

Formed in the *Fire*

A Peabody alumna remembers the merger

BY BONNIE ARANT ERTELT

In August 1977 when I moved into my dorm room to start my freshman year at Peabody, I had no idea that I had set foot on a campus destined for almost immediate change.

Coming for a tour my junior year of high school, no one mentioned how close to financial ruin the school was, not that I would have expected that, in hindsight. Evidence of the “Design for the Future” was everywhere, particularly in the school catalog with its logo—thin, intertwined letters on a square grid reading “George Peabody College for Teachers.” It conveyed modernism and forward thinking. Despite a larger scholarship offer to attend the art school at Washington University in St. Louis, I chose Peabody. I was certain I wanted to teach art, not just make art, and as soon as I walked in front of the Social-Religious Building and looked down the mall toward University School, I knew this was where I wanted to be.

I loved the compact campus with only four undergraduate dorms, the small classes (I was never in a class with more than 40 people—every instructor and professor I had knew my name), and the art department where Michael Taylor, my adviser, was nationally known for his glassblowing and ceramic work. Though I was drawn more to painting (pardon the pun), I was always amazed by the glass-blowing furnaces in the basement of the Cohen Building, and by those students who melted glass on rods and formed beautiful shapes in the fire of those furnaces. On Sundays, my friends and I ate fried chicken and peppermint ice cream in the cafeteria, watching older alumni, some in their sixties and seventies, come back to campus for Sunday lunch reunions, their friendships forged years ago in this same place. We daydreamed aloud that would be us in 50 years and laughed at the thought. But we already understood the community that this place engendered.

Within my first three semesters at Peabody, I had two practica that placed me in Nashville public school classrooms. I

have been forever grateful for those early experiences because they taught me, before I got too far along in my undergraduate studies, that teaching was not the best use of my talents. In January 1979 I switched from an art education major to an art studio major, with an emphasis in painting.

About a month later, I dodged local TV reporters en route to my work/study position in the admissions office, wondering what the hubbub was about. “Haven’t you seen today’s *Tennessean*?” I was asked. The headline broke the news that Peabody was possibly merging with Tennessee State University. It was the first knowledge that my friends and I had of Peabody’s dire financial footing. Clearly, for the school to survive, extreme measures were being considered, and we didn’t know where that would leave any of us, least of all me, since I had so recently decided against a teaching career.

Though that semester remains a blur, there are pinholes of clarity. When I look back at my transcript, I find that I actually remember a great deal from my classes, an amazing accomplishment considering the tumult that went on outside the classroom as it became clear that a merger *would* take place—with Vanderbilt, not TSU. There were many meetings and much uncertainty, but the art faculty assured us that those who were current students would be allowed to finish our degrees and that they would stay on for a year after the merger. I was exactly midway through my undergraduate coursework. It sounded as though I could stay to finish. Then, it was disclosed that only one member of the art faculty would remain, Robert Pletcher, because he alone had an Ed.D. and could supervise art education practica. Amid the turbulence, I developed an ulcer. Most art majors made plans to transfer.



I stayed on through the summer and tried to figure out a way to remain at Peabody. My friends, most of whom were early childhood, elementary, and special education majors, would stay on, finishing their general education requirements in the College of Arts and Science. I had planned my sequence of courses well: at the time of the merger, what I had left were primarily courses in my painting major and electives. As it turned out, I could take painting courses in Vanderbilt’s Fine Arts Department with Don Evans, an icon of nonconformity at Vanderbilt, and a new faculty member, Marilyn Murphy, whose photorealistic colored pencil drawings were soon to catch everyone’s eye. I chose to take a sequence of art history classes in the Fine Arts Department as well, though I was not allowed to declare an art history minor. I was an anomaly—a Peabody student finishing my degree through the College of Arts and Science. I continued to confound those in charge of requirements, rules and regulations until I graduated in 1981.

There is no doubt in my mind that I made the right decision to stay at Peabody and finish my degree.

I am inordinately proud of this college, what it accomplished before the merger and what it has continued to accomplish in the last 25 years. My husband received his M.Ed. from this post-merger place. My son benefited from the post-merger training of its

early childhood education majors as he spent his early years at the Vanderbilt Child Care Center on the Peabody campus. He and I often play hide-and-seek around the pillars of the Social-Religious Building, now called the Wyatt Center, and every time we do, I look down the mall and remember the day I chose to come to Peabody.

I have spent many years of my working career in service to Vanderbilt. I have been influenced by the post-merger Peabody and Vanderbilt for much longer than the pre-merger place that lured me to Nashville. However, in my Hillsboro Village neighborhood, there live at least three pre-merger Peabody faculty members who are neighbors of mine—one from the art department, one from the music department, and one, a beloved professor who taught me to enjoy the discipline of philosophy. All are reminders of how special that pre-merger Peabody was to me. That place continues to exist inside me—the small college with the liberal arts faculty, the schools of music and library science and the art department with its fiery glass furnaces. That place brought me here and made me want to stay. It shaped me in the most basic of ways; it built the foundation for what remains and constantly evolves. I believe it does that for the present institution that is Peabody College as well.

Bonnie Arant Ertelt has written about art for Art Papers and the Nashville Scene. She is the arts and culture editor of Vanderbilt Magazine, editor of the Blair Quarter Note and editor of the Peabody Reflector.

THE Autism Puzzle

BY MARDY FONES
AND JAN ROSEMERGY

The earlier children with autism are diagnosed, the more likely they are to have access to the specialized services and training they need to reach their full potential, says Wendy Stone, Ph.D. But accurately diagnosing autism is a challenge, one which Peabody researchers are studying to pinpoint its earliest indicators and to follow up with early intervention.

“Participation in autism-specialized programs can lead to significant improvements in socialization, communication and behavior,” says Stone, professor of pediatrics at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and professor of psychology at Peabody. “We believe by intervening early, we have a better chance of improving outcomes for children with autism and their families.” The average age of diagnosis is around three and a half, though parents often report concerns at an average age of 18 months, says Stone. Behaviors that may indicate a child has autism include difficulty with social interactions, language and communication impairment and restrictive repetitive behaviors or interests.

Early Strategy

The lack of clear diagnostic criteria before the age of one year has long been a barrier to understanding autism, says Julia Noland, research assistant professor in psychology at Peabody and research assistant professor of pediatrics at the School of Medicine. Noland is the primary investigator in a two-year study seeking to identify behaviors before a child’s first birthday that may point to autism. “Up until now, we’ve had to depend on well-baby check-up records or home videos. These are inadequate, selective and not standardized,” she says.

With funding from the National Alliance for Autism Research, Noland, along with Stone and Tedra Walden, professor of psychology at Peabody, is exploring behaviors that may indicate a child should be followed for autism. Their study compares the working memory and early attention abilities of normal six and nine-month-olds to those who are at risk for autism because they have older siblings with it. “Working memory allows you to keep track of what you’ve seen and can expect to see. We know that babies develop this ability at around six to 12 months,” says Noland, an infant neuropsychologist. “Our study focuses on the predicted abilities that kids who have autism will have.”

Using a modified version of the peek-a-boo game, they videotape six- and nine-month-olds. A tester steps from behind a barrier and engages the infant in peek-a-boo, then moves out of sight. Then, another tester shakes bells from the opposite side of the barrier, distracting the infant’s attention. Noland and her team videotape the scene to see if, once the bells are withdrawn, the infant’s attention returns to where the peek-a-boo game occurred.

Less than one percent of the general population develops autism, yet five to eight percent of infants who have older siblings may develop the disease. “One of the findings may well be that the siblings of children with autism have a different development course but in



DANIEL DURBOIS

Using a modified version of the peek-a-boo game, they videotape six- and nine-month-olds.



DANIEL DURBOIS

Research Assistant Professor Julia Noland (above) works with a young participant in a two-year study that seeks before a child’s first birthday to identify behaviors that may point to autism.



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RICHARD KOCH HERNANDEZ © KRT PHOTOS

Young children with autism are less ‘driven’ to engage in social interactions and less responsive to other people’s attempts to engage them in interactions

the end, function normally,” explains Noland. “But if we didn’t have this long-term follow-up to watch for the differences between the two, we wouldn’t know that. The child who isn’t developing normally is worthy of follow-up.”

Fitting the Pieces Together

“Young children with autism are less ‘driven’ to engage in social interactions and less responsive to other people’s attempts to engage them in interactions,” explains Stone. “Their language development is delayed and they often don’t use nonverbal forms of communication such as eye contact, facial expressions or gestures such as pointing to get their message across. When they communicate, it is more often to get something they want than to share an experience with an adult.”

At 12 months, children and their parents can participate in the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center’s Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) program. “Here, parents of children under three with autism can learn to interact joyfully and to teach their children,” says Stone who is TRIAD’s director. “Our classes help parents become more confident and empowered in their interactions with their children.”

Despite the many unanswered questions, Stone says research in the past 10 years has brought greater understanding to the study of autism. “We know more about the behavioral manifestations in children under three,” says Stone. “We have more information about strategies for early intervention. We have made progress in learning about early brain development and the genetic clues to autism. Most importantly, we have learned the value (and necessity) of integrating knowledge from the behavioral and biological sciences to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development and course of autism.”



STEVE GREEN

Above left: Paige Gaydos, now 11-years-old, has been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. Above: A participant in Professor Wendy Stone’s TRIAD program (Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders).



Mark Campbell Mitchell (BM'75) *Man for All Music*



Mitchell is currently assistant conductor for *The Producers* on Broadway.

“I play fine, for Broadway,” says Mark Campbell Mitchell, BM’75. It’s a self-effacing description that belies his Peabody training in piano pedagogy, training that he’s parlayed into a career as a pianist and conductor of musicals and shows in New York.

His resume reads like a Who’s Who of Broadway highlights. “For Stephen Sondheim I was assistant conductor for the revival of *Into the Woods*, and associate conductor for *Pacific Overtures* and *Assassins*. I was the associate to Paul Gemignani both for *A Christmas Carol* (for 10 years at Madison Square Garden) and for *Kiss Me, Kate* and I conducted the revival of *1776*.”

Mitchell said it all started when he went to New York seeking a slice of the Big Apple’s classical music scene. “Instead, I got a job as accompanist for people who were auditioning for Broadway shows,” he says. It was familiar turf. “At Peabody, I did a lot of accompanying for lessons and

recitals which helped me with my vocal and instrumental knowledge.”

He also worked a seven-year gig as a rehearsal accompanist for the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players. That led to his first New York orchestral experience as conductor for *The Mikado*. He’s taken his conducting expertise on the road with shows ranging from *Cats* to *Miss Saigon* (which played the Tennessee Performing Arts Center in 1997).

In between, he did 22-week stints on cruise ships as a pianist. “It was cool to be in the sky lounge and see the ocean go by,” he says. “I was on the Queen Elizabeth II with *Forbidden Broadway*, having just sailed through the Panama Canal, when the power

went out and we sat in the dark for two hours due to a fire in the boiler room.”

At the moment, Mitchell is assistant conductor for *The Producers* and is enjoying life with his two-and-a-half year-old daughter, Molli, and his wife, Broadway actress, Betsy Joslyn.

Thinking of chasing fame in the big city? Mitchell has sage advice: “The competition is stiff, so be decisive about what you want to do. Learn to sell yourself, network and make every contact you can without being obnoxious.”

—Mardy Fones



Kristen Fleschner (BS'03) *Out of Africa*

“War has created an environment in Africa where all types of violence are accepted,” says Kristin Fleschner, BS’03. “In a place where 20-50 percent of men are HIV-positive, rape is even more devastating for women. In most of eastern and southern Africa, a woman is twice as likely as a man to be HIV positive.”

With these numbers in mind and a keen interest in women’s issues, Fleschner has spent 2004-05 working in Uganda and South Africa with the support of a Keegan Traveling Fellowship. There, she has been assisting aid groups in gathering information and coordinating resources about rape and domestic violence against women and children.

Fleschner’s interest in Africa and the sexual abuse of women and children was borne of two opportunities she had while at Peabody as an HOD

major. One was an internship in the Nashville District Attorney’s office where part of her job included talking with sexual assault victims. The other was a summer she spent in Africa in conjunction with earning her second major in anthropology. “When I was in Africa, I was warned that I couldn’t go out after dark.

Native women who were working with us explained that rape is a big problem,” says Fleschner who began then to look into the tangled knot of cultural, gender, medical and legislative issues that enable the rape of women and children to occur.

“I can’t help but be touched by the strength of the women and children,” says Fleschner who has sometimes struggled with her chosen work, amid



Fleschner with a young boy at Sky Orphanage in Soweto, South Africa.

stories of violence, disease, cultural mores and government inaction. In the end, she says, it boils down to balancing perseverance and passion with a kind of measured perspective. “At the end of the day, I can either say ‘I talked to 15 women who are HIV positive’ or I can say ‘this woman was able to leave the shelter because I helped her.’

—Mardy Fones



John Dunworth

John Dunworth, who was president of George Peabody College for Teachers at the time of the merger, died March 28, 2005, at his home in Pensacola, Fla. He was 81. He had a 50-year education career in California, Florida, Indiana, Tennessee, Hawaii and Kansas, including a stint as president of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.

He also served as school superintendent in Santa Ana, California; dean of education at the University of West Florida; and director of dependents schools for the Defense Department in the Pacific and Far East.

Mr. Dunworth was retired in 1997 when he read a newspaper article about residents of Munson, a tiny community in the middle of the Blackwater River State Forest, who were fighting to keep their school open.

Santa Rosa County school officials threatened to close it because of poor student achievement, high cost and falling enrollment – projected to drop to 67. The children would have been bused 20 miles to a bigger school.

Mr. Dunworth offered to try to rescue Munson Elementary. To sweeten the deal, he volunteered to do it for only a dollar, although he had to commute about 40 miles each way.

“There was a group of parents and citizens in that community that wanted to have a good school,” Mr. Dunworth said in an interview three years later. “They were willing to fight and I was willing to stand beside them and we’d march together.”

He succeeded and wrote about how in *The Dollar-A-Year Principal: Miracle at Munson*, that he hoped would be an inspiration and textbook for turning around other schools.

The Los Angeles native served in the Merchant Marine during World War II and held degrees from the University of California-Berkeley and University of Southern California.

He is survived by his wife, Lavona Walden Dunworth, and a sister.



Faculty

Imogene Cherry Forte, BS’55, MA’60, former associate professor of education, May 8, 2005. Forte taught in Nashville public schools, was a supervising teacher of the former Peabody Demonstration School, and in 1961 was invited to become the first director of Nashville’s Oak Hill School. Forte was the first vice president and director of curriculum and training for Children’s World, a national educational childcare corporation. In 1969, she founded Incentive Publications, Inc., a Nashville-based company that publishes supplementary educational materials for teachers, students and parents. She served as president until her death. One of Peabody’s most enthusiastic supporters, she was a longtime member of the Peabody Alumni Board, where she served as president from 1998 to 1999. In 2000, Peabody named Forte a Distinguished Alumna. In addition to her husband, **Henry S. Forte**, BE’57, she is survived by a daughter, **Cherrie Forte Farnette**, BS’67, MA’68, two grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, a sister, a sister-in-law, and two brothers-in-law.

Raymond Calvin Norris, professor emeritus, Sept. 25, 2004, in Nashville. He served on the Peabody faculty from 1953 until his retirement in 1990, during which time he earned a reputation for his challenging statistics courses and for being a supportive faculty advisor. During his career at Peabody, he served on the Children’s Television Workshop project that launched the “Sesame Street” educational programming. He also established a Peabody program to provide college-level courses for Air Force bases in England and Germany. After his retirement, he worked for a number of years with environmental groups involved in preserving Tennessee’s streams, rivers and natural wetlands. He is survived by his wife, **Jane Kathryn Spotts Norris**, BS’70, MA’75, five children, six grandchildren and two sisters.

Ida Long Rogers, MA’51, professor emerita of higher education and director of student affairs, Sept. 26, 2004, in Nashville. She retired in 1985 after a 30-year career at Peabody that included service on

the Select Committee on Peabody’s Second Century, a three-member committee charged in 1974 by then-President John Dunworth with conducting a self study of the College and making recommendations for its future. The committee’s report, “Design for the Future,” played an integral role in building the framework for the present-day College. In addition to her work at Vanderbilt, Rogers used her higher education expertise as a consultant for Meharry Medical College, Oklahoma City University, O’More School of Design, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Universidade Metodista de Piracicaba in Brazil, and Yonsei University and Duksung Women’s College in Seoul, Korea.

George Alvis Winstead, MA’40, MLS’56, MEd’57, June 28, 2004, in Nashville. He was head of the chemistry department at Peabody from 1956-58 and served as associate law librarian at Vanderbilt from 1958-76. He became director of the Tennessee State Supreme Court Law Library in 1976.

New Online

Now you can post your news online and find out what your classmates are doing. The Alumni Association’s new online class notes let you post a note, upload a photograph, create a buddy list to see if your old friends have news, and much more. Class notes are the latest addition to Dore2Dore, Vanderbilt’s free online community at www.dore2dore.net.

While you’re there, make sure to update your information, including your e-mail address. Vanderbilt is trying to reduce costs of sending paper mail by collecting e-mail addresses that are used to send selected information electronically.



SUSAN DEMAY, MS'79, was one of the last students at Peabody to receive a graduate degree in art. She has taught ceramics for 20 years at Vanderbilt and maintains a studio, Creek Ferry Pottery, in Smithville, Tennessee, where, with the help of her spouse and several assistants, she has created a production line of tabletop wares and an ever-evolving series of art pieces. Her work has been widely exhibited throughout the Southeast, including at the Tennessee State Museum, the Artisans' Center of Virginia, the Hunter Museum of Art (Chattanooga) and at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.



In the pieces above from left: (“Vase with Leaf Stamps,” burial urn “Autumn of My Years” and round platter “Flood Waters Receding”), DeMay uses leaf imagery to recreate vignettes of nature as seen when walking through woods in early fall. In the series of works using this motif, movement suggests leaves being moved by wind or washed by flood waters.

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PEABODY
REFLECTOR



NEEL BRAKE

This watchful "Black Cat" seemingly readies itself to pounce on the next student to pass between the Peabody Library and the John F. Kennedy Center's Mental Retardation Laboratory. The sculpture, by Lynn Driver, was installed in fall 2004 as one of three pieces in the Peabody Library Sculpture Garden given by Bernice Weingart Gordon, BS'56, and Joel C. Gordon.