Adam West (William Anderson ’51) explores another art form as he sketches, paints his partners in crime

William Anderson ’51

Holy Renaissance man!

Adam West (William Anderson ’51) explores another art form as he sketches, paints his partners in crime with an exhibit of 52 sketches and paintings depicting his partners in TV crime and punishment. The Joker, Catwoman, Egghead and others. The show sold out.

“I don’t paint butter dishes, doilies or hummingbirds in my garden,” West noted shortly after the show opened at the M Modern Gallery in Palm Springs, Calif. “It’s more raw, I suppose. But it always creates a reaction.”

As did West’s celebrated role as Batman, the part proved both signature and stigma for the actor. After the series ended in 1968, West struggled to get serious roles. Producers couldn’t see beyond his Batman image, even after he played tough-guy parts like Johnny Cain in “The Girl Who Knew Too Much.”

“Batman is a great example of how Hollywood thinks it can create a persona for you when it doesn’t know who you are,” West said. “But who am I to complain? I got to work with the greats: Vincent Price, Burgess Meredith, Cesar Romero. And we had some great fun.”

When West’s daydreams take him back to his childhood in Walla Walla, he thinks that maybe he was an actor all along. On days when he wasn’t working in the canneries or alfalfa fields, he was riding over hill and dale on Champ, a high-spirited American Saddlebred.

“I was already doing westerns on the farm, he said. “I taught Champ to stand on a barrel, you know. I almost thought I’d head off to the circus.”

West’s father was the third of four generations of “hard-dirt wheat farmers.” West’s stepmother, who played Robin in the series.

When one of the actors between playback and the director told Price to stop, he said: “With a full artillery? Not a chance!” A take-no-prisoners egg fight ensued. “Batman” was theater of the absurd,” said West. “I enjoyed those years, and I’ve made my peace with the after-effects. (William) Shatner has his Trekkies, and I’m delighted and fortunate to have my Batities.”

West maintains that he’s not a serious painter, even when his wife for 36 years, Marcelle Tagand Lear, insists that he is. “The serious part of my work is that I paint what I dream. Seriously,” he said.

The Joker, as played by Cesar Romero.

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West’s father was the third of four generations of “hard-dirt wheat farmers.” (His brother, John, still carries on the tradition.) His mother was a concert pianist who regularly invited opera singers to their home. “I got to hear all the stars from the top of the banister,” West said.

Batman, he allows, was in his blood from the day he found a trove of comic books hidden away in a suitcase on the farm. Of all the heroes in all the comics, Batman stood tallest for West.

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What is life after Whitman? “Everybody has a different story,” said Travis McElfresh ’92, on his recent campus to speak to students, faculty and staff. “But there is something of Whitman in everything I do,” he said. McElfresh has done a lot since he graduated from the college. Parting wasn’t easy, so he worked as a technician in the Department of Geology, his major at Whitman. He went from there to graduate school at the University of Wyoming to Ameritech in Denver to OneSoft Corp. to Xblod.com to Microsoft to MSNBC.com, where he is vice president of technology. All in 14 years.

His learning experience at Whitman informed every step of the way. McElfresh said, and it continues to guide the decisions he makes in his current position. “Whitman was the best four years of my life in terms of learning what I needed to know for life,” he said.

At MSNBC.com, McElfresh oversees program management, development and testing, video architecture, master control operations, news production and Web operations. He started as a program manager three years ago.

“Xbox was cool but it was about wasting people’s time,” he said. “At MSNBC.com, it’s back to that knowledge transfer thing. We’re educating the world.”

The MSNBC.com Web site is the No. 1 online news site in the world. The news clearinghouse boasts 1 billion page views a month and 72 million unique viewers, more than any online cable news network. Content is updated every four or five minutes.

“My focus is morale, being part of something that people are passionate about and getting great results,” said McElfresh.

When McElfresh came to Whitman from Hillsboro, Ore., as an honors student in English, he was one of the few students who owned a personal computer. The Internet era was still in its infancy. In his first year at the college, McElfresh spent as much time cycling and running rivers as studying. His grade-point average headed south of 2.0. He wrote a five-page paper on Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” for his Modernism class that “was so bad my professor wouldn’t even assign a grade to it.” He rewrote it and rewrote it. It was part of his “wake-up call.” By his senior year, he said, “I was pulling 4.0s.”

“If you’re looking at Whitman as a product, and the features it offers, yeah, the weather is nice, but the professors are nice, The amount of time they invested in me was incredible.” — Travis McElfresh ’92

McElfresh’s post-graduation plan was to get a Ph.D. and come back to Whitman as a geology professor. Then the technology bug hit him. He stayed up until 4 a.m. in front of a computer. He built a content management system for the Web and started programming in earnest. “I was having a good time but trying to balance it all. Geology on one side and this distraction on the other,” he said. “I could see the visibility of the computer industry. And I liked the work. It was a way of giving back, which is another Whitman thing,” he said.

“At some point you have to come to terms with what you like and what you don’t like. I like the collaboration with other people. In the work world I found the opportunity to solve things as a group. McElfresh, who is married to Amy Schneider ’93, allowed that he could not have planned his life path “in a million years.” But Whitman’s “takeaways” — the lessons he learned that guided his decisions for the following 14 years — prepared him for what was to come, including the “rocket ride, rocket ride down” in the dot.com world.

“Whitman taught him how to think critically in order to solve problems efficiently. (My greatest strength now, he said.) It gave him communications skills, confidence and, most of all, adaptability. “My advice to you is to take opportunities when they present themselves rather than clung to a set plan,” he said. “Whitman will prepare you in great ways. That is not spin.” — Keith Rarther

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Infant romper
50% cotton/50% polyester sweatshirt fleece by Little King.
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Alumni

Where in the world have you met a Whittie?

Alumni often have chance encounters with fellow Whitties, or people with Whitman connections, at locations around the world. If you get that “It really is a small world isn’t it?” feeling when you unexpectedly run into a Whittie, share the story. To get started, Alumni Office staffers share some of their Whittie sightings. E-mail yours to Nancy Mitchell at mitchenl@whitman.edu. If you have a photo, send it, too. Watch future magazines for Whittie encounters.

Sixty Whitman alumni, parents and friends toured the Galapagos Islands earlier this year. Leading the adventure were Delbert Hutchison, professor of biology, Pat Spencer, professor of geology, and Nancy Mitchell, associate director of alumni. While touring the Charles Darwin Research Center at Puerto Arroyo on Santa Cruz Island, the participants were divided into small groups, each led by a naturalist. The group Nancy was with met up with another non-Whitman group at a refreshment shack.

As Nancy explains it, “Sara Running ‘82 called out to me and said, ‘Nancy, I want you to meet Mary Lou Phillips Holding ‘68’! Mary Lou was touring the Galapagos with friends when we had the chance meeting.”

The alumni group touring the Galapagos Islands visited the legendary Post Office Bay. In whaling days, sailors would drop their mail in a barrel located on the island to be picked up by the next ship that came by en route to the letter’s destination. The tradition lives on today, and Whitman’s alumni visitors took postcards to the island to mail. In turn, they agreed to take mail left at the post office and hand-deliver it to anyone who lived near their hometown. Mary Lou Phillips Holding ‘68 was reunited with Whittie friends as a result of the postcard she brought back to deliver.

This summer Whitman College Alumni Office staff members Margaret Hoglund and Nancy Mitchell were headed to Yellowstone for a vacation. While driving through Jackson, Wyo., Nancy spotted Penny Penrose Bignold ‘56.

“Margaret whipped around the block and pulled up in front of Penny who was standing on the street corner. It turned out that Penny was in Jackson on the way to Yellowstone after a Kappa Kappa Gamma convention,” Nancy said.

Penny told them: “The group I’m with won’t believe this; I keep telling them that Whitties are everywhere!”

Linda Weihmann Brown ’69, of College Place, and Pat Spencer, Whitman geology professor, check out the mailbox at Post Office Bay in the Galapagos Islands.

Mary Lou Phillips Holding ‘68 ran into Jim DeMeules ‘67 and other members of the Whitman alumni group touring the Galapagos Islands this year.