

## The spotlight is on Susan Opt, PhD.



Susan, it has been nearly 35 years since we left high school.... Let's go back to your high school years first.

When you think of your high school years at Stebbins, what are your fondest memories?

Working with the plays. I enjoyed the fun and camaraderie. I also enjoyed working with the yearbook in the running around selling ads. The songs Mr. McCray would invent in chemistry class. Hanging out with friends and games.

What are your worst memories?

Geometry class. I never could figure it out! Also talking to guidance counselors, who seemed more interested in innovation.

Did you have a favorite subject?

I liked English classes. At the time we had quite a selection of English courses, and I remember I really liked science fiction. I also enjoyed government, but that was mostly because of Mr. Young.

Did you have a most embarrassing moment in school?

Nothing comes to mind. People who know me might remember something!

Who among all your teachers had the most influence over you or was most instrumental in your life?

Mr Painter who taught English. He kept a brick on his desk with this saying "All we are is just another brick" was always challenging students to be creative.

Mr. OHare, who also taught English. He allowed me to do a couple of independent studies to explore subjects I liked. Helped me learn about critical thinking.

Mr. Dinino. He wasn't a teacher, but as the principal, he encouraged me to take college classes during my senior year. He overrode a guidance counselor who didn't want to give me permission.

I won't ask who your worst teacher was, but what was your most difficult subject.

See worst memory!

You had many friends, who among them did you admire the most? And why?

I probably admired Richard Wells because he was good at everything!

I believe you went to Wright State during your senior year, do you think that helped prepare you for the transition to school and college? Was it beneficial?

Yes, I was a sophomore at Wright State when I graduated from Stebbins. It helped me because I was bored in my senior year. I had always taken summer school classes and so was ahead on my credits. I got involved in organizations that helped me out later in life. Interestingly though I recall high school being harder than college. English class in high school at the same time I took one at Wright State. Got a B in the Stebbins class and an A in college class!

Q. Okay, you've graduated. It's the summer of 75. What did you do that summer? The big hurrah before college...

A. Didn't apply to me because I was already in college. I do remember having my wisdom teeth out like graduation! Also at the time, I had been writing for the Wright State student newspaper and the staff did not know I was a high school student. They found out when one of the editors was at the graduation.

Q. Tell us about your college years. Where did you go, what undergraduate degree(s) did you earn?

A. I got a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts Management from Wright State. I finally settled on my junior year after changing majors every quarter.

Q. You have gone on to earn graduate degree(s), what are they and where did you earn them from?

A. I have an MA in Journalism from Ohio State and a PhD in Communication, also Ohio State.

Q. What jobs have you held since high school?

A. Immediately after high school I worked at Wright State on the student newspaper. I also started freelancing at Dayton Daily News, covering school board and city council meetings. When I graduated from Wright State I worked in the city of Kettering for the summer as a cultural arts assistant. Then I worked at a Best Products as an Assistant Manager, then at LTD discount foods as a cashier. I ended up in the printing industry for a few years—as a typesetter and layout artist for several different companies. I eventually ended up working as a book production editor for World Publishing in Columbus, Ohio. The company paid for education, so I went back and got a masters and started my PhD. Was later hired as a teaching assistant. When I finished the PhD., taught overseas for 5 years on military bases, then back to the states and have taught in Florida, Texas, and now North Carolina.

Q. You are a professor at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It is one of the oldest educational institutions for women in the country. What are your favorite parts of being a part of the academic process?

A. I like the free time in the summer! I like being able to do different things each semester to challenge myself.

Q. How has the student body changed since you were in college?

A. In many ways, no. The main change is they read fewer books. They also have more distractions, like social media. They are less independent from their parents than we were.

Q. What are the advantages of teaching in a single gender environment?

A. Is easier to talk about some subjects.

Q. What is the hardest obstacle you face as an instructor?

A. Getting students not to take life so seriously.

Q. What is the easiest part of your job?

A. Showing up for work!

Q. What do you like most about your home or living in Winston-Salem area?

A. I am close to family. Is a pretty area. Decent cost of living.

Q. Let's get personal. You are married to Norman Smith. Tell us about how you met, what does he do?

A. We met in Brindisi, Italy, at the port, waiting to go on a tour to Greece that we both happened to be on. He was in the Air Force, running power plants. He has since retired and sometimes works overseas at power plants. He's working at a hospital as a nursing assistant.

Q. What do you love most about your relationship with Norman?

A. We are both independent people and so choose to be with each other.

Q. Are you involved in any community organizations, church, charity, etc.?

A. I've been involved and continue to be involved, although at a distance, with an HIV/AIDS organization Together, located in Florida. Around here, I organize the Neighborhood Watch and serve as its chair. Much taking up doing research related to my job.

Q. What are your favorite hobbies or pastimes?

A. Travel, reading, my four cats

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. YouTube videos

Q. What are your favorite books, movies, plays, poems, etc?

A. Hard to pin down, always changes! A book that comes to mind is Eat, Pray Love. I liked the new Star wouldn't say it is a favorite. As for plays, Mama Mia (but not the movie). TV—Lost, Mad Men, Eureka, Heroes

Q. What is your favorite funny story about yourself?

A. When you've lived in another culture, there are too many stories to pick out just one!

Q. What is the one thing about yourself that few people know?

A. I get the name Opt from my great-great grandmother.

Q. What are misconceptions you think people have about you that you can set straight?

A. Well I've overheard my students say that I'm strange. That might not be a misconception!

Q. I remember you as a highly opinionated person. You were always well read and smart. Are there any issues you feel passionately about?

A. Actually I think that's a misconception that I'm highly opinionated! I suppose I feel passionate about step back and think about where they get their assumptions. These days people spout off opinions and info having critically evaluated where they got their ideas and without considering alternative perspectives.



Susan is standing outside Stebbins at the monument where those chosen as Outstanding Alumni are inscribed.

Q. You received the Stebbins Outstanding Alumnus Award, How did you earn this prestigious honor?  
A. Mr. McCray nominated me.



Mr. Ron McCray, Susan Opt and Ron Wukeson ('74) at the Stebbins Outstanding Reception Dinner.

Q. You recently received a special award.... Which also involves travel this fall and winter... can you tell us and what you will be doing?

A. I received a Fulbright Grant to teach in the Czech Republic this fall. Will be at Masaryk University in Brno. (note: Susan is currently in the Czech Republic. You can contact her via this website or she has been posting pictures on Facebook.com)

Q. Have you received other such awards?

A. In 2001 I received the Enron Teaching Excellence Award when I was working at University of Houston a few months before Enron went under. I got to have lunch with Enron CEO Ken Lay!

Q. Where else have you traveled?

A. Majority of Western Europe, much of Eastern Europe, Russia, Greece, Turkey, Malta, Tanzania, South

Q. Do you think you have met the goals you set for yourself?

A. Never had any goals!

Q. What else do you want to accomplish?

A. Maybe write another book. (had a book published last year, can find it on Amazon). Maybe live overseas

Q. The Class of 75 has gone in many different directions, scattered across the country. Some are millionaires, some are struggling. What defines a "successful" person to you?

A. I don't have a definition of success; I don't think about people in that way.

Q. How would you like to be remembered by the rest of the class of 75?

A. However they would like to remember me!