

# Pembroke Center Associates

## Newsletter

### A Tribute to My Grandmother, Sophie Blistein '41, GP '01

By Emily Blistein '01



Sophie Blistein '41, GP '01 celebrates the graduation of her granddaughter Emily Blistein '01.

The other day I unlocked a storage room that's, literally, overflowing with the spirit of my deceased grandmother Sophie Blistein '41, GP '01. I pulled off my boots, stepped gingerly across her embroidered couch, pushed aside several boxes, crawled on top of my grandfather's desk, and reached over to bring several files of her writing into the light.

I try to avoid overwrought metaphors (one of the many things I learned at Brown), but this image—searching for

pieces of her history, hidden behind the spirit of my grandfather—is wonderfully symbolic.

As a girl, I heard all about *him*. He went to Brown. He went to war. He came back to Brown. He taught English his whole life—to students who revered him. He wore bow ties and bachelor buttons. He had a home library that he claimed was Dewey decimalized. He was a grammatical force. He signed typewritten letters to me—at ages four and younger—"Thine."

Every story I heard about my grandmother was in reference, or in deference, to him. I vaguely knew she had gone to Pembroke and was considered a "faculty wife." But I didn't know what *she* majored in. I didn't know what *she* did during the war. I didn't know where *she* worked or what *she* did. Most of all, I had no idea that *she* had as much of an impact on Brown as my grandfather.

In other words, I grew up knowing her, but not her life. We went to the Rhode Island School of Design Museum together. We made applesauce, peeling the apples—curl upon curl—with this great device that looked like a record player for apples. We talked and talked. But I didn't really hear her stories until I came from Vermont to live with her the summer before my freshman year. I didn't really learn about her life until I asked.

Sophie was the only grandparent I knew as an adult. In my years at Brown and after, we got to know each other well—as grandmother

and granddaughter *and* as women. I asked her more questions and grew increasingly fascinated by the snapshots she showed me—literally and figuratively—of her personal history.

I learned about jobs, friendships, and classes she loved; how she fought small and large battles, and chose not to fight others. I learned about her early aspirations to be a reporter; how she helped manage her father's tool factory during the War; that she was my grandfather's confidant long before their marriage and courtship; why she became a social worker; and the challenges she faced as a working mother in the 1950s and 1960s.

I also learned that she never stopped seeking education—both formal and informal; that she volunteered and was politically active; that she served on many boards and community organizations, including the Pembroke Alumnae Association (eventually becoming President); and that she was one of the first women

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## From the Director

The Pembroke Center is enormously pleased that the new holder of the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair is Anne Fausto-Sterling, Professor of Biology and Gender Studies and Chair of Brown's Committee on Science and Technology Studies. The chair is special in that it is designated for a distinguished scholar in any field who has contributed to scholarship in the area of gender studies and who has a commitment to the work of the Pembroke Center and to the vitality of research on gender at Brown. Fausto-Sterling follows historian Joan Wallach Scott, holder of the chair from 1980 to 1985 and founding director of the Pembroke Center; French literary critic Naomi Schor, holder from 1985 to 1989 and founding co-editor of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*; and English and comparative literature scholar, Nancy Armstrong, holder from 1992 to 2009, and a crucial member of the Pembroke Center's Faculty Advisory Board and of the editorial board of *differences*.

Few people have done more for gender studies at Brown than Anne Fausto-Sterling. She taught some of the earliest women's studies courses at the University and has served on virtually every Women's and Gender Studies—and now Gender and Sexuality Studies—committee for almost three decades. She has helped shape the development of the Pembroke Center since its founding. In 2002-03 she led the Pembroke Seminar in a year-long examination of "Theories of Embodiment," the work of which was disseminated widely, including in a special issue of *differences*. Currently, she is conducting, with Cynthia Garcia-Coll of the Education Department, a research project on the emergence of sex differences in early childhood, a project that began with seed money from the Pembroke Center and continues with Ford Foundation support.



PHOTO BY: CATHERINE KARNOW

Anne Fausto-Sterling

Most significant is the honor Anne Fausto-Sterling brings to the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair, to the Pembroke Center, and to Brown. As an international leader in the study of scientific understandings of gender and sexuality, she is known for her numerous scholarly publications, including two books that have transformed the field: her 1985 *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women*, and her 2000 *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. Fausto-Sterling has been a distinguished visiting faculty member and scholar in residence at a number of institutions in the US, including Harvard, Mount Holyoke, Cornell, and SUNY, as well as at the University of Amsterdam and the Hubrecht Laboratory in Utrecht. It is our great fortune that Brown is Fausto-Sterling's home institution. I can't help but think that Nancy Duke Lewis—Dean of Pembroke College from 1950 to 1960, a mathematician and a strong supporter of women faculty—would be pleased that Fausto-Sterling holds her chair.

Elizabeth Weed  
Director





Sophie Blistein reading to her granddaughter Emily.

trustees on the Brown Corporation. I met a web of women who she counseled and was counseled by throughout her many years and roles at Pembroke and Brown.

Over the years, I lightheartedly challenged *her* commitment to women's issues. I sent her postcards from the women's march on Washington. I brought up provocative issues from my feminist theory classes. I made

grand statements about the status of women—the many evils and the wrongs we faced. She listened.

Sophie had a deep appreciation for Pembroke and the Sarah Doyle Center. She came to feminism thoughtfully, with academic respect for the women's movement as well as an understanding of what it did, and also what it didn't do, for her. She acknowledged, without anger, the impediments sexism put in the way of her own life.

She didn't write manifestos; she didn't get in your face; she was neither overbearing nor self-congratulatory. She spoke up without yelling.

Years after graduating, while beginning to juggle my own life, career, and family, I paid more attention to how she led her life. Like women of any generation, I assumed our experiences were very different from those of our parents and grandparents. But, through conversations with Sophie, I learned the truth: Everything you think you invented has always been here. Your job is to figure out how to make it yours.

In the last few years I tried to do more listening to Sophie. The snapshots of her life knit together, and I got a better sense of who she was within what she did.

Like her, I have mellowed—not because feminism or women's rights play a less important role in my life, but because I no longer need to fight every battle. And, when I do, I want to use a voice that's uniquely my own, not one that I assume the movement demands of me. It's a lesson I learned from listening to Sophie.

While wading through the few papers in my 'Grandma Sophie' file, I found a copy of a short letter she wrote to the Brown Corporation after it was suggested that all women receive the same title for simplicity's sake. While mildly chiding them and asking if we should also do away with the male corporation members' titles for ease, she closed by suggesting that they adopt a simple stance of addressing each woman (emphasis added): **as she wishes.**

Sophie had an incredibly rich life, and people adored her. I will always have to paraphrase what she taught me because her lessons never came in parables or pithy one-liners. She wrote concise letters to important people when they did thoughtless things. She enjoyed her life and wanted people just to be glad they knew her. She asked great questions and gave thoughtful answers, with only the hope that you would listen, to take what you wished and find a way to make it yours.

## The Sarah Doyle Women's Center Celebrates 35 Years of Women at Brown!



The Sarah Doyle Women's Center (SDWC) is celebrating its 35th anniversary during the 2009-2010 academic year. The theme for the year-long celebration is "Thirty-Five Years of Women at Sarah Doyle." In March the SDWC plans to hold a mini-conference/colloquium for alumnae/i and current students, in addition to sponsoring events throughout the year. The Center is planning a series, "Life after Brown," featuring alumnae who are doing interesting things out in the world, as well as informal events enabling current students to meet students, faculty, or staff who have been involved with the Sarah Doyle Women's Center.

The Sarah Doyle Center needs your help. Please send stories, memories, and photographs from your time at Brown to [sdwc@brown.edu](mailto:sdwc@brown.edu). Also, let us know if you would like to be added to our alumnae/i list. Finally, look for the Center on Facebook and join the Sarah Doyle Women's Center group!

## Brown Women's Studies/Gender Studies Alumnae/i Build Enriching Careers

One of the things that prospective concentrators in Gender and Sexuality Studies ask is, "What can I do with this concentration?" The Pembroke Center did an informal survey of our concentrators and discovered that they have gone on to careers in healthcare, public policy, academia, law, social work, finance, and psychology, to name just a few.

This spring, we contacted our past concentrators and asked them to let us know what they are doing and to submit a bio for us to post on our website:

[http://pembrokecenter.org/Women\\_Gender\\_Alum.html](http://pembrokecenter.org/Women_Gender_Alum.html)

We developed the site as a networking resource, where alumnae/i and current students can find out what other concentrators are doing and reconnect with former classmates.

### Were you a concentrator?

We have yet to hear from many of our concentrators, so if you concentrated in Women's Studies, Gender Studies, or Gender and Sexuality Studies, we want to hear from you! Please visit our website or send an e-mail to [Pembroke\\_Associates@brown.edu](mailto:Pembroke_Associates@brown.edu).

Thank you!



Graduating Gender and Sexuality Studies Concentrators (L-R): Chantal Nicole Tapé '09, Michael Nicholas Fruta '09, Kelly Yuka Walton '09, Lily Susanna Shield '09. Missing from photo: Robert Joshuaaway Smith, III '09.



The Pembroke Center is pleased to announce the creation of the new website for the Nanjing-Brown Joint Program for Gender Studies and the Humanities:

<http://brown.edu/Programs/Nanjing/index.html>

This project received seed funding from the Office of International Affairs and is part of Brown's Internationalization effort. The program is a partnership between the Pembroke Center, the Cogut Center for the Humanities, and the East Asian Studies Department at Brown with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Science at Nanjing University. The program brings outstanding scholars from Nanjing University into dialogue with scholars here at Brown about the global future of gender, feminist studies, and the humanities.



# “Realizing Educational Opportunity for All”



## Wendy Kopp

CEO and Founder Teach For America  
National Recipient of the Pembroke Center Associates' Leadership for Change through Education Award

**November 18, 2009**  
**8:00 p.m.**  
**Salomon Center for Teaching**  
**Room 101**  
**Brown University**

Free and Open to the Public  
Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Opening Remarks



**Ruth J. Simmons**  
Brown University President

## Local Leadership for Change through Education Award Recipient



**Hillary Salmons**  
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# TEACHFORAMERICA

Photo of Wendy Kopp by Jean-Christian Bourcart



Sponsored by the Pembroke Center Associates and the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women  
**WWW.PEMBROKECENTER.ORG**



## Pembroke Center Makes Strides in the Boldly Brown Campaign for Academic Enrichment

Given the challenging economy, the Pembroke Center is especially grateful to receive increased support from alumnae/i and friends to benefit the Pembroke Center endowment and other priorities to help the Center strengthen its research and teaching programs. The list that follows represents all pledges and bequests made since the inception of the Campaign. It does not include Pembroke Center Associates membership gifts, which are listed separately by fiscal year (see pages 6 and 7).

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