

## ALUMNAE'S ACCOUNTS

### *A Concert of Alumnae Voices, since 1978....!*

There is frequent talk of the importance of the **mentor role** in the intellectual formation of young people. Set against the chaos of university life, my time at Collegio Nuovo brought a sense of clarity to my goals, perhaps **my first appreciation of the value of a good institution**, optimism about the future. On this experience was based my professional choice, my passion for teaching and research, my desire to work with others for the development of a common project. The value of an institution is in those who are part of it; the habit of listening and the appreciation for the talent of so many companions started a long journey in those years towards openness and moving away from what is narrow or too comfortable until the realisation of a choice: to live, perhaps like a small fish, but in the ocean!, collegially.

*Barbara Casadei*

My story is an example of the importance of following one's dreams, one's inclinations, without fearing the risks that such a choice might entail. **The College scholarship, as it always does, allowed me to land in the neighbourhood of the EU headquarters.** My days were divided between the library, the European Parliament, where I participated as an observer (15 years ago!) in the work of the Social Affairs Committee, conferences, interviews with officials, lobbyists and parliamentarians. And it was social policy that allowed me to stay in Brussels. An offer as unexpected as it was welcome gave me the opportunity to **coincide my graduation and my first day at work in the same week.**

*Cristina Castagnoli*

What is clear from the distance of time and space is that **the beauty of College life, which for me was largely based on friendships (among the dearest), increased in proportion to my departure from that place and time.** It was beautiful to live there and I knew it, but later, when so many of these things disappeared from my surroundings, they became parts of me, my person and my memory. Nothing that I experienced in Pavia and in the Collegio Nuovo passed over my skin like flowing water. Everything stayed with me in a very strong way, with great power and constant reference. That being young together, that growing, learning and discovering not only from books but from one's own life and from listening to and participating in the lives of others, are among the most important things in my personal journey. And in this the College dimension was fundamental. And the more I stayed away and the more time passed, the more I felt that Pavia was a part of me.

*Giuliana Adamo*

One sentence, one line.... After overcoming the organisational impasse and telling myself that those who testify do not have to consider themselves veterans, I click on Collegio Nuovo, as if opening a drawer of photos that move me when I see them again. The first picture was taken during a summer trip, when I was waiting for the final high school examination: a big, sturdy gate. **How could I, at eighteen, have any sympathy for gates and window bars (not even those were missing)?** Then the entrance exam, the written Italian test, which was deemed impossible and taken spontaneously instead, and again on the first evening, with a timely - no doubt - question on Italian literature right in the room,

amidst the amusement and confusion of having to recite any text, as long as it was by a great (sic) poet. All the first-year students share with me photographs, oops! memories, of this kind. But twenty years later, a gate and a rite of initiation, so to speak, represent something quite different, they appear as figures of a very particular and pervasive atmosphere. Far from being intangible! Can anyone forget the "psychedelic" cake on Thursdays or the sound of the telephone in the corridors in the evening? **The new spaces, the new facilities, the new possibilities realised so far and planned for the future tell us that the College is growing without becoming alien.** The sense of continuity lies in the guarantee, which we have experienced, of investing energy not only in books, but precisely in the full "existence" of the person, in the midst of so many requests, available tools, important encounters... **Beyond the gate, one finds "a room of one's own" and, from there, the stimuli useful for designing a life and professional project that responds to preferences and capacities, with significant relationships as an added value.** To pause for a moment here, beyond the gate of the Collegio Nuovo, which has also become virtual in respect of the times, is to meet all of you anew and, much more than a mere exploration of the past, it is a recovered light and a stronger motivation for the thoughts and actions of the present.

*Valeria Gasperi*

I left Bonassola on the first train in the morning (3.47 a.m.!) to take the entrance exam: leaving the day before, sleeping away from home, not even talking about it. As if by magic, everything went well. So began a wonderful adventure: courses at the Faculty (finally something interesting!), life at the College, new friends, a city to discover. These were the years of too many exams to prepare for, classes from morning to night, late nights studying, coffee in the kitchen at midnight... the atmosphere was electrifying. At the College I met extraordinary people: strong-willed, selfless, stubborn and generous. **I understand that I benefited from a free and at the same time protected environment,** from a quiet "cell" and from the liveliness of community life; nevertheless, I must admit that I sometimes grumbled at "those" who made too much noise during "study hours"... and at those who came out to tell me to be quiet when I was the one organising the after-hours party: community life is not always easy... without all this I would not be what I am today. **At the College I met some special friends: scattered to the four corners of the earth, they remain fixed points in my life.**

*Gabriella Tuvo*

I miss the months spent at the college, studying at night with Jefferson Airplane playing in the background, but I miss my friends more: we live far away, we don't see each other more than a few times a year... luckily there are the Alumnae meetings and e-mail! It's funny, **the things I remember most about the College are the atmospheres: the electric atmosphere of exam time** (when someone, whose name I won't mention but who I'm sure you'll recognise, did nothing but talk about what she was studying!), **the more relaxed atmosphere of class and laboratory time**, the bike rides to get there on time, or the early arrivals at the canteen, slaloming between the Volta students, driven by hunger!

*Monica Dapiaggi*

Once again I close my bedroom window. It is an almost daily gesture in my ongoing pilgrimage. I close it, still admiring the garden and the evening light... **I leave this place where I feel deeply at home to embark on a new adventure.**

I leave it with a deep tenderness in my heart for the many days I have spent here, for the many friendly faces I have met, for the many people who have shared another departure with me. I leave with the same certainty, the same serenity with which one leaves a beloved place, knowing that sooner or later one will return, certain that what has been experienced here belongs to us deeply and in some way we belong to it. It is good to know it is there. It is good to carry it with us, inscribed in our souls, as we surrender to the joyful memory of the home where hopes, desires and dreams were nurtured, which then became the path in life. As a former student, what I miss most is the canteen... something that will make many of my classmates laugh, given my proverbial laziness when it comes to shopping and cooking. Put like that, it seems reductive, but... I mean the canteen as a moment, as a place where, for six years, I have seen so many people with whom I have compared myself, laughed, discussed, shared life, sometimes the stress of exams, sometimes the splendid success of parties, sometimes the difficulties that living together inevitably brings. In short, there is what I like to call a 'little miracle' that only life at the College can bring. From the moment you enter, you learn to live with the most diverse people: at first it seems impossible to imagine that you will know them all and that you will know their names... after a few months, the faces become familiar and finally, **just when you are about to leave, you feel that the place itself, with all the stories it brings with it, has become indispensable to you and that it belongs to you, or that you yourself belong to the rooms, the corridors, the library, and certainly to the garden.** The great thing is that all the people you meet change over the years, in the most unexpected ways, but always in a positive way.

*Chiarastella Feder*

But every now and then, for example when I find "Nuovità" in my mailbox, I feel nostalgic for my university days, for that microcosm called Collegio Nuovo, where only commitment and passion really counted, where we all had the same opportunities, where the rules were the same for everyone and there were no shortcuts for the "daughters of". Although I now know that this is not the reality of life and work, I am proud and grateful to have had the privilege of experiencing such a context... **I was one of those non-participating members, although I was always present during those four years of life that passed in a flash, and I remember saying at the time: "For me, the College is a place, comfortable and well-structured, where I can study, but I do not feel part of a whole".** I have never been a dean, I have never run the library, I have hardly participated in the preparation of the annual party and I have never attended the Alumnae Reunion. In short, I am one of those presences that have passed without leaving any particular traces.

No particular traces, except in the few friends who loved me and kept me company between the endless pages of books. Nevertheless, there is not an issue of "Nuovità" that I do not read with attention and impatience, and I often think back to Room 5 and the hours I spent within its walls. I realise that not only was I part of a whole, but that I still am and always will be; that this experience was not just 'living in a place', but also acquiring an inner wealth of riches, knowledge and experience that has made me who I am now. I also realise that, for all the fatigue of intense study, the anxiety of exams and the half hours lost waiting for the number 6 bus, it was a period of true carefree and authentic intellectual

freedom, with no need to compromise with reality, and with the ability to have and cultivate dreams and aspirations that life inevitably then scaled back. **In short, those were my twenties, and I will always be grateful to you for allowing me to live them that way.**  
*Sabrina Parma*

My job this time is to tell you how the relationships between the girls who are no longer in College change once they graduate and are whisked off to different parts of the world... There are three cities in particular where the “Nuovine” have allowed me to find a place that smells like home. **London** has a place for all of them. Whatever path they have chosen, Londoners are alive. To be with them is to be at the centre of the world. No longer indiscriminately students, but with so many different micro-universes that it is nice to enter, even if only as a tourist. And it is easy to think of them when you need professional advice or an expert opinion, but also just for a weekend in the city. **New Yorkers** are winners. They get up early in the morning and go straight to the gym, then happily go to work because that is what they have always dreamed of doing. The only thing they keep dreaming about is the pumpkin risotto that the winter cook used to make and that they try to recreate for the Halloween party. In New York, I met four Nuovine almost by chance on the same afternoon and we made an appointment for dinner at a restaurant on Third Avenue. New friends sit with us at the table and the old world and the new, shared memories and plans for the future, seem to get along perfectly. The Nuovine, with their incorruptible European souls, are in **Brussels**. They can be visited at any time, because they know everyone, are always in touch with everyone and are always available to everyone. They have kept the broken bike from their College years, no matter whether they use it to go to the Commission or to University, they always have the same key that can no longer open the rusty lock. Coming together for a few days of intense confidences, which last until the morning, is absolutely healthy. After getting used to arrivals and departures, to faces that constantly change, to different homes and offices, it is comforting to know that there are people who remain, in important things, the same as themselves and always capable of understanding us. Perhaps those who are in College in recent years will think with less enthusiasm about the idea of never being able to free themselves from the people with whom they currently have to live. In reality, now that I am a ten-year-old Nuovina, I see that the College for me has expanded and dissolved into a network of new and precious relationships, in which I am sure of remaining linked to other people by choice and not simply by virtue of the fact that one day we all ended up living under the same roof.

*Maria Paola Ferretti*

I found life in Collegio Nuovo to be **an interactive experience from all points of view**: you can remain indifferent and live as coldly as in a hotel or you can get involved to the point of to risk being overwhelmed. Finding a balance in the way of experiencing College is not immediate but - it seems to me - it is a significant step in the difficult path of finding personal balance. And this too is at least as important as passing exams! **Of the thousand activities proposed (from conferences to sports, from language courses to photography courses) at the beginning I wanted to do exactly everything.** Only over time did I learn to choose: choose which activities to participate in, but also choose who to attend, choose how much, when and with whom to study, choose which grades to accept in exams and choose - but this was particularly difficult until the last time - which dishes take from the thousand that the Chef suggests! Anyone who knows me knows how many

wrong choices I have made - not least that of choosing "all" the Chef's dishes! - but precisely for this reason, dear College, I thank you: for giving me the opportunity to experiment with "adult" life and also to make mistakes but always without hurting myself "too much".

*Anna Lanzani*

Not a day has gone by since I left that I haven't remembered a person, an anecdote, a joke, a room number, a dinner, a chat until late at night, a cry, a joke, a game, a birthday, in short a small piece of what my life was in Pavia, inside and outside the New. **This baggage of emotions** has now settled under my skin and travels with me.

*Maria Guglielma da Passano*

It was also a new experience for me to live in a College, **a perfect combination of independence and security for such an important period as the university years**. At the Collegio Nuovo I found all the comforts for studying, but also personal enrichment. It allowed me to meet people from all over Italy and other countries. But I can't talk about the Collegio Nuovo as one of the many things I experienced here in Italy, it wasn't just a hotel, but it was my home. Now in my suitcase I carry new words, indelible memories, unrepeatable experiences and people who will accompany me on my journey from here on out and forever.

*Mabel Asensio*

From the beginning I felt at ease in College. I remember that in the first days, when everything seemed rather strange, smiling faces made me feel at home... So life took a familiar form: **lessons, attempts to communicate something interesting about English culture and language to my already very good students, evenings at the Fraschini Theater (how many times!?)**, **my beloved art courses, the delicious lunches and dinners** (especially those "mimosa gnocchi"!)) and **the Chef's joking reproaches for my "not perfect" Italian** (I still wonder : you'll say "fàgioli" "fagiòli"...), then wonderful **trips and adventures on the weekends** or simply a chamomile and a chat.

*Louise Sweet*

I am still in Leuven, a city that has hosted me for a few months as an Erasmus student, while in Pavia, on the occasion of the annual appointment with the Green Party (with the dinner in honour of the graduating students), I would have been among those celebrated "at high table"... **Tonight's party is perhaps my favorite among the collegiate parties**, either because of the approaching summer, or above all for the somewhat magical atmosphere, in which ambition and melancholy merge, that atmosphere you breathe thinking that there is someone who is finishing and that soon it will be your turn and that the years, these years, pass too quickly.

And so this evening, in a city and in a situation that I also love, I inevitably find myself thinking about my College, about the people who make it and who live it, more than a thousand kilometers away from the classmates with whom I shared four unforgettable years and who, at the end of a journey made up of successes, joys and turmoil, they now find themselves celebrating together the approach of such an important stage, seeing themselves as "doctors" on the horizon... It's strange how sometimes we become aware of the value of this which is possessed only by looking at it from a certain distance, from a decentralized perspective, in a different situation. But of course, we are allowed to stay in

only one place at a given time and reflecting on choices and opportunities from a distance perhaps makes us appreciate the value of what we have and what we leave behind. With this I would only like to be able to express the affection and gratitude that bind me to what I left in Pavia. And a good part of the memories are linked to the collegiate community with which I shared these four years: together with the friendships, with those unique and unforgettable relationships that are established between fellow students, the distance also made me understand the **value of an open institution to high cultural initiatives, to the multiplicity of perspectives in a world that is becoming more and more complex** and in which knowledge and culture do not remain dusty between the pages of books, confined to exam results, but offer daily opportunities for exchange and relationships to the other and to the new.

*Michela Summa*

**Why Pavia? I had already graduated, and I had finished a master's degree.** I wanted to do something "different", travel, try a new way of life. I knew that there was an exchange between my college in Cambridge (New Hall) and the Collegio Nuovo... and so, in the month of September 2002, I arrived in Pavia, with the largest suitcase in the world, and nine words of Italian, well try: "Good morning. My name is Helen. I am the reader from Cambridge" (then you have to smile well and pray). You ask yourself, perhaps, "what was this 'Miss without a university? (as a lady called me one memorable evening) doing during a university exchange?" I had a new and unique freedom. I could follow the university courses that I had chosen myself, without having to think about exams or programs. I studied medieval and modern Italian theatre, twentieth century poetry, the history of the expansion of Europe, I tried to study again for the love of knowledge, for interest and not for grades. I studied Italian, in the most effective and pleasant way: studying, speaking, living, working and laughing with Italians. And, as an "English reader", I taught English. I learned this in Pavia: you always study and you always teach. As for the Colleges, you never stop being a "member" of them, and I am very happy to carry with me my memories of New Hall, and of the Collegio Novo.

*Helen Wales*