For almost a half million alumni, the UC Berkeley experience means a world-class education — and much more. Over the decades, Berkeley graduates have credited the campus with countless contributions that transformed their lives and shaped their futures.

In this issue of Cal Futures, we share the inspiring stories of two couples who attended Berkeley in the years surrounding World War II. Though they followed distinct paths to and from campus, Alice ’42 and the late James W. “Walt” ’41 Nelson, Jr. and Witold ’51, M.Arch. ’52 and Norma ’51 Willer share a connection — they met their cherished spouses and lifelong partners at Berkeley.

Grateful for the campus’s role in fueling their romances — along with rewarding careers and creative pursuits — both couples have chosen to leave a legacy by making a bequest to Cal. These planned gifts reflect their appreciation for the doors opened by a Berkeley education. Each bequest will provide undergraduate scholarships to ensure that future generations of talented students have access to that same opportunity.
The Willers share a love of the outdoors.

On just his second day of class at Berkeley, Witold Willer ’51, M.Arch. ’52 spotted a fair-haired woman in a room filled with male architecture students. “Coming from Europe, I couldn’t talk to her because I didn’t know her,” says Wit, a Polish refugee, of his first encounter with the former Norma Pidcock. “So I asked a classmate to introduce us.”

Norma Willer ’51 had plenty of male classmates to choose from during those post-World War II days. Reflecting on this gentleman in particular, “I thought he was very cute,” she says.

The attraction proved mutual. Wit and Norma dated through school and wed in 1951. As Berkeley-minted architects, the Willers went on to play important roles in shaping the UC system that we know today.

From coordinating the planning and construction of Berkeley’s Lawrence Hall of Science and Tolman Hall to participating in the early development of UC San Diego and UC Irvine, Wit and Norma devoted their careers to a heyday of campus building projects.

Grateful for Berkeley’s contributions to their lives — including the launch of their romance — Wit and Norma are giving back with a planned gift. Their bequest will establish an endowed scholarship that will provide budding architecture students with access to a Berkeley education like the one Wit and Norma received decades ago.

“We were very lucky with how things turned out for us,” observes Wit. While Wit shepherded planning and funding for construction projects on all the campuses, Norma was a project architect at Berkeley.

In 1955, she shattered gender barriers by becoming the first woman hired as a professional architect in the UC system. “They had a very nice office on campus and I thought it would be really good if I could get a job there,” says Norma with characteristic modesty.

Active nonagenarians, the Willers have remained close to Berkeley — living in the same apartment building just three blocks north of campus since 1956. Norma’s vibrant watercolors of California’s wine country, coastline, and other scenes decorate their living room walls.

Wit and Norma traveled far different paths to North Gate Hall, then home to Berkeley’s Department of Architecture and known as the Ark.

Born and raised in Poland, Wit had two years of engineering education before his studies were interrupted by World War II. Coming to Berkeley in 1947, Wit hoped to finish his degree and start a new life. Because Berkeley’s engineering program was booked with returning GIs, Wit’s adviser suggested he look into architecture.

Norma grew up in the nearby industrial town of Richmond. The fourth of five children, she dreamed of being the first in her family to go to college. Norma got her chance after serving in the U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve in World War II and qualifying for the GI Bill.

A rigorous course load gave the couple little time together, and they married as new graduates. A Phi Beta Kappa recipient, Wit went on to earn his master’s — thanks to a $500 scholarship. “It was the difference between going to graduate school and not going,” says Wit.

Norma, meanwhile, entered a depressed job market, and “no one wanted to hire a woman,” she says. Eventually she found a job in an engineering firm in San Francisco. She later heard of an opening at Berkeley, gathered up her portfolio, and got the job in the campus’s Office of Architects and Engineers.

Her first assignment was, quite literally, a tall order. Norma was put in charge of work on Unit I, the campus’s first high-rise residence hall, designed by famed architect John Warnecke. Over the course of her 29-year career, Norma coordinated a slew of impressive projects including the futuristic Lawrence Hall of Science built in 1968.

Wit worked in private architectural firms and later opened his own office in downtown Berkeley. In 1967, he became a principal architect for the UC Office of the President. His responsibilities included serving as a liaison between the nine UC campuses and the state’s Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst’s Office, along with representing UC at meetings of the State Public Works Board. It was a complicated job, and Wit often worked 80-hour weeks getting it done.

“Our whole life was involved in the University,” observes Wit. It still is. Today, Wit stays in shape by lifting weights at the Recreational Sports Facility, and he and Norma regularly dine at the Women’s Faculty Club.

Through their bequest, the Willers’ connection to campus will remain unbroken. “I don’t think times change,” says Wit, recalling the financial need he and Norma faced paying for their education. The new scholarships are “going to help students who have talent get a degree that they otherwise couldn’t afford.”

The Willers share a love of the outdoors. Norma ’51 and Witold ’51, M.Arch. ’52 Willer
An indelible bond with Berkeley

Alice '42 and the late James W. "Walt" '41 Nelson, Jr. can thank a pair of empty fountain pens for the chance meeting that sparked their love affair. One fall morning in 1941, the two Berkeley students stopped to replenish their respective writing instruments at the old ink fountain outside Stephens Hall when they exchanged fleeting — but meaningful — glances.

"Mr. Bic hadn't invented the ballpoint pen yet, so we had to rush down to this spot to fill our ink pens before class," recalls Alice, who was a senior studying art. Standing next to Alice was the same fellow who had years earlier offered apples and carrots to her horse outside a grocery store in then-rural Contra Costa County. Later at Berkeley, "He looked at me, I looked at him," says Alice, before they hurried off to their 8 a.m. classes.

That night, the phone rang at Alpha Omicron Pi sorority. The young man from the grocery — and now the ink fountain — was inviting Alice on a date. It wasn't until after curious sorority sisters inquired, that Alice realized she didn't know his name. She learned it — Walt — and much more about him and his graduate studies in electrical engineering during an evening of dinner and dancing at San Francisco's Palace Hotel.

From that day on, Walt stopped by the sorority house daily for hikes and other outings with Alice. "It was absolutely right from the start," says Alice of the romance that quickly unfolded.

Alice had first met Walt when she was 14. Her family had a country home in Lafayette and she often rode her horse to Hagstrom's, the area's only grocery in nearby Walnut Creek. Walt, a clerk there, came outside on a number of occasions to feed her horse. Walt later confided that he'd decided then and there that Alice "was the girl he was going to marry." After meeting again in Berkeley, that wish came true.

Though the Nelsons spent most of their adult years in the Midwest and East Coast, they never forgot Berkeley and the defining role it had in their lives.

In a demonstration of deep appreciation and generosity, the Nelsons created a bequest that will benefit future generations of Berkeley students. Their planned gift establishes a pair of scholarship funds supporting undergraduates in art practice and engineering, the same majors that Alice and Walt pursued on campus.

An engineering honors student, Walt was himself a Berkeley scholarship recipient.

"His whole future could be traced to the wonderful scholarships and deans who supported him in Berkeley," says Alice, a longtime Milwaukee resident. "There was just no doubt about how much these had helped him."

As a graduate student, Walt worked with famed physicists Ernest O. Lawrence and Luis Alvarez on the development of the cyclotron particle accelerator. He also counted chemist Joel Hildebrand as a cherished mentor.

Walt never finished his graduate studies following the attack on Pearl Harbor. That fateful day coincided with the couple's engagement party at the Oakland Athletic Club. "You never saw a party disappear as fast as that one did," says Alice. Soon afterward, Walt was dispatched to MIT and sped east in his old Chevy coupe to work on radar systems for the war effort. Later, as a major in the U.S. Army Air Corps, he helped design the radar used in the Black Widow fighters and B-29 bomber aircraft deployed in the Pacific.

Walt became a leading executive for GE and other companies, where he was instrumental in the development of pioneering technologies such as radar systems, the color TV, microwave tubes, the pacemaker, mammography, and even coated paper cups that didn't leak. That career took Walt, Alice, and their growing family to Syracuse, Palo Alto, Milwaukee, and elsewhere. He also served as president of Talon Zipper, the supplier of zippers that went to the moon. "Those were absolutely

Continued on next page

Answer to "Famous Alum"

In 2011, Charles Ferguson '78 won an Academy Award for Inside Job, his documentary probing the causes and consequences of the 2008 financial meltdown. The founder and president of Representational Pictures, Ferguson also earned a 2008 Academy Award nomination for his first film, No End in Sight: The American Occupation of Iraq. Along with his Berkeley bachelor’s degree in mathematics, Ferguson holds a Ph.D. in political science from MIT. Before embarking on his filmmaking career, Ferguson founded Vermeer Technologies, a successful software company that was sold to Microsoft in the mid-1990s. He also has been a consultant to government agencies and to technology companies such as Apple, Xerox, Motorola, and Intel. A San Francisco native, he is the author of several books. To find more of Berkeley’s famous alumni, visit berkeleywalloffame.org.
marvelous, wonderful years,” says Alice, who was busy tending to their five children.

Known as Alice Betty, Alice grew up in Oakland and followed her parents and three older siblings to Cal. She loved her time at Berkeley. A gifted artist, she studied with professors Oliver Washburn, Eugene Neuhaus, and internationally recognized artist Chiura Obata. Among many extracurricular activities, Alice served as president of Pytanean and personnel director of the Pelican.

After graduation she continued painting and sculpting when time permitted, earning a B.F.A. in 1968 from Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee. She contributed many years’ service as a docent and lecturer at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Alice and Walt enjoyed a nearly 67-year marriage until Walt’s death in 2009.

Alice returned to Berkeley last fall for her 70th class reunion. “Wild horses couldn’t have kept me away,” she says. Alice took the opportunity to donate to the Berkeley Art Museum a Japanese ink painting that Obata had drawn of Faculty Glade.

The Nelsons decided long ago that they wanted to give back to Berkeley if they could. Through their bequest creating two endowed scholarship funds, “we felt this would be something carried on by the University for future generations of students,” says Alice. ●

New estate gift creates scholarship match

A generous bequest from Bill and Grace ‘37 Ford has created an extraordinary matching gift opportunity that enables donors to provide significant support to Berkeley students. Through the William and Grace Ford Undergraduate Scholarship Match, the campus is partnering with contributors to endow 40 new scholarships.

Among its highlights, the Ford Scholarship Match offers:

- A dollar-for-dollar match for new outright gifts of $100,000
- the flexibility to make a pledge payable over five years
- the opportunity to designate a specific field of study

Please contact the Office of Gift Planning for more information. ●

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Director’s Column

The latest tax legislation — the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 — became law on January 2. Among its many provisions, it permanently established an inflation-adjusted exclusion from estate and gift tax. For 2013, individuals can give away — gift- and estate-tax free — a cumulative total of up to $5.25 million (or $10.5 million per couple) during their lifetimes or at the time of death. That amount does not include the $14,000 (also inflation-adjusted) that individuals can annually gift free of taxes, or medical and educational expenses paid directly to an institution for another person.

This substantial exclusion means that most of our alumni can provide for family and friends — and make a charitable bequest to Berkeley — without incurring estate tax liability. A bequest can provide critically needed support for campus programs that are personally meaningful. For Norma ’51 and Witold Willer ’51, M.Arch. ’52 and Alice ’42 and Walt ’41 Nelson, that meant creating endowed scholarship funds for undergraduates. Each couple worked with the Office of Gift Planning to structure their bequest provisions, ensuring that their gifts will be used according to their exact wishes. If you are considering a bequest, please contact our office so we can provide language aimed at making your philanthropic desires a reality.

The new law also extended the IRA charitable rollover for 2013. The rollover enables those 70½ or older to make a gift directly from their IRAs to Cal — the distribution does not need to be included in the donor’s income and can satisfy part or all of their required minimum distribution. New higher income tax and capital gains rates on high-income earners, as well as higher state income taxes resulting from Proposition 30 and a new surtax on investment income for some, can make the charitable deduction even more valuable. The higher capital gains rate can also make gifts of appreciated stock and real estate more attractive.

Please talk with us about including a charitable gift to Cal in your estate plan.

We have worked with thousands of dedicated alumni, parents, and friends who have benefited from our understanding of tax law, as well as our knowledge of campus programs.

Fiat Lux!

Kevin T. Crilly, J.D.
Director, Office of Gift Planning
UC Berkeley
Please □ call me/us □ send information about:

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□ IRA Charitable Rollover

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