





A WOMAN OF Well-Chosen Words

In one corner of Joan Hinde Stewart's former office at the University of South Carolina (USC) College of Liberal Arts sat the second edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* — all 20 volumes. On a stand in another corner rested the more modest, but dogeared, *Random House Webster's Dictionary* (unabridged, of course). And in the bookshelf that lined one wall of the unassuming office from which Stewart managed the largest of USC's eight colleges sat a third dictionary.

BY MIKE DEBRAGGIO

Despite the scholarly books about 18th-century French literature that predominated the shelves in Stewart's USC office and have been a part of her life for more than three decades, those three dictionaries reveal the most about the woman who received a standing ovation when she was introduced on May 13th to a packed Chapel audience as Hamilton's 19th president.

"I like words, and I love dictionaries," Stewart said. "I like grammar; I like syntax; I like diagramming sentences; I like parts of speech. French provided me with all of that, and in a foreign language, too," she added, in recounting how she first became interested in what has become her scholarly passion.

With half a dozen books and more than 100 articles, essays, chapters, book reviews and presentations to her credit, she is, according to long-time friend and colleague Ronald C. Rosbottom, “one of the most influential scholars in the country in her field.” Wellesley College Professor of French Vicki Mistacco said Stewart is “a tremendous source of inspiration” and “a pioneer in the study of fiction by 18th-century women writers.”

For several years, Hamilton Professor of French Roberta Krueger has had her Introduction to French Literature class read Isabelle de Charrière’s *Lettres de Mistriss Henley*, an 18th-century epistolary novel edited by Stewart and her husband, Philip. “Joan Stewart’s publications are very impressive,” Krueger said. “It’s exciting to have a president with such a distinguished — and ongoing — record of scholarship whose work on French women writers of the past has had a real impact on the way we teach our classes.”

Notwithstanding her status as a scholar, it is Stewart’s use of words that stands out most to her colleagues and admirers, and makes her ideally suited to be the next occupant of the southeast corner office on the first floor of Buttrick Hall.

If one believes that a president should embody the values of the college she represents,



Stewart (seated) and Chairman of the Board Stuart L. Scott '61 (standing, center) are flanked by Presidential Search Committee Co-Chairs Drew S. Days III '63 and Patricia T. Smalley.

then Joan Stewart personifies a Hamilton education in the same way that the Chapel, with its distinctive quill weathervane and status as the prime campus venue for public speaking, symbolizes Hamilton’s long-time emphasis on oral and written communication. For generations, the words students use to communicate orally and in writing have been the coin of the realm at Hamilton.

“I think a college president is first and foremost a leader who represents what the institution should stand for,” said Patrick Maney, professor of history and department chair at the University of South Carolina. “In all of her public appearances, and there are many, she has been extremely articulate and passionate in explaining the mission of the university. She has a rare ability to convey to nonacademics the core values at the heart of higher education.”

At Hamilton, those core values include being able to communicate well. USC Interim Vice President for Research Harris Pastides said of Stewart, “It is not an exaggeration to call her eloquent. When I’m in Joan’s company, I try to be my best in speaking the language and writing the language. She will raise the bar for students to speak the spoken word and write the written word capably. She’ll do that by her own use of language.”

Former USC Board Chair William Hubbard said Stewart “looks you right in the eye and speaks directly about issues. One of her strengths is that she doesn’t give you a lot of

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fuzzy talk. She takes on issues squarely, and I believe that results in trust, which makes her very effective.

“I believe that she will be able to relate extraordinarily well to the entire college community,” Hubbard continued, “from the freshman student to the most sophisticated donor.”

Hamilton’s reputation for teaching students to communicate well is part of what attracted Stewart to the College. “It was exemplified by the people I met,” she said, citing, especially, early conversations with trustee Drew S. Days III ’63 and Vice President for Academic Affairs David Paris ’71. “[T]heir skills, not just in communicating, but in listening, which is an important part of communication, were very impressive, very appealing.”

Stewart had an equally strong impression of Hamilton’s students. “Thoughtful, articulate, civil; those were the impressions [of students] I formed during my visits in April and May. They were warm,” Stewart recalled of her reception with students in Café Opus just an hour after being introduced in the Chapel, adding, “they were challenging, but challenging in a courteous and civil way.”

Daisy Mera ’04, a fellow Brooklyn native and the student representative on the Presidential Search Committee, introduced Stewart at the session in Opus. “I was thanked [for helping to select a new president] by so many students,” Mera said. “Everyone who was in Café Opus left with a smile. I don’t think she’ll have any problem relating to students; that was obvious in the interactions in Opus.”

Although Stewart gets high marks for her ability to write and speak well, listening has been a trademark of her time at USC. Sheila Pidgeon is the secretary in the university’s



One hour after she was announced as president, Stewart met informally with students at a reception in Café Opus.

Bill Truslow

Joan Stewart on ...

...what attracted you to Hamilton: "...[T]he emphasis on communication, the value placed on faculty and student interaction and on community, and a commitment to diversity that goes back to the College's very beginnings. ... Add to all that an exceptionally talented student body, a dedicated faculty, and alumni of truly uncommon loyalty and devotion. I realized there had to be good reason for all that loyalty!"

...liberal arts education: "While we teach students to think with a critical perspective, we also want to make sure that they have the sense of history that has made criticism possible."

...being Hamilton's first woman president: "It's hardly an innovation for a woman to head a major institution nowadays, but I appreciate that it does have symbolic value. To me, it's less important than what Hamilton is and what Hamilton represents."

...Hamilton's place in higher education: "I expect Hamilton to become increasingly recognized as a national leader among liberal arts colleges and, with its historical emphasis on communication, as

a place characterized by vigorous conversation about the very meaning of liberal arts education."

... returning to New York: "The very sounds of peoples' voices are different, and I love those sounds. I like the South, too, but this is a perfectly comfortable and happy transition for me. Maybe I'm crazy, but I look forward to some real winters."

... being part of an academic couple in the same field: "Philip is very Midwestern. He's calm and thoughtful and extremely supportive of me. There's never been an iota of competition between us."

... reading novels and listening to books on tape: "I like narrative and I like plot. And at the same time, I'm constantly thinking about how what I read relates to education."

... unwinding: "If possible, I go to Paris! When that's not possible, I get on the treadmill or listen to the Clancy Brothers, Kenny Rogers or Edith Piaf. I also like to watch old movies on video, preferably those set in Paris."

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Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and was the staff representative on the search committee that recruited Stewart to USC. “She has it all,” Pidgeon said. “She immediately picked up on the crux of any issue and was able to listen. And not only does she listen, she follows through.

“I have nothing but the greatest admiration for her,” Pidgeon added. “She’s articulate, dedicated, sincere and warm. She can relate to any person at any level.”

“Joan Stewart is an extraordinary dean, highly sensitive to the concerns of faculty and students,” said University of South Carolina President Andrew A. Sorensen. “She has the ability to achieve widespread consensus, and then, once having arrived at a decision, she is able to stay with it and be consistent in implementing it, all the while maintaining sensitivity to faculty, staff and students.

“All of us make decisions that some people will disagree with,” Sorensen continued, “but if they detect that you are consistent and arrive at the decision fairly, having sought widespread input, they respect your integrity. Joan Stewart clearly is a person with enormous integrity.”

Hubbard, the former USC board chair, recalled one of those disagreements. “I remember one specific example in a board meeting that captured her ability to be the president of

Hamilton College. It involved a reorganization of the departments of languages in the College of Liberal Arts. There was pressure from the faculty to maintain the status quo,” Hubbard recounted. “Certain members of those departments made impassioned pleas to the board not to support the dean’s recommendation for reorganization. After she stood up and spoke in a very diplomatic yet firm manner to the merits of the proposal, it was abundantly clear that she was right on all points, and her recommendation unanimously carried the day.

“What impressed me about that was that these were her colleagues,” Hubbard continued. “The easy way out would be to say ‘let’s study this more’ and risk having the proposal being watered down to the point where it did not accomplish its goals. But Joan stood firm on the merits despite personal pressure from some of her colleagues.”

Bill Truslow



Colleagues Comment on Joan Stewart ...

“Joan is at heart a scholar and a teacher. That is her core.” **PATRICK J. MANEY, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, USC DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

“She seems very serious, but she has a wry sense of humor.” **PATRICK J. MANEY, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, USC DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

“For Hamilton College, hiring Joan Stewart can be equated to winning the lottery. Without a doubt, she will take you to new heights. She will thrive, and you will thrive.” **SHEILA PIDGEON, SECRETARY, USC DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, AND CULTURES**

“Joan brought energy into the college that wasn’t there before.” **DAVID G. HODGES, COLUMBIA, S.C., BUSINESSMAN AND USC SUPPORTER**

“I found Joan Stewart to be a great colleague. She will represent your college in an exemplary manner. She is an excellent administrator who

works as a consensus builder and brings people together to get things done. I personally like Joan’s great sense of humor, the ability to laugh at herself and not take herself too seriously.” **PATRICIA MOODY, DEAN, USC COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY, RETAIL AND SPORT MANAGEMENT**

Added USC Assistant Professor of Russian Judith Kalb: “She may make a decision that is not popular, but she’ll do so because she has a great sense of the big picture and can weigh what she thinks will work best for her college.”

“You’ve got a president who has a strong relationship-based personality,” said David Hodges, former chair of USC’s College of Liberal Arts National Advisory Council and an ardent USC supporter. “She’ll know everyone’s name at Hamilton College, she’ll like them because she likes people, and they will like her. That will give her a reservoir of good will which will help her make hard decisions. If people like her as a person, and if they believe she has a basic understanding of their position, then when she has to step back and say this isn’t going to work, you can’t do this, or we have to change that, I believe people will give her more room than if they didn’t like her to start with.

“It’s always easier to leave things as they are,” Hodges said. “[But] if there’s an issue that needs to be dealt with, she’ll deal with it.

“Joan is supportive of new ideas,” continued Hodges, “and she has the confidence to let people try new things. She has wonderful judgment, and her genius is empowering people around her to be creative.”

Added Samuel Tenenbaum, Hodges’ successor as chair of the College’s National Advisory Council: “Joan helps nurture people to come up with good ideas; she will stimulate that.”

“I ask a lot of advice and try to find out as much as I can,” Stewart said. “I understand the importance of being decisive, but I don’t act in a precipitous way.”

Modest and unassuming, with a quick smile and an easy laugh, Stewart, nonetheless, acknowledged that she is a perfectionist. “She has an eye for excellence and is bold,” said

USC history department chair Maney. “When you hire it’s not just a matter of choosing the best person in the applicant pool. She’s looking for the best people in the country, and she’s not satisfied with less.”

“She’s a person who is always going to move the bar up,” Tenenbaum said.

In taking the Hamilton presidency, Stewart is returning to her home state and making good on a promise she made nearly 40 years earlier when a New York State Regents Scholarship made it possible for her to attend college.

“As part of that scholarship, I promised that, if possible, I would make a career of teaching in New York. I’m happy to be back, and happy to be able to fulfill that promise after so many years.”

Stewart graduated from St. Joseph’s College in Brooklyn, the first in her family to attend college. She lived at home and commuted more



After being introduced to the campus community in the Chapel, Stewart proudly displayed her first Hamilton sweatshirt, met with members of the staff and administration, greeted Physical Plant workers and chatted with members of the faculty.

“She’s a person of quality and manifest integrity. You can trust what you hear from her.” **RONALD C. ROSBOTTOM, FORMER DEAN OF FACULTY, AMHERST COLLEGE**

“I am sure that all constituencies at Hamilton — faculty, students and administration — will be energized by her presence. She will find the spark of originality in all of you and encourage you, each in your own way, to achieve your highest potential.” **VICKI MISTACCO, PROFESSOR OF FRENCH, WELLESLEY COLLEGE**

“She’s a very intelligent person, and, at the same time, a very down-to-earth and warm individual.” **JEROME D. ODOM, USC PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

“She’s extremely supportive of strong teaching,” **JUDITH KALB, USC ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RUSSIAN**

“She’s an excellent scholar, but I may be slightly biased,” **PHILIP STEWART, BENJAMIN E. POWELL PROFESSOR OF ROMANCE STUDIES, DUKE UNIVERSITY**



Soon after she was introduced as Hamilton's 19th president, Joan Stewart joined USC Assistant Professor of Psychology Brad Smith, a 1983 Hamilton graduate, and his daughters outside "Hamilton College," the building housing the anthropology and naval science programs on the Columbia, S.C., campus.

than an hour each way by subway and bus. "I did a lot of studying on the train," she recalled. When she received her bachelor's degree, *summa cum laude*, her mother asked her father the significance of the Latin honor. "I don't know," he responded, "but it must be good."

"The world that I'm in is foreign to my family," Stewart said, "but they have been totally supportive of me." That's especially true of her sister and 92-year-old mother, who still lives in Brooklyn.

When Ruth Simmons was named the 18th president of Brown University in November 2000, Stewart's mother clipped the article from the *New York Daily News* and sent it to her daughter in South Carolina. "Look Joan," Stewart recalled her mother saying, "she's just like you. She studied languages, and now she's a college president."

"The implication was clear," Stewart recounted, "and even though I realized, of course, that this was my mother speaking, somewhere deep within I must have thought, hmmm...."

Hamilton's Presidential Search Committee started thinking seriously about Stewart soon after she was identified as a potential candidate by the search firm that worked with the College. "She immediately rose to the short list in terms of the candidates we were considering," said Associate Professor of Philosophy Todd Franklin. "The College has great momentum, and we were looking for someone who could maintain and continue the upward trajectory of the institution. By the time we got to the final stage for making our selection, she was the unanimous choice."

At the same time, 800 miles to the south, Stewart's interest was growing. "It was a cumulative process for me," Stewart said. "With every encounter I had, either with a person from Hamilton or with something [written] about Hamilton, I became more interested and more excited." Her interest progressed to the point that when Chairman of the Board Stuart Scott '61 and Vice President for Academic Affairs David Paris '71 offered Stewart the position over dinner in early May at Garibaldi's on Greene Street in Columbia, she accepted on the spot.

Stewart's passion for education and her progression to the Hamilton presidency go back to her days in Brooklyn. As if to remind herself of her roots, her office wall displays a photograph of her third grade class at St. Mary Mother of Jesus School. "I loved school; I loved books; I loved libraries; I loved teachers; and I loved sitting in class." Not surprisingly, then, she does not recall having ever been absent or late during her four years at St. Brendan's High School. "I was a very committed, happy student. I just loved school."

And even though she says going to college was "a natural thing for me," she only considered attending St. Joseph's, St. John's and Brooklyn College. "I didn't know there were colleges outside of Brooklyn and Queens, and I didn't know about residential colleges," she said, perhaps only half in jest.

Today, she can't imagine a more perfect place than the institution she now heads. "Small residential liberal arts colleges are the glory of the American educational system," she told those gathered in the Chapel for her

introduction in May, "and Hamilton College is a particularly glorious example of such an institution." And even though her South Carolina colleagues regret her departure, they acknowledge such a move was inevitable.

"This selection did not surprise me," said Hubbard, the former USC board chair. "In my judgment it was only a matter of time before she was tapped to be a college or university president. Hamilton College showed great wisdom in getting to the front of the line in selecting Joan to be its president.

"She's a big loss," Hubbard continued. "She's absolutely one of the top leaders here at the university, [but] I'm absolutely delighted for her. She has enriched my life."

Added Rosbottom, former dean of the faculty at Amherst College: "This is a wonderful match. Whatever adjustments she may have to make, she'll make quickly and successfully."

The skeptics will cite Stewart's association with large public universities, but Hamilton

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Professor Todd Franklin said the search committee considered that issue and quickly dismissed it. "The concern about the transition from a large public to a private institution was mitigated by her experience in the liberal arts and her ability to speak to issues that resonate with all of us concerned about the liberal arts."

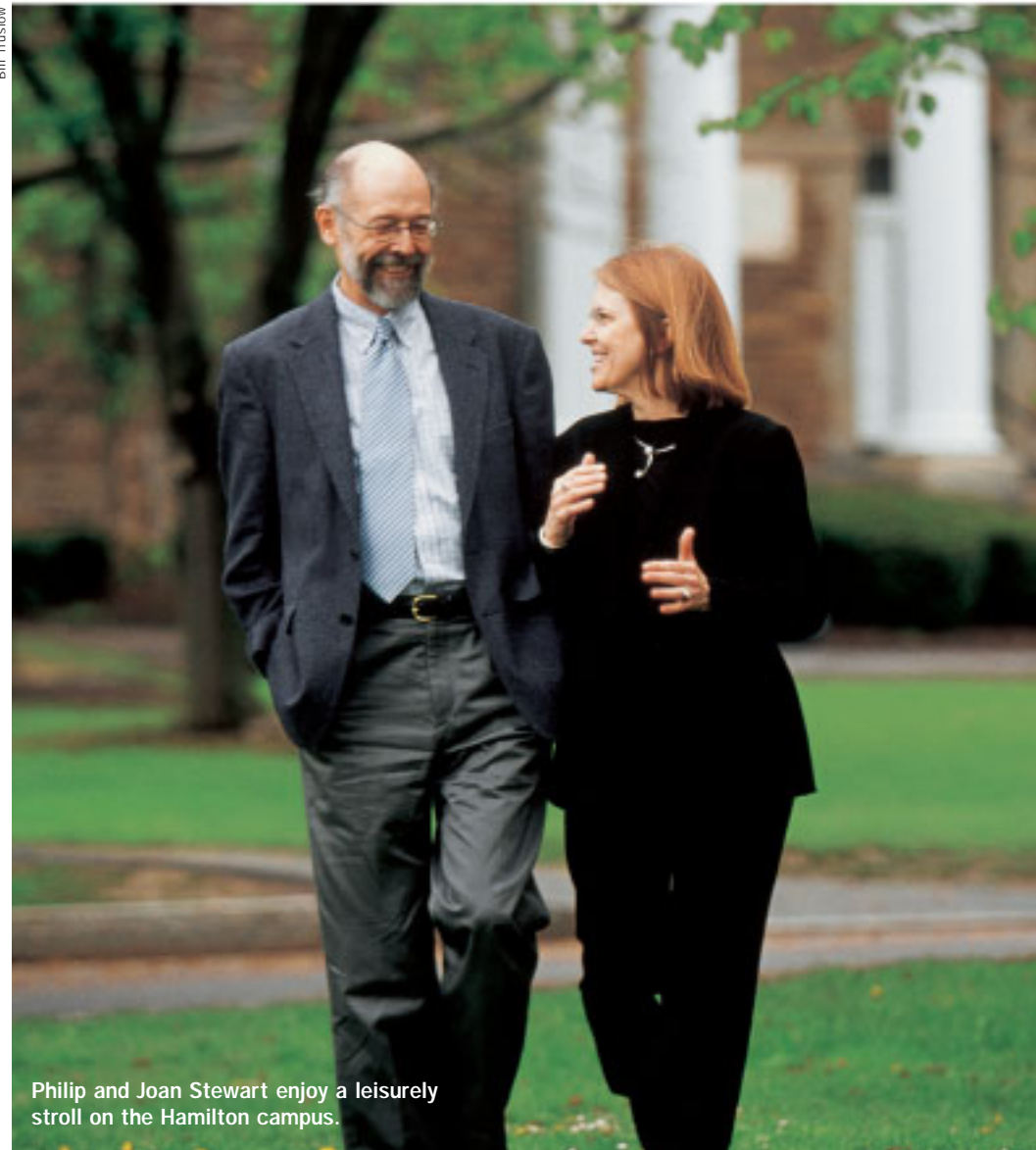
"Although I have spent most of my career in large public institutions," Stewart acknowledged, "I cherish my experience, both as a student and as a young teacher, in small colleges. Liberal arts colleges are the great American invention. They were born of the European Enlightenment, but it was Americans who had the energy to put those ideas into practice."

“She is a lively and entertaining speaker who makes the case for the liberal arts in the most compelling fashion that I have ever heard,” Hubbard said. “In an age in which people tend to talk more about technology and skills training and economic development, she makes the case for liberal arts in a thoughtful and articulate way.”

“She sincerely believes in the power of education to change the world,” Rosbottom said, “and she believes in the liberal arts.”

And if, as Hamilton’s president, Stewart ever needs to provide evidence of the trans-

forming nature of a liberal arts education, she can offer herself as an example. A first-generation college student with a limited worldview after high school, Stewart now assumes the presidency of one of America’s pre-eminent liberal arts colleges. She said she can hardly express her joy at the challenge that awaits her at Hamilton, but those who know her best are betting she’ll find the words ... perhaps in one of those dictionaries that are never far from her side.



Philip and Joan Stewart enjoy a leisurely stroll on the Hamilton campus.

Joan Hinde Stewart
19th President, Hamilton College

SUMMARY BIOGRAPHY

FORMAL EDUCATION

Ph.D., French, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., 1970

B.A., *summa cum laude*, French, St. Joseph’s College, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1965

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Professor of French, Hamilton College, 2003-

Professor of French, University of South Carolina, 1999-2003

Professor of French, North Carolina State University, 1981-99

Associate Professor of French, North Carolina State University, 1977-81

Assistant Professor of French, North Carolina State University, 1973-77

Instructor/Assistant Professor of French, Wellesley College, 1970-72

Teaching Associate/Acting Instructor of French, Yale University, 1967-70

ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTMENTS

President, Hamilton College, 2003-

Dean of Liberal Arts, University of South Carolina, 1999-2003

Head, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, North Carolina State University, 1985-97

Acting Head, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, North Carolina State University, 1984-85

Chair, North Carolina Humanities Council, 1988-89

Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Programs in Humanities and Social Sciences, North Carolina State University, 1983-85

Assistant Head, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, North Carolina State University, 1978-82

SCHOLARSHIP

Stewart has authored or co-authored numerous books (several with her husband, Philip), articles, essays, chapters and book reviews. She is currently working on a book on women and aging in the 18th century, a subject on which she has lectured at numerous universities, including Yale University, Nagoya University, the universities of Oxford, Exeter and British Columbia, and the Sorbonne.

PERSONAL

Stewart is married to Philip Stewart, the Benjamin E. Powell Professor of Romance Studies at Duke University. They have two children, a daughter who is pursuing a Ph.D. in German at Indiana University in Bloomington, and a son who is a student at Prescott College in Arizona.