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Title

Amanda Apgar: Recipient of 2011-12 Irving and Jean Stone Recruitment Fellowship

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/39p7h12d>

Author

Writer, Staff

Publication Date

2011-11-01

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Amanda Apgar



EACH YEAR, CSW and the Department of Women's Studies choose an exceptional incoming graduate student to receive the Irving and Jean Stone Recruitment Fellowship. While this year's pool of candidates was particularly remarkable, Amanda Apgar stood out from the crowd. She received the fellowship for her highly intriguing past scholarship and very promising future work in the field of Women's Studies.

A native of Southern California, Apgar had some difficulty deciding on a career path after graduating from high school: "I began sewing my own clothes at age 12, when my mother bought me two yard of fabric and a zipper instead of the *very* cool and expensive dress I had been wanting. That first dress, a pink cotton sheath with a row of daisies around the neckline, was worn for years; after a while it was cut and re-hemmed to make a little blouse, and later all but the daisy chain was

trashed. I'm sure those daisies ended up glued to my sneakers at some point. Yet, pursuing fashion as a career was not on my radar. I wanted to be a nurse, then a philosopher, and then a geologist, before realizing I would be at community college for a decade. And since the only thing I did besides change majors was make clothes, I enrolled at Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising."

She worked in the fashion industry for six years. "After five years and several different jobs," she says, "I decided to give my all to establishing my own line of clothing and see where I ended up after a year. It was a great year, fun and very busy, at the end of which I felt satisfied and wanted to move on to something different, and I wanted to return to school."

A dinner she had with a couple from Israel was the impetus for her change of career: "I was

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drawn to Jewish studies for a very simple reason. I met a couple from Israel, they invited me over for dinner. The food was delicious, and Hebrew sounded beautiful to my ears. And so, I became interested in Israel. I enrolled at California State University, Long Beach and my interest in Israel quickly expanded to include the Middle East, Arabic, Abrahamic Religions, and politics.”

She committed to learning both Hebrew and Arabic, studying at Brandeis-Middlebury School of Hebrew, Middlebury Language Institute Summer Intensive in Middlebury, Vermont in 2009. While at CSU she won a variety of awards, including the George R. and Beverly August Student Award Endowment for Jewish Studies, the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures Certificate of Achievement in Arabic, and the College of Liberal Arts Exceptional Student Achievement Award, among others.

A class with Professor Hourri Berberian on Middle Eastern women developed her latent feminism and her research interests in gender and feminist activism began to take hold. “My undergraduate senior research paper,” she reports, “was titled ‘Jewish Masculinity, “In the City” and in the State.’ For this project I compared representations of Jewish masculinity found in early twentieth-century Jewish poetry (especially the poem ‘In the City of Slaughter’ by Hayim Nachman Bialik), in order to elucidate the Zionist’s call for the reinvention of Jewish masculinity in Palestine. My

paper touched on the immediate and long-term effects of gendered nationalisms and antinational sentiment in Palestine (and later, Israel). I plan to continue this research and am especially interested in the peace movement as a possible site of gender nonconformity in Israel and Palestine.”

In 2010, she spent a month in the West Bank, where she worked with a nonviolent resistance group in Bethlehem: “During the month, I lived with a Palestinian family, volunteered with a local nonprofit, studied Arabic, and took classes from Palestinian and Israeli activists. It was, at times, a difficult experience but it was quite memorable and left me with many unanswered questions. I plan to return in order to engage in field research.”

We are very proud to have the chance to support Apgar in the first year of her graduate program at UCLA and are excited to discover how her research will unfold!