



Alumni



NIELA ELIASON
BA, ENGLISH '80

Niela Eliason began her professional career as a surgical nurse. But, her literary muses kept beckoning and proved too strong to resist. So Niela pursued an English degree which brought her to USF St. Petersburg. Her deep commitment to writing eventually led to a position as columnist for both the St. Petersburg Times and the Evening Independent. For a number of years, Niela documented the social and cultural history of St. Petersburg in a series of essays called "City in Transition." In these pieces, she examined "a changing community—the people, the buildings, the activities, the attitudes and reactions, the progress and the deterioration," according to her initial column. Niela interviewed both civic leaders and ordinary citizens to glean diverse perspectives. In 1993, she let the USFSP Nelson Poynter Memorial Library copy the contents of two of her collections, including photographs and newspaper columns, resources useful to student researchers studying St. Petersburg.

In 1989, the St. Petersburg Times premiered Niela's new column dubbed "Fiftysomething." Her lively, homespun musings hit the mark for a multi-generational audience and Niela received fan mail from across the country and even from Canada. *Kitchen Tables and Other Midlife Musings*, a collection of her columns, was published in 1995.

During the course of her literary transformation, Niela honed her craft by writing for her collegiate student publications: a short story for St. Petersburg Junior College's literary magazine, the *Obelisk*; film reviews for the USFSP *Crow's Nest*; and news stories for the *Oracle* at USF Tampa. She also wrote a column for the Bradenton Herald's Sunday magazine.

Niela's personal experiences as a student writer reinforced her lifelong commitment to inspiring student writers. As a founding member of the USFSP Society for the Advancement of the Poynter Library (SAPL), she was instrumental in developing an annual Bayboro Fiction Contest for USF

students, first held in the spring 1986. (Student A. Manette Ansay placed third in the 1988 contest and went on to write several critically acclaimed, awarding winning novels including *Vinegar Hill*, *Midnight Champagne*, and *Good Things I Wish You*.) Niela helped coordinate SAPL's fiction contest for two decades and she remains an ardent supporter of SAPL endeavors.



Niela's dedication of her time and talent to benefit students was not limited to SAPL, of course. In 1998, Niela and her husband Richard, a retired urologist, created an endowed fund for USFSP. The fund was split between student scholarships and faculty development (research, sabbaticals, professional conferences, etc.). And today, the Eliason imprint continues to remain a valued campus treasure.

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Heidi Hamlin, *Alumni Relations Officer* (727) 873-4259 - HHamlin2@usfsp.edu

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