

BROMMEL-MENDELSON-HENNINGTON SCHOLARSHIP IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES/ UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS

Carol Mendelson came to NEIU as a returning adult student in August of 1995. “My son, Steve, had died of AIDS in February of 1995,” Mendelson remembered. “I needed a vehicle to heal body and soul, and keep a connection honoring his memory.” For Mendelson, NEIU’s University Without Walls program provided that vehicle.

The University Without Walls program is a competency-based program where students can gain academic recognition for previously acquired college-equivalent knowledge and skills. Students work with faculty and advisors to address prior and proposed learning in three programmatic areas: depth, breadth and effective communication.

It was through the University Without Walls program that Mendelson met Professor Emeritus Bernard J. Brommel. “In order to participate in the program, I had to be mentored by an NEIU professor. I had the great good fortune to meet Dr. Brommel when he agreed to be my mentor.”

Mendelson created an independent research project titled, “The Psychosocial Aspects of Aids.” As part of the project, she engaged in several activities outside of the classroom including:

- Joined the Chicago AIDS Coalition to lobby State Representative Ryan White for funding AIDS/HIV services in Lake County, Illinois and Chicago;
- Co-facilitated a peer-led support group for care givers, family and loved ones of HIV-impacted individuals;
- Facilitated the Family AIDS Support Grief Group for the loved ones after the death of an HIV-impacted individual;
- Recorded and transcribed oral histories of AIDS support groups and spoke before medical students as part of a panel of professionals, patients and social workers to help increase the sensitivity of medical professionals to HIV issues.

“I was very nervous when I was asked to speak at a church AIDS memorial,” remembered Mendelson. “Dr. Brommel took extra time to prepare and coach me in the techniques of public speaking. Building on his training, I was later able to address a major AIDS conference at Loyola University.”

Brommel wrote, “Carol was one of the most caring students I ever taught; she used her talents to help those suffering from AIDS. As a ‘hands on’ volunteer, week after week, she would visit AIDS

patients and their parents or significant others. I observed her many times comfort and educate clients in her groups.”

Mendelson added, “I am proud of the diversity of the University Without Walls program and the quality of NEIU professors as best exemplified by Dr. Brommel. To be named as a scholarship honoree, and thus part of enriching the future for others, is a singular honor - all the more so because the scholarship was created by Dr. Brommel, who is one of my life’s greatest heroes.”

After graduating from NEIU, Mendelson combined her background in art with a form of art therapy to work with the HIV community. She teamed up with local therapist Dan Anthon, and has worked as his assistant for the past 16 years.

Julianne Trubac Hennington, a returning adult student at NEIU in the late 1970’s, acknowledges she was at a crossroads in her life. Trubac, an elementary education major, also took a class in interpersonal communication, which was taught by Bernard J. Brommel, professor emeritus, communication, media and theatre. Her seemingly small choice of a semester’s class schedule ended up being a life-changing one. As a student of Brommel’s, Hennington kept journals that helped Brommel, and eventually Hennington, recognize that she was truly at a pivotal moment in her life. Hennington remembers that Brommel “was kind and generous to counsel me during this time, and as a result of his help, I was able to choose a positive path for my life.”

Hennington earned a B.A. in Elementary Education in December of 1980. In the years after graduation, she worked in the Wheeling, Illinois school district as a substitute teacher. In 1983 she married C. Dayle Hennington, who at the time was the Washington D.C. representative for the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Hennington joined her husband in D.C., and together they entertained and traveled with Members of Congress and United States Presidents, including Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush and Bill Clinton. Dayle Hennington retired in 2005, and the couple returned to the Chicago area where they currently reside.

During those years in D.C., Juli held several interesting and challenging positions in various important government departments. Dr. Brommel wrote, “Juli and I remain in close contact. She calls or emails frequently to check on my health. In the classroom, Juli was a delight and a quiet class leader. She reached out to know her classmates. Since Juli now lives in Arlington Heights close to my daughter, we meet whenever possible. Each contact makes me aware of Juli as a remarkable human being.”

Brommel honored Hennington by including her in the naming of the Brommel-Mendelson-Hennington Scholarship in Interdisciplinary Studies or University Without Walls. The scholarship provides an annual scholarship to a junior or senior in the Interdisciplinary Studies or University Without Walls programs – both of which are geared towards helping returning adult students earn bachelor’s degrees. To be named in one of Dr. Brommel’s scholarships was, Hennington said, “the greatest and most meaningful honor ever bestowed upon me. To receive this recognition from such a selfless and caring person such as Dr. Brommel, makes it all the more dear.”