

COMMUNITY? QUESTION

Where do you find your inspiration?

This new feature poses a different question every issue about values and experiences shared by members of the ECF community across the generations.

JERRY CRAFT '80

Cartoonist, illustrator, writer

"I've always found my inspiration by watching the world around me. When I first created my *Mama's Boyz* comic strip, I based it on my friends who were being raised by their mom or their grandmother. Then I used the lack of African American cartoonists to inspire me to become one.

"I'm writing a story now where I'm incorporating a lot of my experiences from my four years at Fieldston: Commuting each day from a predominately black and Hispanic area of the city (Washington Heights) and ending up in Riverdale. Remembering my dad coming to pick me up in our yellow Ford LTD that was parked in the midst of black luxury cars, being one of only a handful of African American students in the school, and sitting at 'our table' in the cafeteria. Or being one of the few who had not seen the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* or did not know what a Pink Floyd was.

"Now knowing what a gift it was for me to attain a Fieldston education – that in itself has inspired me to achieve a level of fulfillment from what I do professionally and how I can use that to positively affect others."

ISABEL COHEN

Form VI student, artist

"I find inspiration in a wide variety of sources, from the many materials in our sculpture classroom to the accomplishments of other artists. Last summer I discovered the photographs of John Dugdale, who suffered an AIDS-related stroke in 1993 and was left with only 20 percent of his sight. Though legally blind, he continues to be a professional photographer and says, 'I have discovered that sight exists in my mind and heart.' I was struck by his sheer determination to continue doing what he loved. I started to

think about the things that many of us at Fieldston take for granted – sight, mobility, and an unconditionally supportive community. I considered what my life would be like without sight, or all the elements that I as a student, and as an artist, rely upon. Until that moment, I had not stopped to appreciate a very valuable tool: my hands. In September, when Nancy Fried announced that my sculpture class' first project was to create a piece of public art, I wanted to create an installation that would emphasize the importance of our hands. I planned to create a wall of hands performing everyday activities [see photo on inside front cover]. Once I started working, I wanted the sculpture to show more. Each set of hands became a sculpture on its own, and served as a means to express my frustration, appreciation, and concern surrounding social and

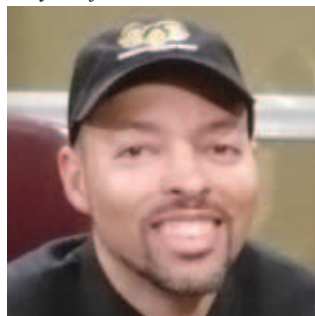
political issues that I thought relevant to our community. While holding onto my original intention, the sculpture developed into something much deeper, because I found unexpected inspiration along the way."

TOM CHRISTENSEN

Fieldston Upper music department chair, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and Fieldston Lower parent

"I find my inspiration for teaching in students who tell me they 'just don't get it' or who tell me they are having difficulty playing something or mastering a concept. I find it fascinating to try to figure out how to get them to understand something or play a phrase with confidence. Doing the same thing with an ensemble is even more inspiring since there are usually 10 different challenges for me at the same time. Inspiration

Jerry Craft '80



Isabel Cohen



Tom Christensen





John Pitman Weber '60



Jesse Kalisher '80



Gabriela Salazar '99



David Black '49

in my performing life is more personal. Although I practice nearly every day, at this point in my life my most compelling reason to play and practice is a gig! I love to have the challenge of new music and to face things I cannot do well musically. I also love to write music. I've found my inspiration for composition in recordings and live music as well as some non-musical sources such as the poetry of Frank O'Hara and the painting of Jackson Pollock."

JOHN PITMAN WEBER '60

Public and exhibiting artist, co-founder of the Chicago Public Art Group

"Starting in my last years of high school (with the Youth March for Integrated Schools in Washington, D.C. in 1958), the Civil Rights movement was really formative for me. Its sense of a possible 'beloved community' has informed every one of my social commitments (played out in my art) since then, including the anti-war movement and getting involved in grass-roots community organizations in Chicago. After spending a year in France on a grant and

doing an MFA at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, by dumb luck I got a teaching job at a small college and got involved in the nascent community mural movement. My art school profs regarded my community involvements and anti-war imagery as dreadful career mistakes. But those involvements have inspired me, shaped my career, and given me a broadly diverse network of close colleagues. I have learned so much from them. Empathy-identification with 'the other' has been one pole of my inspiration. My figurative work has always focused on gesture and body-language. The other well-spring would have to be nature (my garden is full of prairie perennials) and human tenderness. I often juxtapose images. The meaning for me lies in contrasting images and the narratives the contrasts suggest."

JESSE KALISHER '80

Photographer

"I am inspired by truth. I believe that absolute truth exists and that one of our quests in life is to get as close to the absolute truth

as possible. I'm not sure that uncovering absolute truths is attainable, or that if it is, that it's attainable very often. Of course, my camera is one of the tools I use in this quest. My hope is that every time I take a picture I will capture an image that tells a story and one which has some measure of truth to it. I suppose that's why when I'm asked what type of photographer I am, I invariably reply, 'I photograph things that exist.'"

GABRIELA SALAZAR '99

Artist, curator, teacher, and writer

"For me, the best part of making art is getting beyond 'looking' to 'seeing.' I usually turn to the built environment for inspiration and material – and then I try to test and make known our assumptions about how to see the world we've all put together for ourselves. It's exciting for me to take things I 'know' to be true and try to make them untrue, or more true; to look around at what humans have constructed and find the means by which I can make what's already there become more than it appears to be."

DAVID BLACK '49

Tony Award-winning Broadway producer, director, actor, artist, playwright, teacher, and author

"When I am inspired I've cleared the channels of things from the past and of thoughts of what I am supposed to be doing. The saying 'that which doesn't kill me makes me stronger' applies here: if you're not challenged, nothing is going to happen. Art is that which comes unbidden, you can't plan it and if you do you will not be inspired. You have to make mistakes, and the mistakes are the art. Art is a prism, and if you see a painting that has been painted for the right reasons, you will see your own truth in the painting through the refracted light of the prism – you will not see the artist's truth because you and the artist are two different people. Your inspiration comes when you have abandoned all hope of ever finding it."