

Finding The *Write* Path

A collaboration between James Clapp '62, Ph.D., and Danielle M. Murray



James Clapp '62 at the Berlin Wall.

Photos courtesy of James Clapp '62

In 1968, as the plane's wings skirted the San Diego skyline just before landing, James "Jim" Clapp '62, with a freshly minted Ph.D. from Syracuse University, and wife Patricia "Patty" (Lynch) '63, began their new life in "the lower left-hand corner of the United States." Their two young daughters, Laura and Lisa, were in tow.

Flashback a few years, and Jim and Patty were first meeting among another set of hills – the Heights! They married soon after their respective graduations. Jim, a city planner, went on to receive both a master's degree and doctorate from the Maxwell School and signed on to direct a new master's degree program in urban planning at San Diego State University (SDSU). Patty had used her sociology degree from Le Moyne to practice social work, but her true passion was art. She would earn her Master of Fine Arts degree and join the SDSU art department as an adjunct professor.

California was a "paradise" as advertised, but Jim, and especially Patty, eager to see Europe's cities and museums, still needed to "change the scenery." Despite never having trekked beyond Canada and Mexico, at Patty's urging, Jim created a European travel-study program to indulge their wanderlust. It worked, and for the next 27 years these programs, combined with sabbaticals, two stints as a professor associé at the University of Paris, a year as a Fulbright scholar in Hong Kong, and

Jim's wife, Patty, with their two daughters.



lectureships at several universities in China, Jim traveled to over 70 countries and more cities than he could count. Alas, he lost his best traveling companion to multiple sclerosis in 1985, and he never fails to feel a pang when his plane descends over the cemetery in San Diego where she is buried.

"I'm not all that religious, but I have lighted candles to Patty in churches all over the world," he said. "I owe her Laura and Lisa, and the world. It has helped to fill the void that she continues to inspire my writing. It was Patty who led me to realize that travel is much more than a discovery of other places, but a rich experience of self-discovery."

That led to Jim's first travel book, *The Stranger is Me: Travels and Self-Discoveries*, part of a body of publications that to date includes 14 books, a screenplay, and over 800 articles and essays. It also resulted in a new identity for Jim, who is better known in some quarters as "Sebastian Gerard," the combined names of his Italian grandfathers. Sebastian, the romantic, pens novels, records some jazz piano compositions and scripts for movies and public radio. Jim, the academic, writes nonfiction about travel, media, and cities and urban life.

In his professor emeritus years at SDSU, Jim has appeased his storyteller impulses. He always used narrative in his teaching, but didn't get around to a first novel, *For Goodness Sake: A Novel of the Afterlife of Suzie Wong*, written in Hong Kong, until 2007. A few

LEMOYNE COLLEGE MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2016



Jim gives a lecture at Beijing City University.



Jim and President Jimmy Carter in Mexico. The Le Moyne alumnus interviewed the nation's 39th president for his PBS radio show.



Jim and the late Dan Schorr, CBS and PBS reporter.

nonfiction books followed before his second, *Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones, A Novel of Coming of Age Catholic*, that is influenced by his years at Rochester's McQuaid Jesuit High School. For Clapp/Gerard, his education, teaching, travel and love of movies and cities are all intertwined. "There seems to be an interlocking complementarity and reciprocity among all of them."

Clapp still misses teaching. To keep active and current, he established *Dragon City Journal* (www.dragoncityjournal.com), an online hub for his contemporary cultural essays, reviews and graphics in 2003, and maintains a

personal website, *Urbis Media Ltd.* (www.urbismedia-ltd.com), that features his books and other publications, and broadcast media.

Most recently, he published *Vademecum Italica: Travels in Italy*, and is returning to being Sebastian, working on a novel on female infanticide in China, *The River Dragon's Daughters*. "I have two daughters and twin granddaughters for inspiration," he said. Patty would approve. ■