

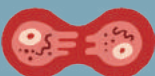
U CONN

MAGAZINE

FALL 2020

Who Is the Class of 2024?

Ten first-years share
admissions essays that
reveal dreams undaunted



In This Issue:



HARROWING TALES OF ADVENTURE
FROM A LONGTIME *NATIONAL*
GEOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTOR



WHAT'S KEEPING US OUT OF
SELF-DRIVING CARS? HINT: IT HAS
NOTHING TO DO WITH TECHNOLOGY

SNAP!

They're Back!

With unflagging enthusiasm and fearless spirit, students returned to UConn campuses after five months of pandemic-dictated exile. About 5,800 students moved into residence halls at Storrs and Stamford, where they began to blithely juggle Covid-19 testing and quarantining along with their online and in-person classes. All told, this fall has 33,500 students enrolled as Huskies, including for the first time 500 who are taking UConn classes at two universities in China.

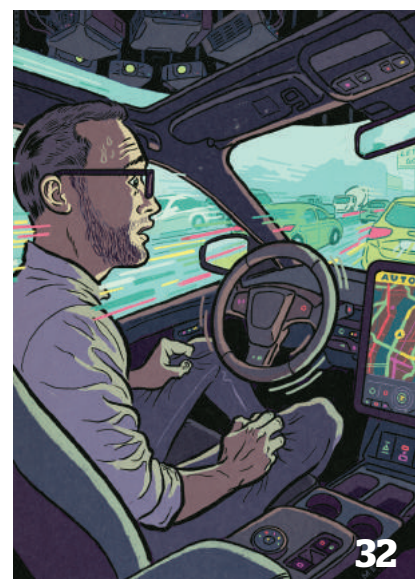


SNAP!

Art Alfresco

UConn Avery Point hosted Open Air by Night exhibits this summer and fall, which drew film and video submissions from artists not just in Connecticut, but around the world — likely because so few art galleries and museums are presenting new exhibitions during the pandemic. “It’s one of those Covid silver linings exceeding our own ambitions and expectations,” says Charlotte Gray, curator of the Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at Avery Point. Shown are videos by Benthaus Studios projected onto the lighthouse.





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16 WHO IS THE CLASS OF 2024?
UConn's Class of 2024 is already iconic for reasons its members would prefer to forget. But their admissions essays — submitted shortly before “Covid” and “pandemic” became part of our daily lexicon — are a reminder of dreams undaunted. Here are excerpts from 10 of our favorites.

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Alums talk doing good with good coffee; the battle against human trafficking; the power of hands-on play; amplifying Black and Brown voices; and fending off heckling penguins. Plus Class Notes, Tom's Trivia, and more.



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FROM THE EDITOR



Scott Wallace interviewing explorer and indigenous-rights activist Sydney Possuelo while on assignment for National Geographic in the depths of the Brazilian rainforest, 2002.

INSPIRATION

I remember so clearly how much it meant to me to hear the stories my journalism professors told of their lives on the job, how it motivated me to get out there and find stories of my own. One such professor worked on the sports desk at the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. I have him to thank for my student job on the copy desk there, which felt heady at the time, despite being mostly a matter of taking bowling scores over the phone from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. (people in Milwaukee get really excited about bowling scores).

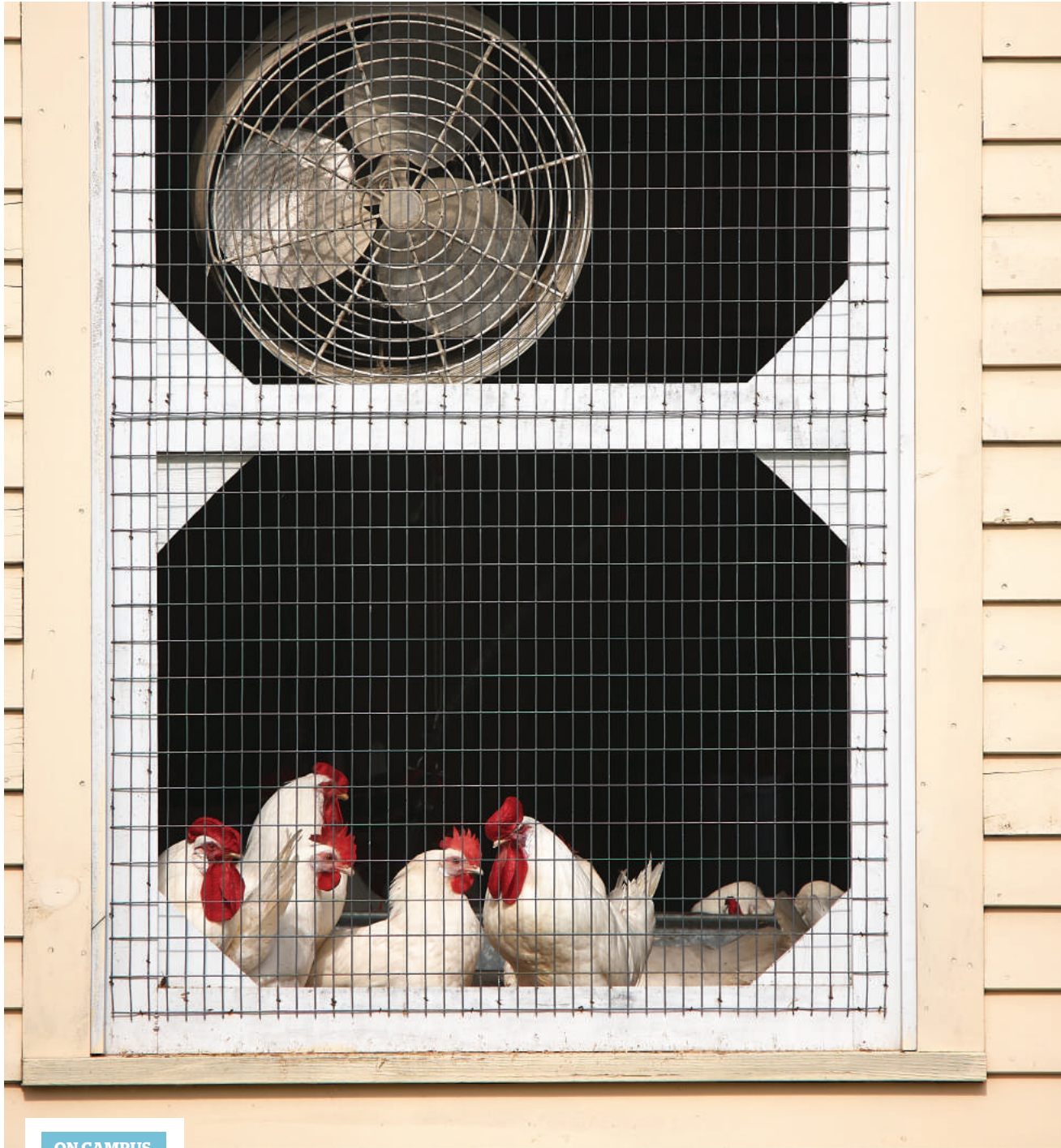
The students who have worked with us at this magazine describe similar motivation from UConn professors, among them Scott Wallace — whose writing, photography, and videography on the environment, vanishing cultures, and places of conflict across the globe have appeared everywhere from CBS News, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* to *Harper's*, *Vanity Fair*, and *National Geographic*.

Camila Vallejo '19 (CLAS), one of those students who used to work for us and who graduated to NPR, found Wallace an especially inspirational and effective journalism professor. “He focused less on giving you assignments just to fulfill a syllabus and more on improving your writing with every draft,” she says. “As a seasoned features writer and war correspondent, he highlighted the good as well as the raw truth behind being a reporter — the adrenaline, the trauma, and more.”

It's clear what Wallace brings to his students. In turn, he says, they remind him how much the profession of journalism matters.

“I see the enthusiasm with which they do their assignments and their work. The questions they raise and the topics they decide to tackle are really surprising, really innovative. These students are not empty vessels that you're trying to fill; they come with lots of ideas and enthusiasm.” Wallace also is a 2020–21 fellow at the UConn Humanities Institute and a faculty affiliate of El Instituto: UConn's Institute of Latina/o, Caribbean, and Latin American Studies. Find out more starting on page 22.

Lisa Stiepock



ON CAMPUS

GOLDEN EGGS

Kumar Venkitanarayanan wants to feed the world — with chickens raised without antibiotics. This poses challenges, explains the animal science professor and associate dean of CAHNR, in keeping birds healthy, production high, and waste generation low — for environmental reasons. “Poultry meat is projected to be a major source of protein for the increasing human population, which is projected to be 10 billion by 2050,” says Venkitanarayanan. “The broiler industry has been able to reach high levels of production through selective breeding and by using antibiotics as growth promoters. We are not sure how phasing out antibiotic growth promoters will affect the sustainability of the industry, especially to meet future demand for the increasing population.” His chance for success increased quite a bit this August when the USDA awarded his project \$10 million.



LETTERS

The overwhelming number of letters we received last issue were on the topic of slavery reparations and public policy professor Thomas Craemer’s “new math.” The issue is complex, and, accordingly, so were the comments you sent. I share a few representative letters here, edited for clarity and length, and you can find the rest on our website. We welcome all feedback; the discourse is vital.

Please email me at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu or post on our website at magazine.uconn.edu.

The New Reparations Math

➔ Has anyone counted the cost of LBJ’s programs, made specifically to rebalance Black life? Caucasians and Asians denied a college entrance for the place of another minority? About 360,000 Northern soldiers died for the war that emancipated slaves. Reparations were made for the sin of slavery. Why do some say it is not enough?
Ernest Cote, via our website

➔ Craemer points out that the purpose of a reparations calculation is to emphasize the magnitude of the injustice, the unrecompensed labor of generations of slaves who built the U.S. economy, rather than demand cash be repaid now. Despite many years at elite educational institutions, I was not taught basic facts about American systemic racism, though I was vividly educated when young about the Nazi era by teachers who were survivors of the camps. It’s crucial that we learn the truth of our history, because it shapes our present and future — the present and future of all of us.

Deborah Marks, via our website

➔ Who will pay reparations, everyone or just slaveowners? What value will be given for those who fought in the Civil War? Let’s heal ancient wounds and move on as a nation.

Dwight Jones, via our website

➔ As a Jesuit high school educator, I feel that enlightening each student (and American) with these numbers and historical facts that are, unfortunately, left out of history books is vital to any form of healing.

Christopher A. White, via our website

Flashback

➔ My husband is the UConn grad, but I am the faithful reader of your magazine. The summer issue did not fail me: “Flashback” brought tears to my eyes. Howard Goldbaum wrote of the coalition of antiwar and Black Power protests in 1969. I ask your readers to research the 1968 Kerner Commission on racial disorder and social division to see some of the roots of today’s BLM

movement: “This is our conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal.”

Elizabeth Cooke, via our website

Light-Years Away

➔ Thanks for bringing back such fond memories of my days at UConn during these trying times. #BleedBlue

Pat Grondin, via our website



KUDOS

Hall of Fame field hockey coach Nancy Stevens, the winningest coach in NCAA field hockey history, retired as head coach of the Huskies after 30 years. Stevens finishes her career with an all-time record of 700-189-24, and as the only coach in the history of the sport to reach the 700-win plateau. Under her guidance, the Huskies appeared in 24 NCAA tournaments; reached 18 NCAA quarterfinals and 10 NCAA semifinals; won 19 Big East tournament titles and 19 Big East regular season titles; and produced 50 first team All-Americans. Stevens led the Huskies to a No. 1 national ranking five times (2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, and 1999) and won three national championships (2017, 2014, and 2013). Find a Q&A with Stevens at s.uconn.edu/stevens.

CHECKING IN WITH

JUST FOLK

After completing her degree in policy at the School of Social Work, **Lara Herscovitch '95 MSW** traveled around the world for six years as an education specialist for Save the Children, carrying her guitar as a traveling companion around the U.S. and on several continents, singing and writing songs as she had done since childhood. In 1998, a friend invited her to perform with him in New York City.

"Every single light bulb in my heart and soul went off," she says, recalling that. "It wasn't even a choice. I knew I had to do this."

Herscovitch spent nearly two decades leading a dual life. Weekdays, she was a social worker evaluating a nonprofit program, writing a grant, or testifying before a legislative committee. At night or on weekends she would head to a recording studio, an open mic night, or a scheduled performance while creating and releasing six albums on her own LaRama Records label.

To leave more time for music, she reduced her full-time work from five days a week to four, moving from the Greater Bridgeport Area Foundation to Connecticut Fund for the Environment and Save the Sound, and then spending nine years with Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance.

With each new recording of contemporary folk music, she expanded her performances beyond Connecticut, receiving critical praise for both her music and her stage presence. In 2009, she was named Connecticut's State Troubadour — an ambassador of music and song who promotes cultural literacy — and gained national attention that year on American Public Media's "A Prairie Home Companion," appearing on its broadcast from the Palace Theater in Waterbury.

Three years ago, Herscovitch realized her goal of pursuing music full time. She completed "Highway Philosophers," her seventh recording and

first since becoming a full-time musician, just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit and ended the tour she'd planned to promote the album.

Like all other performers, you've been sidelined because of the pandemic.

How is it going? Right now is a very confusing time, but overall it's great. I am a musician at my core, and it took me a long time to get here. It's been really rewarding to have more time to focus on it all. The pandemic has helped me understand the importance of music and art in general. When I was working full-time in the public policy world, I felt like that was important work. If I'm being honest, I felt like it was more important than music. Now I really see and feel how they're both important, just in very different ways.

Your music often addresses themes of social justice and you volunteer time with connected organizations. It seems you continue to be involved in social work, just in a different way.

I don't think that's ever going to change. I am one of the protesters showing up in support of Black Lives Matter. I think it's important for all of us to take this very late opportunity to evolve and to make this country healthier, increase equity and justice. I'm trying to show up and let my music also be of service. Some of it's always going to be personal. Some of it's going to be aspirational and some of it is probably always going to be social justice because I care about the world.

Has it gotten better for independent artists since you started in the biz? It's a work in progress. A lot of folk venues are all volunteer, great community builders. I've learned over time the way that music can bring an individual closer to themselves and also bring individuals together and a whole community of people together. We're not even close

to being mainstream popular in terms of pop music. I guess we can answer that question if, and when, the cultural taste swings back to us. Someone told me that folk music represents something like 1% of the music market in America. It's a beautiful field, and I really appreciate the ethic and values of American folk music.

You describe "Highway Philosophers" as "an album of adventure, authenticity, courage, and freedom." Why?

This is an album of the hero's journey and all the different elements of it. I took my own leap of faith into full-time music before I wrote it all, so that's reflected throughout it. I always hope to inspire people to lean into their best self in the same way that I'm trying to lean into my best self. This is the first album, with no disrespect to any of the ones that came before it, that I just feel so thoroughly proud of. This time if a song felt good enough, I knew it wasn't done, and I had more time to get it right. It took a long time to do, and it was a painstaking process in the studio, which also can be fun. I feel at peace. If I get hit by the proverbial bus, I will feel content that I was able to release this album before I went.

Can you leave us with a fun "on the road" tale? I remember a gig very early in my career in Northampton, Massachusetts — I was excited to break into that scene. When I got to the venue, I discovered it was the bar connected to a bowling alley. The whole place had maybe five people in it, including me and the bartender. Every time someone would come through the door from the bowling alley to the bar and back, blaring rock music would come in too. I'd be in the middle of some touching, finger-picky, lyric-rich ballad, interrupted all throughout by parts of Rick James' "Super Freak" — I had to laugh.

—KENNETH BEST

UConn Talks

On supporting the mental health of student-athletes:

“I think across the country, we have to come up with proactive approaches as well as reactive approaches. There’s just not enough therapists in the world to solve the problem purely reactively.”

UConn President Thomas Katsouleas, *USA Today*, Aug. 26, 2020

On nasal breathing to prevent chronic maladies:

“Our bodies were designed to breathe through our noses ... Breathing through our mouths disrupts our body’s normal function.”

Dr. Belachew Tessema, otolaryngology professor, *Connecticut Magazine*, Aug. 24, 2020

On remaining empathic:

“My patients’ families did not thank me for using the most up-to-date treatments, but rather for standing in as family for their loved ones during their dying moments. Being a physician during these times is truly a privilege.”

Anil Magge, pulmonary critical care, UConn Health, *The New York Times*, May 2, 2020

On new CDC data regarding teen suicide:

“Picture a typical high school classroom of 25 students. About five of those students could be thinking about suicide.”

Sandra Chafouleas, educational psychology professor, *Psychology Today*, Sept. 4, 2020

On shifting locations and definitions of “invasive species”:

“The goal in this crazy warming world is to keep everything alive. But it may not be in the same place.”

Mark Urban, biology professor, *Smithsonian*, Aug. 3, 2020

On the 70-year-old travel-demand model transportation planners still use:

“It’s not so much about the measurement being wrong, it’s that the whole underlying thesis is wrong.”

Norman Garrick, engineering professor, *Vice*, Aug. 24, 2020

On whether America has turned a corner when it comes to systemic racism:

“I think we see a corner. I don’t know if we’ve turned it.”

Doug Glanville, sports management/education professor, *Kiplinger*, July 30, 2020



Trending

#BLACKINTHEIVORY: A VIRAL RECKONING

How communications professor Shardé Davis’ tweets turned into a movement for Black people in academia.

Imagine sitting on your couch on a Saturday night, watching the country react to another murder of an unarmed Black man. Your body is tense, your throat is dry as your eyes well up with tears and you begin to feel that familiar anger, sadness, helplessness. You turn to Twitter to share your feelings, book-ending your tweets with a hashtag you create, and head to bed. When you wake up, you’ve gone viral.

“I was certainly outraged by the strangulation of George Floyd, but I was also outraged by the murders of our Black trans brothers and sisters and Black women like Breonna Taylor, who were also slain by law enforcement,” says assistant professor of communications Shardé Davis recalling that night. “I was reeling and thinking, what can I do?”

Davis knew whatever she did needed to have impact and be personal to show that racism is an ever-present reality for Black people in America. So she wrote about experiences she’d had with racism while in graduate school using #BlackintheIvory, a play on words that encapsulates her race, her research, and her position in predominately white academia. She texted her friend and fellow Blackademic Joy Melody Woods for guidance. Woods liked the hashtag so much, she tweeted it immediately. Davis did the same. Within 24 hours, #BlackintheIvory was trending nationwide on Twitter.

“What an emotional yet powerful day,” tweeted Davis that Sunday. “I think I’ve read every single tweet. Thanks to everyone for sharing what it’s like to be #BlackintheIvory. We’ve opened the floodgates, so more may cont. to pour out as the days pass. Pls know that we will continue to hold space for you.”

One week later, a *New York Times* article said, “Sensing a rare, and perhaps fleeting, opportunity to be heard, many Black Americans are sharing painful stories on social media about racism and mistreatment in the workplace, accounts that some said they were too scared to disclose before. They are using hashtags like BlackInTheIvory or WeSeeYouWAT, referring to bias in academia and ‘White American Theater.’”

Although creating a viral hashtag has landed her a lot of media attention and opened the door for conversations about racism at institutions across the country, Davis has always been involved in equity, inclusion, and connecting work. In UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Davis’ research centers around Black women and how they communicate and connect with one another. She worked with former faculty Daisy Reyes and current faculty David Embrick and Milagros Castillo-

Montoya to create town halls for faculty and staff of color. Those spaces serve as opportunities for communities of color working at UConn to connect, relate, and support one another. The night she decided to share her experience as a Black woman in academia, she was hoping to foster a similar community, but virtually, during a time when many aren’t experiencing in-person connections due to the global pandemic.

“As Blackademics, we’ve been, in some senses, bullied by the institution. Many of us have to place a muzzle over our mouths, put our heads down, and work tirelessly if we want to get tenure or enter the ranks of upper administration. For the most part, reaching those milestones requires that we ‘go along to get along,’” she explains. “We’ve never had a space or opportunity to be seen or heard, especially on such a large, national platform.”

On Twitter, the hashtag is filled with stories of professors being mistaken for students and examples of white peers not believing stories of racism Black professionals experience on campus. “[The hashtag] has created a space for many white folks to say to themselves ‘Oh, that’s not a just UConn-specific issue’ or ‘Oh, that’s not a Shardé-related problem,’” she says. “They are reading, quite literally, the exact same stories by Blackademics from different age groups, institutions, regions, fields, and even career points. It’s not a coincidence that these issues are happening over and over again across the United States. Because that’s how systemic racism works. It eats its way through social institutions and rears its ugly head in similar ways. It’s a creature of habit. There is no way to turn a blind eye to it.”

Davis plans to keep the conversation going in a few ways. She and her colleagues at UConn are continuing conversations that began in town halls and talking with leadership about how the institution can be more inclusive. The Black Graduate Support Project is reopening; it lists names and payment info for Black graduate students in need of financial support, and anyone can identify a person and send them money directly. Davis also plans to relaunch the website to highlight various resources that will equip Blackademics to get more institutional resources at their respective universities. Lastly, keep an eye out for #BlackintheIvory, the book. —BRITTANY KING

Find out about the new course Davis co-teaches, U.S. Anti-Black Racism, at s.uconn.edu/davis and keep up with her on Twitter or at blackintheivory.com.



FLASHPOINT

An Indian American who is one of the world's leading experts on the Civil War and slavery in the U.S., history professor Manisha Sinha has been one of the most sought after voices in the recurring and recent debate over removing Confederate statues. She told us why she believes we should take them down.

As a Civil War historian, it seems that I have been fighting against the myth of the Lost Cause throughout my career. The notion that the Confederates fought for states' rights and honor rather than for slavery and that the Confederacy lost the war merely because of the superior numbers of the Union is ubiquitous, especially in the South. Historians have long contested these entrenched falsehoods by pointing out that the southern states that seceded from the Union in 1860–61 mentioned the perpetuation of slavery specifically in their Ordinances of Secession. The Confederacy fought, as Union General Ulysses S. Grant put it, for one of the worst causes in human history. I am against the indiscriminate taking down of all statues, including those of slaveholding Founding Fathers. But Confederate statues deserve to be taken down.

In 1991, I spent a year in South Carolina researching my first book on the politics of slavery and secession in that state. It bothered me that the Confederate flag flew on state grounds in Columbia and I wrote a letter to the campus newspaper of the University of South Carolina criticizing that. I got a lot of blowback for that letter. In Charleston the statue of the proslavery theorist and Southern nationalist, John C. Calhoun, on an 80-foot pedestal, offended me too. I had read every word that Calhoun had written and knew

that he was an unapologetic defender of slavery and white supremacy, even at the cost of wrecking the American republic. Thanks to the movement for Black lives this year, that monstrosity, which had been regularly defaced by the local black population, was finally removed.

Most Civil War historians used to take a catholic position on the removal of Confederate statues. They asked for contextualization or other statues erected with them. Not me. I always thought that Confederate statues were a travesty, erected as paeans to white supremacy after the fall of Reconstruction at the turn of the 19th century, well after the Civil War. They not only commemorated men who fought for slavery and committed treason against the United States, but they also marked the triumph of Jim Crow and a regime of racial terror in the postwar South. African Americans have protested the erection of these statues from the start.

The NAACP initiated a boycott of South Carolina for flying the Confederate battle flag. In 2015, it finally came down after the massacre at the Charleston AME church. A year later, at the very first Draper workshop series, which I began at UConn, I argued strongly for the taking down of all Confederate statues to the consternation of some of my colleagues. In 2017, the neo-Nazi march at Charlottesville that resulted in the murder of Heather Heyer brought the controversy over Confederate statues into the spotlight once again. And suddenly the tide turned, with Confederate statues being taken down in New Orleans and Baltimore, among other places.

But it has been only recently that protestors and city councils have started dismantling these monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond's Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues and flags were put up in the South as symbols of "massive resistance" to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are the crudest ways of doing public history. Our tax dollars maintain these statues, and we should certainly not honor men who committed treason in the name of human bondage or those who upheld white supremacy. Again, this does not mean we should remove all statues such as those of slaveholding Founding Fathers. These can be easily contextualized; we don't need to whitewash their histories but present them in all their complexity. In fact, it has been opponents of taking down Confederate statues who have argued that this would lead us down a slippery slope where all statues would be taken down. It is important to differentiate between Confederate statues that have no redeeming qualities to them and others of flawed men who did. —MANISHA SINHA

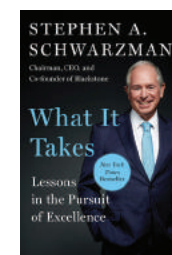


3 BOOKS

YIMING QIAN

Yiming Qian gave a talk at UConn's School of Business in 2016 and says she found the campus beautiful and felt an immediate rapport with colleagues who were "tremendously interested in research and extraordinarily friendly." A few years later she joined the faculty as the first Toscano Family Chair in Finance. Qian says she likes to read about people and stories related to her field because it puts a face to the things she is teaching in the classroom. And, she says, paraphrasing William Styron, "You live several lives while reading."

Just Finished:

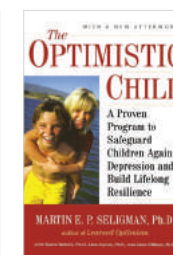


"What It Takes: Lessons in the Pursuit of Excellence" by Stephen A. Schwarzman

A friend recommended this book

to me and I liked it. Schwarzman is co-founder of Blackstone, the largest private equity fund in the world. It is inspiring the way he approaches challenges — always think big and aim high. Whether organizing a student activity, starting a new business, or being a philanthropist, he reasons it is as hard to try something small as it is to try something big, so why not try something big? When starting Blackstone, his partner suggested they raise a fund of \$50 million since neither of them had done any private equity deals before. Schwarzman convinced him they should aim for \$1 billion. They raised \$800 million. It is admirable to think big, but you've got to have the stomach for it. Schwarzman offers the following warning: "If you are going to pursue difficult goals, you're inevitably going to fall short sometimes. It's one of the costs of ambition."

Currently Reading:



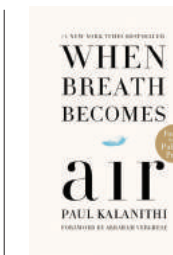
"The Optimistic Child" by Martin E. P. Seligman

An increasing number of kids, and increasingly young kids, have depression. Psychologist

Seligman explains how to teach kids to be optimistic, which helps "immunize" them from depression. When faced with adversity, optimistic people react differently than pessimistic people because they interpret the reasons behind the adversity differently. He argues that empty praises do not work and cause parents to lose credibility. Instead we can help children build self-esteem by helping them do well. He offers advice and strategies to cultivate optimistic thinking. For example, when criticizing my kids, I should criticize their actions but not their characters, be specific, and suggest improvements.

For instance, instead of "You are so lazy; you never clean your room," I should say, "You haven't cleaned your room in the last seven days; why don't you fix that today?" After all, kids are taking cues and they can learn optimism from us.

On Deck:



"When Breath Becomes Air" by Paul Kalanithi

Buddhists believe death is the greatest of all teachers. Most of us defer that learning, but

then some are forced to face death unexpectedly early.

Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with lung cancer just as he was about to finish a six-year neurosurgery residency at Stanford University School of Medicine. In the hospital there, his identity changed from authoritative doctor to terminally ill patient, from "a subject that takes action" to "an object to be acted upon."

He had achieved a lot, but his greatest potential was yet to be fulfilled. He had married but was yet to start a family. He had planned out 40 years of his career: the first 20 years as a neurosurgeon and neuroscientist, the next 20 as a writer. But alas, impermanence is the only unchanging thing.

Reading this brave man's account of his journey facing death promises to be inspiring.

MAKING GOOD

CHILD'S PLAY

Students in UConn's renowned Puppet Arts program have been hosting twice-weekly Facebook Live workshops for parents in desperate need of new ways to entertain and inspire quarantined kids. "We're trying to keep those material resource needs open and flexible," says MFA student Felicia Cooper. "It's important we're not asking people to go out and buy things or invest necessarily in craft supplies; just be creative with what they have at home." Find more at s.uconn.edu/workshops.



COVETED CLASS

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Doreen Simons has one rule: No talking. Ever.



The Instructor:

Despite her decades in the classroom, Doreen Simons never planned to be a teacher. She wanted to be a social worker, so studied sociology at Gaudet University in Washington, D.C., a private university for the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. But while she was a student there a professor noticed how well she used American Sign Language (ASL) and asked her if she would teach it to hearing students at an area high school.

Simons was, at the time, relatively unusual — a native speaker of ASL. Unlike most deaf children, 90% of whom are born to hearing parents, Simons was born deaf to deaf parents, both of whom signed. So she learned the language from infancy just as a

hearing child would acquire English. This was also before ASL had become the predominant language of American deaf people.

Simons gave teaching a try and liked it well enough that she taught on the side while pursuing degrees in deaf education and deaf rehabilitation. That brought her to UConn, where Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of Linguistics Diane Lillo-Martin, who researches how ASL is acquired, recruited her for a study. Simons was shocked to learn that, despite the research into ASL, there were no classes in the language at UConn.

“If you are going to have graduate students researching it then they should know it,” she says. “I volunteered to start teaching.”

Simons taught UConn’s first ASL course in 1986, when very few American universities offered classes in the language. She eventually finished her master’s in deaf rehabilitation and a certificate in deaf education at New York University but kept teaching at UConn as demand for the courses grew, joining the faculty full time in 2002.

Now there are nine sections of the Intro to ASL course each fall, which readily fill up, as well as a long list of other courses, including classes on deaf artists, deaf women’s studies, and ASL literature, which Simons also teaches. Moreover, as of this fall students can earn a bachelor’s degree in ASL Studies at UConn, making it just one of a half dozen or so schools in the country to offer that — and the only one in Connecticut.

The Class:

Simons uses a full-immersion approach in Intro to ASL class, starting from the very first day when she invokes her one rule — no talking, ever. The class is taught in silence. Students can only communicate by signing.

“They have to turn their voices off,” she says. “Sometimes I see them trying to mouth certain words. That’s them holding on to the English, and they need to focus on ASL.”

ASL is truly a foreign language for English speakers. It has its own grammar and syntax, which is completely different from English. Some signs do not even translate into English, says Simons. That is why students need to approach it like any other language they are learning.

They also have to let go of listening, she says. ASL is a visual language that they have to watch. Simons also teaches them to use their facial expressions and body language, which are key elements of ASL. Without them, the language loses much of its meaning, she says. Even how your hand is oriented, whether your palm faces someone or not, can change the meaning of a sign, she says.

“Some people will have the signs on their hands but it doesn’t match what

they are trying to say because it’s not on their body,” she says.

Teaching Style:

When asked to describe herself as a teacher, Simons says, “Pushy.” She has her students stand up when they sign. She stops them when they whisper to each other. She points out when a signing student is not using their facial expressions, which she equates to a speaking person using a monotone voice. She pushes the students, she says, because it is the only way they will ever learn the language.

“Students get frustrated, and I’ll ask how often they practice. If it’s an hour or two a week that’s just kind of a joke, honestly. You have to work at those skills.”

She also describes herself as blunt, which she says is typical of deaf culture. When hearing people might equivocate, deaf people get straight to the point, she says. If you’ve gained weight or gone bald, a deaf person is likely to say so, she explains. That is part of deaf culture, which she also teaches about in the class, so students understand better the world the language comes from.

Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:

ASL is now the third most studied language in the U.S., behind Spanish and French, says a 2016 study by the Modern Language Association. Its popularity speaks to the long list of reasons anyone might study it. Some students plan to use it professionally in fields such as interpreting, education, social work, and speech pathology. Simons finds that students often have a family member or friend who is deaf. To communicate well with our deaf community members we need to learn a new language, a challenging thing for an adult. We need a teacher who’s pushy and blunt to help us get it done and get it done right. —AMY SUTHERLAND



THIS JUST IN

EVEN IN A PANDEMIC, IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

The anxiety and depression we are seeing — and feeling — around the Covid-19 pandemic is linked more to the job losses and economic challenges the pandemic has caused than to concerns about the virus itself. “The impact the virus and the pandemic are having on the economy and employment is, not surprisingly, taking a big toll,” says Natalie J. Shook, a social psychologist, associate professor, and principal investigator for a National Science Foundation-funded behavioral health study underway at the UConn School of Nursing.

“Above and beyond concern about the virus, financial concerns and job insecurity are significantly associated with anxiety and depression.”

The yearlong study is tracking the well-being, feelings, and behavioral practices of about 1,000 individuals across the United States, and more than 18 surveys of the participants have already been conducted since the study kicked off in March.

Concern and Risk Don’t Prompt Prevention

In other unsurprising preliminary results, the study indicates that those of us who are most squeamish about germs and sickness are most likely to engage in preventive health behaviors, like frequent handwashing and disinfecting the living environment, during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

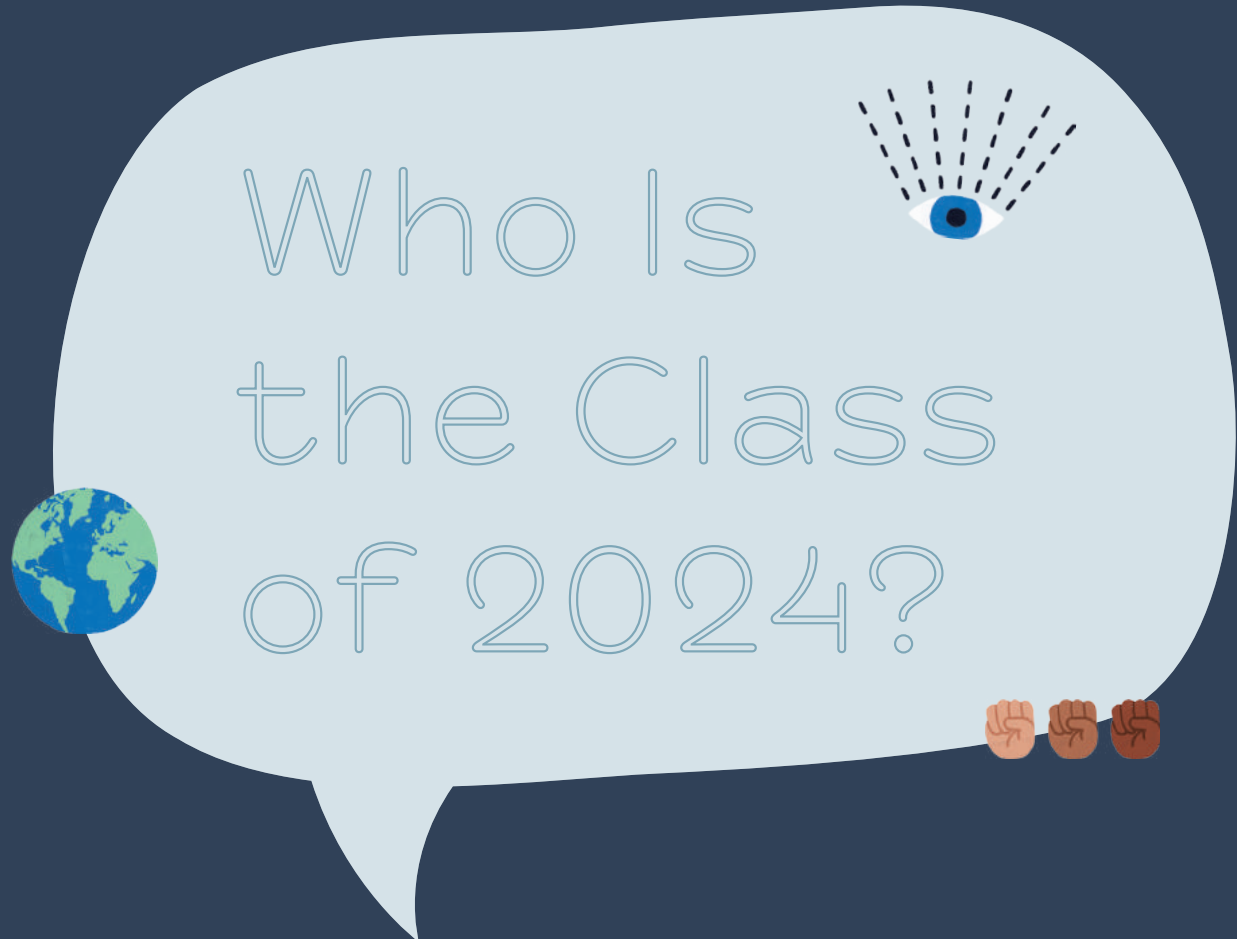
What is surprising and problematic, Shook says, is that the people most likely to be impacted by the virus are not necessarily those most likely to be engaging in preventive behaviors.

“Older participants reported more concern about Covid, which makes sense — they’re at higher risk,” she says. “But when we looked at preventative health behaviors, we weren’t necessarily seeing that older adults were engaging more in preventive health behaviors. So where there was the concern, that wasn’t necessarily translating into the behaviors that could protect them.”

Shook and her team of researchers hope that their findings on how behavior and social attitudes change, and what factors influence those changes when people are faced with the threat of widespread disease, will help to develop new strategies and interventions for public health responses that could limit disease spread in future pandemics. —JACLYN SEVERANCE

“Financial concerns and job insecurity are significantly associated with anxiety and depression.”

Find more on this study and other similar research at s.uconn.edu/shook.



UConn's Class of 2024 is like no other. There's a lot they didn't get to do (proms, graduations, first-year welcome parties), but let's take a look at who they are as a group and what, as individuals, they've already done and — undaunted — still plan to do.

This group of 5,750 first-years is more diverse than former classes — 44.7% are nonwhite; about 18% have Hispanic/Latinx backgrounds, and about 7.5% are Black. They are highly accomplished in terms of high school ranking — more than half graduated in the top 10% of their high school classes. And circumstances have forced them to be more flexible and resilient than classes before them — rolling with every change and pandemic possibility thrown at them and then showing up in Storrs, Stamford, Hartford, Avery Point, and Waterbury ready for anything.

Most of all, they seem overwhelmingly grateful to be here, on actual campuses and virtual campuses among friends and friends-to-be — even if the experience looks a bit different than what they pictured a year ago.

Like so many first-years before them, they wrote their admissions essays and imagined those first weeks in college. They pictured crowded classrooms, parties, and games, dorm rooms with roommates, and gift boxes filled with Husky-emblazoned mugs and tees — but certainly not face masks. And while this class is already iconic for reasons they'd rather were not a part of the picture, their essays — submitted shortly before "Covid" and "pandemic" became part of our daily lexicon — are a reminder of that recent social-embracing past and also the not-too-distant future, a future full of those heady college daydreams and all that ambitious career planning coming true. Here are excerpts from just a few of our favorites.

Illustrations by Katie Carey

on fire



“Bring it on! I'm stronger because of my mane.”

A burning flame stands alone in an ocean of brown and blonde locks. Growing up, I hoped the flame would dim, stand out less in the crowd. Go unnoticed. However, over the years it has burned brighter, both inside and out. My story is not all that original, but still heartfelt. I have always been taunted for my bright red hair. You name it, I've been called it, from Carrot Top, Red, Ginger, Leprechaun, even Lucy. I hated all the myths and stereotypes that others associated with my hair color — from being a hothead, flighty, clownish, even soulless. Did you know that in the Middle Ages redheads were assumed to be witches and often put to death! Why could something like hair color generate such fear and attention? Adults told me how lucky I was to have such beautiful red hair while my peers taunted me endlessly. As you can imagine, this was pretty confusing as a kid and would shake any middle schooler's confidence. I didn't want to stand out, I just desperately wanted to blend in. Eventually, I even considered changing my hair color in hopes that the teasing would stop. The more my confidence diminished, the more I dreamed of becoming a brunette. In her senior year, my older sister, also a redhead, dyed her hair black. Like me, she probably just had enough. I imagine she must have wondered what life would be like without the stigma of being a ginger. But she

didn't seem any happier with jet black hair. I realized that changing hair color wasn't the solution to insecurity. As I watched my sister get numerous re-dyes to return her hair to its natural color, I began to rethink why I let this one thing have so much power over me. Red hair isn't who I am or what I care about, or value. Why was this such a big deal? It's only hair. In the worst case I could cut it off and it would grow back. Why was I letting this mop on my head shape who I was, feel insecure, and make me wish I were invisible? Fortunately my sister's experience helped me figure out that hair color was just one of many of my unique characteristics, like being funny, left-handed, or having blue eyes. The color of my hair didn't mean I was ditzy like Lucy in "I Love Lucy" (what teenager has ever watched that show anyway?). As a matter of fact, I am one of the smartest kids in my class. I'm the opposite of scatterbrained. Math and science come naturally to me. I'm a very methodical thinker. I wouldn't have been elected to class office if I was a hothead or disorganized. Animals at the rescue shelter wouldn't bond with me if I were cold or soulless. With this new self-awareness I decided to face high school with a new attitude. Walking the halls, hearing the same old redhead jokes, I tossed my hair proudly and walked a little taller. Bring it on! I'm stronger because of my mane. I embraced who I am and am comfortable in my own skin. The journey of accepting my appearance has taught me to resist conformity as well as to celebrate other people's differences. I now love my red hair and would never think about changing who I am. My flame now burns bright enough to light a whole room full of matches just waiting to burn.

—Samantha Ceravolo, Syracuse, New York, biological sciences major

everyone needs saving

I'm 17 years old and I have moved 17 different times. Along the way, I have learned that everyone has a story and everyone needs saving no matter what background or where they come from. I have learned how to respect people, take responsibility for my actions, and to maintain a decent lifestyle in order to raise a family. I learned that no matter what, I will be faced with various cultures and diversity that has allowed me to see without color. I have learned to respect every race, no matter how different, and use that in my daily life. My future is bright.

—Horacio Honoret, Hackensack, New Jersey, physiology and neurobiology major



how I learned what a congressman was (or: why I want to be an astrophysicist)

At 4 years old, I firmly believed that aliens had been to Earth. I have profound memories of sitting in my mom's 2005 blue Chrysler Town & Country. The plush gray seats were juxtaposed by the dried-up lollipops on the carpeted floor. The seat belts, and their frayed ends, kept me and my booster seat from sliding around the car (or flying out of it in the event of an accident). In terms of additional luxuries, we were blessed with the latest and greatest of technologies: an FM radio, which allowed for 6 presets and a 6-CD switcher. Quite often, the radio would be tuned to a classic rock station. It was the only genre allowed. Interestingly enough, the speakers in the third row (or as I liked to call it, the "way-back") of the minivan were better than those of the second. And when my parents would think they were punishing me to sit in the third row, I was living life to its fullest. In a strange turn of events one night, my parents banished both me and my older sister to the third row. This aggravated me, because now I could no longer spread my feet across the palatial bench that was the way-back. On the radio, a classic. None other than "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin. The intricate serenade of the song was accompanied by the concerned voice of my mother. "Dear god, what is that?" she questioned, barreling down I-95 at 70 mph, looking in the rearview mirror. Simultaneously, my sister and I whipped our heads to view the mysterious object. The object undulated across the night sky while displaying an unreadable message along its bottom. As 4- and 6-year-olds do, my sister and I start crying, firmly believing that this object was a flying saucer. Naturally, we begin



screaming, "Oh my god, the aliens are taking over!" my sister cried. "WAAAAAAAAA!" I concurred. My mother, visibly confused, reassured us that this was not a UFO, but it was, in fact, a campaign tactic by a local congressman. Me, not knowing what a congressman was, became more terrified. My arms had begun to flail. I could not ignore the fact that alien invasion was imminent. Minutes went by. My arms? Still flailing. My eyes? Still sweating. Me? Still petrified. My sister? The same. Even though I remember the sheer terror I felt at this moment, I wish I could recapture my childhood ability to imagine. Imagination, as indistinct as it may make one's adulthood seem, is an essential part of growing up and setting us apart. It's quite easy to forget when we get so caught up in the hustle of everyday life. But I want to take a step back. I want to imagine what life outside of our everyday is like. I desperately want to learn more about not only the world around me but everything that surrounds it. In my opinion, our ability to imagine is driven by our desire to know more about everything. And according to a Google search and space.com, we only know about 4% of the universe. The other 96%? That's up to your imagination. Or astrophysicists.

—Joshua Ellenberg, Flemington, New Jersey, exploratory major

"...we only know about 4% of the universe. The other 96%? That's up to your imagination. Or astrophysicists."



surviving

It was a chilly, sunny October morning, and I was volunteering at the Breast Cancer Walk in my community. As the momentum of people started to grow, the cold that was biting my fingertips started to dwindle, and I was warmed by the enthusiasm from people who I had never seen before. "Survivor" is what was written on most of their shirts. Witnessing such an incredible sight, watching these dazzling people celebrate their lives, made me come to a realization. Being a survivor is not just about the story you have to tell, but it is also about the person you have become because of it. Now I am capable of embracing the struggle of my own mental battles and preparing myself to surmount them. If these beautiful people could survive and whistle to the beat of a morning tune, so can I.

—Analise Sanchez, Monroe, New York, mathematics major

judgment is a learned behavior

For two years I have worked for my town recreation center through their childcare programs. For two years I have chased laughing children, listened to their elaborate stories, and helped them create new friendships. This past summer, I was asked to work specifically with Jack, whose disability prevented him from the simplest of actions, such as placing a goldfish cracker in his mouth or standing up to use the bathroom. While I pride myself on my maturity and acceptance of others, I could learn a few things from the children I work with. From Jack I've learned to be more vocal, to ignore other people's opinions. He is never slowed down by his disability. Perhaps it's simply the naivness of childhood, but he is unfazed by the opinions of others. From Jack's peers, I've learned not to make assumptions. It is human nature to judge others, but that trait is less prominent with children. The judgment of others is instilled in



us at a young age; it is not a genetic trait. Since I began to work with Jack, I have found myself being less judgmental of those around me. I am less afraid to be curious and ask questions, even if those questions aren't easy to address. Adults often stray away from difficult topics because they are afraid of confrontation or uncomfortable conversations. We should take notes from the children around us and learn to embrace our curiosity.

—Sydney Fournier, South Windsor, Connecticut, digital media and design major

more near-death experiences than a mountain climber

I was born with a severe allergy to milk and dairy. It was discovered after I drank baby formula and went into anaphylactic shock. My parents rushed me to the hospital, where they received the diagnosis. It consumed my life. Double- and triple-checking ingredient labels. Refusing birthday cake, explaining exactly what would happen if I did eat it. Seeing the shock on people's faces as they wonder how on earth a Boston cream donut could have such a fatal effect. Then hearing people's expressions of sympathy. How they cannot imagine going through each day having to constantly be alert for the risk of death by cookies, crackers, or candy. There are certainly drawbacks to living with an allergy, however, it is not all bad. One small enjoyment is revealing that I have had more near-death experiences than the most adventurous of mountain climbers. On a more serious note, living with an allergy has taught me how to be prepared and how to handle myself in stressful situations. When I experience an allergy attack, the most common response from the people around me is panic, while mine is one of calm. I resolve the situation as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to prevent my untimely demise.

—Dennis Dowding, Ridgefield, Connecticut, design tech and theater major



"Seeing the shock on people's faces as they wonder how on earth a Boston cream donut could have such a fatal effect."



inclusion = success

In school, I often encountered various racial slurs, but these experiences made me an advocate for inclusion and acceptance. When my classmates are left out during gym classes, I invite them to join my team. The beauty of leadership does not only rest on promoting and embracing diversity, but also on encompassing the ability to respect others through inclusion and creation of a positive climate. In my orthodox Jewish neighborhood, I saw myself reflecting on my own religious journey as I saw my neighbors walk to temples and dedicate the Sabbath to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community's extreme dedication to their faith and obedience to religious observances

humbles and realigns my priorities. Through them, I learned that there is always something to be learned from those who are completely different from me in every aspect of race, ethnicity, and religion. Diversity is an essential component of success, and this is especially true in the United States that boasts multiculturalism and diversity of background, thoughts, and ideas.

—Eric Hwang, Lawrence, New York, political science major

sports saved my life

I am not being dramatic when I say sports has saved my life and is a part of my family. It's my third parent, reminding me to go to bed on time, to be well rested for game day, nagging me to eat the proper food to fuel my body for the physical demands, encouraging me to set a good example for the younger girls looking up to me. It's my third sibling, annoying me when all I want to do is sleep, cheering me on when I have a great game, arguing with me when I have a bad one. It's the best friend I look forward to seeing every day at school, depending on it to always have my back. It's my boyfriend, making me nervous when the stakes are high, planning my future with it, wanting to impress it.

—Taylor Pannell, Middletown, New York, animal science major



the choice

More than 18 years ago, a young man made a decision that ultimately made my existence possible. To him, the decision to donate his sperm may have seemed like an insignificant event in his life, but without it I would not be here today. I wonder if I look like him or if we have similar personalities. I will never know unless I choose to meet him. At age 18, I will have that choice.

I do not believe that blood creates a family — love does. I have received unconditional love from my moms, and I credit them with the caring, determined, and hardworking person I have become. My parents have taught me to be strong and always stand up for what I believe in. I have grown up with the influence of two amazing women, and I do not feel as if I am missing a part of my family. I feel more connected to my moms than I ever will to my donor. He has not been present for any of my accomplishments and he has not been there to comfort me in times of need. My donor helped give me life, but he did not shape me into the person I am today. With that being said, I have decided not to meet him, because he will forever feel like a stranger and not a part of my family.

—Erin Carney, Hudson, New Hampshire, political science major



the future is now

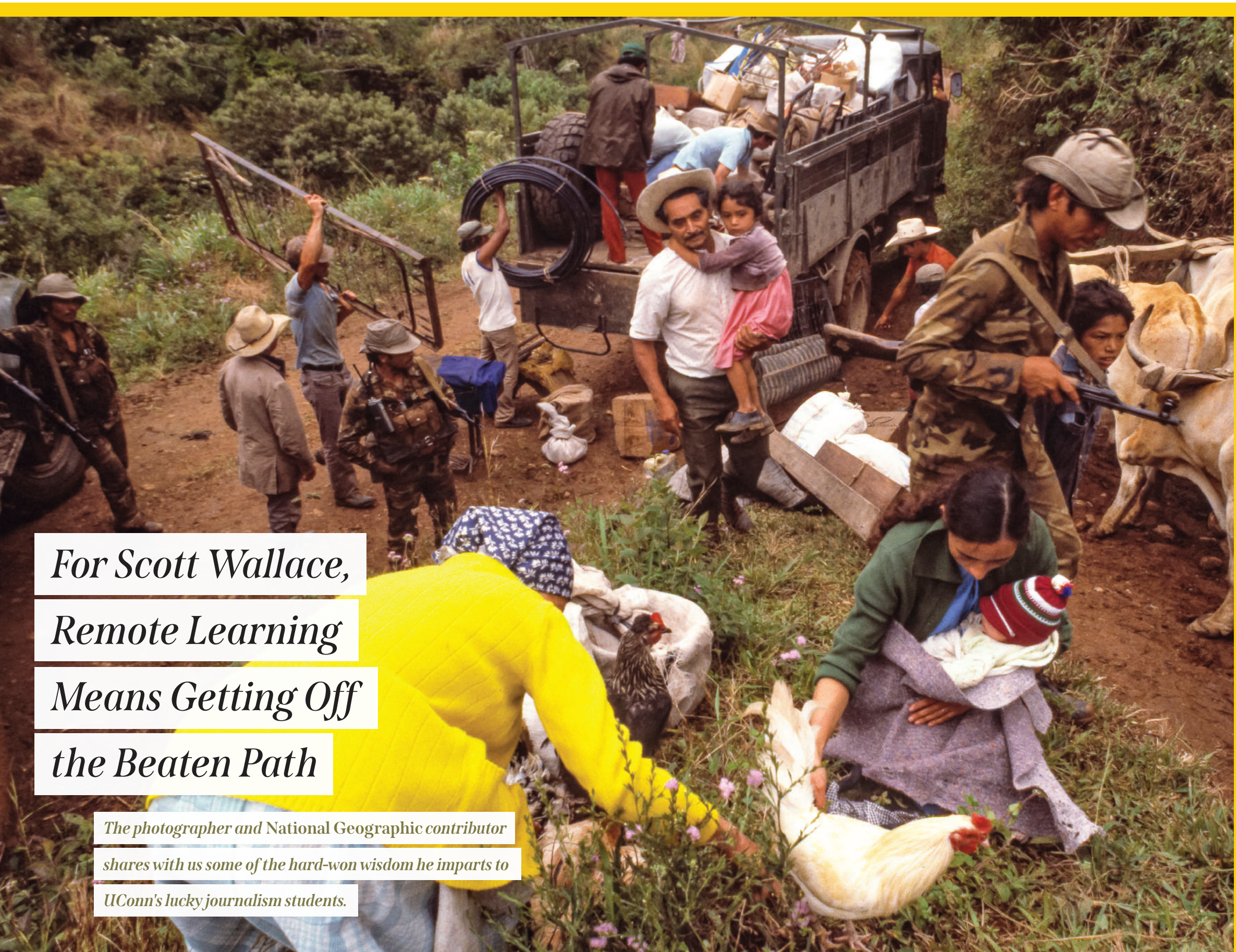


As I swerve down bustling sidewalks and navigate barely distinguishable trails through the woods, I am left out in the world with nothing but my own thoughts to distract myself from the aching in my legs that doubles in intensity every time my foot strikes the ground. But what does one think about when given an hour of open road and near complete freedom of the mind? As my brain searches for any interesting series of electrical signals that will help me pass the time, I begin to wonder, "What is time anyway?" Time is the fundamental element in the sport of running and absolutely crucial in our daily lives, yet it is something so few of us really understand. Relativistic time describes a fourth dimension of the universe, but one through which we are unwillingly pulled. The past, present, and future exist simultaneously, although we can only observe one. They exist just as the people in the next room exist when we cannot see them. All the numbers that will impact aspects of my life — from when I can vote or drive a car to whether or not colleges will recruit me for cross country to when I can leave Spanish class and go to physics — are no more than artificial constructs our brains have created to help us perceive the universe. And according to my brain, I am only five minutes into my hour-long run. When I run, I travel through all four dimensions of space, and that unfortunately includes the vertical one. The burning in my quads as I struggle my way up a seemingly endless hill brings me to question how this hill came to be. What movements of tectonic plates, vast glaciers, powers of erosion, or determination of man have joined forces to create this evil thing that now causes me so much pain? I comfort myself with the knowledge that, as I slowly rip apart the actin and myosin fibers in my muscles, I am actually benefiting myself. To make myself keep going I must remind myself that, as I sit at home later, binge watching "The Big Bang Theory," the satellite cells in my muscles will not only repair the muscles but make them stronger than they were before. But if Einstein was correct, even before I begin my ascent, I have already finished the run. And in a different time that also exists right now, the hill does not even exist yet. Looking for a less confusing way to distract myself, I listen to the songs of a bird and marvel at the millions of years of evolution that have finely tuned the complex DNA sequences giving the bird its ability to sing so beautifully. I run by the World War II Veterans Memorial and think of what could have been done to avoid such atrocities. I think of history's impact on us all and wonder how the world would change had different decisions been made throughout history. I wonder how my life would be different or whether I would even be here at all had any part of history gone differently. Eventually my watch beeps to alert me I have run eight miles, and I realize I am only a block away from home. I have always been fascinated by the intricate workings of the world around me. As I climb the four steps up to my front door, I try to be observant and learn about how those stairs were assembled. Then I go inside and check the weather

forecast to see when I will get to run again tomorrow and escape back into my thoughts. I want to continue learning in the hopes that one day, just maybe, I will learn something that no one has before. That future depends on the decision you make. But if the future already exists, can it still be changed?

—Cody Ottinger, Hopkinton, Massachusetts, engineering major ☺

"The past, present, and future exist simultaneously, although we can only observe one."



*For Scott Wallace,
Remote Learning
Means Getting Off
the Beaten Path*

*The photographer and National Geographic contributor
shares with us some of the hard-won wisdom he imparts to
UConn's lucky journalism students.*



Bill Gentile

Most kids who spent childhoods thumbing through the pages of the canary-yellow-framed *National Geographics* on their coffee tables, marveling at titular photos of exotic people and places, only imagined a day when they'd travel the world and see their own names attached to such stories and photos. Scott Wallace made it happen. Actively into his fifth decade of reporting, writing, and shooting stills and video for not just *National Geographic* but *Smithsonian*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Harpers*, and the like, the journalism professor illustrates his trade secrets and advice to students with real-life narratives that sound straight out of a big-screen blockbuster — one in which the pursuit of truth and justice is filled with as much trauma as triumph.

Telling us how he uses these exploits to illustrate the tenets he most wants to impart to his students, Wallace checks himself. "I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about my own career, but I think I do have a rich trove of experiences to draw on."

It's an understatement. Wallace has traveled on assignment to the remotest of remote places on Earth and had a career most storytellers and adventurers only dream of. His recantations arrive humbly, however, with thoughtful pauses, counterquestions, and intellectual insights that serve to remind he's usually on the other side of the interview.

"Everybody has a story worth telling, and our job as journalists is to pull it out of them," he says while clicking through a computer slide show of favorite photos. His Oak Hall office brims with memorabilia, maps, magazines, and framed photos, including a prominent three — each of his grown sons. Wallace has an open, friendly demeanor made even less threatening by the slightly scruffy grooming one imagines is not just a pandemic thing. It's hard to conjure a more inspiring teacher, or one with more entertaining, hard-won, and wise advice to impart.

*By Lisa Stiepock
Photographs by Scott Wallace*

Don't Stop for Every Body in the Road

For starters — literally — there's this predicament from his first day as a professional reporter in 1983, just weeks out of J school and having made his way to civil-war-torn El Salvador with \$50 in his pocket and a no-certain-pay-check "job" stringing for CBS News. On the way to Wallace's crash pad, his driver swerves around a body in the road. Wallace suggests they should stop to help. "You don't know who that person might be or why he is there," says the driver, who does call for help when they reach their nearby destination. Wallace chalks it up as "my first lesson in how to survive in a war zone."

The Truth Is on the Ground, Not on the Web

Exploring El Salvador and, later, Nicaragua and Guatemala, Wallace felt almost immediately not just the risk of what he was doing but the weight of it. It was clear that reports from him and his colleagues were the only counter to rivers of propaganda from Central

American and U.S. governments. It was also clear that to find the truth he had to get out of the cities into the countryside, "where the heart and soul is." He and a *Newsweek* photographer ventured deep into said countryside on one foray and, having bamboozled their way past army checkpoints, found themselves witnessing a battle in which two Contras fought to the death against a far greater number of Sandinistas. Why would they do that, wondered Wallace, if they were, as the Sandinistas insisted, mercenaries paid by the U.S.?

"Firsthand experience is always the best way to distinguish between information and its opposite," says Wallace. You naturally form opinions, but be ready to change those opinions in the face of facts gathered on the ground.

Know the Risks, Embrace the Friendships

There are moments when reality is all too real. "It was in El Salvador in '89, Election Day," recalls Wallace. "Some friends and I enter a village where there has just been combat.

The guerrillas have taken over, and we are interviewing these kids with rifles, asking them, 'What are you doing? There was supposed to be a ceasefire today.' And then the army counterattacks. One of my friends is hit by a sniper bullet. He looks at me and I see the life go out of his eyes and he goes down. It was terrifying. I thought we were all going to die. I had no idea how we'd get out of there." The rest of them did get out, and that type of shared experience and mission forges deep bonds, says Wallace. "The friends I made early on in Central America are still among my very best friends. There's a camaraderie and solidarity in doing this kind of work. It is understood that everyone is taking a risk — I'm not talking about physical risk, though there is that too, yes, but about being willing to risk failure. In the conventional sense. There won't be 401(k)s and you'll have to wait for things like marriage and kids. And even then, well, trips come up, vacations get canceled."

Keep a Bag Packed and Your Passport Current

It was spring 2003; Wallace had just returned from a lengthy assignment in South America and was about to head off on a long-overdue family vacation when, he says, "*National Geographic* calls and asks if I can head back to Brazil by the weekend." The editor told him that Sydney Possuelo was leaving "any day now" on a trek into deep Amazonian wilderness. Also, "he has no idea when he'll be back."

Which is how Wallace came to be one of the few humans alive — or dead for that matter — to have come within spearing distance of the "Arrow People," one of the last uncontacted tribes living in the Amazon jungle.

Possuelo, explains Wallace, worked for Brazil's indigenous affairs agen-

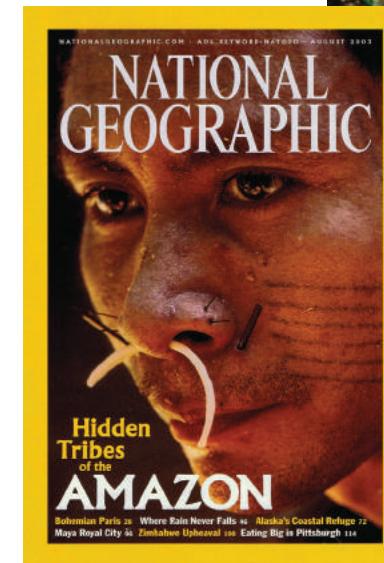
CENTRAL AMERICA: Key to documenting civil war here in the '80s was getting deep into the countryside and speaking fluent Spanish (left). Peasants being relocated by warring Sandinistas had half an hour to collect all their belongings and leave their village (pages 22–23).



cy, making peaceful contact with such tribes to protect them from the advance of "civilization" into their territories. But Possuelo came to understand the gravity of what he was doing. An entire tribe could be felled by the common cold. He had a change of heart. "Once you make contact," Possuelo told Wallace, "you begin the process of destroying their universe." He convinced the government instead to protect these tribes' territories. His current mission was to check on the wellness of the Arrow People without making contact with them.

Carve Out an Area of Expertise

Possuelo, Wallace, and their guides, members of three recently contacted Amazonian tribes, spent nearly three months all told in the depths of the Amazon. They traveled first by boat and skiff up Amazonian tributaries, then bushwhacked for 20 days through tortuous terrain searching for signs of the Arrow People. When they found such signs — fresh footprints, a piece of coiled vine, and a chunk of masticated sugarcane — it was cause for excitement . . . and alarm. "Possuelo has led us into one of the most remote and uncharted places left on the planet . . . this is the land of the mysterious Flecheiros, or Arrow People, a rarely



BRAZIL: Wallace wrote his breakthrough 2003 National Geographic cover story about a three-month-long Amazonian trek with indigenous-rights advocate Sydney Possuelo (center). In the dugout canoe (top) are Wallace, photographer Nicolas Reynard, and indigenous scouts.



glimpsed Indian tribe known principally as deft archers disposed to unleashing poison-tipped projectiles to defend their territory against all intruders, then melting away into the forest,” wrote Wallace in the resulting August 2003 *National Geographic* cover story he calls “the turning point of my career.” After that, Wallace became a go-to guy for stories on indigenous people, an expertise that would bring him back to the jungle many times, but also find him at an incongruous Mexican restaurant in one of the Earth’s northernmost habitats, sharing chips and salsa with tribal leaders on the edge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. And, yes, those trips often meant disappointing family.

If Wallace has any regrets, that’s the main one. “I am very sorry about that. I think my boys are proud of what I do despite the time together we lost out on; I’d like to think that they got more out of it. I don’t know. What I do know is that my sons all are international travelers, all three are activists, all are devoted to learning languages and exposing themselves to other places, other people, and other points of view.”

Get Off the Beaten Path, Way Off

Two years later Wallace found himself in another remote corner of the world on another arduous trek, this time through the nearly-never-traveled Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan, a mountainous region stretching between Tajikistan and Pakistan all the way to China, on a search for Marco Polo sheep with George Schaller, “the world’s most influential naturalist.” Wallace shakes his head in awe remembering how far beyond civilization they were. “It was so remote that in two months we never



AFGHANISTAN: National Geographic Adventure asked Wallace to accompany naturalist George Schaller on a two-month journey through the remotest regions of Afghanistan; a Kirghiz shepherd (bottom left); the year before, Vanity Fair sent him to Tora Bora to cover a very different story — the fight against al-Qaeda (top right).



Peter Bergen

saw a single contrail from a plane. For two months we were never below 14,000 feet.” They crossed hundreds of miles of valleys and mountain passes on foot.

“This was a spectacular, otherworldly experience to have a glimpse into centuries-ago travel with yaks and horses, what it was like for most of human history. We met nomads in encampments. It was an amazing adventure, like something you might read in *‘The Hobbit.’*”

Master as Many Skills as Possible

Some of the most critical — and spectacular — assignments Wallace earned came his way in part because he is that rare journalist as skilled at photography as he is at wordsmithing. Wallace planned it that way, twisting his grad school schedules and syllabi to do all the possible sequences: radio, TV, newspaper writing, and photography. “I had already set my sights on going to Central America, and I knew that to be able to do that as a freelancer I was going to have to bring as wide a range of skills to bear as I could.”

It paid off, and he’s bullish now about getting his students to understand and master the basics of photojournalism. “Just because everyone has a phone — and camera — in their pocket doesn’t mean everyone’s a photographer. I think it’s really important for students — no matter what they are planning to do — to be able to take a publishable photograph. So even in my writing classes, the assignments have a visual component.”

Find Your Personal Shangri-La

Photos always mattered to Wallace. His parents gave him his first camera at age 8. And there was a photo on the wall in his parents’ bedroom that held even more sway over him

than anything he saw in *National Geographic*: An image of a man on a mountaintop, his Scottish grandfather whom he never met.

"I was spellbound by the riddles the portrait held. Where was it taken? Under what circumstances? Was my grandfather a hardbitten explorer or a charlatan? Was it my imagination, or did he look like a man so seized by wanderlust that he felt boxed in by conventional life?" Wallace's mother didn't have the answers. "My mother wasn't yet five when she waved goodbye to him on a Hudson River pier as he boarded an ocean liner bound for Asia in 1930. He promised to come back rich and famous. He did not return." She had a few clues, the photo, some published writings in which he claimed to have discovered an uncontacted tribe in Tibet. That's right, wanderlust and uncontacted indigenous tribes. It's not surprising Wallace was compelled to solve the mysteries surrounding this magnetic figure. By now he'd earned enough trust from editors that he was able to tailor two Himalayan assignments to this quest, from *National Geographic Traveler* in 2012 and a follow-up from *Smithsonian Journeys Quarterly* in 2015.

On the *Traveler* assignment, Wallace searched the wild landscapes of China's Yunnan province. In a village renamed Shangri-La to match the place in James Hilton's novel "Lost Horizon," Wallace's host tells him, "For Tibetans Shangri-La is not a real place but a feeling in our hearts. Everyone needs a personal Shangri-La." Three years later for *Smithsonian*, high in an outpost along India's border with Tibet, Wallace discovered the bungalow where his grandfather stayed during his quest. "It was the first time I ever walked into a room where I knew my grandfather had slept," says Wallace, something about the moment still resonating today, still playing yearning and satisfaction against each other.

Journalism Is a Job that Matters

Not every story requires a remote mountainous trek to uncover an original source. But the proliferation of media has muddied journalistic waters. In this age of alternative facts and unexamined social media posting, it's more difficult — and more crucial — to seek original sources and find firsthand experience, says Wallace. In his classes he addresses this issue by explaining, "This is a challenging profession, perhaps more challenging than ever in this environment, and it's more necessary than ever for people to have fact-based journalism so they can function in a democracy. This job is important. It can shine light on important things."

You don't have to go to the ends of the earth to find those things. Last

QUEST: A search for his grandfather brought Wallace to Himalayan monasteries (center). The World Bank sent him around the world in 56 days to photograph beneficiaries of development projects (the rest). Visit our website for more about these photos.





AMAZON: In Wallace's most recent National Geographic cover story of October 2018, he writes about the plight of the endangered Awá tribe. This year Wallace has posted several stories to the National Geographic website about the advance of Covid-19 into their tribal territory and about the murder of an indigenous-rights advocate who was a close colleague of Sydney Possuelo's. Find links on our website.

semester Wallace co-taught a publication practicum with his colleague Steve Smith, in which the class produced a documentary about the local undocumented immigrant community. "It's an important story happening in our backyard. UConn students could go through four years and not know that in their midst are students who are undocumented, afraid that they and/or their parents will be deported," says Wallace.

Many of his students say they are in journalism to make a difference, and his classes make them believe they can. Camila Vallejo '19 (CLAS) was just hired at NPR and feels prepared for her new challenge thanks in large part to Wallace. "As a seasoned features writer and war correspondent, he highlighted the good as well as the raw truth behind being a reporter. He taught me how to choose my words wisely, the importance of setting the scene in any piece, and never to rely on technology because a reporter's notebook really is your best friend."

For his part, Wallace says he tries to stress both the honor and responsibility a journalist has in telling other people's stories. "It's a challenging time to be a journalist, so these students deserve the best. I try to mentor them as best I can."

Don't Listen to Everything Your Teachers Tell You

And finally, in pursuit of that personal Shangri-La, don't listen to everything your teachers tell you. In those final weeks of journalism graduate school Wallace's professors at the University of Missouri told him not to bother trying to get work in Central America, that there were "hundreds of reporters trying for those spots overseas."

Instead of listening to them and applying for stateside jobs, he found his way into CBS News headquarters in

New York and asked not for a paid job but for the "stringer" position that would pay by the story and get him the important press credential to tuck into his pocket with that \$50 in cash. And he headed for El Salvador to "dodge bullets for chicken feed." It was worth it, he says.

After all, it opened up the world and gave him a ringside seat to witness stories that may have otherwise gone unknown to the rest of us. ☺





by Eli Freund '14 (CLAS) | Illustrations by Curt Merlo

In the *Driver's* Seat

Checking my side and rearview mirrors, adjusting my seat belt, and scanning the environment around me, I peer into the road, ready for the drive ahead. Below me are the standard accelerator and brake pedals, and beside me is the shifter. Outside the car is darkness, with a wisp of chilliness in the air that causes my teeth to chatter. ▶



“The car lurches forward without me touching anything, and the steering wheel starts to veer...”

Seated next to me in the passenger seat is **Eric Jackson '04 MA, '08 Ph.D.**, tall and skinny and describing to me, in his calm, assured voice, the various parts and features of the car that are unfamiliar to me. When Jackson steps out of the car and I'm left alone, with other cars speeding by me and the city bustling around me, my nervousness heightens.

Normally, I wouldn't be so nervous driving in a new car, but there's something different about this Ford Focus. For starters, it is inside a building — the cityscape I see is projected on a wall. And if I were to pop the hood there would be an empty space where the engine used to be.

Why? Because this is not a car at all; rather it is a full-sized autonomous driving simulator. A simulator capable of running driver behavior experiments, which is what I'm here to test and discuss with Jackson, a civil engineering professor and executive director of the Connecticut Transportation Institute and its Connecticut Transportation Safety Research Center.

As Jackson exits the car and starts to walk away, I ask him why we don't have these cars on the road yet. He says that while the autonomous technology is pretty advanced, the unanswered societal questions surrounding the technology are causing a major roadblock.

“The legal system needs to change and adjust,” explains Jackson. “Will I need a driver's license in the future? If the car is driving itself, can I drink and drive? If the technology malfunctions and kills someone, who's liable or responsible? Do I even need insurance

anymore?”

As those answers swirl around in my head, Jackson jumps into the back room, where a computer and a bank of screens are programmed to control the weather conditions projected on the screens in front of me and, importantly, to take over control of the acceleration, braking, and steering of the car.

As the car lurches forward without me touching anything, and the steering wheel starts to veer, I stare in awe as the cityscape starts to blur outside my windows.

The Long and Winding Road Ahead

Jackson projects a long timeline for adoption of the technology I'm testing. For most of us, he says, it may be something that the next generation gets to use and experience. “A lot of predictions we're seeing are saying it will be 50 years before we have highly automated vehicles on the roadway.”

Jackson isn't alone in that assessment. In a 2019 *Slate* magazine interview, Chris Urmson, CEO of self-driving start-up Aurora and former engineering manager for Google's self-driving car program, predicted that people would start to see autonomous vehicles cruising down the road in five to 10 years, but widespread adoption would be “30 to 50 years” away.

Why so long? One of the reasons, says Jackson, is the public's lack of trust in the technology.

A 2018 Intel study found that only 21% of U.S. consumers would swap

their current car for a self-driving vehicle, although a whopping 63% feel that the technology will be the “norm” in the next 50 years.

Jackson cites frequent AAA surveys on trust in autonomous vehicles. “What you'll see is that on one survey, 78% will say they do not trust a vehicle, and then it'll start to go down. Then a crash will happen, and everything gets set back significantly.”

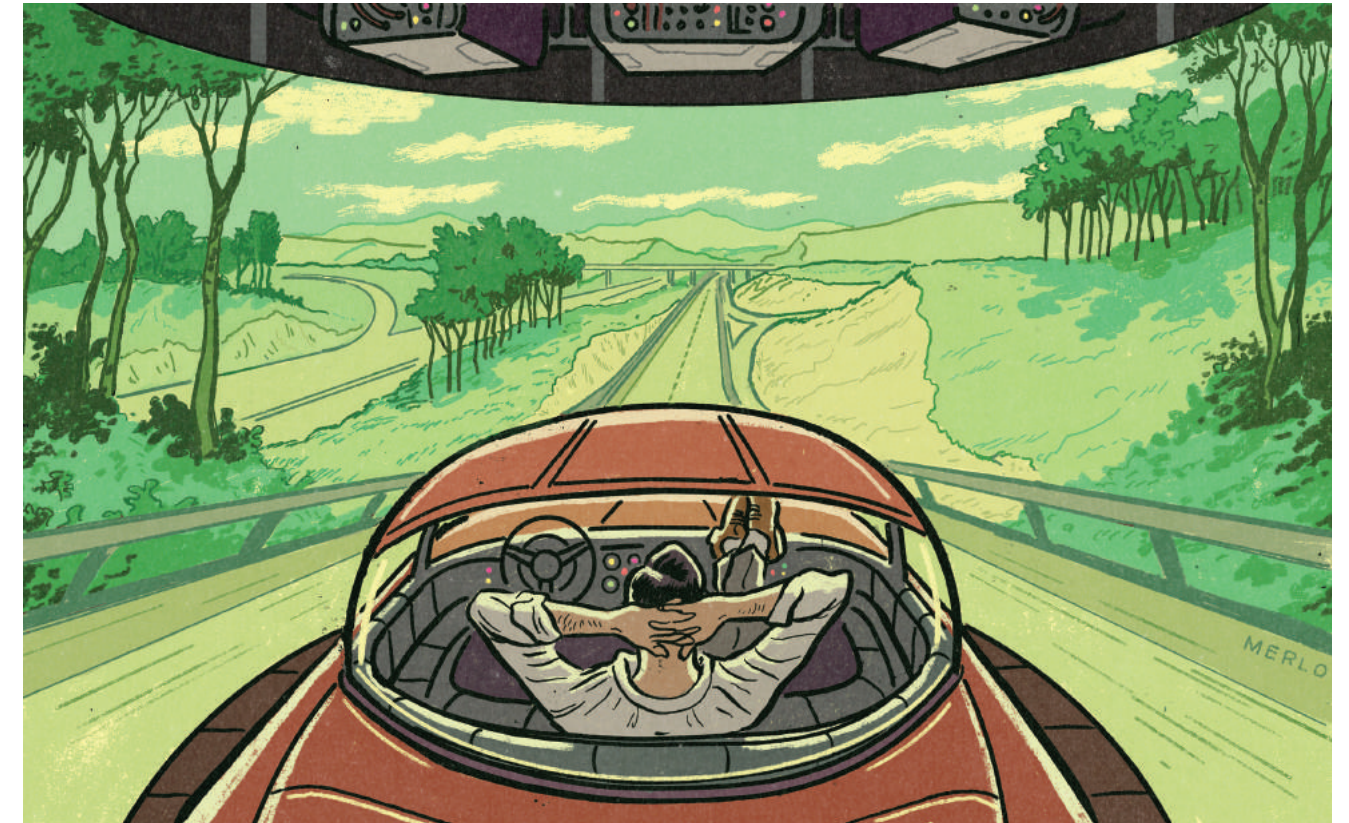
Indeed, in a March 2020 AAA poll 88% of drivers said they would not feel comfortable in a fully autonomous car, and 72% said they would feel safer only if they could take over the wheel if something went wrong.

Personally, I can't blame them.

As I travel down the simulated road in the engineless Focus, I feel a ping of anxiety and dread. The car pulls up to a red light and my foot instinctively moves toward the brake pedal. When the light turns green, and the car turns right onto a new road, my hands tremble as I force them to stay in my lap.

I imagine what it would be like on a real road, with a real car, with real humans driving around me or crossing the street in front of me. What if the technology fails? Jackson acknowledges that pedestrian and passenger safety are one of the other bigger hurdles for lawmakers and insurance companies.

“States are largely left on their own to develop language in legislation, and we still, as a society, don't know how far we need to go to keep people safe,” he says. “On the federal level, we have the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, but it's their job to police and monitor; they don't have



“In the end, it all comes down to consumer tastes and demand. You can't sell something that people just don't want yet.”

—Eric Jackson, Connecticut Transportation Institute

the authority to enact legislation.”

At that, Jackson turns off the autonomous driving mode and I bring the simulator to a full stop, ending my foray into the virtual driving experiment.

Waiting to Level Up

In parting words Jackson throws out a glimmer of hope, clarifying just how far along the automated technology is.

When researchers speak about autonomy and cars, there are six levels of increasing complexity. According to the NHTSA, they are defined as zero, with nothing computerized (think of a classic or vintage car), to five, which is all computer, with no driver intervention.

Current technology, says Jackson, is somewhere in the middle of that scale. “What consumers actually have

in production cars is automation level two, where you see lane assist, autonomous parallel parking, and a lot of the features we're seeing in Tesla. The testing being done by Google and Uber on test tracks or certain roads is between a three and a four, because it always needs driver intervention in case there's a glitch.”

Jackson says he is hopeful about the future, even if public perception and legislation aren't quite there.

“You look at every generation, and they consume and adopt technology different. My parents just got rid of their flip phones and switched to smartphones, but my generation was on smartphones almost instantly,” says Jackson. “In the end, it all comes down to consumer tastes and demand. You can't sell something that people just don't want yet.”

Walking toward the parking lot and my own car, I reflect on Jackson's hope for the future, and the thoughts bring me right back to that pseudo driver's seat and my heart starts racing again.

Maybe 50 years is the perfect amount of time to get this right. ☺

read more books,
drink more coffee



Donatti at Winfield Street Coffee next to Ferguson Library, just down the street from UConn Stamford

Coffee and Cubanos

Breno Donatti '14 (BGS) met his wife, Jeanette, 11 years ago in a UConn-style meet-cute — they were both grabbing coffee in the Starbucks in Ferguson Library. Lucky thing, too, because back then Donatti barely had time to look up from his books; he was carrying a full load of courses at UConn Stamford while also running a farm-to-table restaurant. “I felt a bit like Superman,” he says.

Donatti’s love for the restaurant industry — everything from fine dining to beach shacks — is part of the reason he ended up at UConn. “When I moved to the U.S. from Brazil at age 18, I began working in a pizza place in Greenwich, and I loved the pace. It’s never stopping.” But it turned out Donatti was not actually Superman, and full-time school mixed (*continued on page 39*)

CLASS NOTES



► **Elsie Blumenthal Fetterman '49 (ED), '60 MS, '64 MA, '66 Ph.D.** wrote to fill us in on what she’s been up to all these years. Most recently Fetterman, who is 93 and lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, has been assisting on a new documentary about her synagogue, Temple Beth Israel, in Danielson, Connecticut. She wrote a successful grant proposal to the Massachusetts Humanities Council to win funding to distribute the documentary in schools. Produced by Amherst Media, “A House Built by Hope: A Story of Compassion, Resilience, and Religious Freedom” tells the heartwarming story of how the Danielson community welcomed Holocaust survivors and gave them support, compassion, and hope. She is now helping to write a curriculum guide for it. Fetterman was on UConn’s faculty from 1966 to 1979 as the consumer education specialist for the Cooperative Extension Service. She also served on intergovernmental assignment in 1976 to open a national office of consumer education through U.S. Health and Human Services. More recently, she was the director of Cooperative Extension at the University of Massachusetts from 1979 until she retired in 1992.



► Congratulations to **Lois Greene Stone '55 (ED)**, who celebrated her 64th wedding anniversary to Dr. Gerald E. Stone in June. Artifacts from that wedding are being preserved in museums around the country. She reports that her wedding album is in the American Jewish Historical Society, her wedding gown is in The Strong Museum, and the gown’s lace gloves are in the Smithsonian’s Division of Costume. The writer and poet has 15 grandchildren and “so far” eight great-grandchildren.

► The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) named **Arved Plaks '56 (ENG)** an emeritus member. Plaks lives in Houston, retired from Boeing in 1995, and was named an AIAA associate fellow for his work on wind turbines and the International Space Station.



► Congratulations to **Bruce R. Brown '69 (CLAS)** and **Margaret J. L'Estrange Brown '70 (CLAS)**, of Leland, North Carolina, on their 50th wedding anniversary!



► **Patrick Moore's '70 (CLAS)** podcast “Stand Up Citizen” provides a citizenship refresher for the 2020 election. He is an adjunct professor of political science and history in northeastern Ohio. ► **Kudos to Edward Nusbaum '70 (CLAS)**, a Westport-based family law attorney, who was named to the top 1% of attorneys in 2020 by the National Association of Distinguished

Counsel. ► **Bill McGee '71 ED, '76 JD** reports that he is enjoying (semi) retirement in beautiful San Diego County, where he still arbitrates commercial and investment matters and was elected to the board of directors of the Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation, where he is a nature center host on Thursdays. He invites anyone in the area to come walk or jog the lagoon’s scenic trails with him and enjoy the serenity and occasional wildlife that he and his late daughter, Emily, came to cherish during their many trips to the Del Mar races every summer years ago. McGee says that during the 1980s, he became the first director of adjudications in the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and spent the next 28 years in the Washington, D.C., area in his arbitration practice. He also managed a Thoroughbred racing and breeding partnership for more than 25 years. He and his wife Sandy, another ex-snowbird originally from Minnesota, enjoy their new citrus “orchard” and nearly perfect climate. He says he eagerly awaits next summer’s return of the Mets to Petco Park and the day a progeny of his beloved mare, Quick Shift, wins the

Derby. He would love to hear from friends. ► **Steve Fournier '73 (CLAS), '78 JD** celebrated 50 years as a civilian this spring. This fall, he and **Ruth Tomasko Fournier '72 (CLAS)** will celebrate the 50 years since they met in the back row of Professor Blackwell’s “Black Writers” course. They live in Hartford and welcomed their seventh grandchild in August. ► **William R. Kinlock '73 (CLAS)** retired after a long career practicing law and set up a website based on his lifelong study of the American Civil War. The virtual tour at www.draftriotwalkingtour.com focuses on four important sites of the 1863 New York City Draft Riots. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Cheshire, Connecticut. ► **Colleen Palmer '75 (ED), '07 Ph.D.** was selected head of school for the Mountain School at Winhall in Winhall, Vermont. ► **Jeff Duffany '77 (ENG)** writes that after 43 years away, he visited UConn to see his mentor and advisor, electrical engineering professor Faquir Jain, and to get an ice cream at the Dairy Bar. “I could not even find the Electrical Engineering building. Things have changed so much,” he wrote. Jain wasn’t there, so



he left him a note. “The very next morning I received an email from him! That is dedication!” Duffany worked for Bell Laboratories in New Jersey and received an MSEE from Columbia University and a Ph.D. from Stevens Institute in Hoboken, New Jersey. In 2003 he joined the faculty for electrical and computer engineering at Ana G. Mendez University in Gurabo, Puerto Rico. Since then he has been a visiting scientist and faculty member at several government and military research labs, including Sandia National Labs Center for CyberDefense, Navy SPAWAR Research, and the University of Southern California Information Sciences Institute. He received the Albert N. Marquis lifetime achievement award in 2019 for his teaching and research in A.I. and cybersecurity.

➔ All rise for Justice **Richard Palmer '77 JD**, who retired from the Connecticut Supreme Court after 27 years. He was involved in several

high-profile decisions, including cases that legalized same-sex marriage and effectively ended the death penalty in Connecticut. He plans to continue working as a judge trial referee on Connecticut’s superior and appellate courts.



➔ Congratulations **Henry A. Carpenter II '80 (BUS)**. The founder of Bucks County Elder Law earned the 2020 Excellence in Elder Law award from the Pennsylvania Bar Association. A member of the Elder Law Section’s leadership group, the Elder Law Council, for more than 10 years, Carpenter has been named one of the top 3% of Elder Law attorneys in the U.S. by Super Lawyers, a Top Elder Law Attorney by *Philadelphia Magazine*, and a Super Lawyer. He is a frequently published author, a sought-after speaker, and

hosts the radio show “Senior Legal Strategies” on WBCB, 1490 AM. ➔ **Rosanne M. Shea '80 (SFA)** was appointed chair of the visual arts department at Holy Cross High School in Waterbury, Connecticut. She has taught there since 1996, the year she received her MFA from Vermont College. She also has been an adjunct professor of studio art at Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury since 1991. She lives in Waterbury with her husband Wayne Levandoski and her son Wyatt, a student at Naugatuck Valley Community College. She recently became a grandmother to Jaxson, her son Matthew’s first child. ➔ **Pamela Bukowski-Klapproth '85 (BUS)** was named CEO and executive director of Kendal on Hudson in Sleepy Hollow, New York. She has spent more than 20 years as an executive senior living professional. ➔ **Mark L. Boxer '87 MBA**, executive vice president of Cigna, was named one of the *Hartford Business Journal*’s Power 50. ➔ **Andy Goldstrom '87 (BUS), '90 MBA**, a two-time *Inc. 500* business owner and professor of entrepreneurship at Georgia State University, published a book titled “Grow Like A Pro.” ➔ Kudos to **Judy Hartling '89 (CLAS)**, who has been named to the board of directors for the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy. She has been at Cigna for 19 years and is a lead analyst in civic affairs.



➔ **William H. Steinberg '91 (BUS)** joined The Hartford as head of wholesale property for the Navigators brand. He leads the strategic direction and underwriting for wholesale property products. ➔ **Kristin Connors**

'92 JD joined Stockman O’Connor PLLC as a named partner, changing the firm’s name to Stockman O’Connor Connors. She specializes in defending medical malpractice claims and representing health care providers and facilities before government agencies. ➔ **Tracey Lenox '93 JD** was named the top public defender in the newly created Prince William County Public Defenders’ Office in Virginia. ➔ Congratulations to **Jen Palancia Shipp '93 (CLAS)**, who was recently appointed to the board of directors of the Legacy of Life Foundation in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where she lives with her husband and four children. She earned her master’s in higher education administration from North Carolina State and a law degree from Campbell University and holds a license to practice law in North Carolina. ➔ **Jill (Chmielecki) Sharif '93 (CLAS)** was elected 2019–20 president of CREW Boston, which promotes the advancement of women in the commercial real estate industry. ➔ **Ismael Garcia-Colón '94 MA, '02 Ph.D.**, associate professor of anthropology at CUNY in Staten Island, published “Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms,” an in-depth look at the experiences of Puerto Rican migrant workers in continental U.S. agriculture in the 20th century. ➔ **G. Duncan Harris '94 (CLAS)** was named CEO of Capital Community College. Harris lives in Windsor, Connecticut, and has worked for the state’s community college system for 24 years, leading its strategic reorganization, fundraising, and enrollment management. His extensive civic and community leadership includes serving on the boards of the Urban League of Greater Hartford, Foodshare, Capital Workforce Partners, and Windsor Federal Savings. He is founding director of the



Coffee and Cuban

(continued from page 36) with full-time work proved just a little too much. “It was the first time I had to withdraw from a course in my life,” Donatti says, “and also my first realization that I can’t do everything.” Lesson learned: Sometimes you have to sharpen your focus on the things that matter. That day in the library, Donatti focused on Jeannette.

And okay, he also focused on coffee. What, was he going to leave the entire restaurant business behind because of one little dropped class? Donatti figured he just needed to find the right niche. “Coffee felt natural, like I could dive right into it,” he says. “I pulled my savings to buy a little rundown, in-the-middle-of-nowhere deli.” That was the Winfield Deli, which had been around for 90 years. Breno and Jeanette re-

named it Winfield Street Coffee. They saved more than the name. While renovating, they came across decades-old sandwich recipes — Cubanitos, chicken cutlets, bagels and lox. “I framed them and included many of them on the menu,” Donatti says. The combination of old and new was a winner. Patrons loved it, so much so that locations began springing up across southeastern Connecticut including, in 2019, one in Stamford in the very spot where Breno and Jeanette had first bumped into each other. “We’re right downtown, and the library is a big community hub,” Donatti points out. “One of the goals was to make it a space where people would want to be. It felt like the dream of my life was fulfilled.”

And then, just two and a half months later, the whole game changed. Coffee shops, libraries, entire college campuses shut down. The quick pace that Donatti loved about the restaurant business slowed to a crawl, and in the eerie quiet, he had a bad feeling about what was coming. “From the beginning, I thought this was more than a health pandemic. When this is all said and done, we’ll have tens of millions of people unemployed, and people will need basic things — like food.” With that realization, Donatti saw a way forward that would not only keep Winfield Street Coffee in business but also keep the community fed: a true win-win.

“We thought, ‘Hey, our average ticket is about 15 dollars,’” he says. The cost of

one more additional meal — a sandwich and a cookie in a to-go container — was just under five bucks so, thought Donatti, “If we could encourage people to add a little — a cup of coffee or pastry — we’d promise to donate that money.” For every 20 dollars spent, Giving Back — the program Winfield Street Coffee created — donates a meal to one of four different shelters in Stamford whose needs have spiked during the pandemic. Donatti has also reached out to other local businesses to get them to do the same. Customers have responded so enthusiastically, says Donatti, that “some of them even volunteer to deliver the food package themselves.”

It’s caught on fast. In the first two months, Giving Back committed more than 2,000 meals — and, defying all expectations, Winfield Street Coffee’s sales have been on an upswing. “We’ve seen a 4 to 6% increase every week since May 15,” Donatti said in August. Still, while the bottom line certainly counts, it’s not the only consideration. “I want to make sure that we provide and fulfill a need in the community,” Donatti says. “We’re flexible. If things change again and our space is needed for testing sites or whatever, we just want to make sure we’re providing value to the community. Without providing value, there’s no reason to exist,” he says.

After all, if there’s one thing he’s learned in the past year, it’s to be ready for anything. —NAOMI SHULMAN



➔ Kudos to **Medina K. Jett '08 MBA**, who won the 2020 Women in Business Award from the *Hartford Business Journal*. Jett was selected because of the significant difference she makes in her organization and the community, demonstrating business savvy, confidence, and a strong record of professional success. She is founder and CEO of Integrated Compliance Solutions Group LLC, the world’s only Black woman-owned compliance company. Her company works to break down the intricacies of securities regulations to help companies put compliance rules and procedures in place.

Connecticut State Colleges and University’s Student Success Center. ➔ **Jennifer (Toelke) Bourret, CFA '94 (BUS)** has transitioned to the role of investment strategist with the Global Portfolio Strategies team at Prudential Retirement. Bourret has been with the company since 2013. ➔ **Robert Daniel Irwin '95 (CLAS)**, a singer, songwriter, and guitarist, just released a debut album, “Nature vs. Nurture,” an acoustic blend of vocals, guitars, violin, and

piano with rock, folk, country, and blues influences. He teaches high school English in Meriden, Connecticut, and previously worked as a book publicist and editor. He lives with his wife, **Shelby Z. Irwin '95 (CLAS)**, and their two daughters in Hamden. ➔ **Felice Gray-Kemp '96 JD** was named senior vice president and global general counsel at Cyient. She will provide legal and strategic guidance on corporate transactions and oversee corporate governance, compliance, and employee matters.

➔ **Leinani Walter '96 JD** has been appointed assistant deputy director for service access and equity at the California Department of Developmental Services. Walter was director of program operations for the Association of Regional Center Agencies and client’s rights advocate for Disability Rights California. ➔ **Art Salvadori '97 (BUS)** was promoted to partner of audit services at Crowe, a public accounting, consulting, and technology

firm. Based in Hartford, he specializes in financial and insurance audit services. ➔ **Vincent Pace '98 JD, '08 ML** received his doctorate in juridical science after completing a dissertation comparing renewable energy law in Germany and the U.S. He’s an assistant general counsel for Eversource and resides in Berlin, Connecticut, with his wife and two children. ➔ **Julie Rancourt '98 (CLAS)** is the new communications manager for the Connecticut Council of Fam-



TRAJECTORY

PLAYING THROUGH

Among the many ways that parents are finding to entertain and educate their children at home during this strange time is one that's been around for almost 100 years, what those who work at Lego simply call "the brick."

"You can't plan for years like 2020," says Meghan Hall '08 (CLAS), the Lego Group's senior director of digital marketing in the Americas, "but adults and kids, during the pandemic, are all rediscovering Lego building as a relaxing, fun family play experience." Parents also are looking for activities for their kids that encourage independent play and that aren't digital, says Hall, considering all the distance learning kids are doing on screens. "Lego provides a solution to both of those needs," she says.

Hall has no problem selling the Lego experience, pandemic or no. "It really does feel like the easiest job in the world," she says.

New hires at Lego get a crash course in the company's creative play mission of "build, unbuild, rebuild" through a series of play exercises, one of which is called "six bricks," says Hall. "The

number of combinations you can make with six simple bricks is something in the millions. We do that exercise to understand the vast potential that Lego provides kids in terms of creativity."

The Yellow Brick Road

Hall's path to brickwork began in UConn's School of Business, where she was a marketing major before she switched to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to study advertising and public relations. She found work at an ad agency after graduation and, wanting to try her hand at fashion, ended up gaining social media experience at a remarkably good time.

"I moved to New York City to work for a digital agency, leading their fashion practice. We worked with some really exciting brands like Banana Republic and did the launch of Target in Canada, which was a wild ride."

She moved in-house then to lead the social media campaign for Vineyard Vines, which remarkably managed to convince men it was fashionable to wear lime green pants with pink whales on them.

"I think, when I joined, we had about 30,000 Instagram followers. When I left, we were closing in on a million. In three years we went from 13 retail stores to opening the 75th week that I left — that was our store in Grand Central Station."

Why did she leave? Since high school, she had set her sights on two brands she wanted to work on: Target and Vineyard Vines — check and check. She started to consider what should be next. "I thought I would really love to take a job for a purpose-driven brand with a global footprint, and I would love for that job to be with Lego. And I learned, by chance, that they were hiring for a director of content marketing, someone focused on digital content."

In Our Stars

It was perfect timing because her husband, Chris Hall '08 (CLAS), had just gotten a job as a high school counselor in Simsbury, Connecticut, and the Lego office is in Enfield, Connecticut. "So all the stars kind of perfectly aligned to bring us back," she says.

One of Hall's first challenges was addressing the digital competition. "You want to meet kids where they like to play," she says. They launched Super Mario and Minecraft sets. "You can actually build Minecraft designs out of Lego bricks. I think there will always be a physical aspect to play," she says. "Something you touch and feel. The pride of creation comes through a physical connection." Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall.

Hall's team also promotes a website that allows kids to share photos of their creations online with each other. "We have an app called Lego Life," she says, "that is like a kids-only social network, where 100% of the content is moderated by humans."

The Lego Group overtook Mattel in 2017 to become the largest toy manufacturer in the world, and Meghan Hall was part of the team that got it there.

"I think it's pretty remarkable," she says, "that we're the largest toy company, because we are also the only company that makes a single product. The others have full portfolios. We make a single system for play — with infinite possibilities." —PETER NELSON

ily Service Agencies in Rocky Hill. She and her husband David have four children. She loves reading and writing and is working toward the goal of running a road race in each of the state's 169 towns.

➔ **Rebecca M. Allen '98 MSW** has joined the volunteer board of directors of CASA of Southern Connecticut, an organization that recruits, trains, and supports volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Allen is senior program officer at the Melville Charitable Trust based in New Haven. She has more than 25 years of leadership experience in the nonprofit and public sectors with a focus on homelessness and behavioral health. She is a foster parent, living in New Haven with her husband and their two young adult children. ➔ Kudos to **Rodney A. Butler '99 (BUS)**, chairman and CEO of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, who was named to the Power 50 list by *Hartford Business Journal*. ➔ Westfield State University has appointed **Maggie Balch '94 MA** as Dean of Students. She will oversee student activities and leadership, student conduct, residential engagement, and the career center. Balch served in a similar position for the past five years at Rhode Island School of Design. Prior to that, she held progressively advancing positions in student life at Brandeis University for 12 years. She earned a B.S. in elementary education from Penn State and also has held positions in residence life at Washington University in St. Louis, Indiana University, and UMass Dartmouth.



➔ **Marja S. (Cutter) Barr '00 (BUS)** was promoted to associate director in the

contracts department of UnitedHealthcare in Hartford. ➔ **D. Matthew Olsen '00 MBA** was named chief underwriting officer for surety at Sompco International. ➔ **Danielle McGrath Braun '01 (CLAS), '05 JD** was promoted to counsel at Shipman and Goodwin LLP in the firm's Hartford office. Braun practices public finance and municipal law and serves as bond counsel and underwriter's counsel in tax-exempt and taxable financings and represents borrowers under the State of Connecticut Clean Water Fund Program. ➔ Thumbs up to **Carolyn N. Kinder '03 Ph.D.**, who has joined the volunteer board of directors of CASA of Southern Connecticut, which recruits, trains, and supports volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Kinder retired after 35 years as a teacher and administrator in the New Haven public schools, receiving an Elm Award. She has long been active in her church's community outreach and as a leader in the New Haven club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs. She is a mother of two and grandmother of two and lives in New Haven with her husband. ➔ Tapping his experience as an educator and school resource officer, **James O'Leary '04 BGS** wrote his first young adult novel, "Sanhinga." He works for the Sarasota (Florida) County Schools Police Department. ➔ **Joy Wright '04 6th Year**, principal of King Philip Middle School in West Hartford, was named 2020 Connecticut Middle School Principal of the Year by the Connecticut Association of Superintendents. ➔ **Cara Marie Brown '04 (CLAS)** is now teaching in the Waterbury School System. ➔ **Jodie Comer Oshana '05 MA, '17 Ph.D.**,



MAKING GOOD

LET FREEDOM RING

Lesedi Graveline '17 (CLAS) says it was her UConn education that fostered her affinity for social justice and for addressing the deficit of Black and Brown voices in academia — especially at her current university, Harvard, where she is pursuing a master of theological studies.

"There's a dire need for more Black scholarly work, particularly at the Ivy League level. Harvard is a complicated place with a complicated history, given that it was built by slaves," says Graveline. "And we as Black scholars have a contentious relationship with the university," which is why she knew she had to be a part of the Freedom School.

"Freedom School: A Seminar on Theory and Praxis for Black Studies in the United States" is a two-semester, one-credit course established at Harvard last fall by Graveline's colleague and friend Najha Zigbi-Johnson (pictured at left, above, with Graveline).

This course, says Graveline, "demonstrates that there's knowledge coming from our communities and our experiences, and exchanging that knowledge and experience with each other is still a scholarly exercise."

Grounded in the framework of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools that provided a supplemental education in history and social justice for African American youth, it is student-led and features a nontraditional curriculum steeped in Afro-surrealism and Afro-futurism. Its piece de résistance is a 94-page literary magazine that Graveline co-edits. The poems, essays, stories, and artwork come from writers and artists "across arbitrary divisions of race, class, gender, religion and sexuality," reads the foreword.

Graveline and her Freedom School cohorts hope the magazine serves as a call to action to create, inspire, and imagine without constraint. And as a new semester begins, she says that while this moment is filled with uncertainty there is also opportunity. "I'm a strong advocate for finding beauty in uncertainty and the opportunity for growth in unpredictability," she said. "It is scary, and overwhelming, but it also means all the possibilities in the world — and there's a freedom in that." —MAYA A. MOORE '18 (CLAS)

REMEMBRANCE

CLIFF ROBINSON

When former UConn basketball star Cliff Robinson sadly passed away in late August at an all-too-young 53 years old, it undoubtedly sent the thoughts of longtime UConn fans hurtling back to a much different time period in the history of the program — a time before the Ray Allens and Richard Hamiltons and Kemba Walkers wore UConn uniforms, a time before four NCAA championships, a time before seven Big East Tournament titles.

As the UConn basketball beat writer for the *Journal Inquirer* in Manchester, Connecticut, I was on the scene when Cliff Robinson arrived in Storrs in 1985, a time when UConn's main goal was to avoid playing in the 8–9 elimination game of the Big East Tournament. At the time, Cliff was not the kind of recruit who usually ended up at UConn — at six feet ten, 225 pounds, strong and agile, he was a big-time talent who could have gone to Oklahoma, or Marquette, or Syracuse.

Cliff was a talent level above the recruits UConn had been getting, and he knew it. Menacing and intimidating, he could be downright surly at times. That changed somewhat when a strong-willed Jim Calhoun took over as head coach in Cliff's sophomore season, threatening to “send his ass back to Buffalo” if his attitude didn't adjust. Even though Cliff laid the groundwork for the UConn that was to come by helping the team win an NIT championship in 1988, earning all-conference status twice and scoring more than 1,600 points, he was never fully embraced by some UConn fans, who unfairly placed most of the blame on him when the team failed to make the NCAA Tournament.

The 1989 NBA draft at the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden, however, was destined to be Cliff's night to shine. The Connecticut sports media was in attendance in full force, ready to cover the story of UConn's first-ever NBA first-round draft choice.

At that time, the players invited to the draft sat in the front row, leaving their seats to come onstage as their names were called. As the draft delved deeper into the first round, more and more of those seats were empty, until the first round ended and Robinson was alone in the front row — with players of clearly lesser talent selected before him.

Cliff waited no longer but got up and bolted out of the Felt Forum, walking out into the rainy New York City night, with the entire Connecticut media contingent following. As we called out “Cliff!” he stopped and slowly turned around, while we apprehensive reporters approached cautiously, wary that an angry Cliff Robinson might explode. But it was a totally different Cliff Robinson who stood in the rain and spoke to the media that night — soft-spoken and sincere. It wasn't hard to tell that he was emotionally hurt, embarrassed and humbled. And maturing right before our eyes. It was the night Cliff Robinson grew up.

“They don't really know who I am,” said Cliff, who was eventually selected by Portland in the second round. “But I



Cliff Robinson the Husky in the 1988 NIT championship game in Madison Square Garden; as a Blazer; and a 2014 “Survivor.”

am going to show them.”

And show them he did — 18 years later, out of all the players selected in that 1989 draft, only Cliff Robinson was still playing in the NBA, with a Sixth Man of the Year Award, an All-Star Team selection, and two All-Defensive Team selections on his résumé.

Cliff was mellow, almost lovable, as an elder statesman, always proud of his UConn heritage, a frequent attendee at Calhoun's alumni games, and a sometime visitor to a campus game. Sadly, the newest generation of UConn players will not get to know him. Cliff Robinson could teach them much about coming full circle. —PHIL CHARDIS

TOM'S TRIVIA



CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!

Go to s.uconn.edu/fall20trivia or flip to p. 48 to see if you know as much as UConn Trivia King Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

- Which of these is *not* one of the 81 activities the Student Alumni Association suggests should be on every UConn undergrad's bucket list?
 - A: Visit the Storrs Monument and pay tribute to legendary Huskies at the New Storrs Cemetery
 - B: Watch or build a float for the Homecoming parade, and then enjoy the SUBOG carnival afterward
 - C: Learn the words to the UConn Fight Song and sing it at a game
 - D: Attend your professors' office hours
- Which residence hall at Storrs was originally intended to be a hotel?
 - A: Shippee Hall
 - B: Charter Oak Apartments
 - C: Hilltop Halls
 - D: Holcomb Hall
- Who were the UConn 49ers?
 - A: The first postwar graduating class
 - B: A fife and drum corps
 - C: The nickname of the 1949 men's basketball team
 - D: A notoriously rowdy student cheering section made up of World War II veterans
- During the 1918–20 flu pandemic, which of the following was *not* a requirement for students at UConn?
 - A: Maintain 1,000 cubic feet of air between people
 - B: Bathe at least twice a week
 - C: Do not close another person's tobacco pouch with your teeth
 - D: Do not attend dances in Willimantic

a visiting assistant professor in HDFS, has joined the volunteer board of directors of CASA of Southern Connecticut, which advocates for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. She was formerly an attorney at the Children's Law Center of Connecticut and at the law firm of Brown, Paindiris, & Scott, LLP. She lives in Westbrook, Connecticut, with her husband and their three children.

► Peter Vaughn '05 MBA was promoted to director of insurance operations by Third Coast Underwriters. ► And Katia (Sutyak) Noll '05 (CLAS) was promoted to senior director of Global Food Safety & Quality at Subway at the company's Milford, Connecticut, headquarters.



► Congrats to Ajay Madkekar '06 (BUS) and Diana Flynn Madkekar '06 (BUS, CLAS), who welcomed their first child in April in New York City. They're both thankful for the healthcare heroes who safeguarded Reya Pearl Madkekar's arrival from being negatively impacted by the pandemic. Reya is excited to join the next generation of Huskies! ► A husky of a different sort: Kelly (Heffley) Villar '06 MA, a mother of six who teaches second grade at Southeast Elementary School in Mansfield, Connecticut, was selected last June as the Iditarod's designated “teacher on the trail,” a year-round role created to extract educational opportunities from the

annual 1,000-mile sled dog race. She recently blogged about her time on the trail in Alaska and was featured in the *Hartford Courant*.
 ▶ **Ricki Ginsberg '06 (ED), '07 MA, '17 Ph.D.**, an assistant professor at Colorado State University, received

the university's Multicultural Staff and Faculty Network Distinguished Service Award.
 ▶ Three cheers for **Dr. Jason M. Redman '06 (CLAS)**, whose clinical trial work in metastatic colon cancer was accepted for oral presentation at the World

Congress for Gastrointestinal Cancer. The conference was to take place in Barcelona, Spain, but was held virtually in July. He is an assistant research physician in the Cancer Immunotherapy Program at the National Cancer Institute. ▶ The Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering elected **Matt Fleury '07 MBA**, president and CEO of the Connecticut Science Center, as an honorary member of the academy. Fleury, who also chairs the Board of Regents for Higher Education, was recognized for activities that foster science and engineering education of the highest quality and promote interest in science and engineering on the part of the public, especially young people. He helped to launch the science center in his prior role with the Capital Region Development Authority and has held management positions in communications and government affairs in the telecommunications industry after a career in broadcast journalism. He and his wife are the proud parents of twin boys. ▶ **Rebecca F. Stath '07 MS** was promoted to vice president of accounting and principal accounting officer by the Kaman Corp. She began her career at KPMG.
 ▶ **Lisa A. Barry '07 MS** was promoted to vice president of financial planning and analysis by the Kaman Corp. She started her career at Hamilton Sundstrand and then United Technologies.
 ▶ **Rob Kreager '07 (CLAS)** was recently promoted to managing director at Aon. ▶ **Kate M. Mackay '08 MBA** was named chief marketing officer at Siren Marine in Newport, Rhode Island. Previously she managed branding and digital marketing at Hasbro Inc.
 ▶ **Benjamin B. Levy '09 (BUS)** joined Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. He is a sports medicine and general orthopedic physician and

had been a team physician fellow for NCAA Division 1 sports programs at UConn and Quinnipiac University.



▶ **Sean Halbruner '10 (CLAS)** and **Katie Halbruner '10 (CLAS), '14 MA** happily announce the birth of their first child, Annie Elizabeth Halbruner. The proud dad says the future Husky was born in March in Manchester, Connecticut. ▶ **James Moriarty '10 (ENG)** won the 2020 Kate Goldstein Emerging Leader award presented by the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association. ▶ **Karissa (Burgess) Burnett '11 (CLAS)** earned her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the Fuller Graduate School of Psychology in Pasadena, California.



▶ **Amy K. Smith '12 (CLAS)**, associate director of employer relations at New York Institute of Technology, loves N.Y. baseball but keeps her UConn spirit alive by proudly displaying her Husky license plate on her new car.
 ▶ **Siavash Samei '12 MA, '19 Ph.D.**, a postdoctoral fellow at the UConn Humanities Institute, is happy to report that next year he will be a visiting assistant professor of archaeology at The College of Wooster. "None of my accomplishments would have been possible without the support of the UConn community and specifically the Anthropology Department and UCHI." ▶ **Carla Brigandi '12 6th Year, '15 Ph.D.** was named a 2019–20



MAKING GOOD

HER FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mary-Ellen Barrett '88 JD admits that she once liked the movie "Pretty Woman," the Cinderella-like tale of a prostitute played by Julia Roberts. She cheered when the theme song for the movie "Hustle and Flow" — "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp" by the hip hop group Three 6 Mafia — won an Oscar for Best Original Song. Her opinions changed quickly when the longtime deputy district attorney in San Diego County joined the human trafficking division in 2011.

"It was a window into a world that I didn't know existed," Barrett recalls. "I thought, my god, this has to be stopped."

Barrett, 56, has devoted nearly 10 years to doing exactly that, to fighting a modern-day version of slavery, whether it is forced labor or sexual exploitation. She has tried cases, led sweeping, multi-agency efforts, and worked with schools to raise awareness of the crime. Most recently she was named to a national advisory board that will provide legal assistance to prosecutors combating human trafficking in Tanzania.

Looking back now, the West Hartford native says her whole career has led her to this fight, though that was never her plan. After earning

a bachelor's in international relations at Georgetown University, she moved home to attend UConn Law, then joined a civil law firm and began working on personal injury, medical malpractice, and insurance fraud cases, but she did not see the inside of a courtroom.

Then Barrett took a flier. She followed a boyfriend to San Diego, where she eventually got an offer to join the county's district attorney's office. She had no intention of settling on the West Coast, but thought she would give it a try for a couple of years. In 1990 she started in the division charged with collecting delinquent child support and instantly her dream of litigating came true. She went to court four days a week — to make deadbeat parents pay up.

"I was threatened several times during that year and had my tires slashed," she says. "When you go after people's money they get very angry. It was an eye-opening experience."

After her first balmy California winter, Barrett's plans to return to New England faded, though she remains a diehard Red Sox fan and never passes up a Dunkin' Donuts in an airport. She not only loved the weather, she loved working in the D.A.'s office. She moved to prosecuting misdemeanors, graduated to felonies, then joined the narcotics division. She learned to work with informants and undercover cops, how to get wiretaps, and how gangs work. She went to every training session she could. At one, she listened to the recording of a wiretap of a gang talking about its prostitution ring.

"They were so blatant," she says. "They didn't think anyone would do anything about it."

Dark Side of Paradise

Beautiful San Diego ranks as one of the top 13 areas in the country for human trafficking. Some 3,500 children and adults are trafficked there each year, overwhelmingly for sexual exploitation, according to a 2015 study. That underground sex economy is worth an estimated \$810 million a year.

And San Diego represents a larger trend — human trafficking is pervasive and on the rise in the U.S., Barrett says.

She attributes that change to how the internet has made the crime easier to commit and harder to prosecute. When Barrett first joined the human trafficking division, some prostitutes still walked the streets looking for johns, which made the crime visible. Now women are sold for sex largely out of sight via social media, which makes it far harder to catch pimps or crack gang-run rings.

"It's a low-risk, high-profit crime," Barrett says. It's a world away, but prosecutors in Tanzania face a similar challenge. The country has made human trafficking a far more serious crime but prosecutors there have yet to make real headway trying cases under these tougher statutes. That is why the National District Attorney Association, which is a resource for prosecutors around the U.S., made its mentoring services available to Tanzanian prosecutors, who can call on members of the association's human trafficking advisory board, such as Barrett.

Barrett has not seen the inside of a courtroom for nearly three years as she has fought the crime on another front — the supply side. Since 2018 she's been giving presentations in schools about how human traffickers recruit minors. If teachers, parents, and students know how these criminals work and how pervasive the crime is, the harder it will be for them to lure children into sexual trafficking, she says.

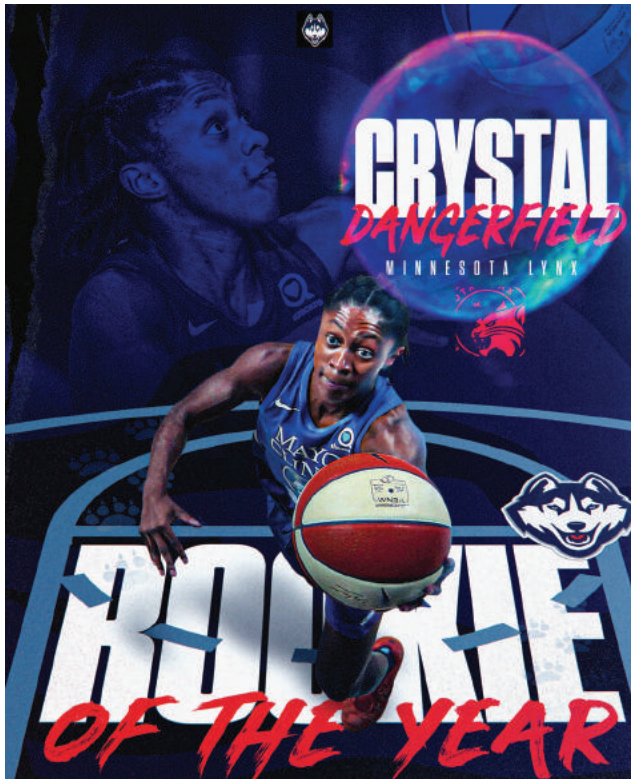
"Any child with a smartphone is vulnerable," she says. "The perpetrators don't need to come in the front door any more. They come in via the internet."

Barrett will return to the courtroom. She's missed it, despite how draining working on human trafficking cases can be.

She says she revives herself with a shot of "normalcy" on the weekends by going to her son's basketball games. Being a mom also made her cut back on her long hours, but not by much she admits.

"There's no such thing as a 40-hour week," she says. "There's always another victim to be helped. There's always another person that can be reached."

—AMY SUTHERLAND



KUDOS

Crystal Dangerfield '20 (CLAS) was named the 2020 WNBA Rookie of the Year on Sept. 27. Dangerfield, who was selected 16th overall in the 2020 WNBA draft, is the first second-round pick to earn Rookie of the Year honors. She is the sixth former Husky to earn WNBA Rookie of the Year — joining **Diana Taurasi '05 (CLAS)**, **Tina Charles '10 (CLAS)**, **Maya Moore '11 (CLAS)**, **Breanna Stewart '16 (CLAS)**, and **Napheesa Collier '19 (CLAS)** — and second in a row, after Collier's 2019 win. Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters.

Dangerfield ranked 11th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg, pacing the Lynx) and third in free-throw percentage (92.2), while starting 19 of her 21 regular-season games and logging 30 minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield ranked first in free-throw percentage; second in scoring, minutes, and assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (0.86 spg) and fifth in field goal percentage (47.1).

Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year honors.



MAKING GOOD

UConn RECEIVES \$1M GIFT AND MATCH CHALLENGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE



The Human Rights Institute (HRI) at UConn is kicking off a matching gift challenge with support from longtime donors Gary Gladstein

'66 (CLAS), '08 (HON) and his wife Dr. Phyllis Gladstein (*the two are pictured at left*). The couple, whose generous giving spans the last 22 years, has committed \$1 million as an outright gift plus an additional match to inspire giving by others. They will match gifts dollar for dollar to the Human Rights Institute, up to \$1 million, over the next three years.

"How extraordinary that our family contribution in 1998 sponsoring a visiting professor in human rights would grow far beyond our expectation to become one of the premier human rights programs in the world," says Gary Gladstein.

"We feel privileged to continue to support the Human Rights Institute with its dedicated faculty, motivated students, and most supportive administration. During this troubled time of pandemic and social unrest, the work of the Human Rights Institute is more important than ever."

Daniel Weiner, vice president for global affairs, noted that the longstanding relationship between the Gladsteins and HRI is "a profound example of

transformative giving that is having important societal impacts in Connecticut, the United States, and around the world." He underscored that this new gift and fundraising challenge is "an opportunity to further enhance UConn's reputation as a global leader in human rights research, teaching, and practice."

The match campaign will enable HRI to continue to build its endowment, which has provided a sustainable resource for undergraduate and graduate student fellowships, support for experiential learning opportunities, and funding for programming and faculty research on cutting-edge issues related to human rights.

"We are tremendously grateful for the generosity of Gary and Dr. Phyllis Gladstein and their remarkable commitment to UConn, to scholarship, and to the cause of human rights," says President Thomas Katsouleas. "The Human Rights Institute is one of UConn's signature programs, and its work has only grown more urgent since it was established."

The gift will also enable the Institute to launch a human rights practitioner-in-residence program and provide funding for seed grants to faculty members who are applying their research expertise to projects that advance human rights research, monitoring, and reporting. One recent seed grant was awarded to associate professor of political science Prakash

Recent HRI seed grant awardee professor Prakash Kashwan (above, right) shows that conservation of forests like this one in Chiapas, Mexico, happens when we protect the rights of the people who rely on them (above, left).

Kashwan for his work to help countries protect their poorest citizens against the effects of climate change.

The Human Rights Institute is a national leader, with one of the largest interdisciplinary programs. And UConn is the only public university offering a human rights major. The Gladsteins have supported programs across the University — at Hillel, the School of Business, the Division of Athletics, and UConn Health. Their gifts and match commitments to HRI have transformed research and academics at UConn and made an impact in the field of human rights globally.

"The generous support of the Gladstein family over the past two decades has enabled the Institute to become one of the premier programs in the country," says HRI director Kathryn Libal. "We have attracted stellar faculty to contribute to the academic programs, and our graduates are securing meaningful work in law and government, business, the health sector, and STEM fields. This gift and match challenge will allow us to deepen and expand our work at a critical time in the country."



The Human Rights Institute (HRI) at UConn is among the nation's leading academic centers. Home to one of the largest majors in the country, experiential learning programs, and innovative research on human rights, HRI is effecting change around the world.

**DONATE NOW TO SUPPORT THE
ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND
YOUR GIFT WILL BE MATCHED.**

Thanks to the generosity of Gary Gladstein '66 (CLAS), '08 (HON) and Dr. Phyllis Gladstein, gifts to the Human Rights Institute will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1 million, over the next three years.

Give today at s.uconn.edu/hri.

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TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. A, 2. A, 3. B, 4. D.

College of Education and Human Services Outstanding Educator by West Virginia University, where she teaches courses in educational psychology, statistics, and special and gifted education. ➔ **Dylan Graetz, '14 MD, '14 MPH**, a pediatric hematology-oncology fellow at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital received a Young Investigator Award from the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Her research in global pediatric medicine focuses on how culture affects communication and how that in turn affects outcomes for children with cancer. She is assessing the communication needs of patients and families in Guatemala at the time of

diagnosis. ➔ **Sophia Ononye '13 Ph.D., '15 MBA** launched The Sophia Consulting Firm in Brooklyn, New York. She was recently honored with the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association Spark Award and a Congressional Letter of Recognition for receiving the Face2Face Leadership Award. She also joined the boards of two growth-stage life science companies: BioSortia Pharmaceuticals and BlueCloud by Health-CarePoint. ➔ **Michael A. Lipson '13 (CLAS)** joined Robinson+Cole as an associate in the firm's Real Estate and Development Group in the Boston office. ➔ **Tara Amatrudo '13 6th Year** is the new principal of Marine Science Magnet High School in Groton, Connecticut. ➔ **Danielle Taylor '14 (ED), '15 MA**, a fourth grade teacher in Windsor Public Schools, was named a 2020 Fund for Teachers Fellow. She will spend 2021 in Bali, exploring mindfulness and emotional regulation techniques to improve students' social and emotional regulation and support those with traumatic backgrounds. ➔ **Jordan Orlovsky '14 MA** was appointed to the football coaching staff at the University of Albany. ➔ **Byron Bunda '14 (BUS)** was promoted to team lead for the North America West Region at Cloudbeds, a company for independent hosts and hoteliers. He is grateful for UConn's Professional Sales Leadership Program, led by Bill Ryan, which gave him the tools to succeed in Cloudbeds' sales organization. ➔ **Nisha Vasan '15 JD** was named director of

employee relations at We-Work. She previously worked in employee relations at The Walt Disney Co. ➔ Law school classmates **Meghan E. Fitzgerald '15 JD** and **Ashley A. Noel '15 JD** were named shareholders at Boyle Shaughnessy Law. Fitzgerald is based in Boston and focuses on defending environmental, premises liability, personal injury, and construction defect claims. Noel works in Hartford, concentrating in insurance coverage and extracontractual liability. ➔ East Hartford school-teacher **Tracey Lafayette '15 (ED, CLAS), '16 MA** reports that with the recent transition to virtual educating, she has been recording herself reading a story every day and shares the link with families. ➔ Another teacher, **Jessica Stargardter '16 (ED), '17 MA**, who teaches gifted and talented students at Norwalk Public Schools and was the Neag School of Education's 2020 Outstanding Early Career Professional, was named a 2020 Fund for Teachers Fellow. She will spend 2021 in London and Prague, examining international storytelling programs and translating their practices into instructional strategies that foster empathy and global competency. ➔ **Rachel Hill '17 (ED)**, who plays for the National Women's Soccer League, was traded from the Orlando Pride to the Chicago Red Stars. ➔ **John R. Amendola '18 MBA** married Elizabeth DeSiena in May 2019 at Sacred Heart Church in Castleton-on-Hudson, New York. He is a senior benefits analyst at Montefiore Nyack

Hospital. The couple lives in Stamford. ➔ Former Husky **Batouly Camara '19 (ED)** was honored for her many off-court achievements with a Billie Jean King Youth Leadership Award at the ESPYs. Camara started the nonprofit Women and Kids Empowerment (WAKE) to empower girls and women around the globe. ➔ **Rebecca Aldred '19 6th Year**, a co-assistant principal at Ellington High School, was named the new principal of Windsor Locks High School in Connecticut.



➔ **Grace Vallo '17 (BUS)** wrote in July to say "yesterday I quit my corporate job. I'm taking the biggest leap I may ever take. This road is so unknown, and I'm not sure where it will take me. I've never felt this scared or excited. I've never felt more judged. I've never felt more proud. I've never felt so liberated. I've never felt so ready." Vallo left her job in the Market Research Department at Travelers for her dream career — food blogger. Find her favorite fall recipes, including Squash, Cider Caramelized Onion & Chorizo Pizza and Whipped Shortbread & Pumpkin Spice Cookie Sandwiches, at tastefullygrace.com.



JOB ENVY

Eau de Herring

Kimberly Grendzinski '16 (CAHNR) begins every workday at NYC's Central Park Zoo by lugging bucket after bucket of fish, some 100 pounds, up two flights of stairs. Waiting at the top of the stairs is a hungry mob of heckling penguins, who crowd her the moment she starts tossing herring. As they try to snap the prizes right out of her hands, they often pinch her forearms and leave a trail of bruises. "The penguins can be jerks, though lovable jerks," she says, admitting to stealing time from the black-and-whites to train the seals and sea lions, whose smarts make them her favorite species.

Since graduating with an animal science degree, Grendzinski, 26, has worked at Brooklyn's Prospect Park Zoo and now at Manhattan's Central Park Zoo, with its melee of penguins, puffins, and seals. After working with UConn's many domestic animals, she found her calling with exotics during a summer internship at Bridgeport's Beardsley Zoo, where she dug up rocks to build a new exhibit and trained a bison.

"I was coming home every day smelling awful, and I was like, 'This is what I want to do.'"

Zookeeping is demanding, physical work, but it is also intellectually challenging, which she loves. Zookeepers keep a watchful eye on their animals because the smallest behavior changes could signal a health problem. For Grendzinski, that means tracking 74 penguins in a nearly 100-foot-long pool.

"It's like I have a catalogue in my head," she says. "Zookeeping takes a lot more mental focus than most people think. It's not playing with animals all day." —AMY SUTHERLAND

➔ For more of our interview with Grendzinski, go to s.uconn.edu/zookeeper.

IN MEMORIAM

Please visit s.uconn.edu/octobits2020 to find obituaries for alumni and faculty. And please share news of alumni deaths and obituaries with *UConn Magazine* by sending an email to alumni-news@uconnalumni.com or writing to Alumni News & Notes, UConn Foundation, 2384 Alumni Drive Unit 3053, Storrs, CT 06269.

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