2008 Alumni Award for Distinguished Career Achievement
Eric Lax ’62, San Miguel

Growing up in sunny San Diego, Eric Lax ’62 loved the beach. At San Miguel High School, he took great pleasure in competitive swimming. A member of the San Miguel yearbook staff, he was the recipient of two prestigious senior honors, the Harvard Cup as well as the title of Senior Prefect. Eric left the sun and surf to attend Hobart College in upstate New York, where he participated in both the campus newspaper and radio station.

Upon graduating from Hobart in 1966, he joined the Peace Corps, working as a volunteer on the Pacific island of Truk. He remained there until 1968 when he returned to the United States to work as a Peace Corps fellow in Washington, DC. In 1969, as part of his fellowship, he traveled to Turkey to write an article about a Peace Corps program based there. Joining him on that trip was Robert Rice, who had worked at The New Yorker for 25 years. He liked Eric’s writing and suggested that he take up writing as a career. And the rest is history.

Over the years, Eric’s writing has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Vanity Fair, Life, The Atlantic Monthly, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Monthly and The Washington Post, as well as Esquire, where he has served as a contributing editor. He is on the Board of Visitors at the California Institute of the Arts and currently serves as Treasurer of the Board of International PEN, an organization that promotes prose and poetry. Eric’s writing has been translated into 19 languages.

In 1971, Eric interviewed writer/director Woody Allen for an article to appear in The New York Times Magazine. The article never made it to print; however, it did spark a friendship between Eric and Allen that has lasted over three decades. Eric’s first book, On Being Funny: Woody Allen and Comedy, was published in 1975. Eric has also published a biography of Woody Allen (1991), as well as Conversations with Woody Allen: His Films, the Movies, and Moviemaking, which was published last year.

In 1997 Eric co-authored a biography of Humphrey Bogart with A.M. Sperber. Eric explains: “Bogart made a good subject because his personal story was a great way
to look at the studio system of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the politics of the time.”

Three years ago, Eric published *The Mold in Dr. Florey's Coat: The Story of the Penicillin Miracle*, a biography of Howard Florey, the Australian pharmacologist. “My interest in Howard Florey,” recalls Eric, “was piqued by an obituary in *The New York Times* in 1999 of Ann Miller (not the famous dancer of the same name), the first person in the U.S. saved by penicillin. The obit talked about Alexander Fleming, who is virtually always credited with making penicillin the first antibiotic, but then it said that the real work in making it viable was by an unnamed team at Oxford. I was curious to know more and soon discovered there was a wonderful story of medical history and how credit for discoveries is (and often isn't) given.”

Eric embodies the traits that the founders of San Miguel and Bishop’s sought to instill in their students: curiosity, wonder, imagination, and a good sense of humor. For his volunteer work at both home and abroad, contributions to writing, and promotion of literature throughout the world, we are pleased to bestow Eric Lax with the Alumni Award for Distinguished Career Achievement.