the past amid the present is very much the center of Orwig's new book, *Historic Photos of Boston* (Turner), published this spring. The publisher had been looking for an author to write a coffee table book featuring photographs of old Boston, and a friend recommended Orwig. The photos had already been chosen from the rich archives of the Boston Public Library; Orwig had to research the history of the buildings and their locations. He delved into the BPL's archives of long-dead local newspapers, peeling back the layers of history to explain each photo.

The subjects of the photos, most from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are surprisingly easy to identify: Louisburg Square on Beacon Hill looks much the same;

**"It's the North End in 1909, and you know that if it hasn't been obliterated, it's certainly changed."**

— Tim Orwig

Washington Street downtown is surprisingly familiar; and except for the horse-drawn sleighs in the snow, Beacon Street appears unchanged. Some, though, are long gone, like Scollay Square, in what is today Government Center, and the West End, demolished in the name of progress.

Many scenes become recognizable upon closer inspection. Take an 1884 photo of the Cyclorama in the South End, whose domed roof and towers now peer out through the contemporary Boston Center for the Arts on Tremont Street. Back when the photo was taken, the Cyclorama was an attraction much like movie theaters today: the large circular building housed a 400-foot painting of the battle of Gettysburg.

"It was supposed to give people the feeling that they were at the battle," says Orwig, who is finishing up work on a Ph.D. in architectural history. "It was a very popular entertainment at the time — in the photo, you can see the crowds waiting to get in. There were a number of them around the country, at least two in the South End at the time."

Not all the photos are of famous places. One of Orwig's favorites shows street sweepers in 1909. "There's a little boy in suspenders watching them," he says. "You've got this magnificent horse pulling the cart. It's the North End, and you know that if it hasn't been obliterated, it's certainly changed." With the sunlight coming down on the horse, "it's like an old master's painting in some ways," Orwig says. "There's so much going on in the pictures once you really start studying them."

TAYLOR McNEIL

**WEB EXTRA:** View a slide show of historic Boston photos, narrated by Tim Orwig from his new book, at [www.bu.edu/bostonia](http://www.bu.edu/bostonia).



Photo by Thomas E. Marr, courtesy of Boston Public Library Print Department and *Historic Photos of Boston*

# Family Folklore

## WHO SAYS GAMES HAVE NO PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM?

WHEN ALEX RAHEB interviewed his grandparents for Tony Barrand's folklore course, he found out about his grandfather's childhood knack for shooting marbles. So for his final project, Raheb (SMG'08) bought a bag of marbles, drew a circle on the ground, and taught his classmates how to play.

When students hear the term folklore, says Barrand, a professor in the University Professors Program, they don't typically think of something as simple as a game of marbles. Instead, they imagine fifteenth-century European love ballads, fairytales, and Maypole dances. What they don't realize, he says, is that folklore exists in present-day America as well. "Simply put," he says, "folklore refers to the ways in which people express who they are in relation to the places they're from and the groups to which they belong."

The purpose of Understanding Folklore and Folklife, an elective course offered through the College of Arts and Sciences, is to appreciate the meaning of the full range of folkloric genres, from holidays and festi-

**By preserving their family's folklore, they are asserting their own identity."**

— Tony Barrand

vals and oral literature to songs and dances and arts and crafts.

Barrand points out that the concept of folklore developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, largely as a result of the industrial revolution. "As more and more people left the farms for factory work in the cities," he says, "it was feared that the old social fabric would be destroyed forever. But what people discovered was that factory workers developed their own dances and coal miners sang their own songs. The groups may have changed, but they were still bound by the performance of their folklore."

Similarly, says Barrand, every family has its own folklore, and the best way for students to learn that folklore is by talking to an older relative. Before the end of the semester, each student is required to interview at least one family member and document the conversation in an archive-ready format. "Students can be as creative as they want," he says. "Of course, they can write a paper, but many make photo albums or design Web sites instead. Some even write plays or recipe books."

While students may interview their parents, aunts, or uncles, Barrand recommends



Illustration by Eric Palma

a grandparent. “In teaching this class,” he says, “I’ve realized that students don’t know their grandparents. They’re just these people who show up for Thanksgiving and weddings. I’ve also learned that grandparents *want* to tell their grandchildren their stories, especially if they never told the stories to their own children. They know they’re getting older, and they know that by telling their stories, they expand their own life.”

In addition to archiving their interviews, some students choose to share their projects through class presentations, many of which involve food. Clay Neal (UNI’07) decided to bake a fruit and chocolate cake that originated on his great-great-grandmother’s berry farm in Oregon. “It took forever to make,” he says. “But it’s really good — much better than anything you’d get from a mix.”

And Robert Stern, a student in the Evergreen Program, which allows people fifty-eight and older in the community to take selected undergraduate classes, shared a recipe from his family’s homeland of Hungary. “My parents grew up on a farm, and they had a very simple diet,” he says. “Growing up, my mother often made *palacsinta*, which is a crepe-like omelet filled with farmers cheese, cream cheese, and salt.”

Lizzy DesRoche (SAR’08), a second-generation Irish Catholic, had a different focus: her family’s perspective on death. “The Irish consider dying to be the ultimate reward for life on earth, and the wake is the farewell party,” she says. “There’s singing and dancing and lots of drinking. My parents have never missed a wake. In fact, my mother once said that if she ever wins the lottery, she wants to open an Irish wake-themed bar.”

Barrand hopes that by the end of the semester, his students will have learned something new about their families — and about themselves. “By preserving their family’s folklore,” he says, “they are asserting their own identity.”

**VICKY WALTZ**



**“I think bad-news stories undercut the political will for people to establish family-friendly policies.”**

— Caryl Rivers, a COM professor and author of *Selling Anxiety: How the News Media Scare Women*. Photo by Kalman Zabarsky

## WHY ARE WOMEN ANXIOUS?

### COM’S CARYL RIVERS ON HOW THE NEWS MEDIA SCARE FEMALE PROFESSIONALS

IN HER JUST RELEASED book, *Selling Anxiety: How the News Media Scare Women*, Caryl Rivers, a College of Communication professor of journalism, explores examples of the disparaging ways professional women are depicted in the popular press.

#### HOW DO THE MEDIA SCARE WOMEN?

I think what the media seem to be doing is selling anxiety about women’s lives and ambitions the same way the media sell anxiety about women’s thighs and waists. The reason women are buying these stories is that it’s a changing time, a difficult time.

#### WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THIS BOOK?

One of things I noticed as I was researching a book on gender stereotypes was that the more the research was showing women moving into professions, accomplishing more, going to school more, that these women were healthy and doing well, the media narrative was the exact opposite. It was saying, if you are a woman with ambition, your kids are going to be miserable, men won’t want you because you’re too smart, you’re not going to be fertile, you’re going to have lousy marriages. It was such a dichotomy that I started to look at why this was. One of the things I concluded was that women, particularly working women now, are a desirable demographic to the media. And what sells, what creates buzz to these women, is scare stories.

#### WHAT DID YOU FIND WHEN RESEARCHING THESE SCARE TACTICS?

There was a study purportedly showing that the higher a woman’s IQ, the less likely she is to be married. It appeared in headlines in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* under the headline “Too Smart to Marry.” But what none of the stories mentioned was that the study was done in the 1930s on women born in the 1920s. So the study has utterly no relevance to the lives of women today, and yet because it was sort of a bad-news story, kind of a sexy story, it played all over the place. And that’s what I found, that often these stories that became breakout stories were based on really bad science, that the research was based on tiny samples, outdated, exaggerated in its findings — not really very good research on which to hang a big story.

#### DO THESE STORIES DO ANY REAL HARM?

I think these bad-news stories undercut the political will for people to establish family-friendly policies — better day care, better school policies, all of those policies that would be sane and sensible — that would make it possible for the 70 percent of working couples out there to really function.

#### IF THESE HEADLINES AREN’T THE REALITY, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REAL STRUGGLES WOMEN FACE?

The biggest struggle that women face is trying to integrate family and work. To have jobs where the standard is not to work ninety hours a week. To have day care so you don’t have to scrounge up whatever help you can and feel anxious about your child because you don’t know if your child is that well cared for. With no paid family leave, if you have a family crisis, what do you do? It’s not only women who are facing this — it’s also men. But it’s always cast as a women’s issue.

**NICOLE LASKOWSKI ■**