

# WHITMAN

MAGAZINE

## Protectors of the Forest

Meet a family of Whitman alums who are helping a vibrant Oregon ecosystem survive and thrive

WINTER 2025



## Under the Lights

First-year Whitman College student Moira Easton rehearses for "Roots and Bones," an original dance performance in December 2024 choreographed by Senior Lecturer of Dance Peter de Grasse and Dance Faculty Fellow Jessica Bertram Williams.





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PHOTO BY PEDRO LIZARDI '26

# Inside

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 Deep curiosity and determination have taken Eyleen Menchú Tuy '25 around the globe—from her roots in Guatemala to boarding school in Costa Rica to studying in Walla Walla. As she prepares to graduate this spring, she reflects on the value of finding community wherever she goes.

**12** **FOR THE LOVE OF THE FOREST**  
 The Zena Forest is more than a pretty place to the Deumling family. It's a beloved home, a thriving business and the heart of a multigenerational mission to protect a vibrant ecosystem. See how this family of Whitman alums is creatively and lovingly stewarding a sustainable forest in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

**18** **BLUES ATHLETES LEVEL UP & PLAY ON**  
 When the pandemic upended the world, it capsized college sports too, but years later, many student-athletes got a second chance to compete—in graduate school. Meet five former Blues who are using the lessons they learned at Whitman to advance and thrive in their graduate studies, sports and life.

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**LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**  
 Whitman College is located on the traditional Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla homelands. We pay our respect to tribal elders both past and present and extend our respect to all Indigenous people today. We honor their stewardship of the land and ecosystem and commit to continuing that important work.

**ON THE COVER** Workers at family-owned Zena Forest Products stroll through the trees. See page 12. Photo by Andy Van Schoiack.

PHOTO BY YAHIR TZECC '25



## We Lift Each Other Up

AS MANY OF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED FIRSTHAND, Whitman College is a marvelous place to explore, learn, grow and prepare for the future. We offer extraordinary academic programs and campus experiences. But what makes a Whitman education so especially powerful is the extraordinary people who help each student make the most of these opportunities as they expand their horizons and shape their own path.

Students are guided by superb faculty who pour themselves into teaching, mentorship and creating new knowledge — and by staff who support them as they engage. Research shows that college students with a mentor who knows them well carry the biggest positive impact into their future lives.

Generations of alumni demonstrate ways to take a Whitman education and use it to build a life of purpose, excellence and impact. And so many Whitman families and alumni step forward to lend a helping hand or a connection or invaluable advice as students consider what direction to take their talents.

Because of the extraordinary people at Whitman, our students have far more than just one mentor. They develop a whole world of people who are supporters, champions and guides. Each of these people brings expertise as well as deep care and connection. Each is part of helping students reach their dreams as well as new possibilities beyond what they have imagined.

Whether I am at the 50th Reunion or at the dining hall with new students, I hear things like, “This professor believed in me,” “They gave me the courage to study abroad, and it shifted how I see the world,” “My research advisor helped me do work that had never been done before” and “I met two alumni who gave me advice that changed my life.”

This issue of Whitman Magazine is full of stories of Whitties helping each other access opportunities, build community, solve problems and meet ambitious goals. My deepest thanks for the many forms of generosity and care you pour into Whitman students and their futures!

Sarah Bolton  
President

“Generations of alumni demonstrate ways to take a Whitman education and use it to build a life of purpose, excellence and impact.”

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### CLASS NOTES

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### NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

Whitman College is deeply committed to the principle of nondiscrimination in all its forms. In its admission, educational, and employment practices, programs, and activities, the college does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex (including pregnancy and parenting status), gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, sexual orientation, religion, age, marital status, national origin, shared ancestry, disability, veteran status, or any other basis prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other applicable federal, state, or local laws.



# On Boyer Avenue

NEWS FROM CAMPUS

## Outdoor Program Alumni Gift Honors Whitman Icons



**Going strong.** Bob and Clare Carson enthusiastically led many Outdoor Program trips over 40 years at Whitman.

PATTI HANKEL NELSON '85 vividly remembers her first rafting experience. It was Family Weekend at Whitman College, and she had signed up for a white water rafting trip on the Salmon River through the Outdoor Program.



**Opening the outdoors.** Charlie Nelson '83 and Patti Hankel Nelson '85 hope to help every student participate in at least one Outdoor Program activity each year.

“The river was pretty high,” says Patti, who is married to Whitman Trustee Charlie Nelson '83. “I was definitely white-knuckling it at a few points, but we all stayed on board. It was a blast.”

Established in 1975, the Outdoor Program offers trips and recreational opportunities that allow Whitman students to get outside and explore the natural beauty surrounding Walla Walla and other wilderness areas.

For decades, many of the trips were led by Professor Emeritus of Geology and Environmental Studies Bob Carson, often accompanied by his wife (and Patti's sister), retired Associate Dean of Students Clare Carson.

To honor the Carsons, the Nelsons established the Bob Carson Outdoor Program Endowment. It provides permanent support for the Bob Carson Outdoor Fund (BCOF), which helps eliminate

financial barriers so that all students can participate in the Outdoor Program.

“Our goal is to fund at least one Outdoor Program adventure [per year] for every student during their time at Whitman,” Charlie says. “We want to support the Outdoor Program while also recognizing Bob and Clare for the great things they did in their careers at Whitman.”

The BCOF encourages students who couldn't otherwise afford Outdoor Program trips to get outside, Bob says.

“Directly or indirectly, the students learn not only outdoor skills but also natural history, and they gain a deeper appreciation for Earth,” he adds.

The Nelsons both participated in Outdoor Program trips and have fond memories of Bob's enthusiasm.

“Bob would tie in geology in a really fun way,” Patti says. “He

would get so excited to show us a rock formation or tell us something about a glacier.”

Clare, who helped create Whitman's Student Engagement Center — now the Career and Community Engagement Center — loved to help lead Outdoor Program trips.

“They were a team,” says Charlie, who notes that the Carsons still climb mountains and go rafting to this day. “So many people have benefited from their passion for the outdoors. Some students have never had the opportunity to do anything like this before. It adds a unique dimension to the educational experience you can get at Whitman.”

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To make a donation to the Bob Carson Outdoor Program Endowment, visit [give.whitman.edu](http://give.whitman.edu).



**Celebrating Indigenous foodways.** The new First Foods station at Cleveland Commons opened in December 2024 with a menu of cedar-plank-smoked rainbow trout, herb-roasted elk rack, root vegetables, fry bread and huckleberry jam.

## Whitman Receives National HEED Award

Whitman College is proud to be named a recipient of the 2024 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from Insight Into Diversity magazine, the oldest and largest publication focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism (DEIA) in higher education.

Receiving the HEED Award is a recognition of Whitman’s ongoing dedication to cultivating an inclusive campus community—where all students, staff and faculty members feel welcome, valued and empowered to thrive.

Whitman’s commitment to DEIA is further reflected in initiatives that are literally changing the shape of campus—from the recent opening of the Third Space Center (see page 10) to other resources that support inclusive excellence on campus, such as the Queer Resource Center and the All Faiths Room. Whitman also hosts Community Learning Days, which are opportunities for faculty and staff to deepen their understanding of diversity and social justice.

Read more about DEIA at Whitman at [whitman.edu/inclusive-excellence](https://whitman.edu/inclusive-excellence).

# First Foods Festival Honors Tribal History & Stewardship

IN NOVEMBER 2024, Whitman College Native American Outreach hosted the First Foods Festival—a new event offering activities and education about local tribal history and environmental stewardship.

The festival featured a dogbane (hemp) cording class, a film screening and panel, a food waste-reduction presentation, and a sampler of delicious native foods.

### SAVING THE SALMON

Tribal and Washington state history came into sharp focus during the screening of “Fish War,”

an award-winning documentary exploring area tribes’ fight to exercise their fishing treaty rights.

The film explores the economic, political and cultural struggles that not only ensured tribes the right to fish but spurred their communities to become leaders in habitat restoration and conservation.

### REDUCING FOOD WASTE

In an informative session, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) staff members Colleen Sanders and Althea Huesties-Wolf presented their food waste-reduction project,

“Nixyáawii, Awkú Čáwpam Ákaatta!” (“Nixyáawii, Don’t Throw It Away!”), which received a grant from the Department of Agriculture.

Among other goals, the project will implement a small anaerobic digester to convert food waste into renewable natural gas and liquid fertilizer.

“We want to keep food waste here; we want to see if we can use this resource,” Sanders said.

### HONORING FIRST FOODS

To close out the Festival, Bon Appétit hosted a First Foods Hors d’oeuvres Sampler, including bison meatballs, smoked salmon spread, Hayshaker Farms roasted root vegetables, huckleberry sauce and fry bread. Shannon Null, general manager of Bon Appétit at Whitman, also announced a new First Foods station at Cleveland Commons, which debuted in December 2024.

## What Are First Foods?

The five traditional First Foods of the Walúlapam (Walla Walla), Weyíletpuu (Cayuse) and Imatalamláma (Umatilla) people are water, wild game, berries, roots and salmon. Historically, the tribes traveled in a yearly cycle to harvest these foods throughout the Northwest.

## New Academic Concentration Is a Pathway for Changemakers

Whitman College students have traditionally cared about making a difference. Now, they can formally integrate that passion into their studies with a new Social Justice Concentration launched in Fall 2024. This concentration can be added to any major,

allowing students to draw together social justice issues across disciplines.

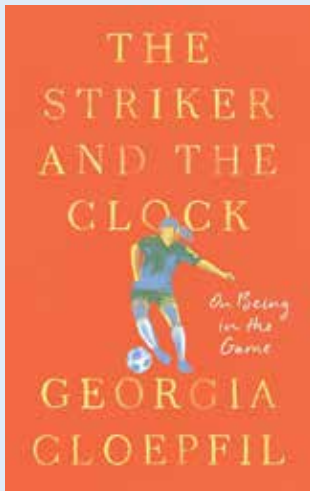
“Students will study systems of oppression, interrogate their own relationship to injustice and learn models for liberation and change, all while connecting theory and history

to hands-on practice,” says Lisa Uddin, Associate Professor of Art History and Paul Garrett Fellow.

Read more about the new program—and its real-world community impact—at [whitman.edu/magazine](https://whitman.edu/magazine).



## FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

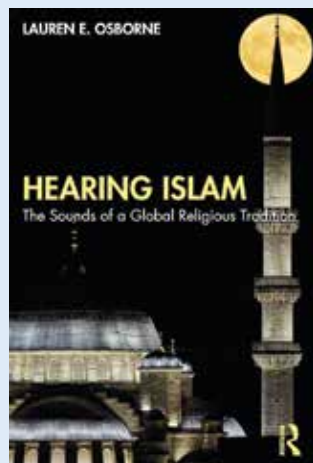


Assistant Women's Soccer Coach and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Rhetoric **Georgia Cloepfil** published a memoir, titled "The Striker and the Clock" (Riverhead Books, 2024), in which she reflects on her six years as a professional soccer player.



**Michelle Janning**, the Raymond and Elsie DeBurgh Chair of Social Sciences and Professor of Sociology, published the book "Investing in Enchantment: Memory, Market and the Family Vacation Home" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024) in which she examines social roles, relationships, and class and race inequalities.

Associate Professor of German Studies and Environmental Humanities **Emily Jones** traveled to Iceland and the Faroe Islands to research her book project "Weeds and Seeds: Plant Propagation and Vegetal Futures." Jones joined farm and seed workers on a seed-collecting expedition focusing on native maritime plants that might be selected for cultivation in North American gardens.



Associate Professor of Religion **Lauren Osborne** published a new book, "Hearing Islam: The Sounds of a Global Religious Tradition" (Routledge, 2024). In the book, Osborne introduces the global and historical tradition of Islam through its sounds, including recitation of the Qur'an, the call to prayer, religious song, hip-hop and more.

Professor of Biology **Tim Parker** was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation to support his investigation into how different scientists can draw different conclusions from the same data.

A paper by Research Scientist and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Brain, Behavior and Cognition



Assistant Professor of History **Camilo Lund-Montaña** (left) and Assistant Professor of Hispanic Studies **Mariana Ruiz-González** (right) have been selected as 2024–2025 Public Humanities Fellows with Humanities Washington. Their project will collect, preserve and publicize oral histories and photographs from the Latinx/e communities in Walla Walla and southeastern Washington.

**Ben Vernasco** was featured on the cover of *Molecular Ecology*. The paper is the first to describe how naturally occurring hybridization in animal populations influences telomeres. Vernasco led the research in collaboration with researchers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

Director of Debate and Forensics **Baker Weilert-Pekar** contributed to "Forum: The Efficacy of Intercollegiate Competitive Debate: Does it Remain a Wise Investment?" published in *The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta*.

Assistant Professor of Computer Science **Jordan Wirfs-Brock** was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation. Her project will develop tools and technologies that enable people to record personally meaningful audio and to reflect on the sounds in their lives. The grant will support five students and one post-baccalaureate researcher.



**Zahi Zalloua**, the Cushing Eells Professor of Philosophy and Literature and Director of Indigeneity, Race, and Ethnicity Studies, published a book titled "The Politics of the Wretched: Race, Reason and Resentment" (Bloomsbury, 2024).



# One Bright Light

CURIOSITY AND  
CONNECTION FUEL SENIOR  
EYLEEN MENCHÚ TUY

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BY MÓNICA HERNÁNDEZ WILLIAMS

EYLEEN MENCHÚ TUY '25 became curious about the world at a young age.

“Thanks to my parents, my brother and I grew up in an environment where we were always invited to learn, to ask questions, to listen and to share,” she says.

Growing up in Guatemala, she always knew there were opportunities out there. She just had to find them.

“My family doesn’t have a lot of finances, but my mom and dad always found a way to expose us to many different things,” she says. “Money was never a limitation.”

From chess to gymnastics, art classes to public speaking, robotics to martial arts, she explored a wide range of interests.

Menchú Tuy’s deep curiosity, determination and cheerful optimism eventually led her to Whitman College, where the now senior is majoring in Politics and Hispanic Studies.

## SEEKING OUT OPPORTUNITIES

At 10 years old, Menchú Tuy began hearing about becas (scholarships) that help older students access educational programs. So she started applying.

“I received a scholarship to participate in debate when I was 14. I got another one that allowed me to travel to Chile and ended up getting many others,” she says.

As the eldest child, she was always eager to keep learning and reaching.

“I knew that, financially, continuing my education would be a challenge,” she says. “So I went on the computer and searched ‘scholarships to continue studying for Guatemalan people.’ That’s when I found UWC.”

United World College (UWC) is a network of schools that offer an International Baccalaureate diploma to students with a passion for making a difference.

She applied and was accepted to UWC Costa Rica on a full scholarship. So at 16,





**“We are not always going to be here. We are only here for a very specific amount of time, so we should think about how our work will impact future generations.”**

—EYLEEN MENCHÚ TUY '25

**A big world to explore.** Eyleen Menchú Tuy '25 chose to do off-campus studies in South Korea during her time at Whitman. “During my trip to Korea, I visited several palaces, but one of my favorites was the Gyeongbokgung Palace [in Seoul].”

she packed her bags and set off for a new academic and life adventure.

## STRANDED YET SHINING

As she said her goodbyes, Menchú Tuy was told to prepare to spend a lot of time away from her family. But it turned out to be a much longer separation than anyone anticipated.

After her first semester away, she spent the December 2019 holidays with her family before returning to campus in January 2020. In March, a global pandemic changed everything.

Alongside 200 other international students, she now had to find her way back home.

“The school shuttled us to the airport. They told us to bring everything and not to forget our masks,” she says.

With her plane ticket in hand, she arrived at the airport early. As she was in line to check in, she heard an announcement on the overhead speaker. Guatemala had closed its borders.

“I couldn’t believe it,” she recalls. “I asked for more information, but no one knew when the border would reopen.” She was stranded in a foreign country.

“It was challenging for me because I *could not* go home,” Menchú Tuy says.

Her family and friends constantly checked on her through texts and phone calls. The school provided food, housing and resources to aid her and 15 others in their transition to online classes. And the staff got creative, organizing activities they could safely do while at a distance.

She made the best of the situation, graduated on time and earned herself a scholarship to continue her studies in the United States.

“My community kept me going—the one I built in Costa Rica and the one I had back home in Guatemala. That’s when I realized community is so important in every aspect of life.”

## EXPLORING PASSIONS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

As Menchú Tuy applied to colleges, she had two things in mind.

“I was curious about liberal arts colleges. I thought it was kind of crazy that, if I wanted to study politics, I could also take a guitar class. I just couldn’t imagine it,” she says. “I also thought it would be nice to go to a school where I could create community.”

Her friend suggested looking at the Colleges That Change Lives website (ctcl.org). Intrigued, she took a peek.

“Whitman was on it. I read the description and thought it sounded very interesting and very welcoming, so I scheduled an interview,” she says. “I was surprised by how this person—who I never met before—wanted to get to know me as a person and was interested in my experiences and what I wanted to do in life.”

Menchú Tuy was convinced she needed to go to Whitman—and in the fall of 2021, she joined the Class of 2025 in Walla Walla.

On campus, she immediately got involved. “There is always something happening,” she says. “I want to go to everything and learn as much as I can. Everything is so interesting. It is challenging to decide what I *don’t* go to.”

Among the many student organizations, she chose to focus on opportunities that align with her faith and identity. She’s held leadership positions in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Unidos Latinx affinity group and the student-run Whitman Events Board. She has also been on various campus planning committees and believes everyone plays an important role in society.


“We are not always going to be here. We are only here for a very specific amount of time, so we should think about how our work will impact future generations,” she says. “All of the efforts my Mayan ancestors made allowed me to be where I am today.”

## FROM GUATEMALA TO GRADUATION

Since the pandemic, Menchú Tuy has been home for short periods of time. In May, she will become the first in her family to earn a college degree.

“I get emotional and excited thinking of graduation day. It will be a collective achievement of the four of us,” she says. “My mom, my dad and my brother ... I always carry them with me. Hopefully, on graduation day, we can reunite in this place that has taught me so much.”

Menchú Tuy also credits all the amazing people she’s met at Whitman for getting her this far and encourages others to build their own network.

“It is really nice to be part of a community. It might be the community within your major or residence hall or common interest. These communities are a special place to learn. Don’t ever let your community go.” 

## WORLD TRAVELER & SCHOLAR

In the summer of 2024, Eyleen Menchú Tuy '25 was one of two students selected to travel to Peru as a research assistant alongside Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies Carlos Vargas-Salgado.

Together, they staged the theater production “Camasca” and interviewed cast, crew and audience members about its political impact on the Hispanic world.

Menchú Tuy will be tying these insights into her senior thesis. Learn more about her Peru experience at [whitman.edu/magazine](http://whitman.edu/magazine).

# Professor Problem-Solver

JOHN STRATTON PUSHES HIMSELF AND HIS STUDENTS TO TAKE ON SOFTWARE PROBLEMS CREATIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

BY DANNA LORCH

IN HIS LIFE AND work, John Stratton has always liked being fast.

Fast at piecing together logic puzzles as a kid in small-town Virginia. Fast with the fry baskets in his first job at the local McDonald's. And a builder of fast things — from rockets to computer software — in high school and college.

Today, the Associate Professor of Computer Science is also quick to share his excitement about his work mentoring the next generation of software developers at Whitman College.

With efficiency at the heart of everything he does, it's no surprise Stratton gets things done. When he's not teaching a class, he can be found collaborating on research with colleagues, directing the Whitman College Software Optimization Lab, advising pre-engineering students or helping lead the global software consultancy MulticoreWare.

## MAKING THE SOFTWARE SWITCH

Although he was always STEM-focused, Stratton initially overlooked Computer Science as a possible major at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign because he didn't understand what it was all about.

"I assumed that coding was just a different kind of typing," he admits. He was more interested in the engineering of computers—building hardware and technology.

He didn't give software another thought until a computer engineering course showed him that computers needed instructions to do anything. "It was eye-opening," Stratton says. "I loved how computer science is about identifying a problem that needs to be solved and figuring out how to build a computer system or piece of software to solve it."

Stratton went on to earn both his Bachelor of Science and doctorate at Urbana-Champaign. While his first love for the hardware side of computing never faded, over time, software became a more dynamic research field.

"My advisor and cohort were very focused on understanding existing systems and testing how to write and develop better software to enable the hardware that we had," he explains. Consequently, Stratton expanded his research focus to include computer science in graduate school.

## EXPLORING IDEAS WITH IMPACT

Realizing early on that he wanted to focus his career on research and academics, Stratton was very intentional about the type of professor he wanted to become and the impact he wanted his work to make in the wider world.

"After graduating, I sought out a position which emphasized more mentorship in teaching than lecturing to giant halls filled with students," he says.

That's just what he found at Whitman in 2016. Under the leadership of Janet Davis, Professor and Microsoft Chair of Computer Science, who had arrived at the college the year before, the new Computer Science Department was coming to life. Stratton was inspired by the invitation to help senior colleagues launch a new program early in his career.

Today's department is constantly growing and changing dramatically — just like the field it prepares students to enter. "It's no secret that our department is excited about wanting to try new things," Stratton says.

And in the Whitman College Software Optimization Lab, or OptiLab, Stratton and

his students can do just that. Together they are exploring new ideas — like reducing the energy that software uses.

"If you can take libraries implementing machine learning or video compression, and you can make them 10% faster, that dramatically impacts global energy consumption," he says. That's a goal that would offer far-reaching positive impacts on the environment and people's daily lives.

Stratton and teams of student researchers explore these applications by building simulators that help scientists run high-quality software to make their research more efficient.

"We work with software systems to learn how to implement efficient, accurate and robust software to solve problems — whether it's gene regulation network simulations or circadian rhythm and heart tissue simulations," Stratton says.

While most of his collaborations are with companies and labs beyond the college, he also partners with several Whitman colleagues. One of them is Arielle Cooley, Professor of Biology, who researches the pigmentation of the Chilean monkeyflower *Mimulus luteus* as a window into the mechanisms underlying evolutionary change. OptiLab helps Cooley process large imaging datasets in record time.

## FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE BOARDROOM

Stratton finds it meaningful to stay active in the corporate tech world too. As a doctoral candidate, he developed a compiler — a tool that translates programming languages into different formats — that could translate and run new programming languages on computers that didn't have




**“I want to give [students] the space needed to take on big challenges without fear ... I believe that growth happens best in a community.”**

—**JOHN STRATTON**, Associate Professor of Computer Science

the hardware capabilities the languages were designed for. He shared his findings with MulticoreWare and has grown with the software solutions company ever since, now serving as its Chief Technology Officer.

His connections there have opened doors for Whitman graduates looking to begin their computer science careers. And Stratton’s practical experience at MulticoreWare heavily contributes to the course materials in his Software Performance Optimization syllabus. The problems he troubleshoots for the company help inspire the assignments he challenges Whitman students to complete.

“These are exactly the types of problems I want my students to be able to solve in class,” Stratton says. “At the end of the day, we all want to go out into the world and build tools that people want to use and can use productively.” 



**Enjoying the process.** In the classroom and the lab, mentorship is at the heart of John Stratton’s (left) teaching.

## Performance vs. Growth: A Lesson in Balance

On the first day of John Stratton’s computer systems courses at Whitman, he likes to start with a powerful demonstration.

“I take a simple Python coding program that a Computer Science student could have written, and I show them in five minutes how to make that program 3,000 to 10,000 times faster,” Stratton says. It makes a strong statement about the potential for improved performance, but he’s the first to admit that going faster in the classroom isn’t his top priority for Whitman students.

In an open letter he hands out in the same session, Stratton invites students to reflect on the difference between growth and performance. In a performance environment, mistakes are penalized. But in a growth environment, the point is to experiment, take risks and even fail before mastering a theory or skill.

“I want to give you the space needed to take on big challenges without fear,” his letter explains. “I believe that growth happens best in a community.”

Stratton believes community works best when it is made up of individuals from different backgrounds with diverse ways of problem-solving. That perspective is rooted in his own early education. Homeschooled as a kid, he initially struggled with time management in college and thought grading systems were a distraction from learning.

“I didn’t just want to answer a question correctly and move on to something else—I wanted to understand the concepts behind the exams and their applications,” he says. Today he tries to pass on this approach to his students.



### THIRD SPACE CENTER

THE THIRD SPACE CENTER is a new campus gathering place designed to center the needs, concerns, interests, histories and cultures of communities of color at Whitman.

Located between the Fouts Center for Visual Arts and the Reid Campus Center, the homey structure has long been a familiar part of Whitman’s campus, most recently used as rental housing for faculty and staff. It’s now reimagined as a space where students can celebrate and fully express their identities.

A pair of pictures hangs just inside the community room: the space as it was before renovation and the floor plan students envisioned. A number of elements students said were important to the space—from the tools in the communal kitchen to the arrangement of the furniture—informed the design.

Why create such a space? The center is part of a larger effort to improve the campus experience for students of color, says Vice President for Inclusive Excellence Dr. John Johnson. “It’s important for the college to have spaces that communicate a real sense of belonging for students of all identities, but especially for students of color who are not represented in large numbers,” he says.









# PROTECTORS OF THE FOREST

Rooted in their Whitman education, the Deumling family is creatively and lovingly stewarding a sustainable forest in Oregon's Willamette Valley

BY TARA ROBERTS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY VAN SCHOIACK





**G**olden light streams through Oregon white oaks robed in moss and lichen, illuminating patches of sword fern and hazel in the rich soil below. The knobbly trees mingle with Douglas-fir, Bigleaf maple and a host of other species, spreading into the Zena Forest, a diverse habitat that climbs hills, snakes along creeks and dips into canyons, covering 1,300 acres in northwestern Oregon.

Ben Deumling '05 has called the Zena Forest home since he was 5 years old. Now, as President of Zena Forest Products, he and his mother, Sarah (Snyder) Deumling '68, have made it their mission to steward the forest in a way that emphasizes restoration and regeneration.

"I've been here almost all my life, and I continue to learn new things about this forest and this ecosystem every day," says Ben (pictured above).

The story of the Zena Forest is a complex ecosystem in itself, weaving together deep family roots, shared care for the land and the environment, and a commitment to thinking creatively about managing a forest and a business for the future—grounded in two generations of Whitman College experiences.

### The Path to the Forest

Sarah is described on the Zena Forest Products website as Visionary Matriarch and Protector of the Forest, a title she laughs about but doesn't argue with.

"She spends her days in the forest

on her four-wheeler with her machete, chopping blackberries, protecting the little trees," Ben says.

Sarah says she was born with a love for the woods in her bones. Her mother's family has lived in the Willamette Valley for generations. Her great-grandfather ran a mill in Portland in the 1870s, and Sarah grew up on a farm in nearby Molalla.

But her connection to Zena Forest started thousands of miles away.

When Sarah was in high school, her family hosted an exchange student from Munich, Germany, named Apollonia (Eulenburg) Heisenberg '70. The girls grew close, and Sarah spent a year after graduation living in Germany before returning to the U.S. to attend Whitman. She loved the Washington countryside and the chance to "make a little ruckus" with the close friends she made on campus.

On a visit to Sarah in Walla Walla, Apollonia fell in love with Whitman too. She moved into Sarah's sorority and convinced the Office of Admission to give her a good deal on tuition.

Soon, another friend from Germany



PHOTO BY DENISE SILFEE



## “She spends her days in the forest on her four-wheeler with her machete, chopping blackberries, protecting the little trees.”

—Ben Deumling '05, on his mother Sarah Deumling '68

wrote Sarah asking if he could come out to Washington too. His name was Dieter Deumling '71. He only spent a year attending Whitman, but it was enough to change both of their lives. He married Sarah in 1970.

Several years later, a family of forest managers back in Germany — cousins of Apollonia and friends of Dieter — decided to buy a forest in Oregon to hedge against the threat of acid rain in their home country.

But they needed someone to manage it. In 1987, they offered the job to Dieter, and the Deumling family moved to the Zena Forest.

### Growing Out of Loss & Love

In the summer of 1996, Dieter passed away, leaving the Deumling family at a crossroads.

“It was fairly sudden, and here we were, and nobody wanted to leave,” Sarah says. “We’d become very attached to this place. Even though it wasn’t ours, it felt like ours.”

The landowners asked Sarah if she’d like to take over.

“It took me about 15 minutes to decide,” she says. “And I’ve never regretted it for a moment.”

Sarah had a Politics degree from Whitman and later earned a master’s in Teaching, so forestry was a new adventure.

The landowners sent their head forester and an assistant out to Oregon for three months to give her a crash course in caring for the woods.

The first time she met with log buyers on her own, she was afraid to ask about all the things she didn’t know, especially because there were few women working in forest management at the time. But once she started asking questions, she discovered the buyers were happy to share their knowledge — as were many other people in the forestry community.

### A Grounded Education

Ben was 14 when his father passed — and deeply attached to the forest. He’d already started working in the woods during the summer and on the weekends with Dieter.

“As a kid, I would follow him everywhere in the woods,” he says.

Zena Forest was Ben’s home and a place he wanted to come back to, but he knew that college was an opportunity to gain new skills and experiences.

After a gap year working in a car repair shop in Germany, he headed to college. He’d heard his parents’ joyful stories and visited his older sister, Katherine Deumling '96, and her then-boyfriend, Brian Detman '93, on campus and was determined to follow in his family’s Whitman footsteps.

Despite his interest in forestry, he started out studying physics. But after taking an environmental politics class, he changed his major to Politics and Environmental Studies. His love for Zena Forest provided a strong foundation for his education.

“The responsibility to be a good steward and citizen of this earth was instilled in me forever by my parents — and by growing up in this patch of forestland and falling in love with this place,” Ben says.

In the spring of his first year at Whitman, he spotted an ad for Semester in the West — a new interdisciplinary program in which students would spend 90 days traveling; meeting scientists,





artists, officials and land experts; doing fieldwork; and learning about the challenges facing public lands. Ben became part of the program's inaugural class and worked as a Semester in the West staff member for a year after graduation.

Semester in the West deepened his connection to the land and his interest in environmental and natural resource policy.

Ben says his Whitman education underlies his whole career: He gained strong writing skills and learned the value of communication, collaboration and “finding ways to thread the needle on thorny environmental challenges.”

“That’s something I’ve continued to this day, trying to help work on challenging environmental issues and find the middle path,” he says.

## New Opportunities Emerge

After his graduation, Ben returned to the Zena Forest, and he and Sarah set out to build a business that would care for the forest and the family while setting an example of innovative forestry management.



PHOTO BY ANDREA LONAS

## A Life Rich in Food, Land & Love

Katherine Deumling '96 spent her teenage years in Zena Forest and was one of its strongest advocates. Her lifelong passion for cooking, foodways, land use and grassroots advocacy led to nearly 25 years of meaningful work in the Portland, Oregon, food scene with organizations such as Slow Food, Noble Rot, and Community Supported Agriculture Partnerships for Health, as well as her own business, Cook With What You Have.

She and Brian Detman '93 met at Whitman and married on the family property in 2003. They made Portland their home and, in 2007, welcomed their son, Ellis, to the world. Katherine served on the Zena Forest Products board until her passing in 2022 from breast cancer.



“I’ve been here almost all my life, and I continue to learn new things about this forest and this ecosystem every day.”

—Ben Deumling '05



“My passion, my reason for continuing to do this work, is to support the good restoration and good stewardship of forests, at least in the Willamette Valley, and more and more around the state,” Ben says.

Today, besides his work leading and preserving Zena Forest, Ben’s advocacy includes being a governor-appointed member of the Oregon Board of Forestry.

Oregon is the timber capital of the world, anchored by Douglas-fir — but the economically valuable evergreen isn’t the only tree in the woods. A healthy forest is complex, Ben says, with multiple species and ages of trees and a wealth of other plants, creating an ecosystem that is resilient to disturbances such as fire, ice or insect infestation.

A key native species in the Zena Forest is Oregon white oak. By finding a use for oak logs, the Deumlings believed they could create a new revenue source for their forest and encourage other managers to support a diverse and healthy ecosystem in theirs.

In 2007, the family opened a sawmill and founded Zena Forest Products, seeking uses for the wood they processed from their land and from the surrounding area.

“If you’re going to be taking care of a forest, you have to be thinning and cutting trees and creating markets for all the other species that grow in a complex forest,” Ben says. “For the last 17 years, I’ve been working at trying to get better and better at making high-quality wood products out of all these other species.”

The next phase of Zena Forest’s life began in 2008, when the owners put the land up for sale with the hope of finding a conservation buyer. The Trust for Public Land brokered a deal that allowed the Deumlings to buy the forest, with the Bonneville Power Administration purchasing a conservation easement, “which ensures that this forest is protected as a working forest ecosystem in perpetuity,” Ben explains.

The family is now raising a new generation of Deumlings in the forest: Ben and his wife, Emily, and their children, Asa and Ezra, live in the house Ben grew up in, with Sarah beside them in an attached apartment.





PHOTO BY ANDREA LONAS

**'A good place to be.'** For the Deumling family, caring for Zena Forest is a lifestyle and a calling. From left: Reuben, Diana, Isabel, Ezra, Ben, Emily, Asa, Sarah, Ellis, Brian and Katherine.

## A Sustainable Vision

Today, Zena Forest Products primarily sells hardwood flooring.

"I didn't graduate college and say, 'I want to make hardwood flooring,'" Ben says. "I wanted to find a way to support these forests. And it turns out that making hardwood flooring is a really good way to do that."

After Ben's sister, Katherine, passed away in 2022, her husband, Brian Detman '93, who directs Oregon's Youth Development Division and serves on Whitman's President's Advisory Board, stepped into her role as a shareholder on the Zena Forest Products board. Brian says it's been an important way for him and the couple's son, Ellis, to stay connected to the family—and to a cause he cares about.

"The environmental and climate change reality is an essential piece of this work," says Brian, who lives in nearby Portland.

Running a sustainable business based on a sustainable forest requires making difficult decisions while balancing environmental, social and economic impacts.

"The Whitman education, the Whitman experience, has helped the business make sense of all that," Brian says.

For the family, it comes down to values, Sarah says. Zena Forest Products makes thoughtful decisions—from how they harvest trees and process wood to how they care for their employees and more. It may mean their products cost more, but customers can also know they're making values-based decisions when purchasing them.

Choosing a sustainable forest product gives customers a tangible reminder of the importance of the environment, Ben says.

"It's not going to necessarily change the trajectory of climate change globally," he says. "But it's a thing that you can connect with and be at least more involved in the conversation about what's important in our lives."

To Sarah, caring for the planet feels more urgent than ever before. She wants her grandchildren to be able to have the kind of connection to wild places that she's had throughout her life. Despite the legacy of human destruction of the environment, she finds hope in Zena Forest.

"Being able to go out and take care of a forest gives me something to do every day that feels useful," she says. "It's a good place to be." **W**

PHOTO BY EMA PETER PHOTOGRAPHY



## Floored at PDX

In Portland International Airport, when travelers walk across the remodeled main terminal, which opened in August 2024, they traverse a beautiful and unusual floor made by Zena Forest Products.

Ben Deumling '05 says the contract with the Port of Portland for 75,000 square feet of Oregon white oak flooring allowed Zena Forest to invest in their sawmill facility, adding the technology to make a type of flooring that's common in Europe but is currently made nowhere else in the United States.

Zena EdgeGrain flooring uses strips of wood three-quarters of an inch wide. Unlike traditional wide-plank flooring, it can be made from scrap wood and small-diameter, lower-quality logs.

"It allows us to use a lot more of the tree and to add more value to these trees that are coming out of the forest," Ben says.

The benefits of the airport project go beyond the terminal floor alone.

"The Port of Portland chose to go above and beyond and source local, sustainable materials across the spectrum of all the things that went into that building, with the interest of trying to make a difference here in the state," Ben says. "We are now able to expand our footprint, our presence, our ability to do good work across the state because of this new facility we built."

# EXTRA INNINGS

**FOR WHITMAN  
STUDENT-ATHLETES**

BY PAM  
MOORE

**MEET 5 FORMER BLUES WHO ARE COMPETING  
IN GRADUATE SCHOOL AND USING THE LESSONS  
THEY LEARNED AT WHITMAN TO THRIVE**



In 2020, across the globe, life was upended by COVID-19. For dozens of Whitman student-athletes, that meant a dramatic halt to their collegiate seasons and athletic aspirations.

▶ But navigating a global pandemic only made many of them stronger, says Whitman Head Baseball Coach Brian Kitamura '10. ▶ "With all the unknowns, the athletes showed incredible resilience. Just like in sports, they drew on their creativity and flexibility to solve problems as they arose." ▶

And as a silver lining of sorts, some former Blues have been given the chance to make up for their lost playtime. The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) granted an extra season of eligibility—beyond the usual four—to student-athletes whose sports pursuits were affected by the pandemic. ▶ Meet five Whitties who shared their reflections on their journeys—from the losses of lockdown to the unique chance to pursue their sports in an arena they never expected: graduate school.



**HOMETOWN:** San Carlos, California

**WHITMAN BLUES:** 2020–2024, Bachelor of Arts, Computer Science

**BRANDEIS JUDGES:** 2024–Present, Master of Business Administration candidate

### HIGHLIGHTS

**WHITMAN 2024:** Leading NWC scorer; First Team All-NWC; D3hoops.com Second Team All-Region; National Association of Basketball Coaches Second Team All-District; Max Seachris Award

PHOTO BY ESTEBAN MORENO

## RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

**J**ai Deshpande '24 was looking forward to his first semester on a college campus when he found out he'd be living at home instead. "I was worried I wouldn't get the traditional college experience," he says.

But the pandemic came with some significant, if unexpected, upsides. With the men's basketball team in a rebuilding phase when he finally arrived on campus, Deshpande enjoyed far more playing time than would be typical for a first-year player.

"This improved my game at a much faster rate," he says. "I found a deeper love for basketball during that season because it was all I had."

During that still semi-isolated time in the pandemic, Deshpande says Head Men's Basketball Coach John Lamanna taught him a lot. "Lamanna challenged me, but I grew so much as a man that year. I'm grateful everything happened the way it did."

Deshpande's focus and work paid off—in multiple ways. As a senior, he was the leading scorer in the Northwest Conference (NWC), which earned him a lot of recruiting attention—and ultimately, a basketball scholarship to Brandeis University, where he's now putting the skills and strengths he developed at Whitman into play on the court and in the classroom.

"Whitman gave me a broad knowledge base, increased my general curiosity about the world and helped me learn how to learn, which prepared me for grad school," he says.

But Deshpande feels his time on the Blues men's basketball team was his best teacher. "I believe playing college basketball at Whitman prepared me the most for rigorous academics because it taught me accountability, performance under pressure and delayed gratification."

## PRIMED FOR THE BIG TIME

**T**anner Filion '23 has amassed an impressive collegiate swimming resume, despite having to skip the NWC Championships in 2020 due to COVID-19.

“While it was hard then, I think it was really a blessing in disguise,” Filion says. He credits the pandemic for giving him time to develop as a swimmer — as well as for the swimming scholarship that paid for his master’s degree program in Management at Notre Dame.

Swimming for the Fighting Irish’s Division I program also led to the chance to compete in the 2024 Olympic trials, where he made the semifinal in the 100-meter backstroke.

Filion gives credit and thanks to both his Whitman professors and coaches. Head Swimming Coach Jennifer Blomme was an instrumental force in his life. “She is an unbelievably talented coach and an amazing human. She played a pivotal role in my development as a swimmer and as a person,” he says.

“Whitman’s liberal arts education also gave me an amazing perspective on problem solving for business, specifically consulting projects,” he says. “In particular, my upper-level Psychology classes taught me how to read, write and think critically.”

Whatever life throws at him, Filion is now confident he’s prepared. “Whitman taught me how to maintain perspective and break any goal into smaller, manageable chunks when things seem daunting.”

PHOTO BY THEO DELMONACO



**TANNER  
FILION**

'23

**SWIMMING (FREESTYLE/BACKSTROKE/BUTTERFLY)**

**HOMETOWN:** Louisville, Colorado

**WHITMAN BLUES:** 2019–2023,  
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology

**NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH:** 2023–  
2024, Master of Science, Management

### HIGHLIGHTS

**WHITMAN 2020:** NWC Male Freshman Swimmer of the Year; First Team All-NWC

**WHITMAN 2022:** Division III NCAA Champion: 200 Back (national record)

**WHITMAN 2023:** Division III NCAA Champion: 200 and 100 Back (two national records); NWC Men’s Swimmer of the Year

**NOTRE DAME 2024:** ACC Champion: 4×100 Relay; ACC Runner Up: 100 Back; Division I NCAA All-American: 400 Free Relay and 200 Free Relay; Division 1 NCAA All-American Honorable Mention: 100 Back; Olympic Trials: 100 Back and 100 Fly

## STARTING & FINISHING STRONG

**M**issing his final baseball season as a high school senior was a tough pill for **Julien Hernandez '24** to swallow. “I still think about what we could have done,” he says. “But aside from the heartbreak of losing that year, I am grateful for other things that came out of the pandemic.”

It may sound counter-intuitive, but Hernandez credits the break from regular practices and competition with benefiting him as an athlete. It gave him time to take a strategic approach to weightlifting and to further develop his skills as a pitcher. “It prepared me to come into Whitman ready to compete right away.”

Hernandez’s excellent preparation set the stage for continued success in both his sport and his studies at Whitman. His many accomplishments include being named the NWC Athlete of the Year, which is awarded to graduating student-athletes who have demonstrated excellence in the areas of academics, athletics, community service and leadership.

During his senior year at Whitman, Hernandez committed to the University of Oregon (UO) to use his additional athletic eligibility. He’s also enjoying a smooth transition to graduate school at UO, where he’s pursuing a Master of Public Administration. “Whitman’s expectations, as far as academic workload, time management and communicating with professors is no different than grad school, so my graduate program feels like a continuation of my academic journey from Whitman.”

Hernandez feels Whitman set him up for success far beyond the classroom. “Learning how to develop professional relationships as well as how to make the most out of every opportunity are skills I learned at Whitman that I can apply for the rest of my life.”



**JULIEN  
HERNANDEZ**

'24

**BASEBALL (RIGHT-HANDED PITCHER)**

**HOMETOWN:** Palo Alto, California

**WHITMAN BLUES:** 2020–2024,  
Bachelor of Arts, Biology-  
Environmental Studies

**UNIVERSITY OF OREGON DUCKS:**  
2024–Present, Master of Public  
Administration candidate

### HIGHLIGHTS

**WHITMAN 2021:** Honorable  
Mention All-NWC

**WHITMAN 2022:** First Team All-NWC

**WHITMAN 2023:** NWC Pitcher  
of the Year; American Baseball  
Coaches Association (ABCA)  
First Team All-Region

**WHITMAN 2024:** NWC Athlete of  
the Year (all sports); NWC Pitcher  
of the Year; ABCA First Team  
All-Region; R.V. Borleske Award





**HOMETOWN:** Los Altos, California  
**WHITMAN BLUES:** 2020–2023,  
 Bachelor of Arts, Economics  
**WILLIAM & MARY TRIBE:**  
 2023–Present, Master of Business  
 Administration candidate

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**WHITMAN 2021:** D3baseball.com  
 First Team All-League and  
 Second Team All-Region  
**WHITMAN 2022:** First Team  
 All-NWC; Second Team All-Region  
**WHITMAN 2023:** First Team  
 All-NWC; First Team All-Region;  
 Second Team All-America  
**W&M 2024:** D1Baseball's Top 100  
 Outfielders; Coastal Athletic Association  
 (CAA) Commissioner's Academic  
 Honor Roll; Second Team All-CAA

PHOTO BY JULIA GARDNER

**TIME TO STRENGTHEN,  
 STEP UP & SHINE**

**W**hen the pandemic cut short his first baseball season at Whitman, “It was a shocking and confusing time,” **Ben Parker '23** recalls. But he made the most of a challenging situation, taking advantage of the opportunity to spend quality time with his family and fine-tune his training.

“I really started to make strides as a player,” he says. Every day, he trained with his brother, who now plays for the Toronto Blue Jays. And he returned to Whitman focused on getting everything he could from his undergraduate experience. “I honestly don’t think I would be where I am today without that time.”

And where is he? In the spring of 2024, Parker led William & Mary’s Division I baseball team in his debut season with a team-best 69 runs and 49 walks, the second most in a single season in program history.

Now in his second year as an MBA candidate at the public university in Williamsburg, Virginia, Parker has no doubt his Whitman education propelled his academic success. “The small class sizes at Whitman forced engagement and participation, which prepared me extremely well for the interactivity of business school.”

**BACK IN FULL SWING**

**L**ike many of his peers, **Leo Rivera '22** describes finding out the 2020 baseball season was suspended as “heartbreaking.” In his first year at Whitman, the men’s baseball team had made it to the NWC playoffs and won the tournament for the first time since 1952.

“I was confident we were going to be even better,” says Rivera.

Then the pandemic hit — and baseball season was suddenly over. But within a few years, gratitude had replaced heartbreak. “Without COVID, I’d never have played at Lewis-Clark State. Playing for a school with 19 national championships totally changed my life.”

His time at Whitman more than prepared Rivera to balance academics and athletics at LC State in Lewiston, Idaho. “I was extremely prepared for my courses,” Rivera says.

His Whitman experience, both in the classroom and on the playing field, also taught him valuable lessons about communication — a key skill as he works toward his goal of becoming a coach.

He describes his Whitman coach and mentor, Brian Kitamura '10, as an incredible role model and says he also gleaned important insights from his Sociology coursework.

“Classes with professors Michelle Janning and Alissa Cordner showed me how our environment shapes our perspectives and beliefs,” he says. “And that understanding has been instrumental in up-leveling my communication skills. As a coach, you need those skills to get to know each player on a deep level — to motivate them on and off the field.”



**HOMETOWN:** Seattle, Washington  
**WHITMAN BLUES:** 2019–2022,  
 Bachelor of Arts, Sociology  
**LC STATE WARRIORS:**  
 2023–2024, Graduate  
 Certificate, Sport Coaching

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**WHITMAN 2019:** NWC  
 Tournament Champions;  
 NCAA Tournament  
**WHITMAN 2022:** All-NWC  
 Honorable Mention  
**LC STATE 2024:** Daktronics  
 National Association of  
 Intercollegiate Athletics  
 Scholar-Athlete; Academic  
 All-Cascade Conference

PHOTO BY TOMMY WOLF

# SUPER SENIORS

## MAKING THEIR FIFTH YEAR AT WHITMAN COUNT

BY MELISSA WELLING '99

**T**his year, five Blues student-athletes who started college in 2020 opted to use their extra year of NCAA eligibility to stay on at Whitman College and pursue unique opportunities—on the court, on the field and in the classroom.



**KORIN BAKER**

Her first year on Whitman's women's basketball team was a very confusing time for **Korin Baker '25**, says the forward from Wauconda, Washington. "I felt like I was finally a college athlete, but I wasn't allowed to train." Her extra year at Whitman, however, came with an unexpected bonus: the opportunity to play basketball alongside her sister, guard Emma Lena Baker '28.

"Getting to watch her play and play alongside her is a gift I never thought I would get," Baker says.

Baker has also leveraged this extra time at Whitman to enrich her academic journey. She changed her major from Biology to Brain, Behavior and Cognition, a new neuroscience program in its second year. She's now gaining more research experience and taking classes to help her prepare for a nursing degree.

**"LINDSAY AND KORIN HAVE REPRESENTED OUR PROGRAM AND WHITMAN SO WELL THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREERS AND ARE MAKING THE MOST OF THEIR 'SUPER' SENIOR SEASON."**

—MICHELLE FERENZ,  
HEAD WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COACH



**LINDSAY DRANGO**

Baker's teammate **Lindsay Drango '25** (a forward from Lake Oswego, Oregon) also took advantage of her fifth year to major in Brain, Behavior and Cognition—a program she hopes to apply to a career as an anesthesiology assistant.

She's seen new opportunities on the court too.

"In my sport, this extra year has allowed me to grow technically and improve on my leadership skills," she says. "Now that I get one more year to play basketball with all my best friends, I wouldn't change any of it."



**ERIC GANTT**

Men's soccer defender **Eric Gantt '24** says, "When I look back on the delay, I'm not as upset as I was in the moment." It gave Gantt time at home in Meridian, Idaho, with his mom and grandparents during a time his family needed him most, he says.

The Biology major used his bonus fall semester at Whitman—officially graduating in December 2024—to earn his personal training and nutritional coach certifications, important steps toward his future career goals.

And he's been able to step into a leadership role on the men's soccer team, helping to mentor his younger teammates as they navigate their first years as student-athletes.



**GRANT HUNT**


With his extra year of eligibility, **Grant Hunt '25** (a guard from Redmond, Washington) decided to take the opportunity to double major in Economics and Religion.

"It has allowed him to continue playing and representing Whitman men's basketball," says Head Men's Basketball Coach John Lamanna. "Grant will be a five-year starter for our program, and he is one of the top returning players in the Northwest Conference. On the basketball floor, Grant's fifth year will provide him an opportunity to lead Whitman as we pursue our third consecutive conference championship."



**BECK MAGUIRE**

Men's baseball infielder **Beck Maguire '25** from Boise, Idaho, isn't sleeping on his fifth year either. "I've been fortunate to really advance my experiences outside the classroom," he says, including studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and volunteering in Walla Walla, including at Providence St. Mary Regional Cancer Center and SOS Health Clinic.

He's grateful to have an extra year to play and compete in the sport he loves, he says—and this coming season, to have "another shot at the conference championship." 



# Help Us Honor Excellence!

## Nominate a Whittie for an Alumni Association Recognition Award!

### There are multiple categories for recognition:

- **Alumna or Alumnus of Merit Award**, the highest honor the Alumni Association gives.
- **Gordon Scribner Award** for distinguished service to the college.
- **Pete Reid Award** for young alumni of the last 10 years.
- **Sally Rodgers Award** for lifetime achievement of alumni graduating 50 or more years ago.
- **Trailblazer Award** for alumni whose work exemplifies inclusion, promotes equity and values, and reflects the diversity of our world.

Nominations  
are due by  
March 21, 2025



## Serve Your Alma Mater on the Alumni Board of Directors

The Alumni Association Board of Directors seeks new board members who will bring diverse perspectives and serve as advisors to the Office of Alumni Relations. Candidates of all backgrounds are encouraged to apply for the board, particularly alumni who identify as female and/or people of color, those who live in the San Francisco Bay area, and/or representatives from Whitman classes from the '70s and '80s.

**Apply soon!** Contact Jennifer Northam '91, Director of Alumni Relations, at [northajl@whitman.edu](mailto:northajl@whitman.edu) or call 509-526-4794 by **March 14, 2025**. More information can be found at [whitman.edu/alumni-board](http://whitman.edu/alumni-board).

# Class Notes



## ‘How Wonderful, How Priceless’: Reunion Reflections From Walla Walla

BY ANNE HELEN PETERSEN '03

*Originally published in Culture Study, Oct. 4, 2024. Excerpt reprinted with permission.*

I'm feeling top-heavy with nostalgia this week, at once emotionally wrung out and gratified. I spent Thursday through Sunday of last week at my 20th college reunion in Walla Walla, Washington, along with dozens of my very close friends and hundreds of my classmates. A group of 16 of us stayed in one house—no kids, no partners who hadn't also attended Whitman—and the entire experience had an undercurrent of languid ease and joy.

How wonderful, how priceless, to be surrounded by the people who were so responsible for shaping the adult you became—and the person you're still becoming? I know not everyone has this experience with college; I also know very few colleges can offer this sort of reunion scenario, which hinges on small classes (as in: 300 in my graduating class) of students tightly bonded through sports, small dorms, interest groups, majors, and, at least in our case, a small but socially important Greek System.

But our small college also does something different than most small colleges I know:

The reunion happens in late September, and it's almost always a

"cluster" (meaning: you're grouped with two other classes above and/or below you). Late September means most alumni are far less busy with summer weddings, activities, or their kids' summer stuff. It's also a particularly perfect time to be in Walla Walla, with the wheat fields golden in late summer light and harvest dust that creates ridiculous nightly sunsets. The feeling of September imprints strongly on students while they're there; asking them back is like asking them back to their favorite college memory.

**The story continues.** Read more of Petersen's reunion reflections at [whitman.edu/magazine](http://whitman.edu/magazine).

**Anne Helen Petersen '03** is a journalist, podcaster and author of the popular "Culture Study" newsletter on Substack ([annehelen.substack.com](http://annehelen.substack.com)). She graduated from Whitman College with a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Film Studies and went on to earn a Master of Arts in English and Film Studies and a doctorate in Media Studies. She was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies at Whitman from 2012 to 2014. Her most recent book is "Out of Office: The Big Problem and Bigger Promise of Working From Home."

**Friendships forged at Whitman.** Above: College friends met up at Revelry Vintners (founded by **Jared Burns '03**). Back row, from left: **Blake Fisher '03, Kate Imwalle Belchers '03, Lauren Grote Stradford '03, Jon Stebbins '05, Irene Wood '04, Billy Pryme-Fuld '03, Alaina Smith Fuld '03, Dylan Frazer '05, Jared Burns '03** and **John Goldmark '03**. Front row, from left: **Sara Weihmann '04, Keely Rankin '03, Anne Helen Petersen '03, Beth Irwin Randall '03, Meghan Bowen Frazer '04** and **Anna Pepper '03**.





President's Advisory Board member **Jennifer Brown Coleman '78** and her mother, **Carol Jeane Brown '53**, stroll arm-in-arm near Ankeny Field.

## 1950s

### **Junius Rochester '57**

continues to write for Post Alley. Rochester's blog explores the history and historical figures of Washington state. He is an award-winning Northwest historian whose recent posts include a reflection on "The Radical Roots of the Pacific Northwest Labor Movement." Read more at [postalley.org/author/rochester](http://postalley.org/author/rochester).

## 1960s

### **Kyra Dodge MacIvreen '61**

took a people-to-people walking tour through Cuba in January 2024. MacIvreen visited Havana, western flat farms with mogotes and cenotes, and an orchid farm; took mountain hikes along waterfalls and streams; then went on to historic cities with 500-year-old cobblestone streets. Her favorite stop was a tobacco farm, where she was treated to rum and coffee while puffing on a local cigar.

**Terry Parsons '63** resumed volunteering in the San Diego area on builds with the Fuller

Center for Housing, One Small House and Habitat for Humanity. In August 2024, he completed a five-day One Small House build for a family of five in Mexico, followed by a dedication of 10 duplexes constructed by Habitat for Humanity over two years in the San Diego area.

### **Robert "Bob" Bruce '66**

earned his doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, with additional education at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Over the past 50 years, he has lived in France, the U.K., Indonesia and Australia. Bruce, a retired university professor, is now an Australian citizen, living in Perth by the Indian Ocean.

## 1970s

**Mike Cregan '75** started a new organization in Santa Barbara called the La Cumbre Center for Creative Arts in 2019. He has also recently completed a new film. The film director is a member of the center and a longtime network TV director for the "Law and Order" series.

### **Margaret Hadaway '76**

and her husband, George Jobanek, traveled to Washington, D.C., in April 2024 as guardians for two Vietnam veterans. One brought a quilt he made with the names of men from his unit who died during the war. They found every one of those names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall.

### **David Atkinson '77**

retired from the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in December 2023. In April 2024, he was appointed as a Research Scientist in the Whitman Department of Astronomy. Atkinson continues to work remotely from his home in Southern California.

### **Suzanne Elliott '79**

looks forward to a life without due dates after retiring from law practice in January 2024. She was honored with the 2024 Gideon Award for an outstanding career in public defense by the Washington Defender Association. Elliott appeared at every level of the state and federal courts, from Bonney Lake Municipal to the United States Supreme Court.



Whitman women from the Class of 1965 gathered together on the Oregon Coast in September 2023 for their own mini-reunion. Front row (from left): **Judith Stone Cederblom '65**, **Nina Lewis Musick '65**, **Kathie Wolfstone Kimmy '65**, **Carolyn Woodward Wheatley '65** and **Julie Gaisford '65**. Center row (from left): **Becky Smith Leventis '65**, **Miriam Allen de Schweinitz '65**, **Wendy Crawford Harden '65**, **Marilyn Muench '65** and **Laurie Glass Yelle '65**. Back row (from left): **Bette Dennen Luke '65**, **Sally Wood Galt '65**, **Heidi Heidenreich '65**, **Helen Bryant Oswald '65**, **Ann Welch Willard '65** and **Chris Kotok Johnson '65**.



From left: **Lucia Landt Hansen '70**, **Dave Hansen '69**, **Carolyn Dvorak Nielsen '71** and **Heber Nielsen '71** sailed the Mediterranean, exploring Greek and Roman antiquities. They enjoyed walking through the cities and countryside they studied half a century ago.



## 1980s

**Wendy Wendlandt '83** is a leading voice for the environment as president of Environment America. She is also a Senior Vice President with The Public Interest Network. Wendlandt is a founding board member of Green Corps, the field school for environmental organizers, and Green Century Funds, the nation's first family of fossil fuel-free mutual funds.



From left: **Brent Schimke '88**, **Sarah Porter Braun '90** and **Lee Braun '88** reunited on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in June 2024.

## 1990s



**Kristine Sauer Geer '91** (right) and **Jonathan Heras '05** continue to make use of their Whitman math and science education as investment advisors with Guide Advisors. Heras resides with his family in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Geer and her husband co-own Guide Advisors and reside in Woodinville, Washington. Read more at [guideadvisors.com](http://guideadvisors.com).



"All the Rare Birds" was dedicated in a special ceremony during the 2024 Reunion Weekend. A group of alumni, current and former staff and faculty, and community members came together to commission the sculpture by multimedia artist **Daniel Forbes '93** to honor and celebrate the memory of **Kyle Martz '07**. Read more about this celebration of all the rare birds in our lives in the Whitman Wire at [whit.mn/wiremartz](http://whit.mn/wiremartz).

## 2000s

**Dana Leighton '01** changed careers from psychology professor to emergency management, joining the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Continuous Improvement Program. Leighton studies past disaster response and recovery operations to understand what went well and what needs improvement. These insights help guide FEMA administrators to improve the nation's emergency preparedness.

**Zack Lough '08** co-founded Channel Marker Cider Company in 2016. The company just opened its first location in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle.



**WHITMAN LEADER**  
**Samantha Howell Barnhart '04** was elected to serve as the Vice President of the National Association of Pro Bono Professionals and President of the Florida Pro Bono Coordinators Association for 2024–2025. She was also appointed to serve on The Florida Bar's Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services for 2024–2025. Barnhart is also a member of the Whitman College Alumni Association Board.



A campus visit with Whittie kids Esmé, Ava, Sabina, Astrid, Eloise, Whitaker and Emerson, the children of **Ben Coleman-Fire '06** and **Leora Coleman-Fire '06**, Dean Rieck and **Kaitlin Coleman Rieck '08**, and **Ian Coleman '11** and **Elizabeth "Liz" Gossard Coleman '11**.



## 2010s



**Keller Hawkins '14** (left) and **Jenni Doering '14** hiked the West Highland Way in Scotland over the course of seven days in May 2024. Hawkins represented the Whitman swim team with her shirt nearly every day of the almost 100-mile hike!

## 2020s

**Kylin Brown '20** will attend the University of Washington School of Law in the fall of 2024. Brown's concentration will be Public Interest and Environmental Law.



**Patrick Cardwell '20** received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco, in the spring of 2024. He moved to Berkeley, California, to join the law firm of Sloan Sakai Yeung & Wong and practice employment law.

## Whittie Authors



**James "Jim" Nelson '67** has released "Trygve Lindstrom: Tales from Libby, Montana" (Outskirts Press, 2024), a novel featuring a few "dear hearts and gentle people" of this rural town, nestled within 2 million acres of Montana wilderness.

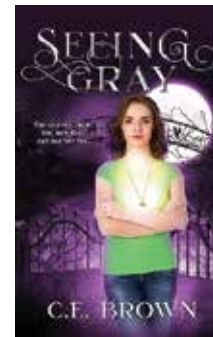


**Kristine Sauer Geer '91** self-published "How She Learned" (2024), which focuses on financial education for women and girls. Profits from the sale of the book go to support charities fighting human trafficking. Available on Amazon.com.

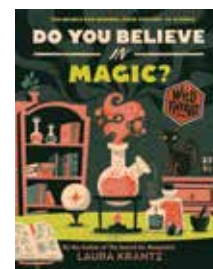


**Amy Kane Dressler '99** has released her debut

novel "How to Align the Stars" (Egret Lake Books, 2024). An enemies-to-lovers romantic comedy, Dressler's book spins the original tale of "Much Ado About Nothing" by Shakespeare into an academic romance, ending with a surprising twist.



**Chrissy Rufolo Brown '00** has published her first novel "Seeing Gray" (Wild Rose Press, 2024), a young adult urban fantasy. In the novel, a teen on the hunt for the demon who killed her mother finds herself hunted instead. "A fast-paced fantasy with a bold lead character and a well-developed fictional world," says Kirkus Reviews.

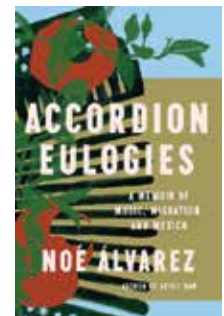


**Laura Krantz '00** published her latest book "Do You Believe in Magic?" (Abrams Kids, 2024). This book is the third in a series of nonfiction, middle-grade books that use journalism and science to explore the mysterious. The first two books in the Wild Thing series are "The Search for Sasquatch" (2022)

and "Is There Anybody Out There?" (2023).



In her book "Climbing Together: Relational Morality and Meaningful Action in Intercultural Community Engagement" (Brill, 2024), **Anna Taft '02** articulates the philosophy behind the work she does with The Tandana Foundation and includes insights gleaned from some of her Politics classes at Whitman.



**Noé Álvarez '07** has released "a memoir of music, migration and Mexico" with the publication "Accordion Eulogies" (Catapult, 2024). A reflection of his travels across the U.S. with his accordion, Álvarez uncovers the story of an instrument central to classic American genres that has also played a critical role in Indigenous Mexican history.



# Happily Ever After



**Marta Olson '05** married Hunter Mitchell on July 20, 2024, in Seattle. In attendance were (from left) **Christian Iverson '04**, **Chris McElwain '04**, **Katie Imbeau '05**, **Olson**, **Mitchell**, **Alison Wallisch '05**, **Tanya Henderson '05** and **Amy Weller '05**.



**Harper Howard '18** and **Charlie Ralston '18** were married July 22, 2023, on Vashon Island, Washington. Whitman folks in attendance included (from left) **Michael Brock '18**, **Olivia Knox '18**, **Griffin Cronk '19**, **Signe Lindquist '18**, **Ralston, Howard**, **Max Hanson '18**, **Thomas Douglas '18**, **Riley Worthington '18**, **Alex Ball '18**, **Kaia Knutsen '18** and **Jeanette Schwensen '18**.

# Little Whitties



Theo Hayes, born March 2024 to **Sarah Dawe '06** and **Ryan Karlsgodt**. Theo joins big brother Archer (2).



Arlo Finn Petersen, born May 14, 2024, to **Susannah Ellis '14** and **Devin Petersen '11**.



### Tell Us About It!

Whether you're just starting your first job, embarking on a career change or preparing to retire after a fulfilling life's work, we want to help you share your news with your classmates. To submit your big news, visit [whitman.edu/classnotes](http://whitman.edu/classnotes).



# In Memoriam

## 1940s

**Dorothy Howard Rodkey '45** on July 10, 2024, in Post Falls, Idaho. After graduation, Rodkey and her Whitman sweetheart, **George Rodkey '45**, relocated to Detroit, where Rodkey earned her master's in Chemistry and was one of the 12 first female medical lab technologists at Henry Ford Hospital. After her husband returned from the Korean war, the Rodkey family moved around before settling in Spokane, Washington. When their children were older, Rodkey returned to the lab at Edgecliff Hospital. Rodkey was predeceased by her husband, George. She is survived by six children, 18 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

**Cynthia Rice McCrae '48** on Feb. 18, 2024, in Indianapolis. After Whitman, McCrae attended Chicago Theological Seminary, where she met her husband. She co-founded the Downey Avenue Cooperative Preschool in Indianapolis in 1965, where she worked as a teacher for more than two decades. She volunteered

for churches and schools long into her retirement. McCrae was predeceased by her husband, Ian; parents; and siblings, including **Helen Rice Pickett '50** and **Julia Rice Mark '53**. She is survived by five children, nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

## 1950s

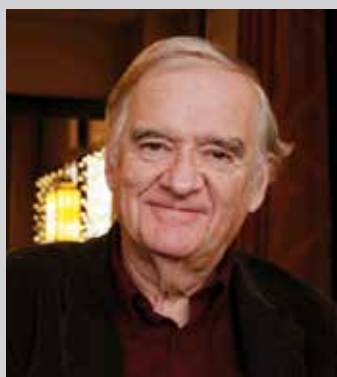
**James "Jim" Reynolds '50** on March 13, 2024, in Olympia, Washington. Following his discharge from the Army in 1946, Reynolds returned to complete his education at Whitman. He began working for Mayr Brothers Logging Company as a Data Manager in 1963 and remained there for two decades. In 1997, Reynolds and his second wife moved to the Puget Sound where they spent 20 years of quiet waterfront living. Reynolds was predeceased by his wives, Elizabeth Ann Hansen and Elise Barr. He is survived by six children, 12 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

**Daniel "Dan" Alexander '52** on March 28, 2024, on Bainbridge Island, Washington. During his sophomore year at Whitman, Alexander transferred to University of Washington (UW), where he completed his degree in Journalism in 1952. Shortly after, he graduated from UW School of Law and passed the Foreign Service exams. He worked with the U.S. State Department until 1966 with postings in Chile, Taiwan and

Hong Kong. After returning to Washington, Alexander worked as a manager at the Yakima Chief Hop Ranch and remained in the hops business for 30 years. Alexander was predeceased by an older brother and grandson. He is survived by his wife, Harriet; his younger brother; three children; and three grandchildren.

**Mary McMillan Brandt '55** on June 28, 2024, in Colville,

Washington. After graduation, Brandt moved to Seattle, where she completed graduate studies at the University of Washington. She returned to her hometown of Colville where she worked as an elementary school teacher and met her husband. After retirement in 1986, the Brandts purchased a small farm and she volunteered in her community. In 2011, Brandt published a family history about the development



**WHITMAN LEADER | Nagle Jackson '58** on July 15, 2024, in Rhinebeck, New York. Jackson was honored with the Alumni Association's 1987 Alumnus of Merit Award and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Whitman in 1995 for his illustrious career as a playwright, actor and director and for his dedicated friendship with Whitman College. He spent his career in regional theaters as an actor, director, translator and playwright. He also produced an original Broadway musical, "The Utter Glory of Morrissey Hall," and, in 1988, was the first American stage director invited to direct in the Soviet Union on a mission of theatrical diplomacy. He was predeceased by his father, Whitman Professor of English and Dean of Faculty Paul Jackson, and his mother. Jackson is survived by his sister, **Jeannette Jackson Murphy '55**; his wife, Sandy Suter; and their two children. *Photo courtesy of AmericanTheatre.org.*



of Colville Valley. Brandt was predeceased by her husband, Charles, and her sister, **Sarah McMillan Bunnell '53**. She is survived by two sons.

**Richard "Dick" Ayres Jr. '56** on June 19, 2024, in Tucson, Arizona. Ayres attended law school at Gonzaga University in Spokane. He worked as a public defender in Spokane County for several years before accepting a position with the State of Montana. Ayres was predeceased by his parents, including father **Richard Ayres '25** and one son. He is survived by his wife, Judy; their two daughters; and four grandchildren.

**Eleanor Fulton Carpenter '56** on July 20, 2024, in Washington, D.C. Carpenter transferred to Wellesley College after her sophomore year at Whitman. She went on to earn her Master of Education from the University of Kentucky in 1967. Carpenter spent her career at The Sidwell Friends and Upper Schools, first as a teacher

and subsequently as an administrator. She retired from the role of Assistant Principal in 1998. In retirement, she taught adult ESL (English as a Second Language) courses and was active in her church. Carpenter was predeceased by her husband. She is survived by her three children, four step-children, and 15 grandchildren and step-grandchildren.

**Carole Lothes Arnold '58** on July 4, 2024, in Portland, Oregon. Arnold transferred to the University of Washington to complete her Bachelor of Arts in French in 1959. She briefly taught French and worked for Air France and Pan Am. After her marriage in 1961, the couple moved to Portland. Arnold stayed at home with their children, working part-time as a Manufacturer's Representative for Pacific Rim Import. She retired in 1997 and enjoyed traveling, playing bridge and piano, reading, and cooking. Arnold was predeceased by her husband, Wilson. She is survived by a

brother, two daughters and two grandchildren.

**Joanne Pennington Kelly '59** on May 27, 2024, in Berkeley, California. Kelly focused on music while she attended Whitman. Although she transferred to the University of Idaho, she often expressed how much her year at Whitman impacted her life. She married her high school sweetheart in 1958 and stayed at home to raise their four boys. Kelly was deeply committed to serving her community, volunteering with the Alameda County Mental Health Association for many years. She continued to find joy in music, social gatherings and travel. Kelly was predeceased by her husband, Paul, and two siblings. She is survived by her four children, nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

## 1960s

**Joann McGillivray Mines '60** on Aug. 5, 2024, in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Mines left Whitman after her sophomore year

and enrolled in the University of Washington, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Math and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. Mines went on to earn a master's in Mathematics from New Mexico State University in 1970 and a master's in Statistics from Colorado State University, Fort Collins, in 1982. She spent her career as a statistician and nuclear safety analyst. In retirement, she enjoyed spending time with her daughter and grandchildren and as a volunteer docent for the local zoo. Mines is survived by her daughter and four grandchildren.

**Duane Gainer '61** on June 8, 2024, in Everett, Washington. Gainer served in the U.S. Navy after graduation. In 1968, he returned to school and earned a teaching certificate in Industrial Arts from Western Washington University. He worked in the commercial fishing industry while he taught high school woodshop. These experiences led to a 40-year career building sailboats. He enjoyed outdoor activities and was earnest about teaching boating, hunting and tool safety to children. Gainer is survived by his two sons.

**Barrett Worthington '61** on May 19, 2024, in Seattle. While attending Whitman, Worthington met his wife **Mary Duncan '61**. Worthington went on to complete his Master of Business Administration at the University of Washington and had a distinguished career in commercial banking for over 30 years. He spent his retirement in Sequim, Washington, and enjoyed regular rounds of golf. Worthington attended most of his Whitman reunions and was a longtime W Club member. He

is survived by his wife, Mary; their two sons; and three grandchildren, including **Riley Worthington '18**.

**Judson Weaver '63** on July 18, 2024, in Ellensburg, Washington. Weaver earned his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from the University of Washington in 1967 and enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served as a dentist with the Medical Corps. After his discharge, Weaver returned to Ellensburg and took over the family dental practice his grandfather established in 1902. He retired in 2009 after almost 40 years in the field. In retirement, Weaver enjoyed time outdoors and international trips with his wife, Muriel. He is survived by his wife, their two children and two grandchildren.

**Judith Borseth Hullin '64** on April 6, 2024, on Mercer Island, Washington. After three semesters at Whitman, Hullin transferred to the University of Washington, where she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics in 1966. She took a job with Boeing as a Computer Programmer, one of the few women in the field at that time. In the 1980s, she married her childhood sweetheart. Hullin was predeceased by her husband, David, and two siblings, including **Jan Borseth '59**. She is survived by a brother; her two children, including **Jane George-Falvy Reynolds '87**; and three grandchildren.

**Anne Waltz '65** on Feb. 9, 2024, in Seattle. Waltz earned her Master of Education from the University of Washington in 1971 and her Master of Business Administration from City College, Seattle, in 1985. A wheelchair user, Waltz was a longtime advocate for people with disabilities. She worked



**WHITMAN LEADER | Warren Gross '62** on July 12, 2024, on Bainbridge Island, Washington. At Whitman, Gross met his wife, **Mary Lee Pettibone '62**. They were married in 1963 while Gross attended U.S. Naval Officer training. He spent his career in banking and trade finance, supervising expansion in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. As Managing Director of the Export Finance Assistance Center of Washington, Gross helped guide 500 Washington exporters through the intricacies of international trade, for which he received the World Trade Council's Most Outstanding Individual Contribution to International Trade award. Gross served as Reunion Chair or on the committee for several

Whitman reunions, as well as almost a decade as a Class Representative. He served on the Whitman Board of Overseers from 1987–1997 and was a frequent fixture at Whitman events in Seattle and at the annual Oregon Shakespeare Festival trips. He is survived by his wife, their two children and two grandchildren.





**WHITMAN LEADER**

**Parke Thomas '79** on May 29, 2024, in Mount Vernon, Washington. In 1977, Thomas left Whitman to complete his studies at the University of Oxford in U.K.-U.S. Theological Relations. He worked as an actor and performer throughout the Pacific Northwest and in New York for almost

20 years. Thomas returned to Walla Walla in the late 1990s, working first as an Instructor of Drama at Walla Walla Community College before accepting an adjunct position as a Lecturer and, later, Assistant Professor of Theater at Whitman, where he taught for 12 years. He also served as President of the Board for Blue Mountain Heart-to-Heart, a nonprofit committed to health care advocacy for marginalized communities in Walla Walla. He later accepted a position as Executive Director at Quail Run Retirement Community where he and his adopted dog, Ollie, brought joy and energy to the residents. He was predeceased by his parents and two brothers. Thomas is survived by his brother Jeff and his family.

the Woodland Park Zoo. Waltz is survived by her brother. **Marvin Stearns '66** on July 13, 2024, in Tigard, Oregon. After Whitman, Stearns went on to earn a degree in Aeronautics from the California Institute of Technology. He worked for the Lockheed Corporation for several years, until the passing of his brother prompted a return to Oregon. He married a former high school classmate, Devina, in 1972. Stearns loved the outdoors and spent countless hours working on his filbert farm. In retirement, he and his wife embraced their love for travel. Stearns is survived by his wife and their two children.

## 1980s

**Diane Valach '84** on March 19, 2024, in Seattle. After Whitman, Valach earned her master's in English from Tulane University and went on to earn her Teacher's Certificate in Language Arts from Western Washington University in 1992. She taught at Bishop Blanchet High School for 26 years, retiring in 2018. In a tribute, her colleague wrote that Valach's name "provokes a kind of reverence and respect

reserved specially for an exceptional teacher." She is survived by her parents; her sister, **Susan Valach '83**; her husband, **Matthew Willkens '84**; and their son.

**C. Clay Widmayer '88** on June 26, 2024, in Walla Walla. After Whitman, Widmayer earned his master's and doctorate in Physics from the University of Oregon. He worked for 25 years at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the Inertial Confinement Fusion program. Widmayer met his wife in the mid-1990s, and they enjoyed hiking, camping and houseboating. In 2022, he co-authored a historic report on the first successful controlled fusion ignition experiment using laser indirect drive. Widmayer was predeceased by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Jo Dee, and a sister.

## 2010s

**Hannah Sieracki '12** on July 15, 2024, in Helena, Montana. After graduating with honors from Whitman, Sieracki earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Montana in 2014. She went to work

as a Registered Nurse at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena. She was described by patients as a caring, kind and compassionate nurse. Sieracki was an avid outdoor enthusiast, enjoying running, hiking and skiing. Shortly before her passing, she was working with the Montana Nurses Association Local 13 bargaining unit to organize the nurses at St. Peter's Health clinics. Sieracki is survived by her parents; step-parents; a sister; and her partner, Brad.

**Benjamin "Ben" Duchin '14** on May 22, 2024, in Seattle. During his time at Whitman, Duchin participated in the Outdoor Program, was CEO of the Whitman Investment Club, and was a member of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity. After graduating with his Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Duchin worked for a time in banking but soon realized his passion was to be a health care provider. In 2022, he earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Seattle University and began work at SeaMar Community Health Centers, providing behavioral health care to people with mental health and substance use disorders. Duchin is survived by his parents and sister.

for the Washington Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities and served as a delegate to the White House Conference on the Disabled in 1976. In the early 1980s, she began work

with the Human Resources Office at University of Washington, where she remained until 1998. After her retirement, she volunteered as a docent for

### CLASS NOTES POLICY

Whitman College is happy to highlight the achievements and milestones of our alumni. To have your item appear in Class Notes, fill out the form at [whitman.edu/classnotes](http://whitman.edu/classnotes), email [alumni@whitman.edu](mailto:alumni@whitman.edu) or mail a note to Whitman College, Office of Alumni Relations, 345 Boyer Ave., Walla Walla, WA 99362. Class Note submissions are limited to 50 words and should include updates from the past calendar year. Class Note submissions may include career updates; publications; honors, awards or

appointments; or other significant life changes you would like to share with the Whitman community. Any photographic submissions for Class Notes, marriages/unions or births/adoptions should include the identities of all people pictured, as well as alumni relatives of births/adoptions. It is the responsibility of the submitter to obtain consent from others pictured or mentioned in the submission.

For In Memoriams, Whitman College runs the name of the deceased, their graduate year and major, and the date and place of death; when available, we will include career

information, survivors and other highlights of their life, including recorded service to the college or honors received from the college. Photographs for obituaries are run at the discretion of the Office of Alumni Relations for those designated "Whitman Leaders." The college makes a good-faith effort to confirm the information submitted with the concerned parties. All submissions are subject to editing for style, content, length and clarity. Address questions to Jaimee Maurer, Class Notes Editor, at [maurerjl@whitman.edu](mailto:maurerjl@whitman.edu) or call 509-527-5052.

# FAST 5 WITH Elisabeth Mermann- Jozwiak

A QUICK CONVERSATION WITH WHITMAN'S  
NEW PROVOST AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY

**Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak** criss-crossed the country (and the world) on her path to Whitman—from her home city of Cologne, Germany, to Texas, Washington and Pennsylvania. But it was the call of the Northwest and the small-campus environment that drew her to Whitman and her new role as Provost and Dean of the Faculty. We sat down with her to learn how she's settling in and what she sees on the horizon for Whitman academics.

—BY MELISSA WELLING '99



## 1 **What sets Whitman apart from other schools?**

The way in which Whitman is able to support students—and faculty are able to mentor students—in a small-class environment. When I hear about the kinds of **field trips and experiential learning opportunities** that faculty design, they're very intentional in a way I have not seen before anywhere that I've been.

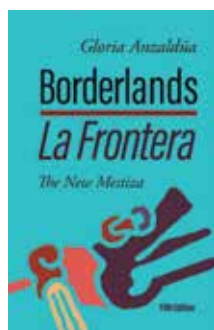
## 2 **What's next for Whitman academics?**

Faculty have just created a new minor in **Law, Culture and the Humanities** that we hope will spark students'

interest. We've also had a discussion group on community-engaged teaching and learning. How can we build a robust and sustainable teaching environment that supports faculty wanting to take students out into the community and make that a real learning experience?

## 3 **How has being an English professor shaped your approach to your role?**

I loved reading because I loved learning about different worlds. I hope people see in me some sort of **openness and disposition toward understanding others** and always approaching the person that's sitting across from me as a human.



## 4 **Did you have a favorite book to teach?**

So many! In South Texas I taught Chicana literature. So one of my favorites is **Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands/La Frontera."** I always go back to that. It's essayistic, it's novelistic, it's got poetry interspersed. So sometimes when I look for a poem, I flip it open. It's just what I needed.

## 5 **What are your first impressions of Walla Walla?**

I love it! I wanted to come back to the West. I was in central Pennsylvania in a pretty small town. Walla Walla offers a lot more amenities culturally speaking. And I just love the outdoors. **Every Saturday my husband and I go for a hike.** We try to clear our brains and enjoy nature and the mountains.



**I loved reading because I loved learning about different worlds. I hope people see in me some sort of openness and disposition toward understanding others.**

Extra, extra! Read five more fun facts about Mermann-Jozwiak at [whitman.edu/magazine](http://whitman.edu/magazine).





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## ▶ Celebrating One Year of **Upward Together**



**BUILDING THE WHITMAN OF TOMORROW.** In October 2023, we gathered in the heart of campus to launch Whitman College's most ambitious campaign yet. In the days and weeks that followed, alumni, families and friends stepped **Upward Together** and showed their support in a big way. Watch a year-one update on what your gifts are doing at [whitman.edu/magazine](http://whitman.edu/magazine) and read highlights from an amazing year of impact.



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