

CHALLENGER

This month's issue

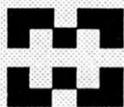
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A Publication of the
Harper College
Honors Society



Profile of the Month: Sharon Z. Alter

- Claudette Peden



Sharon Alter has been in many circles. Her circles have led her to being a volunteer for the blind, a vigorous woman's activist, and an exceptional educator. Follow the interview with Sharon Z. Alter and experience history through her eyes.

Tell me something about yourself.
“Where do I begin?
As you know, I’ve been teaching history and political science at Harper for a number of years. This is my 26th year. I started when this campus opened. Before that, I had taught for one year at East Leyden High School and part time at Triton College. I’m a native of Chicago, and went to Roosevelt High School. I was one of the last groups that went to the University of Illinois at Navy Pier. I enjoy

politics. Politics, good drama, art, classical music and watching basketball. And you being in student government here, you’ll probably appreciate that I was involved in the student government when I was in school.”

I should have known. Is that why you became a political science teacher?

“Actually, I was more history than political science and then shifted more toward political science. I had always planned to teach in

the special education field. The summer before my sixteenth birthday, I was too young to get a job, and too old to go to daycamp. I thought, what am I going to do this summer? Well, the Chicago Park District sponsored a daycamp for blind children and they needed volunteers to help out. And so that’s what I did for the summer, I became somebody else’s eyes. I realized that I had never really seen before. I was assigned to a seven year old little girl, who was very curious. I remember

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one conversation, she asked me to describe something because it was in the park. It was very green and she said, "what is the color green like?" And I don't remember what I said, but I really had to use some imagination. I mean, I described this green grass that was all around us, as far as you could see, but how do you describe the color green?"

And you can't really do it. "No, but if you feel it, you can feel how thick it is or the textile of things, as well as a green leaf of a trees. It made a major impact. I was very committed to teaching special education until I had Milton Rakove. Rakove was the second political science teacher I had, and he was an expert in Chicago politics and with Richard J. Daley. I wanted more intellectual stimulation and I decided to teach social studies and then went on to history.

What did you get your Bachelors' degree in? "My Bachelors' degree was in political studies. And I received my first Masters' degree in history with a minor in social science from the University of Illinois at Champaign. And I decided to go for a second Masters'

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degree in Public Administration. This was at Roosevelt University."

What kind of student were you? "A good student. I had gone to Lafayette Grammar School which was in the Humbolt Park area, and I later went to Roosevelt High School. When I tested into Honors English, we were required to write a paper every week, generally two to five pages. I remember my very first essay - I failed it. Honor's English. It just devastated me. I then learned how to write!

Can you tell me how you distinguish the difference between an honors course and a non-honors course? "I teach it very similarly but I expect a much higher quality from the honor students.

And did you get that? "Yes. I always try to take students as they come to me. The range in the honors classes are generally narrower than the range in the non-honors class. I really believe that if a teacher has realistically high expectations, students will perform at a higher level than they ever expected. Students will learn more than they ever expected to and create a

better sense of community of learning, because everybody has a great chance. And that's true whether it's a class with more class discussion or a class with more lecture."

Is there someone that you consider your own personal hero? "I became somewhat fascinated, with the autobiographies of Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Jane Addams. And these three women came alive to me. I wanted to read everything to understand what motivated them, what enabled them to do what they did. I became politically of age, as you can imagine, in the election of Kennedy."

Can you choose one hero? "I can't. I can't because in the '60s a lot of things were going on at the same time. I had never been in the south, never really knew anything about Jim Crow. President Kennedy supported fairness, and equality. He wasn't able to get the civil rights legislation himself - if he had lived, it might have failed.

What's your definition of fairness? "That's tough, I guess. Fairness is about mutual respect. Fairness certainly involves equal

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opportunity because of mutual respect. There is a symbiotic relationship here, fairness must exist regardless of class, race, sex, age, ethnicity. I am Jewish and of Eastern European ancestry. The reason that I mention that is because I am first generation American. My father was one of a large number of children. They came to this country before WWI, and that gave me an interest in history. Fairness is very important to me because I know members of my family have been victims of prejudice and discrimination. I do believe one does not have to be a victim of prejudice and discrimination to empathize with other people. You have to be open-minded to empathize with other people.”

Based on your definition, do you think the government is fair? “Based on your question, you’re looking for a No answer.” *Am I? I am looking for an answer that you can honestly give me.* “I think that one really has to put this in the context. If you then put your question in context, not only of US History, but World History, then and now, I do believe our government is fairer than it has been in the past, and fairer than any

other governments ever attempt to be. I’m not saying it’s perfect. And I’m not saying there’s no room for improvement.”

“*Fairness is about mutual respect.*”

Let me ask you this question. Let’s restrict this just to America. American Politics. Based on the past and present, do you believe that the way the government is run is fair? “I need to know your definition of fair.”

Based on your definition. “Some people think it is fair, some people think it is not fair.”

I’m not talking about those people. I’m talking about you. “Let me give you a direct answer. I think that a major principle in the US Constitution is Equal Protection and Due Process for all. It is very, very difficult to fulfill. But it is a standard and a model to which one must never lose sight of to

move forward. So what I’m getting at is, whether the answer to your question is yes or no, every one of us, individually and collectively have a responsibility for our rights. And that responsibility is to change what we don’t like, and improve what we do like.”

If we have control in order to change, we the people are the government but yet, are we really the government? “You’re asking me a point after the last year’s election where lots of people didn’t vote.”

Why do you think that is? “In the ‘60s, I was in a generation where we talked about rights, and responsibilities. Politically, our responsibility was to get and protect our political rights, which led to a certain degree of political activism. Taking the responsibility individually and collectively was a very unique time in the ‘60s. Now people talk about rights. They don’t talk about rights and political responsibilities. They talk about, “I have these rights.” But those same people feel that they don’t have to do anything to protect their rights, or to preserve them. People need to get off their duff and go

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vote. It's important to follow up with those who are elected by holding them accountable between elections by writing them in both a critical and praising way and expecting answers."

Do you believe that politics was responsible for JFK's death. "Are we talking about conspiracy?" Yes. Do you think that JFK's death was politically motivated? "There is contradictory information that has never been totally resolved, because of the death of Oswald. It gives people who believe in the conspiracy theory, the license to market the conspiracy theory."

Do you believe that the Vietnam War lasted as long as it did because of financial reasons? "I think it lasted as long as it did primarily because the US Government was unwilling to admit they made a mistake."

Do you think someone's religious beliefs have anything to do with their politi-

cal beliefs? "For some it does. For some people on the abortion issue, politics is the core of their beliefs and their actions on that issue. There may be other issues that religion plays a core role. In the days of Martin Luther King, religion was a part of that core of non-violent civil disobedience."

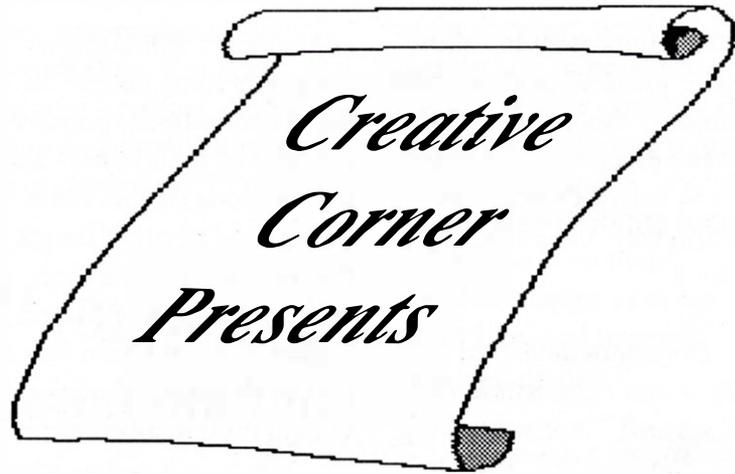
Do you believe that history repeats itself? "Yes. Except, it repeats itself not in the same way. I believe that history can help us understand the past in such a way that we realize we're not as unique as we think we are today and that our problems are similar to those of other generations in the past."

*C*an history predict the future? "No, but I think history can help us understand the past in such a way that we realize that we are not as unique as we think we are today."

You, as an instructor,

"Do you think that JFK's death was politically motivated?"

have brought about enthusiasm to your students. What is it about you, as an instructor, that makes students appreciate you as a teacher, or your teaching style? "I think part of it is the energy and enthusiasm I bring, and that I'm still a student myself. I never stop learning. The November 1994 election has created a lot of work for me in terms of knowing who some of the new leaders are in the Congress. Knowing what their politics are, where their politics are coming from. In that sense, I'm a student of a contemporary political world, and as both a student and a teacher, I have to communicate." ♦



Rites

-Terry Maloney

Willis slumped forward, resting his head against the steering wheel. Steam escaping the twisted radiator couldn't drown out his pounding heartbeat.

"Why this, God? Why this now?" He snapped on the emergency flashers and got out.

Corey's street lights, haloed by falling snow, strung out like a glowing string of pearls in the distance across the farm fields. Soft earth on the shoulder of the road had halted the car's spin and left it inclined toward the deep ravine. A fragment of shattered antler in the down thrust headlight beam silently collected heavy snowflakes.

"Stupid deer. You stupid, stupid deer!" Willis pounded his fists on the car's folded hood.

It didn't take any imagination to predict what his mother's reaction would be like. The angry scene played itself out in his mind.

“Stupid deer. You stupid, stupid deer!”

"And how do you suppose I'm going to get to work now?" She would start off. "What were you doing out on the Esker Road, anyway? Didn't I tell you to come straight home after the basketball game?"

"I had to go some-

where. I needed some time alone to think," Willis imagined himself saying.

"Well, you're gonna have plenty of time to think now, Willis. You're grounded." It would be the same old story. They'd square off across the kitchen table. She'd be on her third pot of coffee of the day and she'd blame him for making her a nervous wreck.

"And I don't know where we'll get the money to fix your father's car."

"My father is dead," he would say. "You wouldn't let him live. You didn't give him the chance. Remember? And we'd have plenty of money if you weren't smoking again." She'd tell him

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not to start that again, but he would and they'd argue until he stormed off to bed in tears and rage, leaving her sitting there drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes all night.

An eighteen-wheeler grunting through its gears on the way up the hill brought Willis back to reality. The flatbed, with a canvas-covered load, was probably cutting cross-country to avoid tolls on the interstate. It downshifted to a stop across from the wreck.

"Everyone okay?" A voice in the dark cab shouted over the rumbling diesel.

"Yeah, we're okay. I mean, I'm fine. There's just me." The engine quit and the sharp hiss of air brakes shot into the silence. The trucker climbed down and hiked up his jeans as he strode across the snow. He stood a head shorter than Willis, but the slim teenager wasn't half the man's size in arms and chest. Snowflakes dotted the bill of the man's baseball cap and melted into his scraggly beard.

In the flashing amber light, the driver squatted, snapped on a powerful hand lantern and examined the pushed-in grille. Wisps of steam floated from the emerald pool of antifreeze

below it. "You ain't goin' no place, Son. Not in this."

"A stupid deer ran right in front of me." Willis kicked at the broken antler.

The driver's dark eyes held Willis'. "Well, shi..., STUFF happens," he said. "Stuff just happens. Kill him?"

"I don't know."

"Let's take a look."

He pointed the beam back up the road, following the graceful scrollwork Willis' tires had etched in the snow. The skid had seemed more frantic to Willis.

The beam retreated, playing back along the shoulder, finally lighting two yellow crystals on the snow a few feet off the road. "You didn't knock him very far." The eyes didn't blink as the boy and the man approached. Snow-covered prongs stabbed skyward. "Looks like he had a nice rack."

Blood painted the animal's mouth and snout and spattered the snow. When they were only a few feet away, the deer twisted its head and snorted a plume of blood into the air. Its front legs struggled for footing while the hind legs lay lifeless.

"Well, you didn't

“... a plume of
blood into the air.”

finish him. Prob'ly just broke his back."

"What's gonna happen to him?"

"Ain't gettin' any better. That much is sure." The trucker stared hard into Willis' eyes. "He's gonna suffer a while and die, boy. Less we do something." The man turned and strode back toward the truck.

Willis' father never opened his eyes. After the emergency surgery, he had laid in a hospital bed with wires and hoses connecting him to a machine and he never opened his eyes. For a day, air hissed into him through a plastic hose and his heartbeat became a constant beeping dot trailing a fading green comet tail across a monitor screen. Willis' father never opened his eyes. He never said goodbye.

"Your father fought very hard, Willis. The doctor told me that. But there was nothing anyone could do," his mother had said. She'd tried to hold him in her arms, too, but he'd wrestled free, turning his back to her and swiping his sleeves at the hot

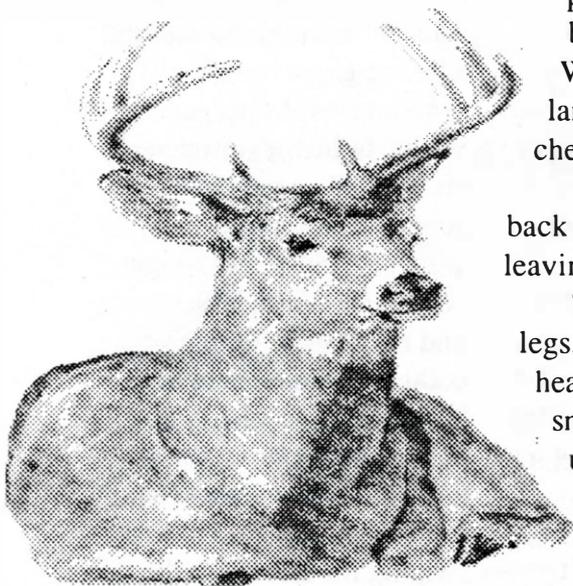
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tears on his cheeks.

“You coulda let him live. You coulda let him keep fighting.” His voice was hoarse and it cracked, and it choked in his throat. “Dad always said, ‘Where there’s life, there’s hope.’ Or don’t you remember?” His last words had been bitter and hateful.

“He wouldn’t have wanted to be on that machine, Willis,” his mother had said. “This is what he would’ve wanted.”

“Shouldn’t still have this, I guess,” the truck driver said, mostly to himself. “But I been broke down in some pretty tough places.” The pistol looked small in the man’s beefy hand. “Ain’t ever used it. Except on targets. Bottles and cans, mostly.” He trudged hesitantly toward



the deer. “Hope I remember where the heart is. I think it’s low behind the shoulder. You’re gonna have to hold the light for me, Son.”

Willis trained the beam on the frantic animal. The trucker pointed the gun at the deer’s quivering flank. After a moment, he swabbed his forehead with a flannel sleeve, exhaling up into the falling snow. “I have damn little stomach for this.”

Willis turned too late to avoid the deer’s frightened stare. The shot was barely more than a pop. The trucker’s arm drooped to his side after the deer’s now lifeless carcass sagged into the snow.

Neither man nor boy looked at each other. Willis forced his breath into long puffs and blinked the blurring from his eyes. Welcome snowflakes landed cool against his cheeks.

“Let’s get him on the back of my truck. Can’t see leaving him to the crows.”

They dragged it by its legs. Willis watched its head wobble over the snow ruts. Empty, untroubled eyes took in nothing.

“C’mon, lift!” The man ordered. It took

them both, the man’s strength and the boy’s leverage, to hoist the carcass onto the truck. Its firm flanks yielded under its own weight and the smooth fur was slightly warm to Willis’ touch. On the bed of the truck the man wedged the deer behind a tie down chain. Willis wanted to touch the smooth thick fur just once more, but the driver tucked it under the canvas tarp before he could.

At the visitation for his father, Willis’ mother had given up trying to hug her son. He made fists in his pockets, refusing her embraces. Willis didn’t talk to her or let her see him cry. The night before the funeral he watched her light her first cigarette in nine years.

An uncle had to finally take Willis from the grave site after all the others had left.

“That chilled me purely to the bone.” The trucker shivered as he retrieved a big thermos bottle from behind the seat. Willis held his feet under the heater in the cab. “Where to?” The man asked.

“Down the hill. In Corey.” Willis pointed toward the lights beyond the disabled car.

The man poured

steaming black coffee into a heavy cup on the console then into the plastic cap from the thermos. Its strong aroma filled the cab.

"Your old man isn't gonna be happy about his car."

"My father died two months ago," Willis said.

"Sorry."

"It's okay. Now."

Willis said, "My mother and I will just have to take care of this together."

The man handed him the plastic cup. "Hope you like it black. Haven't got anything to sweeten it."

Willis never liked coffee, but he took a sip of the hot liquid, feeling its

warmth course through him. In the windshield he saw his own tired face with the cup pressed to his lips. The boy he saw looked a hundred years old even in his school jacket. Willis watched him take another sip. "This is good," the boy in the windshield said. "Just the way Mom and I like it."♦

Touch A Life

- Claudette Peden

"Hey Nigger".

Blackie, Sammie, Sambo, African Queen, Jungle bunny.
Half fried, relaxed, refined, recurled,
hot curlers, tight curl, soft curl, no curls - *Please*.
Dripping wet, plastic cap, comb wearing, big
black afro sheen-keeps it moist.
Don Cornelius and the Soul Train gang,
Shake that big booty, shake that booty.

Pigs feet, chitterlings, corn bread, black-eyed peas,
green peas, red peas and more peas - *Oh pleasssee*.
Ham hocks, turnip greens, grits,
greasy fat that clogs your veins.
Sweetie pie, ain't so sweet.

I got your number.
You has been, used to be, wanna be, good for nothing,
can't get a job even if your life depended on it.
Soaking the welfare system dry.
Nobody cares if you live or die,
so die.

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Jessie Jackson -

What a joke.

Martin Luther King -

Last great hope.

Louis Farrakhan -

Pleasseee - somebody shoot that man.

“Operation Push”,

Push this button.

“I have a dream”,

I have a nightmare.

“Black people should-”

Oh Pleassee, somebody shoot that man.

Bound by chains, sweats in blood,
chanting that same old gospel song.

“Can I get a witness?”

No! How about a forgotten promise?

Amen, Amen

Alex Hailey found his “Roots”,
the famous author, referred to as a “Spook”.

“Can I get a witness?”

Just get over it!

Amen, Amen

Abraham Lincoln set them free,
Ku Klux Klan breaks their necks, hangs them from a tree.

“Can I get a witness?”

Please - What?

Are you crazy?

Amen, Amen

Amen, Amen

Some of my best friends are “Black”
The darker the berry, the sweeter the cherry.
Do you tan? Do you have a tail?
All Black people can play basketball.
I couldn’t see you in the dark,
without you showing your teeth.

Nigger lover, Nigger rich,
Nigger, Nigger, Nigger

Pleassseeee - What a bitch

My sister dropped me off at the train station
A man said "Hey, nigger, why do you ride
with that white woman?"

I'm not a nigger,
and my sister isn't white.

We were just two people,
racial issues are a constant fight.

Don't call me "boy",
I'm a sixty year old man.
Don't call me "Aunt Jemima",
I ain't your aunt, nor your mamma.
Don't call me "spade",
I don't belong in a deck of cards.
Don't call me "coon",
I'm not some kind of animal.

Segregation, separation, integration, the Americanization,
the demoralization, and the complete assimilation of one's own self.

Learn to sit at the back of the bus.
Learn which school one can attend.
Learn which water fountain to drink from.
Learn to hold your tongue when someone spits in your face.
Learn that there are no expectations, but those of a servant.
Learn how not to be proud of your heritage.
Learn to live without respect.
Once you've learned all this,
then you too,
have learned how to be Black in America.

Don't give me a holiday,
or a fake awareness month.
Give me true freedom.
Let my life be as you would have yours,
free without question,
free!

Freedom shouldn't be bought nor sold,
it's a right, not a left.
Words can't be a guarantee for freedom.
Freedom is free without question.
I am an American.
I will someday be free. ♦

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Challenger Update

Graduating Honors Students 1994-95

Fall 1994:

Jim Beckman

Spring 1995

Ma ia Cliffe

Katherine Elmer

Jeffery Krohn

Claudette Peden

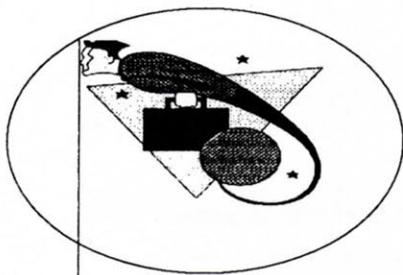
Lori Piegza

Joann Warren

Ap il LaPointe

Jessica Knight

End-of -semester
Potluck Party
May 20th at Betty Hull's
"The Gateway"
855 S. Harvard Dr. in Palatine.



President: Heather Tollerson
Vice-President: Stefan Poulson
Treasurer: Claudette Peden
Secretary: Carter Boe

Editor in Chief: Claudette Peden
Managing Editor: Claudette Peden

-Thanks Susanne Havlic
Coordinator of the
Journalism Program

In response to Renata Galazka's question, why we not interested in the success of Honors Student? Well, like I told Renata over the phone we are, but it's your responsibility to inform us. Congratulations on being a winner in the Design Competition.

Honors Program Coordinator to be Honored By Northwestern University

Honors Program coordinator, Dr. Elizabeth Hull, has recently been awarded the 1995 Merit Award from the Northwestern University Alumni Association. This award recognizes outstanding achievement in the recipient's profession which brings credit to both Northwestern and the recipient. The award will be presented at an Alumni Awards ceremony sometime in May.

Welcome new members to the Honors Society

Karen Fribert
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(708) 639-3210

Karen Romano
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Name Correction:
Renata Galazka