

Self-determination

Transnational interests

By the time he was in college, Eric Drotch '93 had long been fascinated by Israeli society and culture. "I had been to Israel twice as a teenager and just became enamored with the place," he says. A sociology student at Skidmore, he found he wanted to formalize his interest in a more scholarly way.

Skidmore at that time had only one class that addressed Drotch's passion—"European Jewish History." So with the help of two faculty advisors, Michael Marx in English and Spencer Cahill in sociology, Drotch took advantage of Skidmore's openness to self-determined majors and created his own degree program in Hebrew and Israeli studies. He spent a semester at Tel Aviv University and wrote his senior thesis on how Israel's relationship with the US influenced the kibbutz movement.

After graduation, Drotch returned to Israel and worked on two different kibbutzes for a few months.

"It was the real-world experience of what I had studied," he says, noting that government support for the cooperative communities waned as the country continued to tip toward a market-driven economy.

Back in the US he sought a new direction. He worked as a substitute teacher, and then as a development officer at Combined Jewish Philanthropies and Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. He also took some painting classes that rekindled his strong interest and aptitude for art. In 2002 he moved to Philadelphia and earned an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania.

(Among his exhibitions in recent years was Skidmore's alumni art show during Reunion 2008.)

"I am the quintessential liberal arts person," Drotch says. And now he's found a professional position that allows him to continue developing, and integrating, his diverse interests. He is an art teacher at the Peddie School, a boarding academy in New Jersey. There he's working to start an exchange program with the Israel Arts and Science Academy in Jerusalem; he plans to take students on a visit next spring. He says, "The position at Peddie has brought together many of my professional interests: art, education, nonprofit development... I even coached crew for the past five years." (Drotch was a Thoroughbred oarsman at Skidmore.)

His is an unusual career path to be sure, but he says it started with the flexibility he found and exercised at Skidmore. "The self-determined major helped me look at myself a little more closely," he says, "and helped me bring together a set of goals for myself." It's an approach to life that he's continued since graduation, pursuing his interests and striving to synthesize them into meaningful and rewarding work. —Jill U. Adams

Civic and cultural multitasking

From dawn's early light when she hits the treadmill, throughout the day steering a growing arts organization forward, and into the night in pursuit of diverse cultural experiences, Cathy Kraymer Kimball '80 is always on the move.

"I don't have much free time, but I love everything I'm involved with," says Kimball, executive director and chief curator for the past decade at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art. The vivacious, versatile Kimball—who has played the violin since fourth grade and who was a member of the Skidmore Orchestra—keeps pace with a personal agenda of awesome range. She participates in events and meetings supporting opera, ballet, theater, symphony, the American Association of Museums, Rotary Club, and more; serves on the boards of the Tech Museum of Innovation and the Convention and Visitors Bureau; plays hard with

family and friends in Tahoe, Yosemite, and Seattle; and has acted as a court-appointed advocate for a young man in the foster-care system.

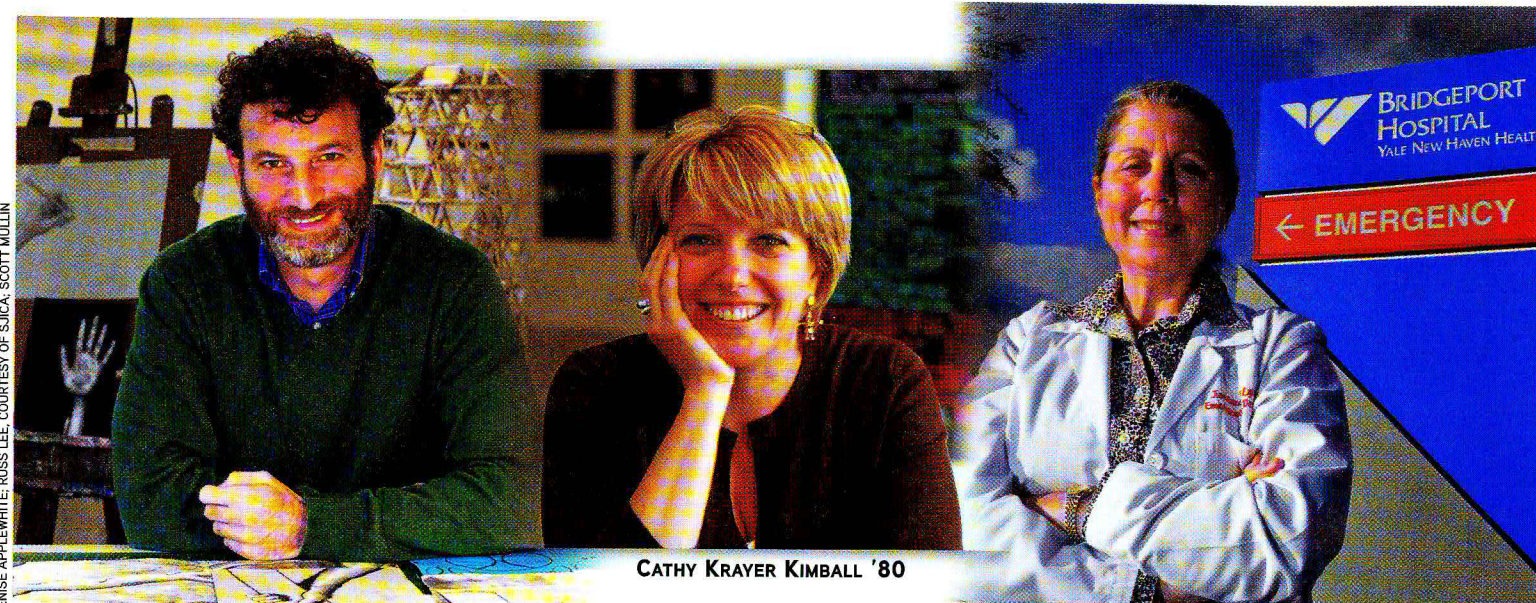
In a life devoted to stimulating the vibrancy of her community and the arts through civic and professional zeal, Kimball has created a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. She aims to balance her home, work, and public domains, carving moments to write in her journal even while she's mounting multimedia installations in an art institute whose new, permanent home she helped secure.

Her capacity to envision and embrace a 360-degree life has deep roots. As a Skidmore student, the Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y., native chose to design her own interdisciplinary major in medieval studies when she found that her interest in the time period embraced art history, literature, music, and philosophy and did not fit a predetermined curriculum. "It is important to remember, and to be able to communicate, that art is not created in a void—whether it was made 600 years ago or yesterday," she points out.

"Skidmore was incredibly receptive to my self-determined major," she recalls. "I am extremely grateful. Twice, I was the only student signed up for a course, and both times I worked one-to-one with the professor." She says the best candidates for an interdisciplinary degree "are really clear about what they want and can work independently."

Engrossed as she can be in her varied passions, Kimball knows when it's time to slow down. She refuels by spending time with her children and through reflection. She concludes, "I have learned that the most important meeting of the day is the one you have with yourself." —Helen S. Edelman '74

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ERIC DROTCH '93

CATHY KRAYMER KIMBALL '80

JANEANE FLYNN LAMONTE '78

From dance science to medical arts

Janeane Flynn Lamonte '78 showed both grace and grit when she shifted her focus from the performing arts to premedical studies at Skidmore.

"I first came to Skidmore to major in dance," says the Long Island native, noting that former New York City Ballet star Melissa Hayden was teaching at Skidmore at the time. As a dance major, Lamonte took a course in anatomy and physiology, part of the dance curriculum aimed at deepening and diversifying students' perspectives on movement and the body. "I loved the course," she says with grateful praise for her professor, biologist Bill Brown, whom she credits with inspiring her. "It was dramatic. I realized I wanted dance in my life for relaxation and enjoyment, but I wanted science as a career."

At first, Lamonte thought she would become a dance therapist, but as she explored her interests and options, physical therapy seemed like a better fit. "Skidmore had no physical therapy major," she recalls. "I considered transferring, but I loved the College." Luckily, Skidmore was "receptive to an interdisciplinary degree." So, with support from Brown, chemistry professor Parker Baum, and the faculty in the physical education program, Lamonte created a self-determined "pre-physical therapy" major. Friday afternoons were reserved for sessions with Baum: "I used to go with a list of questions, and he'd work with me for as long as it took to answer them," she says. Her final project was a paper about PT modalities. Through Skidmore, Lamonte also had the opportunity to work with physical therapists at Saratoga Hospital.

"This is when I started to think about medical school," she says. After graduation she took a year to study organic chemistry and work as a research associate at Dartmouth Medical College, then attended Albany Medical College. Lamonte ultimately chose to specialize in emergency medicine, which she practices

today at Bridgeport Hospital in Connecticut.

Married to another physician and the mother of three, Lamonte has scant leisure, but whenever possible, she enjoys cooking, travel, and reading historical fiction, sharing books with her family of avid readers. And she's never forsaken her first love: the doctor still makes time to dance in local musical theater productions.

"I appreciate the flexibility of the liberal arts education, and I advocate for it," she says. "I was able to combine arts and sciences in my degree, and I am still fulfilled by that balance."

—Helen S. Edelman '74

Complexity and challenge

Ken Vennema '89 spent many hours in Skidmore physics labs. Whether his projects worked or didn't, he always wanted to know why. "I wanted to see results and make sense of what was happening," he says.

Vennema's keen eye for detail—along with curiosity, creativity, and fearlessness—has taken him far, recently to Chad, Korea, and Kazakhstan. Like his lab work, each real-world assignment has demanded he have "a thorough understanding of what it takes to do it, and what can make it fail."

Thanks to summer jobs at construction sites, Vennema landed a job right after graduating with his major that blended math and physics. He later earned a second undergrad degree, in civil engineering, from NYU's Polytechnic Institute, and by 1998 he was ready for something big ... very big.

That's when ExxonMobil recruited him, and he found he was attracted by the "complexity, remoteness, and challenge" of its work. What could be more challenging than a project worth billions and involving thousands of people working on multiple continents? Vennema spent a decade training for, planning, designing, and executing sizable portions of just such a venture—the monumental Chad Development Project. →