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In Memoriam

Deborah L. Nichols 1952–2022

John M. Watanabe

Deborah L. Nichols, late William J. Bryant 1925 Professor of Anthropology at Dartmouth College and then-President of the Society for America Archaeology, died July 27, 2022, in the afternoon about when field archaeologists in rainy season Mexico call it a day before thunderstorms roll in. A near 20-year survivor of breast cancer, she died of a different malignancy. Deb was always happiest in Mexico doing archaeology with other archaeologists, eating Mexican Mexican food. An anthropologist's archaeologist, she did encyclopedic research on Mesoamerican production, exchange, and urbanization from the Formative to the Postclassic. Four years (1981–1985) on the Navajo and Hopi reservations with the Black Mesa Archaeological Project (Powell et al. 1983) also committed her to Native American issues and students, especially repatriation and indigenous archaeology, and she coedited a volume on social violence in the ancient Southwest (Figure 1; Nichols and Crown 2008). Despite her final illness, Deb worked tirelessly as SAA President to hold annual meetings amid the COVID-19 pandemic and to improve organizational transparency, inclusivity, ethics, and civility. Advocate of both equity and professionalism, she took pride as president in establishing the meeting access grants that now bear her name to help otherwise under-resourced members attend SAA annual meetings, fostering their careers while also becoming better professionals for the SAA. Teaching Anthropology, Native American Studies, and Latin American Studies at Dartmouth, Deb mentored many women and indigenous students, inspiring new archaeologists and historic preservation professionals. She was an informed, generous colleague who always sought the best in herself and others with an abiding faith in bettering the institutions that made scholarly careers like hers possible.

Figure 1. Deb with student at the Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, 1990. Dartmouth College. Photographer unknown.

Formative "Debbie"

Deborah Louise Nichols was born April 17, 1952, in Queens, New York to Harold L. "Nick" Nichols (1923–1999) and Ada Geraldine "Gerry" (Mallow) Nichols (1924–2008). After serving with the U.S. Air Force in England during the Second World War and attending the University of Missouri on the G.I. Bill, Deb's father worked as an accountant for Shell Oil Company, her mother at Monsanto. They married in St. Louis on May 14, 1949. Shell moved the Nichols to New York City, where they lived in the Fresh Meadows Housing Development in Flushing, an early planned residential and retail community opened in 1947 on the old Fresh Meadows Country Club golf course (Tomasson 1972). "Debbie," as she went by until her early twenties, lived her first years in Fresh Meadows, joined in 1956 by her sister Elizabeth (1956–2019). Deb remembered asking her mother when she started grade school why they were not Jewish like her many classmates absent on high holidays. Her early exposure to things beyond her family's Midwestern background gave Deb a lifelong love of New York City and of traveling to new places that she would pass on to her son Aaron from an early age (Figure 2).

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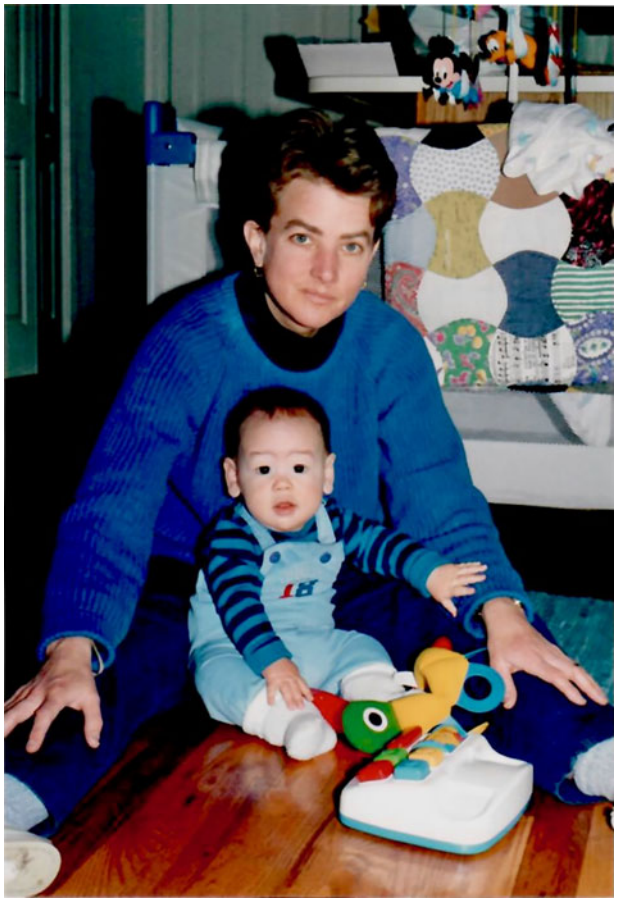

Figure 2. Deb with son Aaron at home, early 1992. Photograph by John Watanabe.

Figure 3. Deb in high school, ca. 1969. Photograph by Karl deSantos.

In 1958, the family moved to Northport on Long Island Sound, lured by post-war U.S. middle-class visions of a single family home on a tree-lined suburban street. Deb recalled learning to swim in Long Island Sound and going to Mets games, although listening to the Yankees play while writing her dissertation rekindled her Yankee fandom, again bequeathed to son Aaron until tempered by college in the heart of Red Sox Nation. She learned the flute and played in her high-school marching band and felt it important Aaron learn an instrument. She attended Northport High, a large, mostly white suburban school with over 600 students in her class. High-school friends Karl "Kito" deSantos and Robert "Bob" Varsha (personal communications 2022) described her as a smart, witty, take-charge person (Figure 3). She had a mind of her own and followed it, persevering when a teacher told her girls could not do math, having a boyfriend two years ahead of her with a background and interests different from hers (but with a Chevy Corvair for jaunts to Fire Island), ever skeptical of "popular" girls who relied too much on their looks. A history teacher recruited her to help manage the Northport boys cross-country team that he coached, so Deb was ready years later to travel all across New England and New York, Oregon, and Iowa for meets when son Aaron became a New Hampshire high-school state champion cross-country and distance runner.

Academically, Deb was an honors student and one of only 15 girls (along with 23 boys) in her class who won New York Regents Scholarships to attend college in New York state. After graduating Northport High in 1970 (Figure 4), she went instead to Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. Until college, as far as anyone recalled, Deb never expressed interest in archaeology, but she and friend Lynne Cohen Reik (personal communication 2022) applied to the Case Western archaeology field school for the summer of 1971, and at the Saige-McFarland Mimbres site in Cliff, New Mexico (Lekson 1990:x, 5), Deb found her calling during that six-and-a-half-week field season. By January 1972, she had transferred to the Pennsylvania State University to study archaeology, following the lead of the field school supervisor, then a graduate student of William T. Sanders at Penn State (Lekson 1990:5; Lynne Cohen Reik, personal communication 2022).

Deb finished her B.A. with highest honors in anthropology a year early in 1973 and entered the Ph.D. program. After her first year, she spent the summer and fall of 1974 on the Cuautitlan Region Settlement Survey, the seventh of eight Basin of Mexico surveys begun by Sanders in 1960 (Sanders and Gorenflo 2007:1). After completing her M.A. thesis on Postclassic Teotihuacan ceramics excavated at Xometla in 1962 but never written up (Nichols and McCullough 1986; Sanders 1986:5), Deb excavated in the Mimbres Valley, New Mexico during the summer of 1975, then that fall helped supervise the last Temascalapa phase

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Figure 4. Deb, Northport High School Yearbook, 1970. Photographer unknown.

of the Basin of Mexico survey (Gorenflo and Sanders 2022). In winter 1976–1977, she supervised on David Webster's excavations of three fortified Maya sites in the northern Yucatan Peninsula, learning firsthand how central and southeastern Mesoamerica differed. She also did historic archaeology in Pennsylvania at Fort Augusta in Sunbury in 1979 (Nichols 1980a) and surveys in Scranton and Pittsburgh in 1980.

During her early years in Mexico, Deb began to go by "Deborah" or "Deb" instead of "Debbie," because Mexicans tended to hear "Debbie" as *bebé* "baby," and as a diminutive, blond, blue-eyed *gringa* she wanted to downplay the association. Also, Sanders had nicknamed her "Debbie Reynolds" (Stephen Whittington, personal communication 2022), so perhaps another reason for the change, although Deb did like to dance (Kenneth Hirth, personal communication 2022), and she was not past disputing Sanders when warranted. In 1977, Deb married a Penn State biological anthropology graduate student, and although they divorced in 1982, she never forgot lessons learned on his project in America Samoa in 1978. Besides the oversized aluminum Hudson Cabin Bread tin she kept from Samoa, the other thing to survive Deb's first marriage was her introduction to chiefly politics. Years later, she would still recall complications in Samoan reciprocity that gave her deeper appreciation of household risk, crafting, marketing, status as collective calculations of contending options, obligations, opportunities, oppositions.

Deb's intellectual foundation remained Sanders' "materialist cultural evolutionary and ecological model of the origins and development of Prehispanic civilization in the Basin of Mexico" (Nichols 2023:36; Sanders and Nichols 1988). While ever grounded in ecological and cultural systems as systems, she welcomed theoretical advances in Mesoamerican archaeology on agency, political economy, collective action, and "thematic archaeologies" especially of households (Nichols 2023:37). Without graduate students at Dartmouth, Deb generously mentored other Ph.D. students and junior colleagues. She spent many summers (except in son Aaron's early years) at the now Arizona State University Teotihuacan Research Laboratory in San Juan Teotihuacan, working on her research collections there, connecting with other archaeologists at "the Lab" for projects or just passing through that crossroads of Mesoamerican archaeology (Figure 5).

Deb valued her contact with other women archaeologists: Susan Evans was her self-described "grad-school littermate" (personal communication 2022; Evans and Nichols 2015; Nichols and Evans 2009); Emily McClung de Tapia (personal communication 2022) shared interests in ecology with Deb from their first meeting in 1977; Deb mourned the untimely deaths of Mary Hodge (Nichols and Parsons 1997) and Elizabeth Brumfiel (Nichols 2016a; Parsons and Nichols 2012); Susan Gillespie and Rosemary Joyce brought new perspectives to their shared vision with Deb of archaeology as anthropology (Gillespie and Nichols 2003); Frances Berdan remained her ethnohistorical touchstone for all things Aztec (Nichols et al. 2017); Oralia Cabrera Cortés became her invaluable *compañera* in Mexican archaeology (Figure 6).

Deb maintained close ties across North American Mesoamericanist archaeology through her many coauthors and collaborators: with Bill Sanders, Susan Evans, David Webster, Ken Hirth, Larry Gorenflo at Penn State; George Cowgill, Mike Smith at Arizona State; Jeff Parsons (Nichols 2006), Joyce Marcus at University of Michigan; Bill Fash at Harvard; Dan Healan at Tulane; David and Jenny (and Tony and Danny) Carballo at Boston University; Gary Feinman at the Field Museum; with Mayanists Diane and Arlen Chase, among many; in Mexico, with Emily McClung de Tapia, Rubén Cabrera Castro, Oralia Cabrera Cortés, Saburo Sugiyama, Leonardo López Luján, Sergio Gómez Chávez, and others like Raúl García Chávez who, after hearing her paper for a conference at Ometusco in 2007 (Nichols 2015), exclaimed to Oralia Cabrera (personal communication 2022), "Wow, this Deborah is *superchingona*!"—loosely translated, "a real bad ass."

Another crucial network for Deb consisted of Native American archaeologists and historic preservation professionals. To promote indigenous archaeology, Deb and future SAA President Joe Watkins organized a Dartmouth conference in May 2001 that brought together Native American archaeologists to turn the tables and discuss how they saw archaeology, their place in it, and what might improve archaeology's often fraught relations with indigenous communities and professionals. An unintended consequence of

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Figure 5. Son Aaron's first visit to Teotihuacan, 1997. Photographer uncertain.

the conference emerged first in an email listserv, then a more formal network that came to call itself the Closet Chickens (Atalay 2006:269–271). The Chickens included many but not only indigenous archaeologists, students, and committed others who for a time exchanged ideas, debated, challenged, and grew professionally (Watkins and Nichols 2014). They bestowed on Deb the name "Chicken Itza." She remained lifelong chickens of a feather with conference presenters Dorothy Lippert, Desireé Reneé Martínez, her former Dartmouth students Davina Begay Two-Bears and Janine Bowechop Ledford, Joe Watkins, Roger Echo-Hawk, and many of the attendees. She persevered in recruiting indigenous archaeologists to bring their voices to SAA and American Anthropological Association committees and initiatives.

Early Classic "Deb"

In 1974, the Cuautitlan Region Survey had found indications of early irrigation canals in walls of two huge, 10 m deep barrow pits near Santa Clara Coatitlan on northwest Lake Texcoco. In 1977, Deb returned to the site for her

Figure 6. Deb with Oralia Cabrera (left) and postdoc Rick Smith (right) on her final visit to "the Lab" in Teotihuacan, 2018. Photograph by John Watanabe.

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dissertation on the role of floodwater irrigation (Sanders and Santley 1977) and environmental risk (Sanders and Webster 1978) in early agricultural intensification in the Basin of Mexico (Nichols 1980b, 1982, 1987). This project had all the hallmarks of Deb's archaeology. First, she made significant findings, in this case the still earliest known floodwater irrigation canals in the Basin of Mexico dating to the Late Middle Formative. Second, in attributing such early irrigation to household efforts to minimize risks from erratic rainfall and early frosts in the cooler, semi-arid northern Basin, her anthropological eye caught the human capacities, assessments, and objectives that always inflect the workings of systemic prime movers.

Third, and perhaps most telling, the project demonstrated Deb's indomitable will. Since the 1974 survey, the two barrow pits where she dug had become garbage dumps, and the burning domestic and industrial waste produced toxic smoke and a noxious stink. For nine weeks, Deb and her local crew of twelve (Nichols and Sanders 1978:7) labored to clear meters of alluvial fill to determine the disposition and dates of the canal cross sections exposed on the soon-to-disappear garbage pit walls. Early on, crew members also warned that she had caught the attention of local opportunists, so she had to devise ways to bring the weekly payroll to her crew without getting mugged. Years later, Sanders self-reflected to Larry Gorenflo (personal communication 2022),

> You know, I never really believed that women were cut out for fieldwork in archaeology, but then Debbie Nichols ended up excavating for several weeks on the edge of a trash dump … and every time I visited the excavation, with the bad smell and smoke from trash burning and the overwhelmingly unpleasant setting, I told myself, "Thank goodness she's working on this site, because I could never do it." It changed the way I viewed women in archaeology.

Larry Gorenflo and Bill Fash (personal communications 2022) both tellingly described Deb, for all her collegiality and consideration of others, as "one tough cookie." Even in the midst of chemotherapy she matter-of-factly returned Gorenflo's phone call about complications in Mexico conserving Jeff Parson's research collections after his death. She could also shrug off her story of getting punched in the face by a random angry guy one evening while walking home alone from a grad-student party in State College. Similarly, she once wondered if Santa Clara had given her her cancers, but she shrugged that off too as alternative history she could not change.

A final hallmark of Deb's research lay in her concern for comparison. When near-infrared aerial photographs suggested irrigation canals on the deep alluvial Tlajinga plain south of Teotihuacan's center, Deb's excavations in 1980 dated the earliest canals to Classic or perhaps terminal Formative Teotihuacan (Nichols 1988). Excavations with Mike Spence in 1987 and 1988 did find terminal Formative floodwater irrigation canals under the west Teotihuacan Oaxaca Barrio (Nichols et al. 1991). Together these projects confirmed the early importance of floodwater irrigation not just centrally-directed permanent irrigation in the Teotihuacan Valley (Nichols and Frederick 1993:125–132), and residential construction for Zapotec immigrants over preexisting irrigated fields evidenced growing city power to reshape the landscape.

Classic Deb

Deb's first project as a principle investigator came in her collaboration with Thomas H. Charlton at the Aztec site of Otumba east of Teotihuacan where he had worked since the 1960s. Charlton's visit to Deb's excavations at Santa Clara in 1977 prompted him to excavate similar evidence for irrigation canals in a road cut near Otumba (Nichols and Parsons 2011:696). In 1988–1990 at his invitation (Nichols 2013:77), Deb went to Otumba as a fellow principle investigator to work on Aztec craft production (Nichols and Charlton 1996:232). The project revealed the greatest concentration and widest array of craft workshops yet found in any Late Aztec town. They attributed this to Otumba's greater distance from Tenochtitlan, its access to trade routes beyond the Basin, and Postclassic population growth in the northern Basin that all stimulated local craftworking (Charlton et al. 1991, 2000a, 2000b). Additionally, Otumba had access to obsidian and resident long-distance *pochteca* traders, so local craft producers of obsidian goods, lapidary work, and textiles benefited from more readily available resources and wider markets (Nichols 2013).

Deb wrote specifically on the organization of workshop production at Otumba (Nichols 1994). Concentrations of debitage from lapidary, maguey, and ceramic production, some with domestic refuse, indicated to Deb household-based workshops, with overlapping distributions suggesting part-time producers whose crafting shifted opportunistically (Figure 7). As with floodwater irrigation, Deb saw craft production at Otumba as household decision-making based on need, available resources, labor, and market access that varied by craft. Her specific study of maguey production (Nichols et al. 2000) used the ecology of maguey and the economics of scaling up the labor-intensive processing of maguey fibers into thread and cloth to explain the competitive advantage of perhaps multi-household workshops in producing domestic goods more efficiently than households could alone, if not full-time, then during the agricultural offseason. Deb would later theorize with Liz Brumfiel "intermittent crafting and multicrafting" as central to household archaeology (Brumfiel and Nichols 2009).

Denied full access to project field records, Deb published no other analyses on Otumba beyond overviews of workshop production (Charlton et al. 1993) and ceramics (Charlton et al. 2007), and a paper revising Aztec chronologies from Otumba obsidian hydration and radiocarbon dates (Nichols and Charlton 1996). She resorted instead to editing a comparative volume on the archaeology of city-states (Nichols and Charlton 1997) and extended her previous work on irrigation with comparative studies from elsewhere in the northern Basin (Nichols and Frederick 1993) and Oaxaca (Nichols et al. 2006), integrating agency and political economy into her thinking on emergent elite needs for

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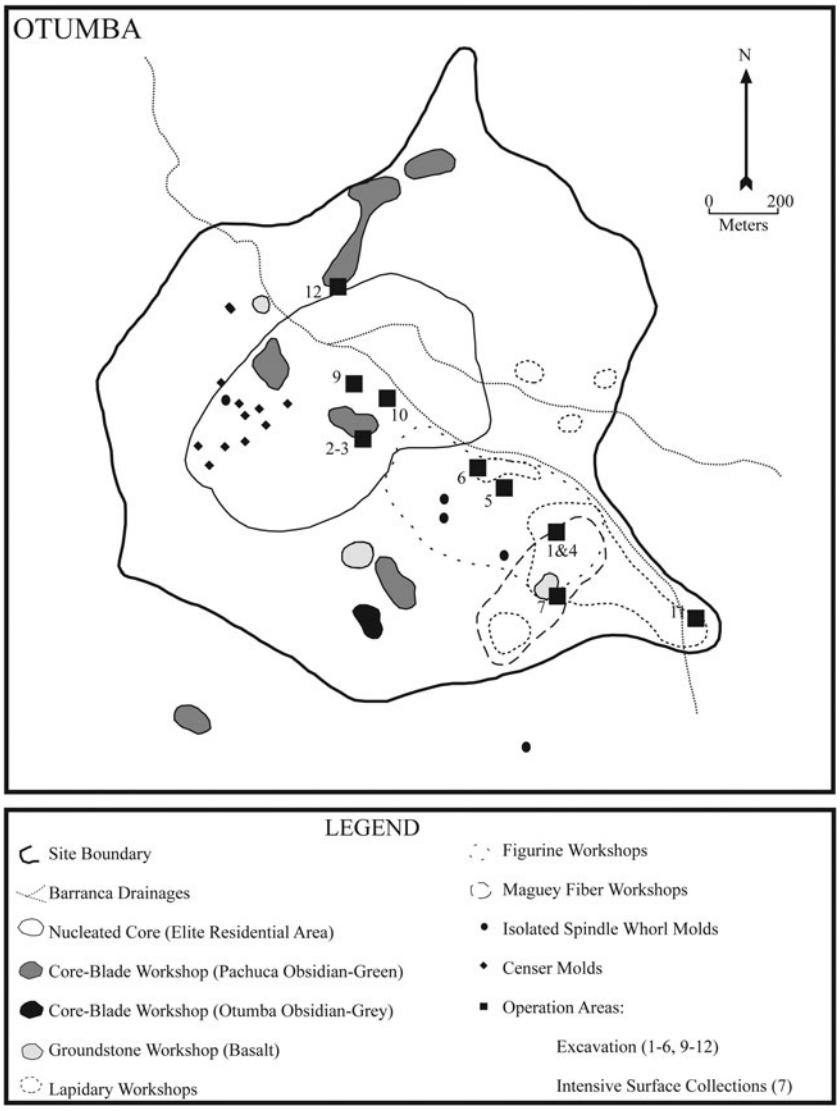

Figure 7. Craft production at Otumba. Map by Deborah Nichols from Nichols 2013:57.

reliable surpluses to underwrite their feasting and status building (Nichols et al. 2006).

Most productively, Deb expanded comparative application of neutron activation analysis (NAA) begun in tracing the sources and distribution of obsidian and ceramic production at Otumba (Charlton et al. 2007; Neff et al. 2000). Here again, Deb's use of NAA represented a logical extension of her work on irrigation and craft production in tracing patterns of exchange across the Basin for their effect on what Aztec households produced. Impressed with Hector Neff's NAA contributions to Mary Hodge's and Leah Minc's pathbreaking studies of ceramic sourcing in the southeastern Basin, Deb coordinated further sampling of clays from across the Basin to refine five geographically distinct "composition groups," then with her coauthors sampled ceramics from Chalco, Xaltocan, and Cerro Portezuelo to trace exchanges across these composition groups from the Epiclassic to colonial times (Nichols et al. 2002). No simple, linear development of an integrated market system emerged but instead a complex interplay of first "solar markets" focused on subregional centers as Epiclassic Teotihuacan declined, then growing cross-regional exchange throughout the Postclassic that shifted with political rivalries between regional centers.

Sampling the ceramics from George Brainerd's excavations at Cerro Portezuelo in the 1950s led to a full-scale reanalysis of Brainerd's materials for what they might reveal about Teotihuacan's relations with its hinterlands (Nichols et al. 2013). The study tempered conventional assumptions of Teotihuacan's absolute economic if not political dominance while also demonstrating the value of restudying older collections from sites lost to Mexico City's growth. Deb's work with Christina Elson on Chiconautla (Nichols et al. 2009) similarly used NAA and Elson's reanalysis of George Vaillant's 1935 excavations there to show how Postclassic pottery markets developed despite volatile political realignments across the Basin.

Deb synthesized these studies of production and exchange in her chapter for *Rethinking the Aztec Economy* (Nichols 2017a), a volume appropriately honoring Frances

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Berdan's retirement from California State University San Bernadino in 2014 (Berdan et al. 2017:13). Deb's analysis of the growing but still partial integration of different markets for different agricultural and craft products across the Postclassic Basin of Mexico nicely exemplified the volume's approach to artifacts as objectified interactions from households interacting in communities and across regions through marketplaces regulated by competing authorities that in turn conditioned household decisions about production and consumption (Hirth et al. 2017).

Late Classic Florescence Deb

In 2009, Deb asked Christopher A. Pool to coedit *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology* (Nichols and Pool 2012b). Their introduction reviewed the burgeoning of theoretical approaches since the 1960s, then argued for careful attention to theoretical scope (what any given theory best explained—and did not) and scale (how best to apply theories to their appropriate level of analysis) to keep this "theoretical pluralism" from "devolving into opportunistic cherry-picking to support a pet idea about the past" (Nichols and Pool 2012a:16). Deb would hone this metatheoretical awareness of admissible eclecticism throughout her ensuing research and writing cut short by her death.

Deb's last field project returned her to the Formative Teotihuacan Valley. It began appropriately with Dartmouth honors student Bridget Alex, whose thesis Deb suggested might source ceramics from Altica, an Upper Piedmont Formative site southeast of Teotihuacan. Alex unexpectedly found that some of her sample possibly came from the Gulf Coast (Alex et al. 2012). In 2013, Deb and Olmec specialist Wesley D. Stoner, then a postdoc at the University of Missouri Research Reactor, relocated Altica, misrecorded on 1960s survey maps (Stoner and Nichols 2019b:247), then excavated the site in 2014 (Nichols and Stoner 2019; Stoner and Nichols 2019b); Deb was pleased son Aaron joined the crew. At ca. 1250–800 cal B.C., Altica became the earliest known settled village in the Teotihuacan Valley (Nichols and Stoner 2019:372, 374; Stoner and Nichols 2019b:248, 256). Excavations yielded exotic prestige ceramics, probably from southwestern Puebla (Stoner and Nichols 2019a:326–330). They also confirmed social differentiation even in this small, early settlement, surprisingly evidenced by a large jadeite bead likely from Guatemala's Motagua Valley found in one of four burials at the site (Nichols and Stoner 2019:370–376). The presence of elites, prestige imports, and whatever households were crafting with the exceptionally high proportion of obsidian found in surface collections suggested the early roots of mutual constraint that collective action theory would predict for the rise of corporatist forms of governance then being argued for Teotihuacan (Nichols and Stoner 2019:377–378).

Findings from Altica thus supported Deb's conference paper from Ometusco in 2007 (Nichols 2015) that analyzed Formative agricultural intensification in the Basin of Mexico as a nexus of household-controlled production and elite quests for preeminence, each mediated by regional versus interregional exchange, with the massive reorganization and reorientation of terminal Formative Teotihuacan an effort by early city elites to shape "a new *sense of order* with Teotihuacan at its center" (Nichols 2015:415, original emphasis) still at odds with other corporate identities in the city and beyond. In 2012, Deb wrote a near forty-page review paper of research at Teotihuacan (with a bibliography as long) (Nichols 2016b) that informed her paper for a Dumbarton Oaks conference in 2017 assessing models of Teotihuacan urbanism and relations with its hinterlands. She masterfully concluded by posing unresolved questions of dating, provisioning, economy, administration, and ideology and how each hinterland might address them (Nichols 2020).

Deb's work on the Postclassic culminated with two award-winning projects. The first involved Oxford's invitation in 2013 to edit *The Oxford Handbook of the Aztecs* that she asked Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría to coedit (Nichols and Rodríguez-Alegría 2017). *Choice Reviews* rated the *Handbook* "essential" (Mendoza 2017) and selected it as one of its Outstanding Academic Titles of 2017. The second project began as the 2015 SAA session Deb organized with Mike Smith to honor Frannie Berdan. The Amerind Foundation selected the session for a follow-up intensive research seminar at their center in Arizona (Berdan et al. 2017:13) and published the results in *Rethinking the Aztec Economy* (Nichols et al. 2017). In reviewing these two books, along with Ken Hirth's *The Aztec Economic World* (2016), Gary Feinman (2017) praised their treatment of the Aztec economy as household based yet fully commercial except for low commodification of land, labor, and capital. This finessing of long-stale, overpolarized formalist-substantivist debates heralded for him a "new paradigmatic era" in the study not only of the Aztec economy, but also of ancient economies more generally (Feinman 2017:1665).

Perhaps fittingly, in literally her final single-authored paper, published posthumously in 2023 but originating in her Gordon R. Willey Lecture at Harvard in 2018, Deb chronicled "The Evolution of a Revolution," doubly referencing developments in Sanders' "revolutionary" Basin of Mexico survey and the need to qualify V. Gordon Childe's "urban revolution" as presumptively Old World (Nichols 2023:27–28). She placed Sanders' full-coverage surveys and René Millon's Teotihuacan Mapping Project—itself revolutionary in proving Teotihuacan a New World city (Nichols 2017b)—in their wider intellectual and social histories, arguing that together both projects went beyond "the evolution of a civilization" in Mesoamerica to reframe "big questions" for urbanism and its long term ecological consequences everywhere. Unintentionally, if inescapably, Deb documented her own 50 year contribution to this "evolution" in understanding what made settlement, cities—and yes, "civilizations"—possible. More than evolutionary, however, her account of Sanders' and Millon's tranformative inducements to new methods, technologies, theories, restudies, collaborations in fact better suited Thomas Kuhn's (1970, 1990) model for a paradigm-shifting "scientific revolution" because for Kuhn such revolutions occurred not by self-aggrandizing proclamation, but through

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unselfconscious grappling with "anomalies" in "normal science" that eventually led to "exemplary achievements" built as much as possible on that normal science but endowing a community of innovators with a new, more compelling, productive "lexicon" to explain their object of inquiry. Deb's matter-of-fact exposition could have no better substantiated Feinman's sense of such a paradigm shift, but with the archaeology she had known and helped grow itself the scientific revolution.

Terminal Classic Deb

Despite her archaeologist's calling, Deb never dwelt on her own past. She seldom reminisced or self-reflected about her life but instead always looked to the future and what she needed to do to make it happen. Whatever in life brought her to who she was, people remembered her as "kind," but her consideration was never softhearted or solicitous. She gladly accommodated others, especially those otherwise overlooked, but she never did it to appease, and woe to the overly presumptuous who mistook inclusion for deference. They could find her insistent, if not intimidating, but she could also disarm them with that not-taking-myself-too-seriously roll of her eyes and her quick, crooked smile (Figure 8). Deb genuinely cared about others and wanted them treated as she would want to be.

A devout realist and pragmatist, Deb most appreciated people who did what they did well and wanted to improve. She never made anyone who came to her feel they were not good enough, but she pulled no punches about the high expectations facing them if they wanted to succeed. This came in part from having to prove herself as a woman (and field archaeologist to boot) in a still male-dominated academy. Even in 1985 when Deb arrived at Dartmouth, only five women held tenure in the social sciences. Entire pages of the faculty directory had no women on them at all (Figure 9). Deb was the first woman tenured in anthropology in 1990; there would not be a second for 22 years. In class, she found frat boys in the back with baseball caps askew mocking women students who spoke too often. She despaired at first of ever fulfilling, much less changing, their visions of the Ciceronian "Dartmouth Professor."

Rather than succumb to bitter resentment or self-righteous victimhood, or even chip-on-her-shoulder vindication, Deb worked hard so students and colleagues alike recognized her know-how. Quick to figure out the system, she tweaked it (in both senses) even as she succeeded in it. She also understood the redemptive power of institutions: more than bastions of tradition and privilege, places like Dartmouth had the people and resources to nurture uncommon interests, ideals, efforts, and in the end, accomplishment, but this could only happen if everyone gave their best for everyone together, not just for some individually. Many times she declined to call out colleagues who needed calling out because she never wanted it to be about her or them but about getting things done. It bothered her when those in positions to help would not, or worse, could never be bothered. As with the meeting access grants she

Figure 8. Deb on her last trip abroad in New Zealand, 2020. Photographer unknown.

Figure 9. Deb, Dartmouth Faculty Directory, 1986. Dartmouth College. Photographer unknown.

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championed as SAA President, she wanted to make institutions more open and inclusive, but she also respected the need for precedence, procedures, standards as imperfect if always malleable means to greater fairness and achievement.

Deb walked the talk. At Dartmouth, she chaired the Department of Anthropology multiple times; convened DAWG, the interdisciplinary Dartmouth Archaeology Working Group (2016–2020); and sat on endless committees. Professionally, she served repeatedly on NSF and NEH review panels, as chair-elect and chair AAA Archaeology Division (1997–2001), convener AAA Section Assembly (2000–2001), elected member Society for Economic Anthropology Executive Board (2002–2005), elected member AAA Executive Board (2005–2008), Editorial Board member *Ancient Mesoamerica* (2008–2022) among others, chair AAA Committee on the Future of Electronic and Print Publishing (2009–2015), chair SAA Publications Committee (2011–2015), Editorial Board member *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2012–2016), SAA Treasurer-elect and Treasurer (2015–2018), SAA Executive Committee and Board of Directors member (2016–2018), chair SAA Nominations Committee (2018–2019), chair SAA King Family Grant for Precolumbian Archaeology Task Force and Review Committee (2018–2020), AAA Archaeology Division Director of Publications (2019–2022), SAA President-elect and President (2020–2022). When Deb decided to quit the ICU for hospice care, the first thing she did was resign her presidency. The SAA Board met the next week on the afternoon she died and upon hearing the news rejected her resignation so she remained president to the end. For all that others saw as dedication to the SAA, in truth she was most herself in her final months when doing SAA business on Zoom or by phone because those were things she could still get done in an ever narrowing world where she already knew everything else would go forever left undone. The SAA indeed proved a final redemptive gift.

In all, Deb held six major NSF grants, one from the National Geographic Society. She received two AAA President's Awards (2008, 2015) and three SAA Presidential Recognition Awards (2014, 2019, 2023), the last posthumously. Despite her not being a Mayanist, Bill Fash invited her to give the Gordon R. Willey Lecture at Harvard in 2018. She also received the Outstanding Alumni Award from the Department of Anthropology at Penn State in 2019. At Dartmouth, she became the William J. Bryant 1925 Professor of Anthropology in 2002 and received awards for innovative teaching, mentoring, and advising. Recognition by her peers meant the world to Deb because, ever the realist, she never expected it.

Deb was the last Nichols, having survived her father, mother, and sister (her father was an only child, her sister had none). She leaves behind "the Cousins" and their families on her mother's side; brother-in-law Daniel Wilson; husband John Watanabe (Figure 10); and her son, Aaron

Figure 10. Deb married John Watanabe on the deck of their new house, August 4, 1990; she died a week before their thirty-second anniversary. Photograph by Noel Barbulesco.

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E. Watanabe, of whom she was prouder than anything else she ever did; she most grieved not getting to know where else life would take him. Deb's papers are being archived at the Tozzer Library, Harvard University.

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