

## **Boys and Girls ... together?**

### **Report to the Yale Class of 1962**

Comparing 45<sup>th</sup> Reunion Surveys of Yale '62 and Smith '62

*by Celine Sullivan, Smith '62 Survey Queen and Class Historian*

Background. This is the third study of the Yale Class of '62 (Y62) with which I've been involved, linking your surveys to a 25-year effort of mine with the Smith College Class of '62 (S62). The first of our paired studies was in 1982, the second in 1997, and the third this year.

In 1982, when Chris Cory (Y62) and I – then colleagues at *Psychology Today* magazine – piggy-backed our first surveys, we expected to document endless distinctions between our two universes.

Instead we found endless similarities. Then we reminded ourselves that we share so many determining factors: background, socioeconomics, respect for the liberal arts, same sex education. Some of us even married one another, maybe even divorced each other.

Nevertheless, differences did emerge in our survey and they continue to emerge: Differences in how we think about ourselves and our life roles, in how we spend our time, how we relate to family, to friends, and to work, how we think about money, how we age, and in how we talk about ourselves in these surveys – to cite just a few areas of distinction.

Before examining the 2007 results, an overarching and consistent Smith/Yale similarity merits attention: Both Y62 and S62 exhibit an enduring sense of group identity with our respective college classes. We look to our classmates as peer groups that are never irrelevant in our thinking about ourselves and where we are in life. The appeal of these surveys seems to lie in the opportunities they afford us to talk quite candidly about who we are and how we're feeling, then see how we compare to one another. The resultant class profiles in their many dimensions tend to reinforce our sense of ourselves. They bolster our pride in our accomplishments, ease our disappointments, validate critical choices (good and bad) that we've made, give permission to change direction or perhaps to stay the course – and certainly give us lots to talk about at reunions.

Should they matter that much? I can't answer that question dispassionately, since I've yet to encounter a group of women brighter, more driven, more engaged, more compassionate, or more admirable than my Smith classmates. My access to this peer group is priceless. Even those – and there must be some – who think this whole survey thing is a waste of time and talent are kind enough to go along with it.

I plan to examine the peer group phenomenon more energetically before our 50<sup>th</sup>, and I welcome any insights.

Response rates and reliability of the data. These respondent samples aren't representative of anything, really, other than people who care enough to participate. That would be roughly 15% of Y62 this year, and close to 50% of S62. We don't know, and can't know from these studies, about classmates who are too disenfranchised, ill, overwhelmed by adversity, or otherwise disinclined to talk to us in this way. Most assuredly, the conversion of non-respondents to respondent status would have altered the class profiles, probably in directions away from "right" answering, from self-congratulatory answering, and from strong affiliation with our respective colleges.

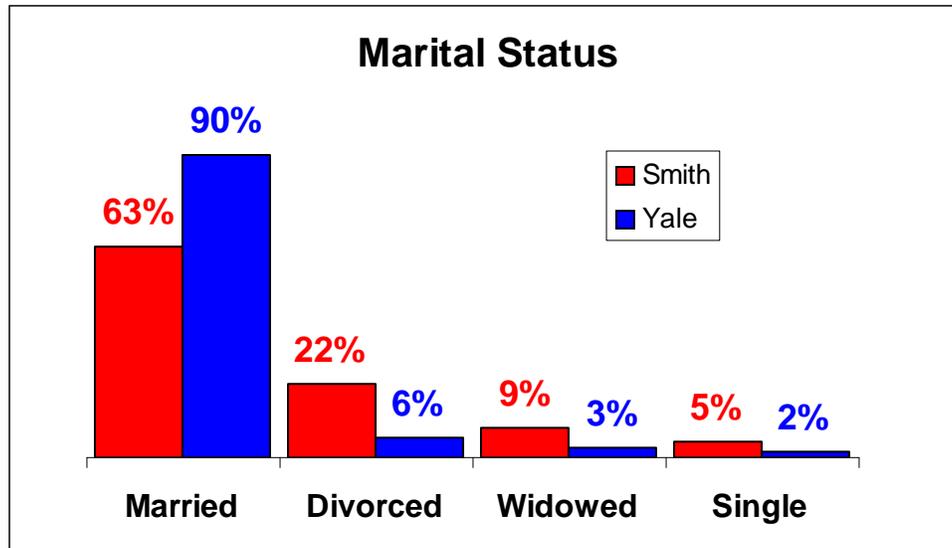
Our methodologies differed in this go-around: Y62 was conducted online via your website, and the S62 study was done the old-fashioned way, by mail. The S62 questionnaire was considerably longer, soliciting many more "essay" answers which don't feed readily into digital data capture and statistical analysis. Some comparisons between the two surveys, as a result, are not as crisp as they might be, had we been more scientific in structuring the questionnaires.

A note about the numbers: Statistical detail presented here was current in early June 2007. As later responses are tabulated, some slight variation in specific numbers is likely to occur.

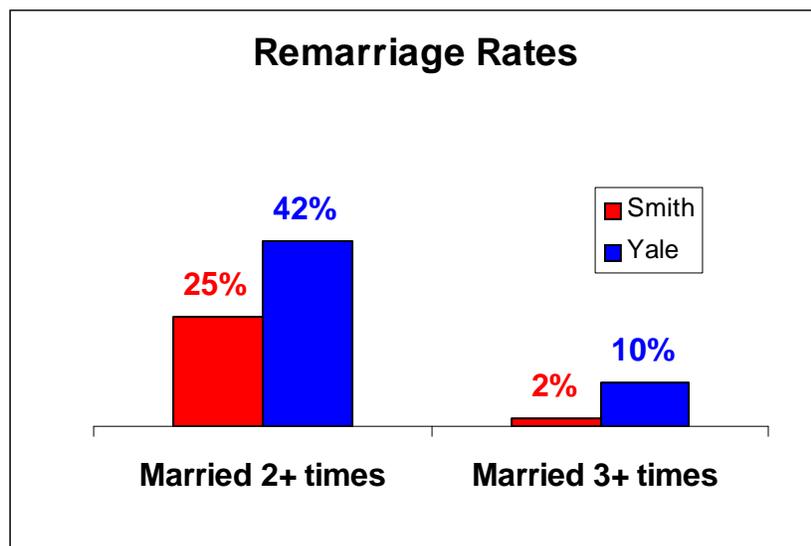
Some of the comparable highlights of the two studies follow.

Y62 much more married, and more often, than S62.

Nine out of ten Y62 men are married, considerably higher than the percentage of S62 women (63%) who fall into that demographic. Of the currently unmarried in both classes, most have been married and today are divorced or widowed.



42% of Y62 men have been married two or more times, compared to 25% of S62 women. 10% of Y62 men have been married 3+ times, while only 2% of S62-ers have made more than two trips to the altar.



#### Who's at home?

Spouses are present in the households of nearly all who report themselves as currently married, in both studies.

3% of Y62 men live with a male partner, and 3% with a female partner, compared to 2% and 2%, respectively, among S62 women.

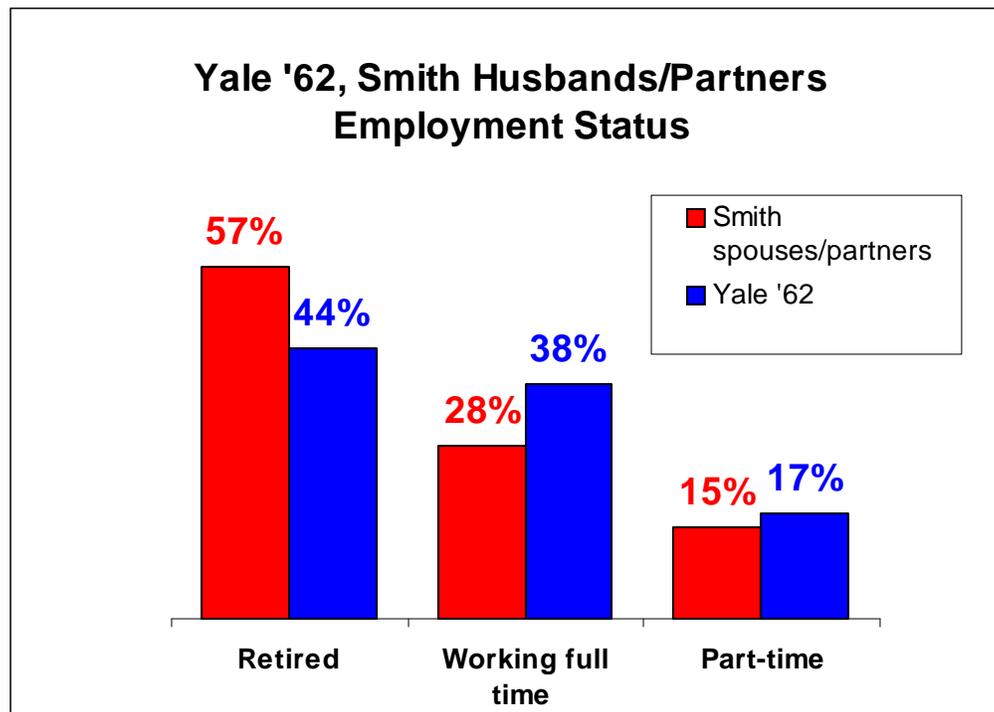
Reflecting the higher (and presumably more recent) remarriage rates among Y62 men, 11% have children living at home vs. only 3% of the Smith sample.

### Grandparenting

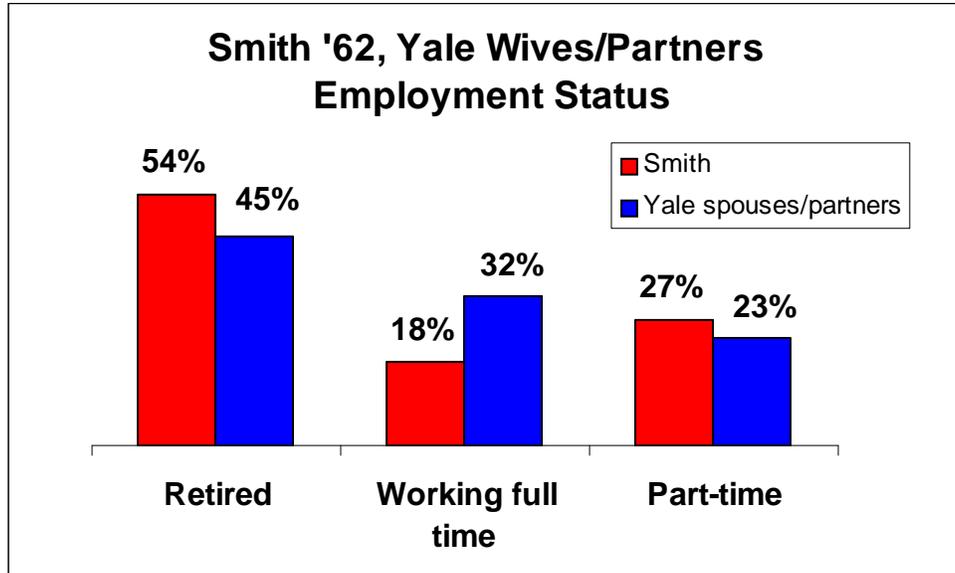
S62 women married younger, and began raising families younger than Y62 men, so it's not surprising that more Smith respondents claim grandparent status today (76% v. 65%). From replies to open-ended questions, it would appear that gender differences don't compromise the great pleasure grandchildren bring into our lives. S62 respondents, though, noted many more contexts in which grandchildren make everything better, whether it's a quiet moment on the porch or a trip halfway around the world.

### Work and wealth.

Y62 men are more likely to be working full- or part-time today (55%) than are their Smith counterparts (45%). For that matter, they're more likely to be at work than are S62 husbands/partners (43%).

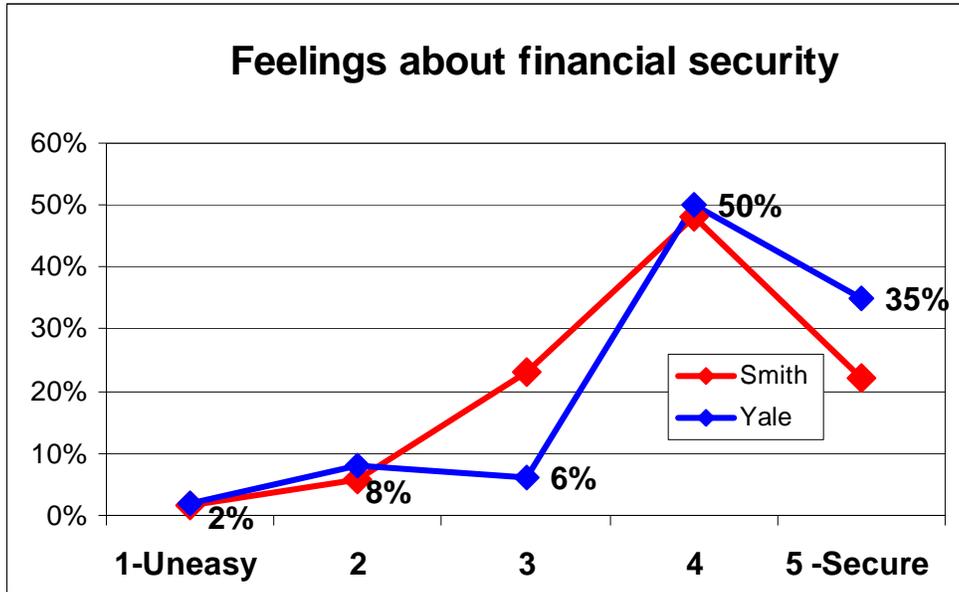


And comparing Y62 wives/partners to S62 women, the latter, having nearly all reached the age-65 benchmark, are more likely to have bailed out of the workforce.



While income alone isn't fully indicative of financial well-being, especially as we move into retirement, it is relatively easy to consider in a survey context, and useful for comparative purposes. Y62 reports higher 2006 household income than S62's (median: \$182K v. \$100K), consistent with higher levels of income-generating employment illustrated above.

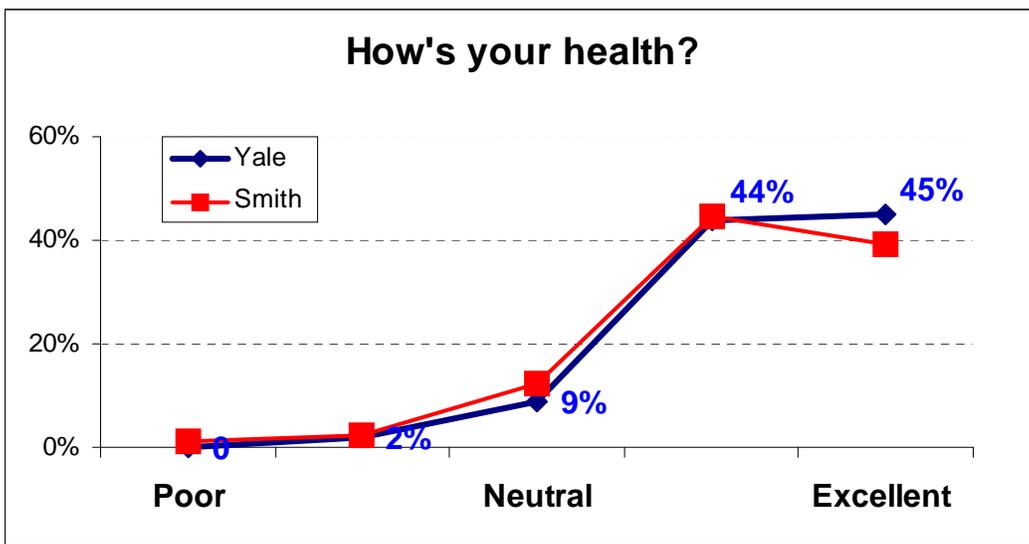
As we look ahead, feelings of financial security are confident in both classes. S62 skews a bit more markedly toward the center of the range; Y62 evidences more confidence at the very high end.



Volunteer work is a preoccupation of seven in ten members of both classes. Y62 men report more hours volunteering, averaging 9.2 hours per week, v. S62's 4.0 hours/week. The S62 figure reflects a decline from 7.2 hours five years ago, quite possibly as S62 reorganized their lives around grandchildren and other post-career activities.

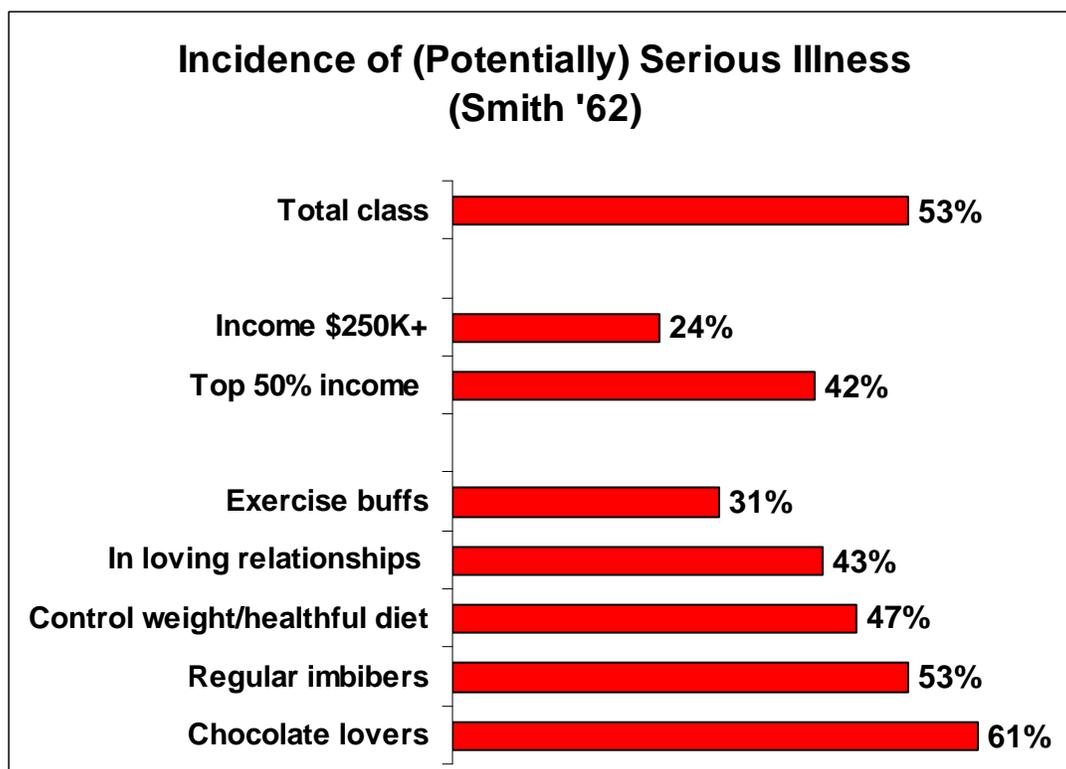
### Health

Both survey samples reported exceptionally good health overall; roughly 9 out of 10 in each class rated their health in the good/excellent range.



In further questioning, however, the incidence of serious or potentially serious illnesses was more apparent. Data are not comparable here, due to question design issues, but many respondents cited particular illnesses of some consequence, people who nevertheless would tell you that their general health is "great, thanks."

Findings concerning lifestyle indicators, cross-tabbed from the Smith study, might interest all students of this research. Factors that corresponded strongly with good health included adherence to *serious* exercise regimens, weight control/healthful eating, and being in a loving relationship. Regular enjoyment of alcoholic beverages, while not influencing overall health one way or the other, corresponded to slightly lower than average levels of hypertension and arthritis, while regular enjoyment of chocolate, not surprisingly, tends to correlate with less robust health, and moderately elevated cholesterol.



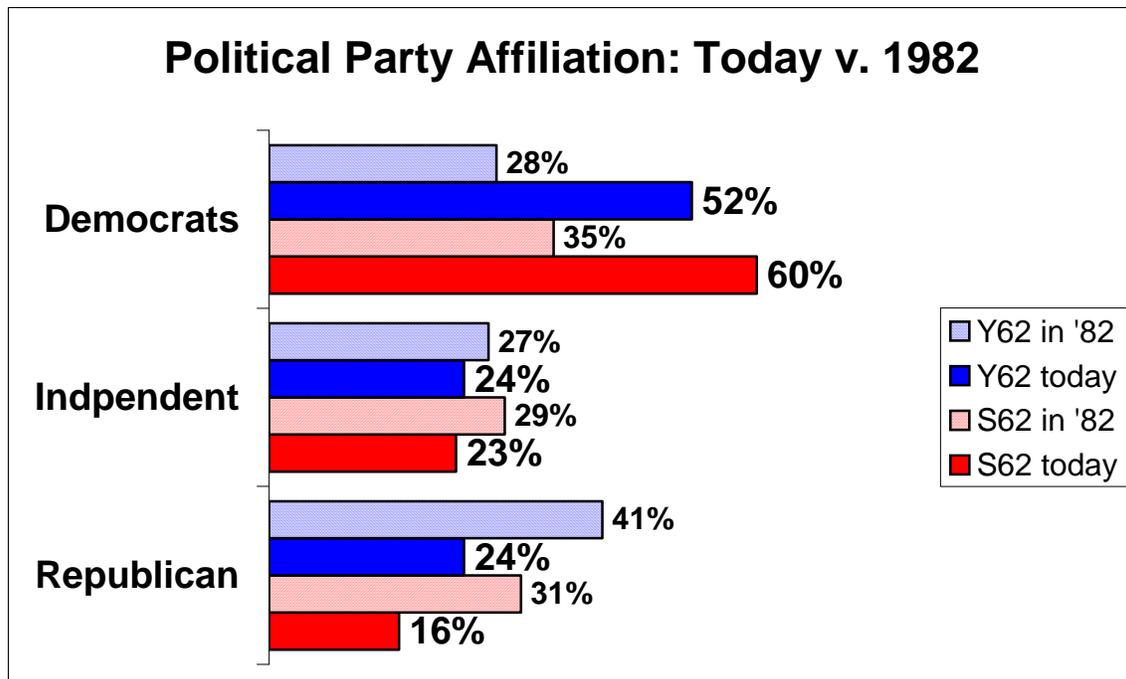
While higher levels of income correlated with more favorable reports of health status, cause-and-effect relationships can be confused in this regard. Health care can be prohibitively costly for those carrying other financial burdens, and

illness in and of itself can seriously dent one's financial profile. Also, an unmeasured, but possibly related, factor pertains to our stage in life: Some uncounted number of classmates encountered difficulties in obtaining affordable health insurance in the years between group policy coverage and Medicare eligibility, and they may have felt reluctant to seek uncovered care for still-lingering health problems that other classmates would have had treated.

(Higher levels of income also correlated in the Smith study with Republican party affiliation and voting for GWB in the last election, causing one classmate to wonder if the election results had introduced an epidemic of stress-related illnesses among Gore voters.)

### Speaking of politics...

Political party affiliations have, well, flip-flopped, within both '62 classes in the past quarter-century. The big gains went to the Democratic party, one in four voters moved that way in each survey, primarily away from the GOP.



At the time the recent surveys were conducted, in the Spring of 2007, Obama (31%) and Clinton (22%) were the Yale Democratic frontrunners, while Giuliani (13%) and McCain (7%) led the Republican field.

S62 preferences were similar: Clinton (38%) and Obama (36%) running closer to one another with Clinton in the lead, and Giuliani (9%) and McCain (6%) leading the much less favored Republican hopefuls.

Three in ten Y62-ers (31%) and almost as many S62-ers (28%) actively campaigned for political candidates in 2004 or 2006.

### Concerns about major issues

Concerns about major issues confronting the nation were explored in open-ended questions. It's tempting, but potentially misleading, to quantify these answers for comparison. By way of summary, however, both Y62 and S62 showed remarkable symmetry in their answering. The Iraq war/terrorism/situation in the Middle East overwhelmingly dominated replies in both surveys, with the environment, health care, perceived crisis in leadership, misguided U.S foreign policy and the economy also prominent. An interesting distinction emerged in comments about the Bush presidency: Several Y62-ers mentioned with distress the fact that GWB is a Yale man; not a single Smith respondent, however, referred to the fact that GWB's mother is a Smith alum.

### Sex a major issue?

Y62 provided specific detail on satisfaction with their sex lives (59% satisfied, 31% not), while S62 was given the option of saying anything they wanted to, or nothing, about theirs. Half the S62 sample opted out of the inquiry. Among answerers, nearly half reflected that their sex lives were non-existent, a distant memory, or precluded for lack of a partner. 10% of Y62-ers answered "not active" to the specific inquiry. Several S62-ers filed rave reviews of recent frolics, while relatively few, active and inactive, expressed feelings of tristesse looking back over more thrilling moments in their sex lives. From answers to other questions, there is abundant evidence that S62-ers are carpe-ing their diems, and evenings, resourceful in substituting new delights for bygones of all sorts. Yale 62-ers tend more – but certainly not without exception -- to keep on

keeping on with lifelong pursuits, at work and at play – this particular area of play probably included.

### About being “here”

Gender differences aside, we are all enjoying the many aspects of “liberation” that we experience at this point in our lives. Liberation from work, for many. Liberating ourselves from the expectations of others. Enjoying (some, anyway) the liberation of becoming “invisible” in a larger, youth-driven culture. Self-actualization is seen at last as a possibility, and many are taking full advantage – whether it means wearing comfortable if unattractive footwear, speaking out boldly about touchy issues, or pursuing a long-postponed ambition to play a musical instrument or take up ice skating or sail around the world. Being with family, enjoying these people to whom we’ve devoted so much of ourselves, not to mention genetic material, delights us all on many levels, with grandchildren introducing us to new experiences of love. Most of us worry about our health, and about how we’ll cope when it fails us. And we worry a great deal about the state of the nation and the world – aware that so much has gone adrift on our watch and that the consequences, if not checked, will comprise our legacy.

However that legacy may be taking shape, one Smith classmate wrote that the best thing about being “here” in life is ... “at least seeing how it all turns out.”

Indeed.

Sincere thanks for so much documentation of all that.

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