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Stelling Bill- Callison College One Pager

Bill Stelling

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I graduated from the International School of Bangkok in 1970, and that fall, moved to Stockton, California to participate in the International Studies program at Callison College. I experienced “reverse culture shock” the first year in Stockton, coming from a traditional educational curriculum to the free-wheeling, experimental Callison model that allowed students to more or less create their own college experience. I met students from radically different backgrounds, and formed life-long friendships with many of them. It was the first time I ever met a classmate’s mom who wore hot pants. Grateful Dead music blasted night and day in the quad from giant speakers propped in dorm room windows. The professors smoked pot. With students.

I spent my sophomore year in Bangalore, India; and my junior year in Kyoto, Japan. We were offered extensive travel time, and this allowed full immersion in local culture. The experiences I had were transformational, and have imbued my world view with compassion and curiosity. I spent a month living in a houseboat on the Ganges in Varanasi, waking daily to the prayers of millions, and watching flotillas of lit candles sailing down the river at night, honoring yet another Hindu god. In Japan, there were moments of exquisite beauty, sitting alone in a temple in the Higashiyama hills, overlooking a garden with thousand year old camphor trees. I lived with a family whose father was a Noh dancer, and who still planted rice in the fields in front of their ancestral home near Nara. Fireflies flickered over the rice paddies at night.

After graduating, I moved to New York City with the intention of living a life in the arts. I had studied batik in India, and opened a studio in an East Village storefront. I created painted fabrics for the New York City Ballet, fashion designers and the Broadway production of “Pacific Overtures”. At one point, I realized that I was more interested in showcasing the work of other artists, and turned the storefront into a gallery. That space became a showcase for some of the most exciting and original artists of that time; Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, to name just two. Today, Fun Gallery has been the subject of museum retrospectives, and is considered legendary for its place in art history.

Callison College instilled in me an ability to think creatively and take risks. Enrolling there required a leap of faith in an experiment that could have only happened in that moment in time. We didn’t need grades. We were evaluated on our individual strengths. Self-examination was encouraged. Each of us followed our own path, and like a miracle, those paths have converged over and over, as we gather for reunions, and virtually through the internet. Our differences fade away as we remember the shared, beautiful times we had together.