

All in the Family

Why are family members drawn to Goddard across the generations? Our investigative reporter takes a look.

Winston Blackburn, pictured here in Egypt, received his master's degree from Goddard in August. His father, Gregg, earned his bachelor's from Goddard in 1970. Below, Gregg during the 1970s with Winston's mother.



You can't call it legacy, Goddard's appeal to members of the same family. It has nothing to do with paying into endowments or naming buildings or bricks so that a son or daughter – no matter how apt or inept – may also attend.

No. This aggregation of Goddard students related by blood or marriage did not seek advantage by class, or school tie promotion. Look elsewhere for the reason that so many parents and children, spouses and siblings feel drawn to attend Goddard—to words like magic, curiosity, independence, possibility and passion. The sampling of the families in this article is proof.

Luckily, network TV makes scientific research easy. All those swabs turning blue (blood!), or glass boxes filled with smoke (whaa?) – it's a snap. Thus trained as a researcher, I wasn't daunted to be asked to investigate why family members related by blood or marriage all chose Goddard at different times in their lives.

The questions were obvious: Is there a constant that is Goddard despite its reinvention over the years? Is there a constant in Goddard students – a Goddard gene one might map? The answers are: Yes. Yes. And, according to at least one of seven: Yes. Now to the proof....

The test subjects include three generations of women in one family who all found their way to Goddard; a husband and wife who came to Plainfield as singles and later married; and a father-son duo who received their degrees across a divide of almost 40 years.

BY BONNIE BLADER (MFA '97)

We begin with Barbara Frankel (ADP '66), who did not know then that her step-granddaughter, Audrey Shah (RUP '00), would also attend Goddard decades later (without realizing that her step-grandmother had been there first). Barbara's daughter-in-law, Susan Frankel (PSY '06), was inspired by the "magic" she and Audrey found on campus when Susan dropped her off for her first semester. She enrolled as an off-campus student herself, several years later.

Carey Turnbull (RUP '73) graduated while his future wife, Claudia, was a freshman. Claudia transferred out to a California college/ashram, and the two did not meet again for four years. After 25 married years, Claudia came back to Goddard, drawn by the chance to engage in the Consciousness Studies Program. She finished her bachelor's degree and earned her master's in 2007.

Gregg Blackburn (RUP '70) was looking for a place less structured than the University of North Carolina, where he had started as a freshman, and a place to be safe from the war in Vietnam; he found both at Goddard. His son, Winston, found Goddard too, after hunting for a master's program that would allow him to marry his passion for travel, his videography of foreign lands and his high



school teaching curriculum. He graduated with an education degree earlier this year.

Winston says it was “a practical thing,” in the end, to choose Goddard. He might not have found it if his father hadn’t gone, but Goddard was “the perfect fit” for his idea of the video M.A. “Goddard’s flexibility made it work,” he says, adding that turning 50 hours of raw footage from 12 countries into material that would make “the foreign” familiar to his students recommitted him to teaching.

Unconventional People in an Unconventional Place

Barbara Frankel’s first husband found Goddard for her, in an ad in the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

“Do you plan to spend the rest of your life cleaning closets?” he asked one day. She had started college at 17, attending the University of Chicago and opting for a two-year degree. After coming home to Philadelphia, she soon married and was raising three children when her husband asked his question.

Contemplating a return to college, she knew she didn’t want to sit in a class with 18-year olds. Low-residency study was appealing. She says completing two half-year projects in anthropology for her bachelor’s degree “turned me on to learning again.” Goddard was quite different from anywhere else, she remembers.

“We were unconventional people in an unconventional place,” she says. “[It was] a good place for the self-motivated.”

Barbara’s rekindled passion for learning took her to Temple University for her master’s and Princeton for her Ph.D.

“There was a feeling of importance about what I was doing at Goddard that lasted me through all the aches and pains of graduate school,” she says. She retired from Lehigh University’s faculty as a professor of anthropology after 20 years of teaching.

Although Barbara credited Goddard’s “wildness” of spirit to the ages and life experiences of her adult classmates, Claudia Turnbull points out that many people at middle age are “treading water.” Claudia re-began at Goddard in 2001, knowing she wanted to gain a deeper insight into the meditative practice she had engaged in for 37 years.

“I wanted to find my own voice” in the Vedic tradition, she says. “If I talked about that tradition, I wanted to come from deeply grounded knowledge.” What excited Claudia about her Goddard return, and inspired her to go beyond finishing her bachelor’s to complete her master’s, was how much she got out of three and a half years of study that may not have happened elsewhere.

People at mid-life, Claudia says, “may observe the routines of life without pausing to look inside to ask, ‘What do you feel? What are your passions?’” Goddard gives them a way to look, she believes, and that, along with a faculty willing to travel great intellectual distances to help students, is a gift.

Inherited “Nonconformism”

Winston characterizes Goddard students as individuals who already are self-directed and self-motivated.

“It’s for people who would like a system they don’t have to conform to,” he says. Winston says that both he and his father fit that description, though they have their differences, too. His father, Gregg, mentioned self-motivation as a quality students need to take best advantage of the freedom Goddard has traditionally offered. At the same time, he remembered another way Goddard was important.

“For me, one of the most profound experiences was working in the dishwashing room,” he says. “I hadn’t done that before, hadn’t done chores. It was about growing up and building a strong sense of community. Everybody was doing something top to bottom to make it work.”

Gregg’s on-campus passion was helping to design the art building. “It was all new to me; I continued to enjoy that kind of stuff.”

When he graduated, Gregg stayed in Vermont and with the skills he had learned on campus, built his own house. His children were born there. During the Vietnam War, he remained a conscientious objector, working instead at the Waterbury Hospital and the *Barre-Montpelier Times-Argus*, before going on to law school.

His current practice, defending architects and engineers, can be traced to his Goddard design experience, although he is self-effacing about his academic life. It was Winston’s 2008 graduation ceremony that impressed him more.

“I’ve never seen more enthusiasm,” Gregg says. “They were all proud of themselves and appreciative. Everyone was feeling it; they weren’t just grinding it out.”

Three Generations of Goddard Women



Barbara Frankel (ADP '66), right, is the matriarch of a Goddard family tradition. She, her daughter-in-law, and her step-granddaughter all attended Goddard over four decades. Pictured above, Susan Frankel (PSY '06) and her daughter, Audrey Shah (RUP '00), play with Barbara’s great-granddaughter, Isabella. “Who knows,” says Susan, “maybe she’ll attend Goddard one day.”



Carey Turnbull, Claudia's husband, also chafed at conformity in 1969. He was an on-campus student hoping for an education that "would not be entirely irrelevant" to him. He wanted to study more about the world and his place in it rather than focusing only on a career path. He knew a liberal arts education at Goddard would mean not being spoon fed the traditional tenets that "glorify some above others." He didn't want to redo the "great books" education he had had in high school and knew there were currents swirling around him he wanted to know more about.

"There was a real sense the world could change and interest in how it would change immaterially. Whatever lurch it could take culturally, it could take it in an immaterial way."

Like his wife-to-be, Carey learned to meditate and then taught meditation in Europe and the United States for years after graduating.

Although Carey does not believe anyone can ever fully go home again – "those philosophical neighborhoods, most don't exist anymore" – he was surprised to see Goddard still offering Consciousness Studies in 2001, when Claudia began to look for a graduate program.

"The old Goddard is still there in the new millennium," he says. "I don't think Claudia would have gone to the Goddard of memory, but Goddard today still does for people much of what it did then. It was enormously broadening and empowering. It widened my world and made me feel that people can credibly make up their own lives."

Rekindling "Magic" over Generations

The Goddard that Carey re-met in 2001, when his wife, Claudia, went back to school, was still "a place where you meet people being transformed, but not manipulated."



"Magical" is the word Susan Frankel uses to describe her first impression of Goddard's campus.

"There was a particular tone to it, the sense of a mystical journey beginning when we arrived," she said. Although Susan and her daughter, Audrey, did not attend at the same time, their feelings about Goddard, and even their courses of study, are aligned. Susan raised Audrey alone in rural surroundings. Walks they took together when Audrey was young often were enactments of stories they'd made up the night before. Goddard reminded them both of that early play, and for Audrey, the art she would find in the campus woods reminded her of her childhood.

"It kept my sense of play, anticipation and magic alive," she says.

A Common Yearning for Exploration

For both Audrey and Susan, Goddard was the answer to their desires to shape their courses of study. Audrey transferred in as a sophomore. She had met with difficulty when she tried to create a major that combined the leadership program she was enrolled in at her former college with her interest in philosophy. Goddard allowed the exploration.

She now works in public housing in the United Kingdom, finding homes for the homeless. She recently worked with local children to stage an art show in a neighborhood clinic. The show focused on health issues and attracted great interest in a community unused to such attention and enthusiasm. Audrey says her mother's enrolling at Goddard did not surprise her; in fact, "she is following some ideas that I was studying during my [own] education..."

Susan says she considered going to college locally on weekends, but then she saw "Consciousness Studies" on Goddard's website.

"This was really interesting for me – the question of 'what allows us to be conscious,'" she says. "Isn't psychology really all about consciousness studies – how it unfolds?"

Susan's thesis, a study of child abuse, disability and resilience, keeps her conferring with Audrey and acknowledging Goddard for allowing the exploration.

"They allow you to be curious about everything," she says. "Goddard allows for an alternative in thinking things through."

Current treatments and therapies might depend on that ability to explore, according to Susan, and on refocusing or reusing what is known for different contexts. Curiosity, she is sure, is an essential part of what drives Goddard students.

"I think there is a Goddard gene," she says. "I think most people who end up there are really curious. They have curiosity about the world and what hasn't worked.... It's about as far from boot camp as you can get...it's a place of possibility. I think it is a gene – and it's physically free." ☺

Though they met at Goddard in the early '70s, Claudia (left) and Carey Turnbull followed different paths before they re-found each other and married several years later. Carey had already earned his Goddard degree in 1973, and Claudia returned to Goddard in 2001 for both her bachelor's and master's.