Laurenti also wants to see those already in alumni leadership roles “rediscover and experience what is so special about this place.” The three regular HAA directors’ meetings held during the current academic year will focus on the “demographics of democracy” (in October), engineering and science instruction at the University (in February), and a celebration of the arts (in May). “I’d like to help alumni get out and see what’s happening at the University—and have some fun!” she adds.

Laurenti’s own experience at Harvard helped provide an entrée into her chosen career: banking. A native of Princeton, New Jersey, she is the daughter of an African-American letter carrier and a second-generation Japanese-American “social worker turned caterer.” “Princeton was a very accepting town,” she reports. “But my parents wanted to prepare me for entering this ‘white’ world of business and social relationships, which they knew very well was hard for someone of minority background to penetrate. They always said that if I could get the best education possible, they hoped that would level the playing field for me.” In college, the Eliot House resident concentrated in economics and managed the men’s ice-hockey team throughout her four years. “I was an only child,” she says with a laugh, “so it was quite an experience with the gentlemen.”

A few months after graduation, she took a job on Wall Street at U.S. Trust Company of New York, where she is now a senior vice president in private banking. Early on in her career, Laurenti says she and her then-supervisor, Thomas C. Clark, M.B.A. ’71, attended lunches to introduce her to clients. “He would always weave into the conversation that I had gone to Harvard,” she recalls, “and when I asked why he kept doing that, he always said to watch how it would change the conversation and help you. And he was right.”

The University also soon turned up a mate. Yuki Moore met Jeffrey Laurenti ’71, a senior fellow in international affairs at The Century Foundation, while volunteering for the Harvard Club of New Jersey’s schools committee. They married in 1981 and live in Trenton with their teenage son, Mario. Yuki Laurenti is a former member of the Trenton School Board and of the board at Princeton Day School, her other alma mater, and recently stepped down as president of the board at Isles Inc., a nonprofit community development and environmental organization. She remains on the board of the philanthropic Princeton Area Community Foundation.

In addition to her longtime work for the schools and scholarships committees of both the Harvard Club of New Jersey and the Harvard Club of Princeton (where she is currently committee chair), Laurenti became an HAA elected director in 1994, and has filled various alumni leadership roles since then. She has especially enjoyed scouring her New Jersey region for “diamond-in-the-rough” candidates from backgrounds not usually associated with the Ivy League, including the son of an Atlantic City croupier and another successful applicant from a predominately Puerto Rican public-housing project in Perth Amboy. “I’ve felt very close to the University and excited about the young people I see, and glad to help shape the student body,” she explains. “The committee and alumni work has also forced me to be more engaged with what’s going on at the University, to come back to campus and meet with students, and get to know other alumni. The truth is I’m more connected now than I ever was as a student here.”

The Corporate Empires

Once we were The Corporate Empires.

Today, Bob does fiber-optics research in Arizona. Chester works at the U.S. Patent Office, refereeing intellectual-property fights over wastewater systems. I work for a newspaper. There are wives (current and ex-), children, and mortgages.

Every summer, the remains of the Empires reassemble for an afternoon of ragged interpretations of Chuck Berry and the Rolling Stones. We usually wrap up with Lou Reed’s “Sweet Jane,” whose narrator, noting the street-corner parade of ordinary working stiffs, declares, “Me, I’m in a rock-and-roll band. Huh!”

The Empires never really walked on the wild side. I was the sort of first-born son so obedient that I never dared to ask my parents for a set of drums. Night after night, I listened to the Stones on my headphones, air drumming with a pair of No. 2 pencils. When I got to Harvard, one of the first things I did was spend $100 on a dented four-piece Ludwig drum kit. I dragged it to the basement of Pennypacker Hall and learned to play, or at least to play very simple songs: two kicks on the bass pedal, pop the snare—repeat ad infinitum.

Meanwhile, my high-school friend Chester had set off for MIT, similarly devoid of musical skill but, like me, fantasizing about playing in a band. As luck would have it, one of his fraternity brothers, Bob, a math-and-music whiz, agreed to teach Chester how to play electric bass. With Bob on guitar and vocals, we had a classic power trio.

It was late summer 1980. We practiced for a week straight before sophomore-year classes started. Then I precipitously arranged for our debut at a back-to-school party at the Crimson, where I spent most of my time and to which my parents should have been sending their tuition checks. In certain circles at the Crimson, I had a reputation as a precociously sold-out political moderate. On the night of the party, an older, more leftist colleague...
dubbed our band The Corporate Empires. The name stuck.

At our best, we were not very good. But we showed up on time, and Bob didn't talk a lot between songs.

Harvard was bursting with musical talent: student orchestras, jazz groups, and rock bands that, unlike The Corporate Empires, played their own stuff. I felt a little embarrassed when I crossed paths in the Lowell House courtyard with a group of real student musicians, who always seemed to be accompanying a visiting Leonard Bernstein to a master class. My aspiration was to keep 4/4 rock songs more or less on the rails.

But people did come to hear us play, as my punk roommate Tom noted ruefully at the time. Tom led his own earnestly cacophonous threesome, The Not. Most audiences found The Not a little more than they had bargained for.

The Corporate Empires played the Stones’ “Live With Me” in dining halls after football games, Chuck Berry’s “Little Queenie” at frat parties, and “Sweet Jane” for the Northeast convention of the National High School Model United Nations. “Some people, they like to go out dancing.” Lou Reed’s hip narrator says in “Sweet Jane.” “And other peoples they have to work.” To our amazement, we got dancing.

Bob and Chet found another (better) drummer. I later played music with other people. But it was never the same. The Empires died after that glorious 1980-81 academic year.

Some years back, we started our reunions, and the Empires gained a second life. Now, every summer, we gather in a rehearsal studio in Manhattan and barrel through the old set lists in four-hour marathons that to an outsider might appear strangely businesslike. Children and spouses are welcome for the final 15 minutes, but otherwise we don’t like distractions.

There’s a lot of material to get through, and it feels like we should play everything we can remember.

I never sang with the band and don’t normally search rock lyrics for deep meaning. But in preparation for this summer’s reunion, I looked up “Sweet Jane.” I discovered that it isn’t a condescending hipster’s portrayal of the workaday world, after all. The song seems to question whether the rocker’s pose is any more real or original than that of Jane, who is a clerk, and her banker boyfriend, who together save their money and listen to classical music. We all choose parts to play, Lou Reed suggests. “And anyone who ever played a part/They wouldn’t turn around and hate it.”

The Corporate Empires were always pretty conventional, even when we were 19 and pretending to be rockers. Still, I have never felt more like myself than I did on those Saturday nights.

~PAUL M. BARRETT

Hiram Hunn Awards

Six alumni are to receive this year’s Hiram S. Hunn Memorial Schools and Scholarships Awards, presented by the Harvard College Office of Admissions and Financial Aid. The award honors Hunn ’21, who recruited and interviewed prospective students for more than 55 years in Iowa and Vermont. Winners are to receive their awards at an October 28 ceremony. This year’s recipients are:

Francis Blake ’61, of Big Timber, Montana. Active in admissions work for more than 20 years, Blake is the founder and president of the Harvard Club of Montana. He has interviewed students throughout the state, and has served as both an HAA elected director and an HAA regional director.

Paul J. Brennan ’67, of Carlisle, Massachusetts. Brennan has recruited students in the Greater Boston area for 30 years. He also chairs the Harvard Club of Boston Foundation, which provides financial assistance to undergraduates and students at the Divinity School and the Graduate School of Education.

Kheng-Chuan Chew ’82, of Singapore. As the first Singaporean admitted to the College, Chew began interviewing candidates immediately following graduation. He has chaired the Harvard Alumni Interviewing Committee for Singapore since 1983.

Linda (Greenman) London ’55, of Wycombe, Pennsylvania. An interviewer since 1978, London has also served as cochair of the Philadelphia schools and scholarships committee for the last decade. She is a retired teacher of inner-city children.

Paul Brennan ’83, JD ’87, a feature editor with the Wall Street Journal, lives in New York with his wife, Julie Cohen, and dachshund, Ginger.