

The fruits of passion

By Dana Cook Grossman

Passion is a word with mildly unsavory connotations today, seeing as it regularly pops up in perfume ads, R-rated movie trailers, and the subject lines of e-mail spam. Once upon a time, however, it appeared only in religious tracts. The first two definitions for “passion” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) deal with martyrdom and crucifixion and include usage citations that date from as early as the 12th century.

But the word's meaning expanded over time to uses well beyond the biblical. By the 13th and 14th centuries (and the third and fourth *OED* definitions), it had also come to mean nonreligious affliction or suffering. By the 15th and 16th centuries (and the sixth and seventh definitions), “passion” was being used to refer to strong emotion, though mostly of a negative sort—rage, hate, fear. Then the perfume marketers arrived on the scene—well, actually it was poet Edmund Spenser who first used the word in an amorous context (definition eight), in the late 16th century in *The Faerie Queene*.

By the early 17th century (and the ninth definition), passion referred as well to intense enthusiasm or zeal. And 400 years later, that's still a valid meaning—making “passion” an apt word to describe several people in this issue.

In fact, the word is actually used in one of the articles in the Discoveries section—to describe geneticist Barbara Conrad's enthusiasm for life at the lab bench (see page 4). And take a look at this issue's Faculty Focus profile of craniofacial surgeon Mitch Stotland (on page 54). It's clear that he, too, approaches his work with passion.

If you're thinking we've fallen prey to hyperbole in our stories, I invite you to look at the expressions on the faces of the students (and scientists) in the feature that starts on page 28, and to read what these undergrads say about doing real science, not just experiments with a foregone outcome. These are college kids who, in addition to a full slate of courses and extracurriculars, make the time to work in a lab. The federal government may be cutting funds for biomedical research, but the field's future can't be too bleak if the nation's schools are turning out passion for science like this.

There is also, sadly, an unplanned exemplar of passion in this issue, on pages 52 and 53. This section of the magazine covers events in the institu-

tion's Transforming Medicine capital campaign. The subject this issue is a celebratory gala held in mid-May. There was indeed lots to celebrate at the event. But for those in the know, there was a bitersweet note to it, too. The campaign had been chaired since its launch by epilepsy expert Peter Williamson, a longtime member of the DMS faculty. Williamson, who had been diagnosed with cancer several months previously, was bound and determined to be at this mid-campaign gala. And he did make it there, reveling in the feel-good spirit of the evening. But just over two weeks later, he died, peacefully, at his home in Lyme, N.H.

Peter Williamson was passionate about several things, including collecting vintage cars (to learn more about him, go to dartmed.dartmouth.edu, click on the Search link, and enter “Williamson” in the box). He was also passionate about helping people who suffered from intractable epilepsy; patients traveled to DHMC from the four corners of the globe to get care from the program he founded here. And he was passionate about furthering the work of the institution generally, through his leadership of and support for the campaign. Less than a year ago, he and his wife, Susan, made the largest gift ever to DMS-DHMC—a \$20-million commitment, in recognition of which a planned new translational research building will be named the Peter and Susan Williamson Research Building.

It may not be too many years before eager Dartmouth undergrads are finding work in labs in the Williamson Building. And, who knows, one of those students might be the Peter Williamson, or the Barbara Conrad, or the Mitch Stotland of the mid-21st century. That's exactly the fruit that the Williamsons hoped their gift would bear.

The fact that the work of an educational institution is aimed at the long-range betterment of the world is part of what makes my colleagues and me so passionate about what we do.

We get to share with you, our readers, the stories of people who are committed to research and education, and some of their zeal rubs off on us. We even get to do some educating of our own, as evidenced by the fact that this issue's cover feature is largely the work of two undergraduates. We hope that some of our zeal has rubbed off on them. ■

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