At the Fall Luncheon . . .

SJSU ERFA President, Jill Cody and special guest and luncheon speaker, Larry Gerston enjoy a moment at the Fall Luncheon. Gerston spoke on the eve of the presidential election, offering insights and analyses of the political forces arrayed for the climactic battle of the campaign.

April 5: Save the date

By Don Keesey (English)
For this year's Spring Excursion we will be taking a bus to the de Young Museum to see “The Girl with the Pearl Earring: Dutch Paintings from the Mauritshuis.” (The Mauritshuis contains the world's greatest collection of Dutch masterpieces and, while undergoing remodeling, is temporarily allowing these works to be exhibited elsewhere.) The full exhibition, which has 35 works from the Dutch Golden Age, including five by Rembrandt, is making only two stops in the States. So, short of traveling to The Hague, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see most of these paintings, including the famous “Girl with the Pearl Earring.” Your ticket will also get you into a companion exhibition, “Rembrandt’s Century,” which has 200 seventeenth-century works from the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts collection, including 60 Rembrandt etchings. (You can find further details at www.deyoungmuseum.org.) In February we will mail a flyer, including a reservation form. Meanwhile, mark your calendars for April 5th.

Go along with the group!
A visit by new Chancellor Timothy White this Spring

By Peter Buzanski (History)

Much as the faculty and staff at SJSU might wish to be working at an independent university, the reality is that we are part of a 23 unit system headed by a Chancellor’s Office which exerts power over all branches, much of which is unwelcome. At the moment the system is headed by a new Chancellor whose initial impression, system wide, has been very favorable. One project the new Chancellor, Timothy White, has announced is his desire to visit all of the CSU campuses, and it is quite likely that SJSU will be visited by him this Spring.

The Chancellor’s Office, like most bureaucratic organizations, is easily influenced by public events, to which it often responds without careful scrutiny. I refer here to the latest Chancellor’s Executive Order 1083, issued in mid-January 2013. This new order states that “every CSU employee is now a mandated reporter for suspected child abuse or neglect.” To implement this requirement the category exempted from these requirements is that of volunteers, a term that may involve members of our organization, among others who volunteer services without compensation.

Now that Proposition 30 has passed in California one should not jump to the conclusion that the budget deficit for the CSU has eased. In fact, as a result of negotiations with the Governor, the Trustees are now required to reduce the additional tuition fees for Fall, 2012 students, fees that were to be continued into Spring 2013. Although the CSU no longer faces the $250 million trigger that would have gone into effect had the tax increase not been passed, the net loss to SJSU still amounts to $9.3 million. At this writing there has been no word as to how the administration will deal with this large sum. The one possible bright spot in this dreary financial situation is that the Governor has promised to increase the CSU budget for 2013-14 by as much as the undetermined sum. On the other hand, the state legislative analyst proclaimed the Trustees’ 5% increase enrollment projection to be unwarranted, given what the analyst explained as the inefficiencies of the universities. Instead, he suggests more instruction be given online.

Budget woes lead to quotas and online teaching

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The new, widely reported pilot program of online instruction that SJSU has begun with Udacity (a private, online educational system outside of Stanford) may result in some cost savings, but so far the faculty remains wary. While no students were new admits for Spring 2013, SJSU was given the same quota of students for 2013-14 as during the past three years, namely 21,045 full time equivalent students. However, the Board of Trustees had adopted a budget proposal for 2013-14 that foresees an enrollment increase of 5% plus a faculty salary increase of 3.5%, a paltry sum given that most faculty have had no increase for up to five years. Note that this is only a budget proposal; the state legislature and the governor will act on the proposal later this year. If the enrollment increase is actually funded, then SJSU will be given its share of additional admissions.

New administrators are now appearing. University Advancement has replaced Nancie Bussani with Christina Schultz, who came with outstanding accomplishments at the University of Southern California, and Dixie in Utah. A new dean for the College of Engineering, Dr. Andrew Hsu, will appear in February. He comes from Wright State University, in Dayton, Ohio. He has a Ph.D. in Aerospace Engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology and has a very respectable record in publishing research papers in his field. The Academic Senate passed a few noteworthy policy recommendations which the President signed quickly. One such policy replaces an earlier one enacted in 1999, regarding allegations of misconduct in research. The earlier policy was found insufficient by the federal government, and since all federal funds were at stake, the new policy, using to a large extent the language required nationally, is in the new policy. After much discussion, both in committees and on the floor of the Senate, a new policy recommendation passed concerning the evaluation of teaching effectiveness for all faculty. In order to save funds and conserve resources, student observations on teaching effectiveness will now be administered online instead of on paper forms.
A Second Career

By Arlene N. Okerlund
(English/Dean, H&A/AVP)

“It’s loud. It’s brassy. And it’s happy. Just like the people who play it.” That’s what I tell my friends about my love of playing the banjo. Most would rather not know about my second career. In their minds, the banjo is definitely déclassé, an opinion that amuses me in its assignment of musical instruments to a sociological stratum.

From the first time I heard a banjo at the annual carnival in rural western Maryland where I grew up, I loved the sound of the instrument. With no movies, theater, or television in town, the carnival—sponsored every June by the volunteer fire company as its principal fundraiser—was the social and artistic event of the year. For an entire week, every evening featured live music—gut bucket players (including some about General Douglas MacArthur. He made an unforgettable blunder that escalated a brief “UN police action” that was being successfully concluded into a major war with China that continued for three years with the sacrifice of more than 50,000 Americans. But for all that, MacArthur was always a “soldier’s soldier.” His motto was, “Don’t hit ‘em where they are; hit ‘em where they ain’t.” For example, if the Japanese were on the east end of an island, MacArthur would land his troops on the west end with the comment, “Let them hack their way through miles of jungle to get to us. We’ll be rested and waiting.”

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Don’t hesitate to enhance the event with some research. Little-known vignettes intrigue readers and add enormous value to the memoir. My own memoir includes little-known details about the Korean War, including some about General Douglas MacArthur. He made an unforgettable blunder that escalated a brief “UN police action” that was being successfully concluded into a major war with China that continued for three years with the sacrifice of more than 50,000 Americans. But for all that, MacArthur was always a “soldier’s soldier.” His motto was, “Don’t hit ‘em where they are; hit ‘em where they ain’t.” For example, if the Japanese were on the east end of an island, MacArthur would land his troops on the west end with the comment, “Let them hack their way through miles of jungle to get to us. We’ll be rested and waiting.”

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By James Asher (Psychology)

One of the purposes of our section on Reminiscences is to encourage our members to seriously consider writing down their experiences and sharing them with others. Last year, Jim Asher wrote a 260-page memoir of his life, called Growing Up Ugly (North Rockwell Press, which you can find at www.tpr-world.com). It’s a sentimental journey into the 1930s, 40s and 50s which brings back the colorful people and events that shaped his life. Here is what he learned writing his memoir, which may be helpful to you in writing your stories.

Writer’s block
Just thinking about writing a memoir triggers something in one’s brain that whispers, “You can’t do it! You’re not good enough!” and events is sketchy at best. It won’t work! Don’t bother trying!” I discovered that those messages are an illusion. Just sit down at your computer keyboard and type anything you can remember about an earlier event and something magical will happen. A static scene will suddenly morph into a kind of motion picture replaying exactly what happened in real time with the actual conversations of people involved. All you have to do is observe the action, and write what you are hearing and seeing and feeling.

Do some research
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Memoir tips

There is nothing more exciting than a fresh look at something that is ordinary and familiar. This book takes bits of information that we accrue over a lifetime transform every person into what my dad liked to call, “a walking university.” There follows some examples from my own life. One of my sisters revealed this personal observation: “When money changes hands, behavior changes.” Jacqueline Kennedy once said, “If you don’t make it with your own kids, nothing else counts.” One of my favorite stories: In college I was driving my car on a double date. My best friend in the back seat was making amorous moves on his date. She became indifferent and scoffed him harshly: “You should be ashamed of yourself!” My date, sitting next to me, turned her head and said gently, “Don’t fault him for being a man.” That impressed me.

An interesting technique

My editor's mother, Edith Robertson, recommended a strategy for recovering the details of the family history. She found that just asking her mother to tape-record her remembrances was not enough. People tend to freeze in front of a microphone. Edith discovered that if she played the role of interviewer asking questions, the information flowed from her mother. Later, she listened to the tape-recordings and wrote the stories into a book, which she published as Life on a Missouri Farm. You didn't mess with Mrs. Robertson.

Edith also wrote a memoir called Stopwatch Teacher. Before she became a teacher in middle age, she nurtured dozens of foster children in her large home and instructed her own children to call her “Edith” so that the foster children would not feel second class. When she was 50, she returned to school to get a teaching credential and taught 4th, 5th, and 6th grades for the next two years. Somehow she was Edith the woman, many of her students were taller, which might have presented a discipline problem, but she had the reputation of being able to handle difficult students. One of the secrets she revealed: She rehearsed her stories into a book, which she published as Why We Came to Santa Fe (Penny whistle Press). It tells the story of the their restoration of an old, crumbling city house. Their friends, their eight children and 13 grandchildren, all helped and continue to maintain the 120-year-old adobe. They were inspired by the words of Jose’s father, Encarnacion, who used to say, “La tierra es su hogar” (“The earth is your home”).

How to go quietly into that good night?

We have to strive to leave that world a better place. We have to be guided by the words of our children and grandchildren. Here are some thoughts on how to go quietly into that good night:

1. Start in the morning by taking a walk in the fresh air.
2. Have a healthy breakfast and a good cup of coffee.
3. Spend some time doing something you enjoy.
4. Take a nap and relax.
5. Read a good book or listen to music.
6. Spend some time with your loved ones.
7. Write a letter or take a photo of something you cherish.
8. Finish your day with a good dinner and a good night's sleep.

A life well lived is a life well spent. Let us all strive to go quietly into that good night.
Yes, Santa was at the Holiday Celebration . . .
That’s Gus Lease in his furry Santa hat at left

And so was . . .
Phyllis Keesey, Pat Strandburg and Ann Williams.