



The Peralta Retiree

July—September 2007

Vol. 3 No. 4

<http://www.peraltaretirees.org>

From the President...

by Jerry Herman, PRO President

Author, Author!!

Some people are reluctant to retire for fear they'd have nothing to do. At least three PRO members haven't found that to be a problem. They've written books. In the last newsletter we acknowledged Ed Minasian's *Musa Dagh* (Cold Tree Press), a historical account of the Armenian genocide and the subsequent suppression of a movie based on it; and Tom Turman's *Teacher - Stories to be Read and Graded by Friday*, a collection of short stories based upon Tom's long teaching career in the Architecture Department at Laney.

Smokey Wilson's new book, *What About Rose? Using Teacher Research to Reverse School Failure* (Teachers College Press), is featured in the current issue on Page 4. Smokey's book is also based on her Laney career, primarily in Project Bridge, a program designed to teach basic literacy skills to community college students unprepared for college academic work. Anyone who knows Smokey recognizes her dedication to those students. Her new book establishes guidelines for others so dedicated to follow where she has led.

Not everyone is up to writing a book as these three PRO members have, but as an alternative you might spend your time profitably reading the books they've written.

Third Annual PRO Picnic

It's hard to believe that another year has flown by and that the annual PRO picnic is at hand. But it has (the year) and it is (the picnic). On Thursday, August 2, we'll gather for the third time in a spectacular redwood grove (details on page 3) for food, fun, and fellowship. The first two picnics were

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Plan to Attend ...

PRO's Third Anniversary Picnic

Roberts Regional Recreation Area

Thursday August 2 11 AM to 3 PM

See Details on Page 3

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The Peralta Retiree is published four times a year by
the Peralta Retirees Organization (PRO)

Volume 3 Number 4

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splendid successes and there's no reason to expect less of the third. I'd like to thank Linda Japzon, Social Committee Chair, who, despite personal adversities, has managed to organize the picnic once again. If you haven't come to the picnic before, try to make it this time. You will be delighted with it.

CoreSource-Blue Cross SPD

Approximately half of Peralta's retirees are enrolled in the CoreSource-Blue Cross health plan (about 400 members). When their Summary Plan Description (SPD) - the document that describes the specific benefits - was finally published some months ago PRO's Benefits Committee did a close analysis of it to make sure the benefits described are equivalent to those we had under Blue Cross prior to 2004 (Article on Page 4). Discrepancies were found and for some time now PRO has been in ongoing discussions with PCCD about reconciling the differences. PRO's analysis is very impressive in its comprehensiveness and intelligence. Board members Remo Arancio and Ned Pearlstein contributed a great deal, but the lion's share of the work has been done by Benefits Committee Chair Alex Pappas and PRO Vice-president Bruce Jacobs. They deserve a tremendous amount of credit for their work.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PHOTO APPRECIATED

To the Editor:

When I saw the picture of my late husband, Walter Asato, among the Laney College family members of 1964, it brought tears to my eyes and I was overwhelmed with emotions.

I don't know who Mary Smith is, but I am grateful she sent the picture to you, and to you for its inclusion in the newsletter. It will be placed in Walter's album as a treasured photo for his family and his descendants.

Gratefully yours,
Aiko Asato

DEBRA GREEN MOURNED

To the Editor:

Debra Green, former Staff Assistant in the Office of the President at Laney College, passed away suddenly last March.

Debra had worked for Peralta since 1993. For the past six years, she served with great distinction and humility

IN MEMORIAM

The following Peralta retiree has passed away during the last months. PRO extends our deepest condolences to her family and loved ones.

Delores Benton

If you have any information about the passing or the serious illness of a Peralta retiree, please contact Bruce Jacobs at: webmaster@peraltaretirees.org

as the Staff Assistant to former Laney College Presidents Dr. Debra Blue, Odell Johnson, and current President, Dr. Frank Chong, all of whom praised Debra Green at the memorial services held on April 14, 2007.

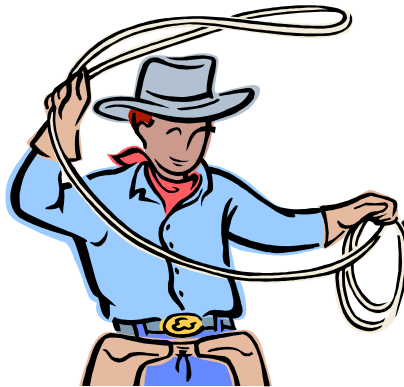
(Continued on page 7)

PRO'S PICNIC ROUNDUP!

All you cowboys and cowgirls dig out your blue jeans and your cowboy hats! It's time for our

Annual PRO Picnic!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 2, 2007
11:00 AM TO 3:00 PM



In the redwoods of
Roberts Regional Recreation Park
Huckleberry Picnic Area

Bring your own beer or wine. PRO will provide soft drinks, condiments, plates, cups, utensils and charcoal.

Parking: \$5 per car

Wheelchair Accessible

Driving Directions:

From Highway 13 (Warren Freeway)

Take the Joaquin Miller exit and go east, up the hill on Joaquin Miller. Turn left at Skyline Blvd. Proceed one mile to the Roberts entrance on the right.

From 580

Exit on 35th Ave. and proceed up the hill on 35th, which will eventually become Redwood Road. At the intersection of Redwood and Skyline Blvd., turn left

and proceed for one mile, then right to stay on Skyline. Proceed for one mile to the entrance to Roberts on the right.

RSVP: Let us know if you're coming and how many will be in your party. Call or e-mail Social Committee Co-Chair:

Linda Japzon

510-483-7183 · coolbigeyes@sbcglobal.net

PRO and PCCD Continue Discussions on SPD Changes

by Bruce Jacobs, PRO VP

In the last issue of the PRO newsletter, we informed you that PRO had identified a number of discrepancies between the CoreSource Summary Plan Description (SPD) that the District had issued in November of last year and the coverage we had had when Blue Cross was the Health Plan administrator. On June 4, Alex Pappas and Bruce Jacobs were finally able to meet with PCCD Chief Financial Officer Tom Smith to request that the District make changes in the CoreSource SPD in order to return to the benefits that were available through Blue Cross. At that meeting, Smith requested that PRO prepare a document that would enable the District to easily identify the changes we were requesting and our justification for those changes.

He also agreed to schedule a meeting for the following week to discuss the identified discrepancies with representatives of the District, Peralta's broker for health insurance, the PFT and PRO.

At that meeting the District presented a document in which they confirmed that some of the discrepancies identified in the PRO document were valid while they questioned many of the others. Although the PRO and PFT representatives had not been given an opportunity to review the PCCD response in advance there was an exchange of views on each point. The District then asked PRO to respond with a new written document. In the course of the meeting, the PFT representatives introduced additional documents, including language that has appeared in the PFT contract since 1992 and a 2005 letter from the District written to then-PFT President Michael Mills clarifying some of the actual benefits that

CoreSource would cover. In both cases these documents provided additional documentation supporting PRO's concerns and raising some new ones.

In the next months PRO expects to continue to work with the District for a resolution of the outstanding issues surrounding the CoreSource SPD. However, it is important that PRO members understand that PRO is *not* a bargaining agent and has no legal standing to negotiate with the District for retirees. PRO cannot agree to any changes in the benefits to which a retiree is contractually entitled. PRO's role is to advocate for retirees.

However, if the District does not agree to restore the level of benefits that were guaranteed to a retiree s/he has the right to demand that the District honor its obligation. As a last resort the retiree may take the District to small claims court (up to the \$7500 maximum in Alameda County) or demand an arbitration hearing. As a service to our members the PRO Board is planning to set up a Legal Aid Committee which will be charged with acquiring expertise in order to help members who want to pursue a claim using the legal or arbitration system. If you are interested in serving on such a committee, please contact PRO President Jerry Herman (jerrherm@sbcglobal.net) or send a letter to PRO (PRO, PO Box 1951, El Cerrito, CA 94530) indicating your interest.

What's next? PRO will be providing the District with its new response early in July. We will keep members informed as the discussions between the District and PRO continue.



New Book Written by Laney Retiree Smokey Wilson

Our latest Peralta author is Smokey Wilson, whose book, *What About Rose? Using Teacher Research to Reverse School Failure* has just been published by Teachers College Press as part of their Practitioner Inquiry Series. The book is based on Smokey's work at Laney College and most particularly with Project Bridge students. She takes us into the classroom and lets us witness learning as it happens or fails to happen, puzzles out the "why" and reflects on her always incomplete but growing understanding. Throughout this very readable book she also describes and reviews theory that leads and misleads, and finally offers a guide to other teachers. It is a work that can make Laney and Peralta proud.

RETIREMENT LIVING: STORIES OF OUR DAYS

With this story written by Laney retiree Carmen Rezendes, The Peralta Retiree begins a new occasional series of first person accounts of our experiences in retirement. If you would like to share a story, please send it via email to webmaster@peraltaretirees.org or by US Mail to the PRO PO Box (PRO, PO Box 1951, El Cerrito, CA 94530).

CHEATING DEATH VALLEY

by Carmen Rezendes

On the first day of spring, March 21, 2007, I made the worst mistake of my life. Walking down to our camper from the Lippincott Mine, I turned from the trail onto a wash, spent the next five hours trapped into going down a canyon, came out on an alluvial fan, spent a very cold night on the desert floor before finding my way to a road. I put my life in peril in Death Valley. One doesn't do dumb in Death Valley and I did dumb. Why? Why did I do it?

On the way up to the mine, I found my knee hurt riding on the motorcycle with Peter and I had gotten off and had left my helmet on the part of the trail that crossed the wash. So when I came down, I assumed the wash was the trail. But as I continued, I soon realized I wasn't on the trail because in the ten or twenty minutes that had passed, I should have already reached the camper. But the way was beautiful. There were beautiful rocks, rose quartz that I gathered for a friend. It was an enchanting place and I assumed that the trail I was on would circle back to the road below our camper and I could climb back up. I had earlier taken a Relafen for my knee and Relafen makes me feel at one with a benign world. And then there is the curse of the Ubehebe. We had taken the Ubehebe/Lippincott Road from the Saline to the Racetrack a few years earlier in our camper, the most fearful trip of our lives. Perhaps it was the first sign of dementia. At any rate, when I came to the first dry fall, a fifteen-foot slide down a boulder, I did not turn back. I slid down and that sealed it. There was no going back.

I continued on. I was heading west and going down. The canyon went on and on. At each switch back, I thought I would reach the road. Didn't happen. I realized the trouble I had gotten myself into and I became very focused on not falling and breaking a leg. If I did, I did not believe I would ever be found. I'd be a white pile of bones gnawed at by coyotes. I must have slid down at least fifteen sets of boulders. I fell only once, from a boulder that went straight down and left a gap of about five feet between it and the earth below. I landed on my knees and hurt my wrist, but I was not badly shaken.

It had rained the night before and there were pools of water on some of the boulders from which I drank. Some other pools I came to had been fouled by coyotes' shit. Why do they do it? Mischief? To hide their tracks? Hemorrhoids? I kept going as fast as I could as it was late afternoon and I knew I had to get down before dark. I stopped only once. At my feet there were three dead coyote pups, newborn, laid out on a line, fresh enough to be undisturbed. Later, on the desert floor, I thought of that coyote woman. I also passed a nest of six to eight broken eggs shells clustered under a boulder. They were big eggs, the size the Easter bunny brings in chocolate to beloved children. Maybe a desert tortoise?

At about seven o'clock, I came out of the mountain and out onto an alluvial fan. In the distance, I saw a sand dune and I hoped it was the Racetrack and that I could find the road seven miles back to our camper. But the characteristic black rock wasn't sitting in the middle of the dune and I was somewhere else. In the distance I saw the curve of a road. I would walk to the road and sooner or later, someone would drive by.

I walked towards the road until it grew dark and I could no longer see. I didn't have time to choose a place to rest. I was near a wash. The wind had started blowing and it would provide some measure of shelter but because there were dark clouds overhead, I didn't want to risk drowning in a sudden rush of water. I lay down near some rocks that I hoped would break the wind. I tucked my jean legs into my woolen socks. I had on a light fleece top that I zipped up, a sun shirt over it that I buttoned up and tucked into my pants. I put my bandana over my face and pulled my cotton hat over it. I had leather motorcycle gloves on, a wristwatch, keys in my back pocket and my binos around my neck. Nothing else.

It was a long night. In fact, it was a dark and stormy night. There were black storm clouds overhead and I hoped it wouldn't rain. I thought if it rained I might not make it. It was cold but not freezing. I shivered most of the night. I heard coyotes in the distance. Early in the night, I saw car lights speeding on the road. I heard a fly buzz around me and felt enormous affinity with this living creature that had come to see if I were alive or dead. I heard the thump of pack rats on the other side of the rocks. I think they wanted me to move on. I spoke aloud to them, telling them I would have none of it. We had to share. I felt raindrops a couple of times during the night, but around four o'clock the clouds moved off and opened onto a sky of stars.

(Continued on page 6)

PRO Scholarships Awarded By Service Committee

by Sondra Neiman, Chair of PRO Service Committee

The Pro Service Committee was delighted to award \$500 scholarships to four very qualified and deserving Peralta students, one at each campus. We were able to obtain information about three of the recipients for this issue of the newsletter.

At Berkeley City College, the recipient was Tenzin Chinkarlage. Tenzin is a continuing student whose family emigrated from Tibet. She has been here for 12 years and is a science major. Her hope is to specialize in the area of nutrition science. (PRO Board Member, Ned Pearlstein, made the presentation on behalf of PRO.)

At Laney College, the recipient was Lisa Sutton. Lisa is a single mother, returning to school after a six year absence. She's very determined and engaging and was very excited to receive this scholarship. After receiving the award, she told her story to the awards ceremony audience, and did a great job conveying who she is and what she has accomplished. (PRO President Jerry Herman made the presentation on behalf of PRO.)

At Merritt College, the recipient was Babalola Ogunbiji. Babalola is from Nigeria. He is 27 years old and has been in the United States for five and a

(Continued on page 8)

(CHEATING DEATH VALLEY *Continued from page 5)*

My thoughts were mostly "I'm going to make it. I'm going start off for that road as soon as it becomes light." It might become a hot day and I would not have any water, but if I made it to that road, even if I collapsed, I would be found. I thought about Peter and how he was worse off than I because I knew I was still alive and he must have concluded that I was dead or dying. I knew he was awake in the camper with the light on. I thought about my daughter Sierra, how I might not get to see more of her life's story, how I was sorry she would lose me, but at least she was thirty. Briefly I thought about friends and how my death would confirm all their worst fears about our tramping around the desert. And I resented their conclusions. I had made a terrible mistake and I might pay for it with my life, but if I did it was my fault, not the desert's.

I thought about hypothermia. I knew as long as I was shivering, I was okay, but if I stopped, it would be a sign that death was approaching. (My information on this was literary: Jack London's "To Build a Fire.") I thought it would not be a bad way to die. I had lived a measure of a life, had finally found such happiness and meaning and that if I did not grow older I would not grow so very old that Peter would have to take care of me and that was some kind of blessing.

But I wanted to live and mostly I told myself over and over that I would do what I needed to to survive. I would reach that road.

At first light, I left for the curl in the road. My legs were not as strong as on the previous day but they were sturdy

enough. The sun at my back was warming. I walked up and down a number of arroyos, sometimes tempted to walk down the wash on some of the worse ones, but afraid they would not lead me to the road. I walked for about two hours and reached the road at eight o'clock. It came up to me as a surprise. I found a rock and sat beside it, waiting. I thought of the start of an exercise I had used in creative writing: "You're on a road. Describe it and tell what you do." You sit and wait beside it, like Siddhartha. Soon, behind my back, I heard a search plane. I turned and saw it circling the mountains from which I'd come. Peter had gotten help. I took off my blue shirt and waved it around, tried to catch the sun flashing on the steel whistle on my key chain. But I must have been a speck on the road and the pilot didn't see me.

At nine o'clock, Jason Hamm, co-director of The Athenian School's twenty-eight day survival camp, and two student colleagues, drove up. They gave me water, an apple and through satellite phone, connected me with rangers, who took me back to Peter.

I was lucky. Quite irrationally, I had beckoned death to me. He lay beside me in the desert. I found him a paltry thing, as I had always thought him to be. It was not death that mattered, but the dying and if I had to die, I would do so calmly, as aware as I could be. But all along I wanted to live and I'm pleased that after initially losing my head on that first wrong turn, I kept it as best I could. I had done a senior solo in the desert and I had survived.

Contribute To The Pro Scholarship Fund By Honoring Or Memorializing A Friend Or Loved One

You can make a contribution to the PRO Scholarship Fund in honor of an occasion, in memory of someone or in honor of someone. The honoree or honored occasion or person in whose memory the contribution is made as well as the contributor will be acknowledged in the next newsletter . Also, a card acknowledging the contribution was made in the honor or memory of someone will be sent to the person you direct.

Please complete the form below and send the completed form with your check made out to **The Peralta Foundation—PRO** to: PRO Scholarship Fund, PO Box 1951, El Cerrito, CA 94530.



Yes, I want to support the PRO Scholarship Fund with a contribution.
(Please print)

- In honor of:** _____
- On the occasion of:** _____
- In memory of:** _____

Please send acknowledgement card to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Contributor's Name: _____

Contributor's Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Make check payable to: **The Peralta Foundation—PRO**
Send to: PRO, PO Box 1951, El Cerrito, CA 04530

(LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Continued from page 2)

A large contingent of Laney staff, students and administrators as well as Trustee Linda Handy attended the services to honor the beloved Debra Green.

In her role in the President's Office, Debra worked closely with Executive Administrative Assistant Yvonne Lewis and came in contact with nearly everyone on the campus at one time or another. Her quiet, calm and profession demeanor made her a role model for many students and staff alike.

On April 3, 2007, the Oakland City Council honored Debra Green, an Oakland resident, by adjourning the Council meeting in her memory.

Odell Johnson

Contributions Received for the PRO Scholarship Fund

In memory of	Contributor
Hazel Evans and Wanda Garcia	Heo Park
Marv Thornblad and Louis R. Miller	Art and Jackie Naftaly
Audrey and Phil Elwood	Chris Hadley and Helen Bersie
On the occasion of	Contributor
Dorothy Neiman 90 th Birthday	Sondra Neiman



Have you renewed your PRO Membership for 2007?

Please renew your PRO membership for 2007 if you have not already done so. If you are not sure whether you are paid up for 2007, please contact PRO Treasurer Shirley Timm (smtimm@juno.com) to find out.

Dues are: \$20-1 year, \$55-3 years, \$80-5 years, and \$250-lifetime.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Mail to: PRO, PO Box 1951, El Cerrito, CA 94530

(PRO Scholarships *Continued from page 6)*

half years, for two of which he studied at Merritt. He graduated with an Associate Degree in Liberal Arts with a concentration in math and science. He has been accepted at U.C. Berkeley and plans to study Economics. (Dr. George Herring, Merritt College President, made the presentation on behalf of PRO.)

The Service Committee wants to thank the presenters.

In addition to awarding these scholarships, PRO also made awards of \$250.00 to each of the four Peralta College libraries to be used for the purchase of books for their students.

If you would like to make a contribution to the PRO Scholarship Fund, see the information on page 7.

PRO By The Numbers: PRO has 412 retirees in our database. 195 have paid through 2007, 52 through 2009, 29 through 2011, and 10 for life. Fifty-five retirees paid in 2006 but have not paid dues for 2007. Seventy-three retirees in the database have never joined PRO.

Peralta Retirees Organization
P. O. Box 1951
El Cerrito, CA 94530