The decade between 1965 and 1975 was nothing if not volatile. The counterculture had begun and flourished. Seismic events like protests over the Vietnam War, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., Kent State, and Woodstock had a big impact on many University of Hartford student leaders. Which led me to wonder...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

My three greatest influences are Casey Stengel, Woody Allen, and Jesus Christ…but not in that order.

Jimmy DIAMOND?

by Paul D. Tieger ’73, ’83

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Whatever Happened To...

You’d be hard-pressed to find anyone who went to UofH in the late 1960s and early ’70s who doesn’t remember Jimmy Diamond. Many of us have our own favorite “Big Jimbo” stories. What has the once outrageous, flamboyant Student Association president and counterculture “poster boy” been doing since graduating in 1972? Quietly working as a social worker, mostly with mentally retarded citizens. And he’s a born-again soldier in the Salvation Army.

PDT: To set the stage, you were at UofH from 1967 to 1972…another “five-year plan” guy. What was your major?

JD: Sociology…social work.

PDT: So fill me in. What have you been up to for the past 30 years?

JD: I’ve been a social worker. For the past 13 years I’ve been working for the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation. And I’ve got a caseload of about 70 people with mental disabilities. In ’72 I went back to get a master’s degree at Saint Joseph College [West Hartford, Conn.] in psychology, child development.

PDT: Do you like what you do?

JD: I absolutely love my job! It’s hard work, but it’s really rewarding, and it’s what I’ve always wanted to [do]. I wake up every morning with a smile on my face and can’t wait to go to work.

PDT: Are you really a senior soldier in the Salvation Army? What’s that all about?

JD: I’ve always been involved in the Salvation Army. I do street ministry work in New Britain. I’m involved in running a soup kitchen on Saturdays—the Out of the Cold program, where we feed a hundred people every Saturday. I go down to the New Britain General Hospital and fill up my pickup truck with food they prepare. Then I bring it down to the soup kitchen, and sisterhoods from churches serve the food.

PDT: That sounds like it’s very fulfilling.

JD: I’ve always had it in my heart to want to help people….It’s a calling, and it has to do today with my relationship with the Lord and my commitment to one of the greatest diseases of our society, and that’s poverty.

PDT: Switching back to UofH, you were the first hippie,…the first one with long hair. You had that Arlo Guthrie thing going on.

JD: I tried the fraternity route and drinking beer, but I could never get a date. So I decided to get rid of my glasses (which were held together with tape) and my slide rule, picked up a guitar,…started listening to Bob Dylan, grew my hair long, and all of a sudden, I started getting a lot of dates. It worked….I became very popular. (But I was a Republican the whole time).

PDT: The one word that most people who knew you back then would use to describe you is outrageous…. Were you trying to be outrageous, to shock people?

JD: I would say I was a legend in my own mind….I guess it was attention seeking. But I’ve always had a sense of humor and enjoy making people laugh. Over the years I’ve learned you have to tone things down and be careful what you do and say and not to exploit other people’s misfortune.

PDT: I knew you pretty well and always thought you were very political, but you say that was a misconception?

JD: I was not political and not a radical….In fact, I was born a Republican. Although my mentors were Ben Holden [’71] and Jack Hardy [’70], I was politically naive and had no real interest in what was going on, and I’m still not political today. I was more involved in the cultural revolution.

PDT: Who were some of your big influences at UofH?

JD: To show you how important UofH was to me, my Introduction to Social Work teacher was a lady by the name of Roz Putnam. In 1979 I became the executive director of the social service agency that Roz Putnam’s mother founded in 1909, called The Women’s League, in the North End of Hartford. I did that for eight years, and that was an honor,…and it was a calling, too. Other influences were my advisor, Norman Ofslager, who was very conservative but always stood by me; Paul Stacy, who turned me on to cinema and literature; and Lee Yosha.

PDT: At UofH you were a big fish in a relatively small pond. What was it like when you left the University?

JD: I guess they called it BMOC [big man on campus], a ganzah macher [Yiddish for “big shot”]. It was exciting, and I got a lot of reinforcement. But when I graduated, I had to come to [terms with] reality, and continued on page 25
didn’t get all that much reinforcement. But I stuck with being a social worker in the North End of Hartford, which I also did as a volunteer at UofH, working with Ned Coll and Vista. And I guess it worked out because I’m doing what I always wanted to do. Friends tell me I peaked early in life.

PDT: How did your experience at UofH influence where you ended up?
JD: It had a lot to do with it. When I came to UofH there was a lot of polarization. You had the freaks, the jocks, the frats, the engineering students…There was a lot of animosity, but there really were not big differences between these people. I learned about diversity and the need for everybody to get together. I first got involved on the Orientation Committee because I wanted to do away with the ridiculous freshman hazing custom of having to wear beanies. My mission to create bridges between people really started there and is still going on now.

PDT: What’s it like being 50?
JD: Oh it’s great! Especially if you look as good as I do at my age. I don’t feel any different than I did when I was 22 or 23.

PDT: Who would you like to track down and catch up with?
JD: Ray Fudge [’72], Carl Clay [’76], [Dean] Jack Addley, Paul Stacy [professor emeritus of English], Lee Yosha, Gary LaRocque [’75].

Little-known facts about Jimmy Diamond:

Was a very decent intramural basketball and softball player

Studied classical guitar at The Hartt School from 1992 to 1997

Is a single parent who raised a son who became a star high school basketball and baseball player

Is the grandfather of a one-and-a-half-year-old boy

Ran the Boston Marathon five times and the New York marathon twice