

Cambridge Author Anita Harris Addresses Cornell Reunion Class

On June 12, I had the privilege of introducing the zoom happy hour for classmates who attended the 51st reunion of my graduating class. I touched on some of the incidents I wrote about in my 2015 book, *Ithaca Diaries*, which is about our four years 1966-1970. Sometimes, I call the book “Gidget Goes to the Revolution” which, in a way, sums up my college experience. But 51 years later, I thought it would be important to reflect on the past as it relates to the present and future—rather a handful for a 10-minute talk—but I think I managed to do it. [Here’s a link to the video;](#) the script, which I did not follow exactly, is inserted below.



Hi, I’m so glad to see everyone here, and especially that we’re all still here after this difficult year. I know that some of us are disappointed not to be in Ithaca—but the good part is that friends from far away can be with us. One such

friend said he would join in if I provided free drinks...which I am...in my living room. **CHEERS!**

51st ANNIVERSARY OF GRADUATION 1970

I'm sure you know that this is the 51st anniversary week of our crazy graduation. With those three walkouts, and the demonstration on stage where Morris Bishop, the distinguished historian and leader of the processional hit someone over the head with the baton he was carrying... Many people think that it was Dave Burack—my gov instructor—who got hit over the head ...Burack swears it was his roommate...In any case, the demonstrators got hauled off stage and into a cop car...The bear at the top of the mace got bent and has never been the same—nor, I think, have we.

I remember that really well...which is amazing because people were passing a **JOINT** when we were standing in the graduation processional...and I was definitely stoned.

I WROTE ABOUT THAT IN MY BOOK, ITHACA DIARIES which is based on the journals I kept as an undergraduate: it starts with me arriving at Cornell freshman year carrying the pink suitcase my uncle Leon gave me for my bat mitzvah—goes through draft card burnings, demonstrations against the war, the straight takeover, **MY LOVE LIFE, WHAT WAS I THINKING** Kent State...and ends on graduation day...when, to my amazement, I even led a demonstration.

I WAS ORIGINALLY SUPPOSED TO TALK ABOUT ITHACA DIARIES LAST YEAR, AT OUR FIFTIETH but with the pandemic that really didn't work out. So this year, Sally and Kathy asked me to introduce the social hour— they told me several times to be brief and to keep in mind that this is supposed to be a **HAPPY** hour. So I'm not going to reminisce a whole lot...I will just move the story ahead a little, wax a bit historical and philosophical, and then we'll breakout out the drinks. I mean..join the breakout sessions.

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SINCE ITHACA DIARIES CAME OUT, I"VE BEEN WORKING ON TWO SEQUELS.

THE FIRST SEQUEL IS ABOUT MY FIRST YEAR OUT OF CORNELL— and I imagine that many of us went through similar experiences.

After all the turmoil on campus, and changes in the late sixties, I had no idea what to do with myself. (**And of course, I was an English major...need I say more?**) But as a fledgling feminist, I wanted to prove that I could do things: that anything a guy could do, I could do, too. I got a bunch of short-term jobs.

WEST VIRGINIA First I got a job with the ILR School that took me traveling around the country to several hospitals,; in West Birginia, I had my first look at coal miners with black lung disease.

I WORKED IN A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN where one of the pols spent his days pretending to read the newspaper while staring at my legs...

THEN I WENT ON A ROAD TRIP cross country with two Brits I didn't know, whose names I found on a bulletin board. They were both named John John, John, and I drove cross country in a big black buick =-u drive it—and picked up every derelict and druggie, all the way from Miami to San Francisco.

AFTER THAT, I WORKED WITH DISADVANTAGED TEENS IN THE PHILADELPHIA GHETTO...AND FINALLY, I WOUND UP IN HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.

That's where the first sequel, which I'm **CALLING PHILADELPHIA STORIES ENDS.**

HARRISBURG

SO, THEN, THE SEQUEL TO THE SEQUEL: HARRISBURG

IT TURNED OUT THAT THREE OF OUR CLASSMATES, ED ZUCKERMAN, FRED SOLOWEY, AND VINCENT BLOCKER, WERE ALSO IN HARRISBURG, EACH FOR HIS OWN REASONS. WE AND SOME OTHER PEOPLE ENDED UP STARTING A NEWSPAPER THERE, IN CONNECTION TO A MAJOR POLITICAL TRIAL— IT WAS THE TRIAL OF THE HARRISBURG 8., WHICH HAD AN INTERESTING CORNELL CONNECTION.

HARRISBURG 8 TRIAL

BERRIGAN: You may remember Dan Berrigan the anti war Priest, and poet who was deputy director of Cornell United religious work. Anyway, while Dan Berrigan was in prison, Nixon's FBI Director J EDGAR HOOVER ACCUSED DANIEL's brother Philip , who was also in prison, of conspiring to kidnap Henry Kissinger and blow up underground heating tunnels in Washington DC. Also accused were former ILR Professor Eqbal Ahmad, and six others—mostly nuns and priests. I'm not kidding, I'm not kidding.

So, Ed, Fred, Vincent and I started a newspaper called the Harrisburg Independent Press—or—HIP- around the trial of the Harrisburg 8. That was how I became a journalist, the paper was amazing.

And, for the last few years I've been working on a book on my experiences at HIP.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I WAS WORKING ON THE CONCLUSION. And I started wondering what the heck am I doing, why am I time traveling, going back into the past all the time?

ONE REASON IS PERSONAL : AS WITH *Ithaca diaries*, I needed to understand on a personal level, just what had gone down, to get things straight in my head, this was such a formative period, in order to figure out what to do next.

BUT ANOTHER REASON IS HISTORICAL/SOCIETAL.

WHEN I FIRST STARTED WORKING ON THE HARRISBURG BOOK, TRUMP WAS JUST COMING INTO OFFICE, AND I FELT THE COUNTRY WAS DIVIDED,

much as it was in the late 60s and early 70s. I thought it might be interesting to draw some parallels between the present day divisiveness along the lines of race, poverty, ethnicity, and corruption... and what was going on back then, under the Nixon administration, with race relations, the Vietnam War, dirty tricks and such.

SPIRALS: BROKEN PATTERNS:

Then I thought about my first book, it's called Broken patterns, and it's about our generation of professional women in relation to our own mothers and grandmothers. It describes a spiral pattern in history—a spiral pattern that I think holds true for Individuals as well.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY SPIRALS? HERE I'D LIKE TO PONTIFICATE, A BIT, IF YOU WILL INDULGE ME...

Many of us—myself included—tend to think about progress in a linear way. That is, that to progress, we move forward in a straightforward path toward a goal. But the older I get, the more I see that life sort of emerges in a series of starts and stops—that we get just so far, in moving toward a goal—maybe we reach it; maybe we get blocked... and then, as a society or as individuals, we tend to pull back to reassess, to reintegrate our own pasts, our country's past, in order to move forward, once again.

TODAY A TURNING POINT IN A SPIRAL

I think that now as a society we're at a turning point in a spiral that's kind of similar to where we were. 50 years ago. Now, as then, society is divided. Many have moved toward equality but others have been left behind. As you know, there are issues of race, poverty, war, environment, how government should work, what kind of nation we want to be.

BUT despite all of the disruptions, the divisiveness, the protests, **the violence, I feel heartened** that many of us are looking back historically, to understand how we got to this place so that we can regroup to find new ways of doing things.

I know that I'm painting with a rather broad brush—but I believe that==or I HOPE that— retreating a bit to reassess, will allow us move forward as individuals, and as a society, once again. **END PONTIFICATION**

COMING TOGETHER FOR OUR 51st

In the same way, coming together for our 50th, or 51st reunion, gives us the chance to look back, to heal, to understand, to figure out where we're at in order to find new ways to move forward in our own lives. I'm hoping that in our social... er happy hour, we'll have a chance to catch up, figure out where we've been, where we are now, and what adventures come next as we enter this new phase in our lives. **TOAST WITH GLASS**

One quick reminder—please use chat to catch up/share info or addresses with anyone you want to stay in touch with after the social.