

UCCONN

MAGAZINE

SPRING 2021



SNAP!

Downhill From Here?

Co-captain and veep of UConn's Ski Team **Sydney Murner '21 (ENG)** competes in the giant slalom last year at Whiteface Mountain in Lake Placid, New York, where the team placed in the top five. Covid-19 canceled the team's season this year, so Murner has had more time for studying and for job applications — she hopes to do fieldwork for an environmental engineering firm. Murner, her ski teammates, and her Delta Zeta sisters also have been working on numerous fundraisers for Connecticut Children's Hospital through Huskython.





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FEATURES

14 DO GOOD, FEEL GOOD

We could easily fill every issue of this magazine with stories of Huskies doing good works for people and for the planet — it seems to be in the genetic makeup of our blue blood. But this seemed like a season where we all could use the feel-good inspiration of these stories a bit more than ever. So, from the front cover to the final page, get to know some of our favorite Husky humanitarians, philanthropists, climate crusaders, and more.

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1 UCONN NOW

Huskies making meaningful music and movies, spreading joy, creating creators, saving lives, change-making at the Pentagon and the West Wing, and much more.

36 UCONN NATION

Alums show their Husky — and civil — spirit by busting monopolies, helping prisoners get degrees, mentoring young social work students, and turning '60s campus memories into novels. Plus Class Notes, Tom's Trivia, and more.



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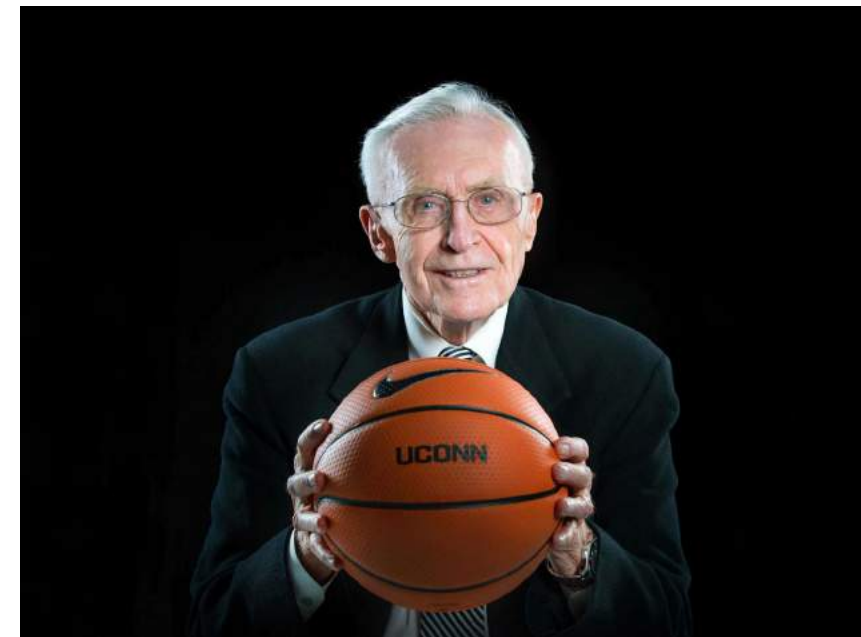
Snap! Peter Morenus

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From the Editor Stephen Slade '89 (SFA)

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FROM THE EDITOR



GOOD PEOPLE

When we decided to make this issue a front-to-back compilation of UConn people doing good in the world, it was because we thought everyone could use a hit of happiness right now. We found out near press time in January that our friend and colleague Dee Rowe had died, and it became, also, a fitting tribute to this UConn icon who was as good as good gets, and who left a lasting impression on every human being he met.

Six years ago, almost to the day, as I looked out my new office window at Swan Lake and the Chem Building stacks, my computer pinged with the first external email to my uconn.edu account. It was from my dad. After I got settled in my new job, he asked, could I please try to find an old friend of his he'd lost touch with, a longtime UConn coach and athletic administrator named Dee Rowe. My initial search failed when I looked for Rowe in the ranks of the retired — the Athletics communicator who ultimately shared his contact info said, "He still has an office in Gampel, comes in most days." Rowe was 86 at the time.

Dad introduced me to Dee at halftime of a local high school basketball game where the son of a friend of his was playing. It was his fourth basketball game or scrimmage of the day and he was headed to another. Indeed, Rowe had a singular passion for the game and is credited with helping make UConn men's and women's basketball, and athletics in general, what it is today through his post-coaching career as a fundraiser. Rowe was a friend and trusted advisor to countless UConn coaches, athletes and, yes, presidents, deans, faculty, and staff.

"He took the time to really get to know people and wanted to help them," says my colleague Mike Enright who worked with Rowe for years. "When you went to an awards dinner or a game with Coach Rowe, one thing was certain, you would be the last to leave. He had to see everyone. To thank them and make sure they were doing OK. He loved sitting down for a cup of coffee and a muffin to talk about life, family. He always said that to know the right thing to do is easy, it is just hard to do it sometimes. Dee helped people do the right things in life."



LETTERS

We want to hear from you — good, bad, just not ugly. Please share thoughts, insights, discrepancies, recollections, and how's your Tom's Trivia win-loss percentage coming? Post to our website at magazine.uconn.edu, email me at lisa.stiepok@uconn.edu, and send by regular mail to UConn Magazine Letters, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06268-3144.

Cliff Robinson

➔ Your story on the tragic passing of Cliff Robinson certainly evoked some memories of what seems like an era long since passed. He's the bridge between the mediocre teams of the mid-'80s and the ascension to glory a few years later. I remember the first time I heard about him. I used to subscribe to the old Husky *Blue and White* publication, which covered UConn sports back in the day.

In one of their issues probably back in early 1985, there was a men's basketball recruiting update with two players mentioned, one of whom was Cliff Robinson — "6' 9" forward from Buffalo, New York." I remember saying to myself "Wow — this guy actually sounds like a good player." And he was indeed beyond good. He'll always be my UConn favorite, even if several other players went on to amass slightly

better numbers and be a part of significant championship teams.

I'm certain there were several NBA teams in the 1990s who looked back at the 1989 draft and wished they had chosen him.

Gone way too soon.
Rick Darling '84 (BUS), via e-mail

Lego

➔ I had the chance to work with Meg [Hall '08 (CLAS)] in her agency days. Savvy, smart, and a lover of all things Connecticut. Happy to see her still doing great things here in Connecticut!
Eric Panke '93 (SFA), via our website

Women in the Jungle

➔ I would like to clarify that the first females took up residence in "The Jungle" in the fall of 1967. ["Jungle Reunion, Class Notes," Spring 2019] I resided in Fairfield.

I have not returned to UConn since I graduated, yet I have often wondered if the initials three of us carved in the maple tree near the entrance to Fairfield still remain.

Susan Hollister '71 (CLAS), via e-mail

Campus Update?

➔ I love my *UConn Magazine*. Well done! As an older alum, I'd love to see you feature a new map of the University and surrounding town. So many alums would love it. #BleedBlue
Ann McGreevy '84 Ph.D., via mail

ASL

➔ I have a teen very interested in learning ASL. She was unable to take a high school course. Perhaps next year, for she aspires to attend UConn and work with children with hearing and speech difficulties like herself.
Lorraine MacIntyre, via our website



MAKING GOOD

SOCIAL MEDIA



Congratulations to my good friends Angie and Matt the luckiest humans I know. @jonathanhusky14



\$60,000 in less than two weeks. Safe to say, #UConnNation holds themselves #accountable. THANK YOU @husky_ticket_project



Congratulations to Brett McGurk '96 (CLAS) on being appointed the National Security Council's coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa. @uconn

THE KEY OF LIFE

Brianna Chance '23 (SFA) says the philosophy of "try everything" is what led her to rewarding research experiences during her first year at UConn. The music education and vocal performance major from New Haven, Connecticut, joined La Comunidad Intelectual, a Latinx living and learning community, where she says she and her peers quickly recognized there were relatively few Latinx people working in higher education.

So she joined communication professor Diana Rios in collecting testimonials and data about Latinx students' experience here. Last February, the two presented their findings at the annual Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy.

"It was so gratifying," says Chance. "For me it was almost a form of activism and education."

The experience also showed her that this kind of work is not only for those in STEM fields. "I thought research had to be done in a white lab coat over a microscope," Chance says.

"I didn't realize research could be going out and gathering people's stories."

Chance hopes to apply her newfound data-collection skills next to questions that may have been overlooked surrounding students of color in the arts. "I really want to connect what it means to be a student of color and be pursuing the arts and not be tokenized."

Chance plans to be a music educator and credits the music educators in her life with helping her through difficult situations. "They were the people I could rely on," she says. "So, I said I needed to do this because it saved me as a kid. It's a tribute to myself and the people who helped uplift me."

She encourages students interested in conducting research to reach out to professors conducting work they care about, even if it is outside their major, as it was for Chance.

"Being at a research university, the possibilities are endless," she says. — ANNA ZARRA ALDRICH '20 (CLAS)

CHECKING IN WITH

LAUREN STOWELL, DOCUMENTARIAN

The first time Lauren Stowell '06 (CLAS) walked into a television production truck, she knew this was how she wanted to make a living.

"It was organized chaos, and you could cut the tension with a knife," says Stowell, who that day was working as a runner for ESPN during a UConn basketball game when she was a student. That meant she was doing every little odd job the ESPN crew needed during their time in Storrs.

"I remember looking at the producer and the director in front of the board calling camera shots. There were graphics people yelling. It was the most chaotic, but beautiful, orchestra of madness I ever experienced. When I went home, I told my dad, 'I am not sure what I just experienced, but I want to be doing that.'"

Stowell knew sports at an early age as her father, Bob Stowell '71 (CLAS), was a football player and then a long-time photographer at Husky events. The younger Stowell graduated with a degree in journalism with a concentration in pathobiology and is now a features producer at ESPN and a five-time Sports Emmy Award winner. Her most recent effort was the highly acclaimed documentary "Tiger Woods: America's Son," part of ESPN's "The Undefeated" brand, which premiered in November.

Stowell worked her way up in the sports communications business, starting in UConn's Athletic Communications Office as a freshman. She answered the phone, made copies of newspaper clippings, and proofread media guides. Stowell says she also learned how to interact with people at that time.

"I learned how to communicate with the public, with the media, how to be a liaison for the school," says Stowell, who is quick to credit now-retired Athletic Communications secretary Luanne Dunstan as the person who first prepared and mentored her in the field.

"It was a huge opportunity with the level of notoriety the UConn programs were having. The phones were ringing off the hook, people wanted media guides, tickets, licensing was blowing up. It all prepared me for a great career in media."

Satellite City

Combining that experience with her classroom work, which she says gave her a foundation of style, form, and good writing, Stowell applied to the ESPN production trainee program after graduation and was hired for the competitive seven-month position.

"You have to prove yourself in many different areas," says Stowell. "You learn very basic production skills in many different areas. I learned all I could during that time, and was exposed to a lot of shows."

She was hired full-time after that seven-month period and, in 2013, won her first Sports Emmy for the short feature "Drive," the story of a NASCAR motorsports engineer working for the most successful team in the auto racing circuit, despite having been born without arms.

In 2015, she received an Emmy for the short documentary "No Excuses," the story of 7-year-old wrestler Isaiah Bird. "Isaiah was born without legs, had a troubled family situation, and his coach became his mentor and took over his child care responsibilities," says Stowell. "His father was in and out of prison, and he had a teenage mom with other challenges. It was an incredible story of relationship and bond. Isaiah had an incredible spirit and character, and never saw himself as having a disability. That attitude impacted so many people, and that was the story we told."

Stowell was also one of the producers as ESPN told the story of Purdue University student and super sports fan Tyler Trent, who passed away from bone cancer on New Year's Day 2019 at

age 20. Trent was a source of inspiration around the country for the way he fought the disease and supported his beloved Boilermakers.

"We didn't even feel worthy of the time we had with Tyler," says Stowell. "His time was so short. We were with him on the sideline when Purdue beat Ohio State in football. His family allowed us into the experience while he was in hospice care at home. It was an honor to share those moments with him."

No-Hugs Storytelling

Over the past year, the pandemic and the social justice issues that have gripped the country have made Stowell's job a challenge. "It's been a different landscape for storytelling in 2020 for many different reasons," says Stowell. "It has been logistically challenging, because we are doing interviews remotely. You don't get that connection you make when you go out in the field and look someone in the eye as they tell their story. There are no hugs or handshakes."

"We are at a time where there is a national sense of reckoning. You are trying to do these stories with Zoom interviews. Normally, you would go into communities and walk the streets. That is a huge part of shaping a story. We have found novel ways to work around it, but it is a challenge as a storyteller." And, at her core, that is what Stowell is — a storyteller.

"Incredible people . . . that is the joy about what I do," says Stowell. "All these stories. We are getting to meet and spend time with people that are inspiring, who are really changing the world. I get to take their experience with me and learn things from them."

—MIKE ENRIGHT '88 (CLAS)

Stowell won Outstanding Short Sports Documentary for "Isaiah Bird: No Excuses" at the 2016 Sports Emmy Awards.





3 BOOKS

JAMES C. KAUFMAN

James C. Kaufman, professor of educational psychology in the Neag School, is an expert in creativity and practices what he preaches. He’s published more than 35 books and more than 300 papers. He’s won countless awards, including Mensa’s research award. He tested Dr. Sanjay Gupta’s creativity on CNN, appeared in the Australian hit show “Redesign My Brain,” narrated the comic book documentary “Independents,” and wrote the book and lyrics to the musical “Discovering Magenta.” He says researching past “3 Books” columns was “a bit intimidating, since they were generally filled with quality, intelligent nonfiction or literature. I unabashedly love genre fiction — I have grown to prefer entertainment over enlightenment.” We’ve ordered all his picks.

Just Finished:

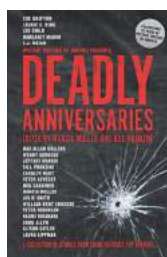


“All Our Wrong Todays” by Elan Mastai

“All Our Wrong Todays” is a time-travel love story, but in lieu of the romance of “The

Time Traveler’s Wife,” it has snark, massive screw-ups, and a narrator who is somehow relatable despite a litany of flaws. It has time travel without too much hard sci-fi, a vision of the future that doesn’t feel overly fantastical, and alternate universes that don’t feel like a cop-out to avoid enforcing the rules of time travel. I co-teach an Honors seminar (with P. J. Barnett) on time travel and the movies. If the in-the-works film adaptation is better than Mastai’s past work (the sequel to “Most Valuable Primate,” etc.), I look forward to adding it to our syllabus.

Currently Reading:

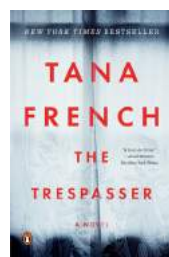


“Deadly Anniversaries” edited by Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini

I love mystery and thrillers, and anthologies are particularly enjoyable. I like to

experience small tastes of my favorite writers while I discover new ones. This collection has some of my all-time top writers (Laura Lippman and Jeffery Deaver) alongside other strong contributors (Lee Child and both editors) and new folks I’d never encountered. I like mysteries that have a twist, especially one that I never see coming (yet doesn’t feel like a cheat). When I was a teenager, I loved Agatha Christie (I still do). I like a lot of the 1950s and ’60s (and on) writers who would publish in “Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine.” They are sometimes forgotten because they preferred to write stories, yet they are worth seeking out: Robert Bloch, Edward D. Hoch, Jack Ritchie, Henry Slesar, and many others.

On Deck:



“The Trespasser” by Tana French

Tana French’s Murder Squad series has an enjoyable progression — a novel will be written from the perspective

of one character, and the next novel will be written from the perspective of a supporting character. It connects everything without risking becoming trite or predictable when an audience knows the protagonist too well. I’ve read the first five and have held out finishing the series (French’s latest work has been standalone books). But why? I will indulge soon, and perhaps dispense with my general “leave one book to save” policy, which applies to most of my favorites. In addition to those already mentioned, I’d include Kate Atkinson, Lawrence Sanders, Michael Connelly, Harlan Coben, Jerome Healy, Jonathan Kellerman . . . and so many others.

KUDOS

Nursing professor **Colleen Delaney ’80 (NUR), ’98 MS, ’03 Ph.D.**, was named Holistic Nurse of the Year by the American Holistic Nurses Association. The national organization’s annual award recognizes a nurse who has “contributed to outstanding innovations or changes in the field.” Delaney has dedicated her career to investigating interventions to help older adults with heart failure who are receiving care at home and older adults with depression, as well as spiritual interventions for older adults with cardiovascular disease who are living in senior communities. In 2016 UConn began offering its Holistic Nursing Online Graduate Certificate program, of which Delaney is the founding director. As Renae Martin, a recent graduate of the certificate program, said: “Dr. Delaney, you are an exemplar of what we all aspire to be.”

UCONN TALKS

On the collapse of the iconic Arecibo telescope in Puerto Rico:

“We lost our star quarterback.”

Chiara Mingarelli, astrophysics professor, *Scientific American*, Dec. 11, 2020

On what drove so many college football programs to play through the pandemic:

“Money.”

Head football coach Randy Edsall, *The New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2021

On the legality of using data archived from the social media app Parler to track down Capitol riot participants:

“All the data would be fair game for law enforcement.”

Kiel Brennan-Marquez, law professor, *The Washington Post*, Jan. 12, 2021

On UConn certifying pharmacists to administer the Covid-19 vaccine:

“The more people we can get on the front lines and ready the better.”

Dr. Jeffrey R. Aeschlimann, pharmacy professor, NBC CT, Jan. 11, 2021

On why missing out on family traditions is a big deal:

“For many people, the lack of ceremony is experienced as a feeling of emptiness, as if their very life narrative had a gap in it.”

Dimitris Xygalatas, anthropology professor, *The Atlantic*, Dec. 15, 2020

Describing the fantasy football competition in which he won \$2.5 million:

“A hobby.”

David Bergman, operations and information management professor, *Hartford Courant*, Jan. 17, 2021

On racism:

“It’s the Achilles heel of American democracy, and it always comes up.”

Manisha Sinha, professor of history, *The Washington Post*, Dec. 31, 2020

On the negative hashtags:

“If there are frustrations with Facebook, they don’t seem to be affecting people’s use of it.”

Sherry Pagoto, psychology professor, *Newsweek*, Dec. 23, 2020

On his famous prediction of widespread unrest in 2020 and on what happens next:

“We may be the first society that is capable of perceiving, if dimly, the deep structural forces pushing us to the brink.”

Peter Turchin, ecology and evolutionary biology professor, *The New York Times*, Dec. 16, 2020

KUDOS

CARDONA IS NAMED EDUCATION SECRETARY OF THE UNITED STATES



When President Joe Biden tapped Miguel Cardona '01 MA, '04 6th Year, '11 Ed.D., '12 ELP to be the country's top education official, Cardona became the first UConn alum to hold a Cabinet-level position in the White House.

"He will help us address systemic inequities, tackle the mental health crisis in our education system, give educators a well-deserved raise, ease the burden of education debt, and secure high quality, universal pre-K for every three- and four-year-old in the country," Biden said in a statement announcing his choice. "As a lifelong champion of public education, he understands that our children are the kite strings that keep our national ambitions aloft — and that everything that will be possible for our country tomorrow will be thanks to the investments we make and the care that our educators and our schools deliver today."

Cardona has a long association with the Neag School of Education, earning four postgraduate degrees and certifi-

icates from the School while moving from teaching fourth grade in Meriden to his appointment by Gov. Ned Lamont as the state's education commissioner.

And his ties with the Neag School and UConn go beyond earning degrees; he represented Meriden as a partner district on the Neag School Leadership Preparation Advisory Board; was an instructor in the UConn Administrator Preparation Program (UCAPP) for several years before becoming education commissioner; and was a guest instructor in an Executive Leadership Program course on school district leadership.

"Dr. Cardona exemplifies the very best of public education in our state, which he has served as a classroom teacher, a principal, and as Connecticut's Commissioner of Education," says UConn President Thomas C. Katsouleas. "We are very proud of his ties to UConn, not only as a recipient of multiple degrees, but as an adjunct instructor in the Neag School of Education and an advocate for his students

and colleagues. His nomination to serve as the country's top educational leader is an amazing credit to Dr. Cardona's talent, commitment, and passion, as well as a tribute to public education in Connecticut. On behalf of our entire University, we wish him the greatest success."

"Miguel has continued to contribute his time and energy to our students, faculty, and alumni," says Dean Gladis Kersaint. "On the national stage, he will no doubt shine as an engaged and competent leader at a time when our schools are facing challenges like never before."

When asked in a 2017 interview with the Neag School's Shawn Kornegay what led him to choose the field of education, Cardona said, "Kids. There are few things as gratifying as knowing that your hard work will improve the lives of children. Coming from a family who modeled service to others, I knew I wanted a profession that would give me the opportunity to serve others and help strengthen my community. Teaching did that. Initially, I wanted to become an art teacher. I love the arts and the important role it plays in the development of a person, but I gravitated toward elementary education once in the program. Being an elementary teacher is akin to being an artist, so I got the best of both worlds."

Asked what makes a great educator, he replied, "Great educators are ones that do not look at their work as a job, [but] as an extension of their God-given gifts. The passion and commitment from great educators comes from within . . . Great educators build relationships with students and set a high bar for their growth. Great educators believe in the potential of their students, even if the students don't yet. Great educators pay attention to detail and, like any other profession, value the importance of preparation. Whether that is lesson design, or getting to know their students, great teachers invest in their work — and they reap the benefits of their students' success . . . The role of teacher is the most important of all. Teachers shape lives."



KUDOS

TOM PENDERS NAMED TO HALL OF FAME

Tom Penders '67 (BUS), who played on some of the finest UConn basketball teams of the 1960s and also starred for the UConn baseball team (pictured, left, with brother and teammate Jim Penders '66 (ED), father of current UConn baseball head coach Jim Penders '94 (CLAS), '98 MA) before going on to a long and successful college coaching career, has been named to the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame in the class of 2021 as a coach. The Stratford native began his head coaching career at Tufts in 1971: Penders coached seven different programs over a span of 39 years — Tufts, Columbia, Fordham, Rhode Island, Texas, George Washington, and Houston. His overall record was 649-437, with a 12-11 mark in the NCAA Tournament. In 1987 while coaching Rhode Island, he was named the Atlantic 10 Conference Coach of the Year. Penders' NCAA teams lost only once to a lower seed, and that was a No. 8 vs. No. 9 game in 1992. His 1988 Rhode Island team was the first A-10 team to reach the Sweet 16. He guided Texas to an Elite 8 appearance in 1990, the school's first since 1947.



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

THE TEST DRIVE

Vishal Patel '21 (BUS, CLAS) sampled primary care as an EMT

After months of training, Vishal Patel knew he was prepared to care for patients as a member of the Tolland ambulance crew. But when the first call came, a patient with fatigue and chest pain, it was the new EMT's moment of truth.

"I was really nervous. You go through months of training and shadow work, and I felt confident in my abilities, but that first call is nerve-wracking," says Patel, now a UConn senior. "I had to keep myself focused. I didn't want to make the patient nervous."

During his year of service, he helped with everything from badly sprained ankles to car accidents with trauma. "Tolland has an older population, so many calls are to homes and nursing homes, and occasionally to an accident on the highway," he says.

Patel, a native of South Windsor, is pursuing dual degrees in healthcare management and physiology and neurobiology, with aspirations of attending

medical school after he graduates in May. He began working as an EMT in September 2019 but recently resigned to focus on applying to medical school.

"Initially I wanted to see how it felt to be the primary healthcare provider," he said. "I'd had experiences in medical centers in the past, but they'd mostly been backseat experiences. I wanted one-on-one patient interaction. After joining the ambulance, I found meeting people and talking with patients and their families, to be really rewarding."

In the past Patel volunteered as a patient escort at Massachusetts General and as an ER nurse assistant at New York-Presbyterian. He has also volunteered with Bethesda Medical Mission, assisting citizens in countries with natural disasters for four years. Patel is the son of Dipti Patel and Dr. Mehendra Patel, who practices internal medicine and is his son's inspiration.

During a medical mission to Haiti four years ago, they served a village

that had no electricity and was inaccessible by road. Some 350 people lined up to receive healthcare.

"It was eye-opening," he says. He helped with triage, took blood pressure, and used his limited knowledge of French to translate symptoms. "It made me feel good about the profession, making an impact and making a difference with your time, effort, and energy," he said.

Patel added the healthcare management major after several semesters at UConn because he ultimately wants to be a decision-maker in healthcare, either running a department or even as the CFO.

He says the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't deterred him from a career in medicine — in fact just the opposite.

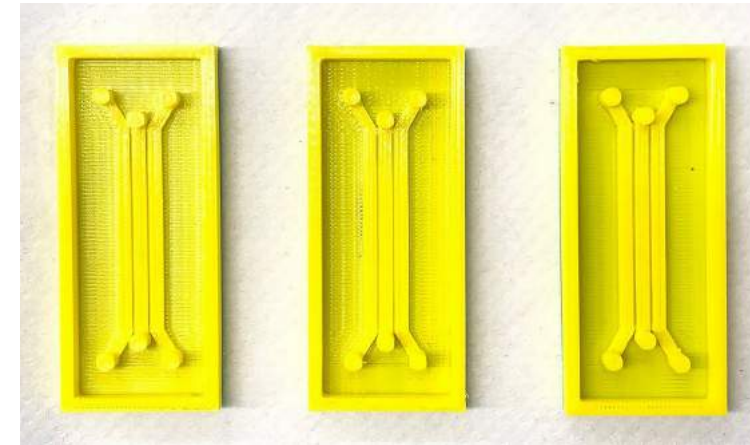
"I think the Covid pandemic strengthened my determination to be a physician," Patel says. "I saw the impact that healthcare providers made and wanted to continue on this path so that I can continue helping people in the future."

In his spare time, Patel, an Honors student, tutors student-athletes and serves on the funding board for the Undergraduate Student Government. But that isn't what he is known for among his friends, says Aaron Yao '21 (BUS), a finance major, who has known Patel since middle school.

"Vishal has a passion for baking," says Yao. "He always jumps at the opportunity to make delicious desserts for his family and friends, whether it's a flag-themed cake for July 4th or a coconut cake for a birthday."

"He never ceases to amaze me with his creativity, precision, and craftsmanship when it comes to making cakes and desserts, and is unparalleled in comparison to other baking enthusiasts that I know," he says. "His tiramisu is a personal favorite of mine."

"If his dedication and perfectionist attitude toward baking is any indication of his future capabilities as a medical practitioner, I believe Vishal will find great success in any endeavors he chooses to pursue throughout the course of his career," says Yao. —CLAIRE HALL



THIS JUST IN

ENGINEERING CARTILAGE IN SPACE

Use it or lose it — muscles, bone, and cartilage all deteriorate when astronauts spend long periods of time in space, away from the ponderous pull of gravity. Muscles and bone gradually recover once astronauts return to Earth, but cartilage rarely does. Now, a group of UConn engineers have a plan to encourage cartilage to regenerate, and to test it on the International Space Station.

They have successfully engineered cartilage constructs and tissue chips in the lab on Earth and just received \$400,000 from the National Science Foundation and the Center for the Advancement of Science in Space (CASIS, which is also known as the International Space Station National Lab). Their partner, Space Tango, an aerospace manufacturer in Lexington, Kentucky, will also receive \$415,000. This multi-agency grant will fund the development for an experiment on the space station to begin in 2022. NASA has committed to funding the launch costs.

A team of bioengineers led by UConn's Yupeng Chen will test two techniques. One uses a scaffold inside a 3D printed slide with micro channels for the cartilage to regrow upon. The channels also carry nutrients to the young cartilage cells; blood vessels do this for most tissues in the body, but not for cartilage. The other looks at the effect of a micro-RNA (μRNA) researchers suspect could preserve or even encourage cartilage growth and maintenance.

Eventually, the research could improve astronauts' health in space and on other planets with weaker gravity than Earth. This is particularly important for NASA's long-term goal of sending humans to Mars. And even if the μRNA is unsuccessful, the 3D printed cartilage scaffold could be a very valuable tool, allowing medical researchers to test potential drugs for cartilage in early stages without sacrificing animals.

"If we can engineer a tissue in space, we can engineer it on Earth!" Chen says. —KIM KRIEGER

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

IN DEVELOPMENT

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

Assistant professor of social work Caitlin Elsaesser is one of 16 researchers in the U.S. to receive the first Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funding for gun research in 24 years. Elsaesser studies cyberbanging, how social media can intensify conflicts among youth in neighborhoods with high rates of violence and lead to offline violence, including gun violence. She plans to use those same social media platforms to help prevent the violence.

Elsaesser's two-year \$250,000 grant is one of just two KOIs, early career awards that provide intensive training and mentorship to develop the next generation of research leaders.

"I am honored to be a part of this groundbreaking group of CDC grantees that recognizes the public health crisis of firearm violence in the U.S.," she says, adding, "This award is an outgrowth of a four-year partnership with Compass Youth Collaborative and is a recognition of the importance of violence prevention researchers being guided by agencies and youth who truly understand their communities."

Elsaesser has long collaborated with the Hartford-based Compass and its Peacebuilder program, which connects violence outreach workers (peacebuilders) with disconnected youth, providing conflict mediation, crisis intervention, and counseling.

Her project takes a community-based participatory approach, soliciting input through focus groups from both the Compass Peacebuilders and youth to develop a social media-based intervention that reflects their values and preferences. By considering the preferences and values of the community, the developed interventions will have a much better chance of succeeding.

—ANNA ZARRA ALDRICH '20 (CLAS)

Find more on this study at s.uconn.edu/gunviolence.



Neuroscientists who study our brains on happiness tend to agree that a key ingredient for one's own contentment is helping others.

As the Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus famously told a room full of *Forbes* 400 billionaires, "Making money is a happiness. Making other people happy is a super-happiness."

We are all in need of a little happiness and a little inspiration lately, so we've devoted this issue of the magazine to stories of just a few of the many UConn faculty, staff, students, and alumni who spend their days doing good in the world, making it a better place for all of us.

These folks are called to their vocations because they are passionate about what they do and about making a difference — it just so happens that doing so may be making them happier in the process. We know that reading and writing about them made all of us just a little bit happier, too. And we hope you share that feeling.

REDEFINING "WEALTH"



As seen and heard on YouTube or on Revolt TV, the music network founded by Sean Combs, a Richie Mutts freestyle strikes all the right notes. Contemporary beat, dazzling wordplay, powerful urban imagery. Close listening reveals a strong social justice message baked into the groove. Mutts calls it "putting medicine in the food," whipping up a confection so delicious kids don't realize it's good for them.

For **Mutts '06 (CLAS)** the impulse to do good is as irresistible as an infectious melody. In addition to making music and videos, the Hamden, Connecticut, native works as a program director for Meriden Children First, and last year he established the Born Rich Foundation. Dedicated to improving racial equality across Connecticut, the nonprofit is built on what Mutts calls "the five Es — exposure, experience, education, and empowerment, all wrapped up on a foundation of equity."

The Foundation's name comes from a 2019 documentary Mutts made about the disconnection between communities of color and institutions of power,

including the police. It nods to a wider definition of "wealth" than is commonly celebrated by the music industry.

"Information is wealth, friendships are wealth, access is wealth," he says. "Born Rich addresses the idea that generational wealth begins with parents being able to share information and opportunity with their children. Social and emotional learning techniques, understanding of self, financial literacy — in underprivileged communities, we just don't have full access to all that."

Among current projects, the Foundation is collaborating with the cities of Hamden, New Haven, and East Haven to produce a series of public service announcements aimed at bridging the disconnect between communities of color and law enforcement. "I want to get officers and municipal leaders to put themselves in the shoes of a young minority," Mutts says. "And I also want that 16-year-old kid to put himself in the shoes of a cop. We have to be able to at least try to understand each other."

As Mutts and his team produce the PSAs, kids will work alongside them to

learn video editing, sound engineering, graphic design, coding, digital marketing, and other marketable skills. "A lot of these kids want to be rappers," Mutts says. "I would never throw dirt in someone's drink, but breaking through as an entertainer is very challenging. While honing those skills, why not learn how to engineer? Why not learn videography?"

Mutts got his own start in the recording industry more than a decade ago. A writer of poetry and lyrics since childhood, he decided to go full throttle with music after graduating with a degree in human development and family sciences. "I packed up the car and drove to California to see where it would take me," he says. In short order his talent landed him in Atlanta, the red-hot center of hip-hop, where he worked with major label Jive Records. But the deeper he got into the business, Mutts discovered, the less he liked it. "It was so much smoke and mirrors, the cheap high of sex and drugs and money. Rather than how to make a record from the heart, the question became, how can I make a hit record? This was not what I loved about the culture."

Craving something more meaningful, he returned to Connecticut to do community outreach. While not everyone from the industry understands why he'd launch a nonprofit — in Atlanta, one manager counseled performers to bring \$10,000 cash to live shows to toss at the audience — for Mutts the reward has always been obvious. It's the ability to make an impression, change a life, shift a perception. It's the thirteen-year-old aspiring rapper who shares a song he's written after hearing Mutts's work — in place of the same old, same old, the kid is now rapping about being class president.

"These are the stories that resonate with me," Mutts says. "Building ourselves up, creating connections within our community. That's true wealth."

—KEVIN MARKEY

Inspiring Students to Save the Planet

“Sustainability is arguably the biggest challenge we face in the 21st century,” says **Michael Willig**. It’s not just about sustainability, though. “Probably the most important questions we have to answer are not if a system is sustainable, but if it is desirable,” says the Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. “We have many paths we can take in our stewardship, but science doesn’t tell us which of those paths to take per se — it’s human values that guide us. I don’t think that each of us fully understands how we might marshal those perspectives and ways of knowing to the common good.”

Willig also directs UConn’s Institute of the Environment — tasked with bringing together science, the humanities, and social science to chart a course to a greener world. One of the many things the Institute is doing to help students find such perspectives and paths is getting them into the field with research programs abroad. A partnership with the Organization for Tropical Studies allows students from around the world to take UConn courses at three field stations in Costa Rica and one in South Africa.

“They provide outstanding opportunities for students to have a global experience where they see the world not only through their eyes but through the eyes of others who have different perspectives and cultures and social backgrounds,” says Willig. “Truly I think this is an example of one of those life-transformative opportunities.”

Being in the field with students, says



Willig, “you see their eyes light up with the excitement of being in a new place or environment and you see them become hooked on that perspective on life, which is what a college education is all about essentially. It’s called a liberal education not because we’re liberals but because it liberates us from ignorance.”

UConn replaced Duke as the program’s school of record in 2019, which, Willig says, democratizes the opportunity. Now “kids from all sorts of social and economic backgrounds can participate. That’s where a state institution like UConn becomes really important — we’ve got academic standards like Duke but we offer them at a price that students can afford. In fact we take that

as part of our responsibility — to educate people regardless of circumstance. That’s the cool thing about being at a public university. This is who we are.”

Willig has his own award-winning ecological research project in Puerto Rico, where for 32 years he has studied gastropods to understand the impact of hurricanes on tropical ecosystems. As a student, though, he never went abroad, because the programs were offered in the summer. “I could never afford to go to those classes. I came from a poor family where if you couldn’t work in the summer, you couldn’t afford to go to school the next year. So I really like the idea of making these experiences available to everyone.”



Advocating for Animals

Professor **Jessica Rubin** founded UConn’s Animal Law Clinic and worked with animal rights groups to pass and implement the groundbreaking 2016 Desmond’s Law, which allows courts to assign legal advocates, usually law students or lawyers working pro bono,

to advocate for justice in animal abuse cases. It was the first law of its kind in the nation, but now several states have passed or are considering similar legislation. Rubin grew up surrounded by abandoned and abused animals. Her mother ran a rescue organization for dogs, cats,

and wildlife. “It’s gratifying to use my legal skills to help animals, building on the humane values that were part of my upbringing and continue as important parts of my work and my life,” says Rubin. That’s one of her own rescues, Holly, with Rubin above. —AJ WYMAN



Join UConn Reads for an Earth Day Event

Michael Willig and the rest of the steering committee for this year’s UConn Reads invite you to join them at a virtual event with Amitav Ghosh, author of this year’s selection: “The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.” In the book, says Willig, Ghosh deals with critical environmental issues from a humanist perspective. It’s a way to get the broader UConn family, including faculty, staff, students, the surrounding community, and alumni, together to widen perspectives around a certain issue. Find out how to join in at s.uconn.edu/ghosh.



MAKING THE WORLD MORE POETIC

When I was a senior in college, I was told I had to take four classes my final semester, even though I only needed three to graduate. For fun, then, I signed up to study independently with a young English instructor named **Marilyn (Wanick) Nelson** (now professor emerita of English at UConn). I told her I wanted to write fiction, but she was a poet and suggested we write poetry instead. My poetry was, at best, pretentious and derivative, and at worst, birdcage liner, but with a week to go, she told me I had talent and that I should consider a graduate writing program. I was terrified of the shapeless future and uncertain what to do with my life, but if she saw something in me, I thought maybe I could give it a try.

One MFA, 30 published books, and 150 published articles and short stories later, I have walked the path she set me on, sometimes diffidently but always happily, and I have made a living telling stories, some of them my own. I have also stayed friends with Marilyn Nelson all these years, meeting when we can, at literary festivals in Vermont or over dinner one night in Manhattan where, coincidentally, James Baldwin was dining at a nearby table.

Despite her claim my senior year that she was more a poet than a storyteller, Nelson's poems are narratives, more than any poet I know, imagining and giving voice to the interior lives of people who did not get a chance to speak for themselves. As Connecticut's Poet Laureate from 2001 to 2006, she wrote "Fortune's Bones: The Manumission Requiem," about a Connecticut slave whose skeleton ends up in a white doctor's office, and "A Wreath for Emmett Till," telling the heartbreaking story of the 14-year-old Chicago boy who was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955. She's written poems to accompany a slave narrative of a man named Venture and poems about the settlers of the first African-American town of Seneca Village, a people displaced when New York City built Central Park in 1857.

And she has striven, as a teacher, to help other people (like me) find their voices. After 20 years at UConn, teaching both ethnic literature and courses

in creative writing, she retired in 2002 but was lured back when the head of the English Department, who knew she'd always dreamt of starting a writers' retreat, made her an offer she couldn't refuse. "He said," Nelson recalls, "If you come back and teach half-time, we'll donate the equivalent of the other half of a full-time salary to your nonprofit."

She started Soul Mountain Retreat in 2004, buying a large house in East Haddam, Connecticut, where, over the next 10 years, she hosted more than 100 young writers. "I wanted to be able to offer residencies to people in small groups of shared ethnicity so that instead of one person of color in a group of 50, the way it was when I was at Yaddo, I could have six people of color together, and give them an experience that they couldn't have anywhere else."

"Amazing woman and a phenomenal teacher," says **Dawn Lundy Martin '91 (CLAS)**, director of the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics at the University of Pittsburgh. Lundy, as an undergraduate, used to host poetry workshops in her home for both undergraduate and graduate students, and Nelson would come by to participate, outside of class, sometimes workshoping her own poems in progress. "I have undergraduate students now who want to start off writing experimental poetry, and I tell them what Nelson told me, that you have to have a foundation, in prosody and form, to experiment from. Whatever your aesthetic is, you need to know how narrative functions and how to tell a story."

Her connection to Nelson, like mine, is more than pedagogic. "I have this beautiful life as a poet, essayist, professor," says Lundy, "and I believe that it is in no small part due to Marilyn's seeing something in my poetry that made this path possible. And because she saw something, she took great care to nurture it."

I might brag about Nelson's work as poet in residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, or her numerous awards, including the Frost Medal in 2012 and, in 2019, the Ruth Lilly Prize, the top honor an American poet can aspire to, but prizes and recognition

do not reflect the true value of a story, or the reason to tell it. They're not why a writer writes. Stories are successful, according to the theory of literary Darwinism, which Nelson taught me to embrace, insofar as they help us survive and adapt. Stories, whatever else they convey, teach empathy, and they let us see through someone else's eyes and feel what they feel and learn from it, and when stories do that, they stitch the social fabric together.

"Poems and stories tell us what it means to be human," says Nelson. "They are underlaid with a moral vision."

Her current project, "Papa's Free Day Party," tells of her maternal grandfather, John Mitchell. "His father had a farm in Kentucky, and the Klan came and set it on fire. The parents said to this little Black boy, who was 6 or 7 years old, 'Go north.' And he left running, by himself, and got to the banks of the Mississippi River. He was standing there, crying, and this white man asked him where his parents were. He told him the story, and this man said, 'Why don't you come home with me? I have a boy your age. You can be playmates.' And this man took my grandfather home, where he and his wife raised him with their son. These were not wild-eyed radicals. They were just ordinary farmers, and yet they did something extraordinary. And I think we need to raise those people up as examples of what can happen. Of who we could be, as Americans. Of how we could understand each other, and learn to talk to each other. I think it's important to tell stories that are true. You can't paint everybody with the same brush. And I think at this point in our shared history, that's what we're doing. Everybody is sort of dividing into camps. To fight that, we have to keep the empathy growing."

Where some poets turn ever inward, Nelson turns outward, and there is compassion in every line she writes. She showed me compassion years ago. She knew I was lost and she pointed me in the right direction. I have not had a moment's regret. Sometimes I even still write poetry. But just for fun.

Or maybe for her. —PETER NELSON



Helping Dolly Fight Illiteracy

“We know if children don’t read at their grade level by third grade they likely will never read at their grade level later,” says **David Dotson ’76 (CLAS)**. “This is a world where reading and writing is fundamental, and it will likely stop you from making the living you want — and having the life you want.”

As CEO of the Dollywood Foundation, Dotson has helped legend Dolly Parton realize and expand her vision of improving childhood literacy. When he joined the fight in 1999, the organization gave away a book a month to about 2,000 children in one county — today it’s more than 1.7 million children in the U.S., Canada, Australia,

and the U.K. Dotson recalls fondly how Parton asked him then if more might be possible. “I remember her saying to me, ‘Do you think we could even help millions of kids in this way?’ It’s how she said it, that she was really saying, ‘If you see this and you’re willing to work for it, I’m right there with you.’” —ERIC BUTTERMAN



RAISING HER VOICE TO AMPLIFY OTHER VOICES

As a teenager in her hometown of Paraty, Brazil, **Pauline Batista ’16 MA** was enrolled in a rigorous five-year teacher-training high school and held multiple paid internships. “It was very hectic because I would leave my house at 7 in the morning and come back at 10 at night,” Batista says. “Your average 15-year-old is not dealing with all that. But for me, that was normal.”

She didn’t slow down in the summers, working for Festa Literária Internacional de Paraty (Flip), the largest literary festival in Brazil. Her work as program coordinator of youth-oriented FlipZona included media and filmmaking programs and inspired her early interest in filmmaking. At Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut, she focused on video production, but after graduation, she says, “I started to get really critical of the relationships between what we call people from the North and people from the South” — those regions of the world that have more and, respectively, less wealth and power. After earning a master’s degree in Latin American studies at UConn, she decided to return to Brazil for a year while deciding what to pursue next.

“I go back home after all those years and, after participating in this literature festival since 2002, for 14 years, every summer,” she says, “I learned that the media program was going to be entirely cut. I was enraged.”

Batista ended up in a meeting with the secretary of education for Paraty, whom she effectively lobbied for the refunding of the program — a success she attributes to the critical thinking she learned at UConn. “I was exposed to the right body of work and literature,” she says. “The conversation shifts because I could shift the conversation.”

The experience made her a bit of a hero at home, and she was asked to be a torchbearer for the Rio Olympics in 2016. It also made her want to expand her skill set even more. “That was when I started thinking, ‘Maybe I should really get a Ph.D.’ because people like me typically don’t have a voice,” Batista says. “But if they have the right education, all of a sudden, they have a voice. All of a sudden, the door is open.” She decided to enroll as a doctoral student at the Neag School’s Department of Educational Leadership.

“That was a really important moment in my life because my skill set really came together,” she says. “Everything clicked.”

In the Ph.D. program, Batista has learned about youth-led research methodologies and participatory filmmaking projects, bridging her experience at Flip to her research. She focused her doctoral research on international organizations and Latin American education. “The whole idea is to showcase how it is that international organizations have power over education in Latin America,” she says.

Batista conducts her research through Youth Participatory Action Research, a research model that involves collaboration and co-ownership of research work with youth. For Batista, this means co-authoring papers, co-creating filmmaking projects about local education, and organizing local events.

“We’re going to be bringing the youth together to make short films, and the youth are going to have ownership of the short films, and they can use them as they please,” she says. “If that means they call attention to policymakers, they are entitled to do that. It’s their films that we produce together.”

—MICA CLAUSEN

Humanizing Human Rights



Don't look for **Ellen Messali '10 JD** on Monday nights.

You won't find her in her car, where she's typically making good use of her hands-free function to knock off phone calls during her 45-minute commute.

You won't find her running, even though she's invested in a home treadmill since the coronavirus pandemic has kept her away from the gym where she was once training for a 10K.

You won't find her binging on podcasts, though she's become an avid listener since this proud former "technology rejecter" finally caved and got her first smartphone in 2019.

You also won't find her at her desk at New Haven Legal Assistance, though on many other nights she's probably there, working well into the evening preparing briefs or evidentiary records or making other arrangements for her clients, many of whom are in detention facilities outside of Connecticut and all of whom are refugees and immigrants fleeing circumstances beyond their control.

Instead, on Monday nights, Ellen Messali is tap dancing.

She started tap dancing at two years old, stopped for more than a decade, and picked it back up at age 31. Even Covid-19 hasn't slowed her, thanks to an innovative dance instructor, video conferencing on Zoom, and a portable dance floor in her home.

Tap dancing is her escape, she says, playing a huge role in her sanity, something vital for an attorney who spends her days and nights thinking about her cases and her clients and, often, the violent and traumatic circumstances that have led them to seek legal aid.

"It's a lifesaver," she says. "I think it's the one thing that sort of helps repair a lot of mental health damage throughout the week."

A UConn Law graduate, and a product of professor Jon Bauer's tutelage at the Asylum and Human Rights Clinic, Messali has worked at New Haven Legal Assistance for just over four years, and

she helped to establish the Immigration Unit there.

She primarily does removal defense, with a priority for detainees being held in federal custody, and as one of the few law groups in Connecticut doing this kind of work, the Unit is busy, especially under the immigration policies in place during the past four years.

"When you're not detained, it's much easier to find counsel," she explains. "You have much more time to pursue and prepare your applications for relief, because the detained docket moves so quickly. You have your first hearing, and then, a month later, you have your final hearing and in that time you're supposed to find counsel. That counsel's supposed to prepare an application for you, talk to numerous witnesses to try to get statements on your behalf, gather evidence from you when you're in lock-up — I mean, it's a system created to be impossible."

It is work that she views as "insanely important," but that's only part of why she's dedicated herself to it. She's a second generation American, but she's quick to say that she doesn't have an immigration story of her own.

"I wanted to do something that would feed my soul," she says, and because of her mother, a humanitarian. "I grew up watching her just be a good person."

While issues surrounding immigration may have faded from public consciousness with the onset of Covid, her work has remained constant, even ramping up during the early days of the pandemic when there was a strong push to get as many detainees as possible released from detention facilities for their own safety.

"From what our clients were telling us and just from our own experiences being at these facilities, there was absolutely no way that they were safe in there," she says. "They didn't even have basic things; it was very poorly managed. So we tried to take on as many cases as possible to get people out and then

worked with local groups on class action litigation to get people out as well."

Messali's work takes her into out-of-state prisons — no immigration detainees are held in Connecticut facilities — to meet with her clients. She brings her own personal protective equipment to her no-contact visits while constantly coping with ever-changing rules on what she can bring with her — sometimes her disinfecting wipes are allowed, and other times they aren't.

"I think we put ourselves at risk every single time that we go to those facilities," she says, "and I think it is brutally unfair. Our clients are not criminals. They are individuals who have immigration violations, and if they are just released on certain conditions or with monitors, we wouldn't need to be cannon fodder going into these facilities."

Messali knew when she entered UConn Law that she wanted to work in the public interest, but it was in the Asylum and Human Rights Clinic that she found her calling. "Jon Bauer just taught me how to do this work so compassionately, so well, so thoughtfully," she says. "It was the only thing I knew how to leave law school doing, and I knew I knew how to do it well, and after you represent one person doing this — which is what I did in the clinic — it's such a powerful experience."

Though the hours are long, and the work sometimes takes an emotional toll, Messali said her work with her clients is a mutual relationship: she needs them and they need her.

"My clients restore my faith in humanity, and if I can offer them something in return, then I should," Messali says. "This is what I love doing, this is what I know how to do, I think I do it pretty well. I know I care about it, and at least for the foreseeable future that I can predict, this is what I'm going to be doing as long as I'm able to do it."

But on Monday nights, don't bother looking for her. Because she needs to tap dance. —JACLYN SEVERANCE

FEEDING OUR APOCALYPTIC FANTASIES

“They have popped in 2020 like crazy,” says **Pam Bedore** of the apocalyptic and dystopian books that are one of her specialty areas as a professor of literature at UConn Avery Point.

Why, when the world itself feels downright disastrous, do people want to immerse themselves in the culture of Armageddon?

“It’s a way to process that anxiety,” says Bedore. Beyond that, she says, it asks something of readers. “Dystopian literature is activist at heart — it asks readers to act,” says the teacher of a popular utopia/dystopia course, who claims dystopia is the more optimistic genre. “It is usually worse than reality. It tells people you gotta go do stuff to avoid this.” There’s a catharsis element, too. “You identify with great characters — and some of them survive.”

Here’s Bedore’s list of “great pandemic reads — if you’re into dystopia and apocalypse!”



Louise Erdrich. *Future Home of the Living God*. 2017. This eerie novel that’s hard to classify explores a very near future plagued by environmental crisis and human devolution. Moving and funny, it draws together elements from political thriller and speculative fiction. It also contains my all-time favorite final chapter.

Emily St. John Mandel. *Station Eleven*. 2014. Set 20 years after a pandemic has killed most of the Earth’s population, this elegant novel follows a troupe of Shakespearean actors and musicians as they face the challenges of a postapocalyptic world shot through with danger and beauty.

Cory Doctorow. *Little Brother*. 2008. In this YA

novel, Canadian writer and activist Doctorow brings Orwell’s *Big Brother* into the 21st century. This novel includes lots of accurate information about hacktivism even as it tells a great story about teen rebels.

N.K. Jemisin. *The Fifth Season*. 2015. This gorgeous fantasy novel follows three powerful female orogenes (who can control energy) in the days leading up to what promises to be the worst “fifth season” (season with no growth) in history. An exploration of environmentalism, inequities of many kinds, and hope.

Margaret Atwood. *Oryx and Crake*. 2003. At once satirical, terrifying, and thought-provoking, this novel tells the story

of the human race’s final days — and the days right after. It’s part of a trilogy that suggests the human race may be more resilient than we think, even in the face of a bioterrorist attack.

M.T. Anderson. *Feed*. 2002. Narrated by a teenager whose life is consumed by “the feed” (a very realistic extension of our own cyber-practices), this novel is a mix of satire and poignant scenes about coming of age in a world without a future, where Aldous Huxley’s dark anxiety about the dangers of pleasure have come to fruition.

Octavia Butler. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. California is on fire, there’s a white supremacist in the White House,

and wealth disparity has hit new heights. The story of Lauren Oya Olamina, a young hyper-empath, includes a dark exploration of modern-day slavery but also provides hope through new spiritual practices and philosophies.

Stephen King. *The Stand*. 1978. This thousand-page doorstop may remain my all-time favorite pandemic novel, and it was the first I ever read. This mix of science and fantasy follows the few earthly survivors of the superflu Captain Trips. It’s dated, but still compelling.

Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Dispossessed*. 1974. Do you love physics and dystopia? No matter. This classic “ambiguous utopia” tells the compelling story of

Shevek, my all-time favorite fictional physicist, who moves between a consumption-oriented planet and its stark yet utopian moon.

George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 1949. A great companion to Huxley, this classic dystopia examines totalitarianism, surveillance, and disinformation through the ever-compelling Winston Smith.

Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. 1932. This is a must-read for anyone interested in dystopia. Exploring emerging technologies, such as genetic engineering and new pharmaceuticals, this novel posits a terrifying world in which everyone is carefully bred for their position and control is maintained through pleasure.



Keeping Students Crafty

Underneath **Karen Sommer’s** contact info and credentials as operations and program manager for UConn’s William Benton Museum of Art is a quote from 17-year-old Nobel Peace Laureate Malala Yousafzai — “If you want to end the war then instead of sending guns,

send books. Instead of sending tanks, send pens. Instead of sending soldiers, send teachers.”

Sommer and her colleagues are using their teaching skills in the war against Covid-19 and, in particular, its attendant isolation by bringing virtual

arts to students. “We know they’re on campus by themselves without family,” she says. From roundtable art critiques, sculpture scavenger hunts, drawing workshops, even pumpkin carving, the programs and workshops are a point of connection — and fun.

HELPING KIDS DECODE THEIR BRAINS

After nine months of Covid-19 quarantine and endless online meetings, **Fumiko Hoeft** has webinars on the brain. Literally. Her new “Ask a Brain Scientist” webinar series for kids covers everything from dyslexia to optimism to the newly urgent question, “Is screen time really bad for me?”

The irony is not lost on her.

“I struggled with the webinar format because it just means more Zoom calls,” she acknowledges. But after months at home with her two young sons, she was acutely aware of the lack of science opportunities available to kids this year. Museums are closed, events canceled, teachers overloaded. But kids still need science.

Hoeft, who directs UConn’s Brain and Imaging Research Center (BIRC), and former Disney artist Rebecca Lin thought the moment was ripe for a live, interactive webinar. Lin mocked up a flyer, Hoeft began promoting it, and the first episode launched last October. October happens to be Dyslexia Awareness Month, so beginning with that seemed natural. The second episode covered what brains actually do, and how we study them. For that one Hoeft dressed up in a wig with an open skull, complete with exposed grey matter at the top so she could pretend to poke and prod her own brain. The third episode, in December, covered optimism and why it’s important. Former and future episodes can be found on

their website: haskinsglobal.org/ask-a-brain-scientist/.

Hoeft chooses the topics to cover all the basics you’d get in a neuroscience textbook. But she frames them in a way that kids can relate to, echoing things their parents might say to them. And the sessions can’t help but be informed by her own situation.

“It was a huge struggle to shut down the lab and BIRC, support my students, re-budget all my grants and apply for new ones, all while keeping track of my kids’ schooling,” says Hoeft.

Her kids’ online schooling, says Hoeft, was so chaotic at first that she ended up writing a seven-page manual just to help herself keep track of all the logins and passwords required. Simply trying to remember all of them without the manual, she says, would have caused brain overload (She’s going to cover that subject in March’s episode, “Why Do my Teachers Tell me to Focus in Class and Not Multitask?”).

Despite the difficulties, Hoeft found several silver linings in the timing of the pandemic, starting with a big one: her son who has dyslexia-like traits had just “graduated” from reading therapy. So at least they didn’t have to stay on top of that along with everything else. She doesn’t need to imagine the difficulties families with learning disabilities face on top of remote schooling.

Hoeft remembers when her family first realized her son was having

trouble repeating sounds and rhyming words. Dyslexia is her primary area of research, and she recognized the warning signals. But even with all the knowledge and contacts and resources she had, it took six months to get her son a formal psychological evaluation. Finding therapy took even longer.

That was one of the inspirations for APPRISE (Application for Readiness in Schools and Learning Evaluation), another of Hoeft’s initiatives, which is still going despite the pandemic. It’s an app that eventually will both allow teachers and parents to identify young children at risk of dyslexia and help those children even if they have to wait for testing and professional therapy.

“We really want to reduce the financial and human cost” of addressing learning disabilities, says Hoeft. She and collaborators including educational psychology professor Devin Kearns hope to have a new and improved version of the app out this year.

Hoeft will keep doing the webinars this year, too. That is, when she isn’t spending time with her sons, pursuing research projects, supporting students, or writing grants. When we spoke on the phone, she mentioned she’d been sitting at her desk since 1 a.m. When does she sleep? Well, she’s covering that in the February episode of Ask a Brain Scientist, “Do I Really Need to Get More Sleep?”

Tune in. —KIM KRIEGER



UConn’s Brain and Imaging Research Center director Fumiko Hoeft likes to dress up for her online seminars aimed at kids. From left to right, she demonstrates how hard it is to experiment on your own brain; shows how to construct an almost anatomically correct brain out of playdough; brings a little Einstein style; and leans in with her own sons.



Left: Courtesy of Fumiko Hoeft. Right: Peter Morenus

Feeding the Fish that Feed Us

As a kid **Peter Goggins '21 (CAHNR)** spent lazy summer days trawling a dragnet along the shore in Clinton, Connecticut, scooping up minnows and sea robins. As he got older, he bought a dinghy and a fishing pole and caught flounder and bluefish. These days his passion has turned to the fish in aquafarms.

The environmental science major's start-up company Pisces Atlantic, which manufactures healthier fish food, recently won the \$20,000 grand prize in UConn's Wolff New Venture Competition, which Goggins says, is "the equivalent of strapping a rocket booster on the company."

It's not the first capital infusion Goggins has received here. He transferred to UConn as a sophomore after friends told him about the entrepreneurial opportunities here and he proceeded to win awards in UConn's iQ, Get Seeded, and Accelerate competitions. He also received a CCEI (Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation) summer fellowship.

"I'm not a business major, and I learned so much about business, patents, and financials through the iQ program and others," he says. "I also made great contacts who gave me advice, all kinds of advice."

Goggins is focused on nourishing the fish that people eat. The typical American consumes about 16 pounds of fish each year, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service. About half of that seafood is farmed, and that percentage is growing.

Some commercial feeds include feathers, bone meal, and chicken excrement, he says. They can also contain "junk fish" like anchovies, which are high in mercury, and plastic bits culled from the ocean. In addition to his concerns about nutrition, Goggins says he is dismayed by the environmental damage done by conventional fish-food companies as they trawl the ocean for ingredients.

With a school of goldfish and an



aquarium purchased at Petco, he started experimenting with fish-food formulae.

The initial results were disappointing, and there were some "burials at sea." But he fine-tuned his fish food, made from a combination of vegetable and insect protein, and tried his Pisces Atlantic compound on a tank of catfish.

"I fed some high-grade commercial feed, and some my own food, and 80 days later, there was no difference in their size," he says. "I realized my food was just as good as the high-end product. That was my big moment!"

Another big moment came mid-2020 when Goggins moved Pisces Atlantic to a facility in East Hartford from his parents' home in Middletown, where it has been taking over.

"I have boxes piled in the garage that are taller than me and 50-pound bags of ingredients that I'm milling to flour," he says. "It's not just the garage. It's in the basement, the shed, and my bedroom too."

The new space (pictured above) has allowed him to clean out his parents' garage (he's still working on the other rooms) and made production 45 times more efficient. —CLAIRE HALL



Dispensing Stress Vitamins

Think you might prefer a small spoonful of snark to a large spoonful of sugar with your guided meditation? Have you been wanting to try a meditation practice but just haven't known where to start? Either way, **Greg Sazima '90 MD** might just be the guru for you.

In January, the psychiatrist and Stanford University professor published "Practical Mindfulness: A Physician's No-Nonsense Guide to Meditation for Beginners," which he says is "meant to lower the bar to entry for readers interested in mindfulness but skeptical of a mystical approach."

Sazima brings a large dose of humor to everything he does, including teaching meditation. But he takes the practice quite seriously, having seen

so many of his patients who "weren't getting any better" find a way through meditation. He says mindfulness and meditation have a "vitamin-like quality in the way that they preempt the stress."

The other reason Sazima is so evangelical about meditation is personal. He calls the book, accompanying podcast, and blog a pay-it-forward mission for the practice that he believes helped him beat a rare and aggressive form of bone cancer into remission.

Meditation's effect on his fight with cancer motivated him to write "Practical Mindfulness."

He wants to share the ideas, methods, and specific practices that helped him manage and adapt to what he calls

"that whole mess." Which gives you a sense of the author's tone and attitude.

The informal and what he calls "snark" are outweighed by the compassion. He explains it in the foreword. "This particular life course can cultivate in a shrink, or at least this one, a passion to examine the experience and share what I've learned. It feels like a kind of empathic duty, a compassionate act. Born from those intentions, I've pulled together leading-edge ideas in several areas of inquiry — psychology, evolutionary biology, and, surprise, a bit of quantum physics — and my own expertise as doctor, teacher, and sufferer, to illustrate a better way of approaching this precious but unpredictable human experience of life."

ELEVATING ENGLISH MAJORS



English professor **Gina Barreca**, dubbed the “feminist humor maven” by *Ms. Magazine* has kept us laughing through 10 books from “I Used to Be Snow White But I Drifted” to “If You Lean In, Will Men just Look Down Your Blouse?” Her latest, though, invites others to the party. “It’s like that children’s book ‘Stone Soup,’” she says of the “little of this, little of that” approach she took to editing “Fast Funny Women: 75

Essays of Flash Fiction.”

For the compilation Barreca brought together 75 writers including Jane Smiley, Mimi Pond, Fay Weldon, Marge Piercy, and Judy Sheindlin aka Judge Judy — and 35 UConn students, alums, and staffers. “I thought, ‘I want emerging writers, I want students, who might not have their voices heard, alongside these foundational writers,’” says Barreca. English major **Nicole Catarino ’22 (CLAS)** is one of those students. She also helped Barreca put the book together. “She said, ‘We’re making a book and I want you in it,’” says Catarino, “which was massive for me. It’s such an honor to be side by side with these women. My confidence has skyrocketed.”

It’s not surprising that Barreca would find a pandemic project like this. “Making comedy, making a story, has always been my way to cope,” she says. And she is known for gathering people. Pre-Covid, friends, students, and former students were always stopping by Barreca’s office, which she describes as “a cross between a piñata, a toy store, and an Italian deli. Everybody comes, we eat, we talk.” Even more than humor, perhaps, this is Barreca’s brand — bringing people together to support one another in a community, as she says, “based on letters, on a love of words.”

“Dartmouth may have Gina’s papers. The Friars Club may have Gina’s photo. Thankfully, UConn has Gina’s living legacy of students and alumni,” is how **Laura Rossi Totten ’91 (CLAS)**, another English major, puts it.

“I hold the singular honor/distinction of being Gina Barreca’s very first mentee,” says Rossi, “the two of us started at UConn at the exact same time 34 years ago. I can still picture us side by side in her former office on the third floor of the Arjona Building where, as a wide-eyed freshman in Storrs, I was calling publishers and magazines for her bestseller “They Used To Call Me Snow White.” It’s this experience that directly launched my New York City career at Viking Books and led eventually to getting Gina on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and having my own business.”

Forget comedy. Forget English. Do the math. That’s 34 years of helping countless students and alumni, as Oprah would say, become their best selves. “I’ve been here for more of my adult life than I haven’t,” says Barreca. “I stay in touch with these now thousands of adult students.”

Those students are now professors, publicists, CEOs, authors, and lawyers in cities and towns across America. And they aren’t all women or, as Barreca puts it, “Sometimes the muse is male.” It was yet another former English student, **Dave LeGere ’06 (CLAS)**, who pitched the idea for “Fast Funny Women” to Barreca and it is Woodhall Press, the company he co-founded, that will publish the book in early March.

“All of us are united,” says Rossi, “by the friendship and encouragement of The Career Whisperer Gina Barreca.” —LISA STIEPOCK

Join Gina and other alums and authors for a special “Fast Funny Women” book club on March 18. Sign up and find more at s.uconn.edu/club.

UConn Contributors:

- Jianna Heuer, *Making a Girl*
- Nyanka J., *Smiling with No Teeth*
- Caitlin O’Donnell, *How I Spent My Summer Vacation*
- Michelle P. Carter, *Ace AF*
- Dawn Lundy Martin, *How to Remove a Lost Tampon*
- Lauren Saalmuller, *Gambling for Tampons*
- Monique Heller, *Obituary*
- Suzanne Staubach, *The Hayfield: A Gardener’s Tale*
- Kristina Reardon, “*This is a Green Pear*”
- Ali Oshinskie, *The Blender*
- Erica Buelher, *Stranger Roommates*
- Lisa Nic An Bhreithimh, *My First Date . . . with a Girl*
- Niamh Emerson, *Coming to Am-er-ic-a*
- Kristen Mongillo, *Anti-Social Media*
- Laura Rossi, *The Podcast Diaries*
- Katharine Capshaw, *Fred the Aviator*
- Maggie Mitchell, *Vanilla*
- Jennifer Sager, *Weighing In*
- Mollie Kervick, *Falling in Love Is Fattening*
- Cynthia Luo, *No Belly*
- Lisa Douglas, *Free Chance at Happiness*
- Kerri Brown, *For Now*
- Lydia Snapper, *Fame Adjacent*
- Anna Zarra Aldrich, *Personal Statement*
- Amanda Smallhorn, *What Does That Word Mean?*
- Nicole Catarino, *Manipulating Man Spreading*
- Joan Seliger Sidney, *I Married a Mathematician*
- Brenda Murphy, *The Nearby*
- Kristina Dolce, *Girl School Rules*
- Jessie Lubka, *My Perpetual Fear of Water*
- Laurie Cella, *Chaos Theory*
- Emily Heiden, *Reasons Why I’m Giving Up Dating Online*
- Krisela Karaja, *Waste Not*
- Kate Luongo, *I Apologize for What I Said When I Was Hungry*
- Gina Barreca, *The Miserable Snapshot Theory of Life*

Find photos and more at s.uconn.edu/gina.



Pioneering the new field of regenerative engineering – and championing social justice

He has established preeminence in science, engineering, medicine, technology and social justice. A master of multiple fields, **Dr. Cato T. Laurencin**, holds UConn's highest academic title: University Professor.

Please tell us about yourself and how you got to where you are today.

I work at the interface of medicine and engineering and am also someone that is very much involved in issues of social justice. I grew up in Philadelphia and became interested in medicine at a very early age, and decided I wanted to become a doctor. I started college at Princeton, where I met people who were fantastic mentors in engineering. At that time, I was not quite sure how I was going to combine engineering and medicine, but I pursued chemical engineering.

When I completed college, I went on to medical school at the Harvard Medical School in Boston and part-way through I decided to revisit my scientific and engineering routes. I met Robert Langer, who was a young assistant professor at that time and decided to join his laboratory. I subsequently took on a combined MD-Ph.D. program combining work at Harvard with work at MIT. This program was unusual and I realized that to do a comprehensive job on both would take a long, long time!

With the support and help of Noreen Koller, who was a fantastic registrar at Harvard, I was allowed to move back and forth for my training, so I would do clinical rotations and then I would do work in the laboratory. This enabled me to complete my MD and Ph.D. combined in seven years, which really helped me on my journey because I became very, very used to working in both the clinical and research realms. I then began a

residency in orthopedic surgery and opened my laboratory at MIT.

Since then I have been working in both areas; a common theme in all my research has been combining the principles of material science and engineering with physics and clinical medicine to allow us to be able to create new information and new science.

You have been recognized numerous times for your achievements in bioengineering. Could you talk about your work in this field?

I essentially defined what is now a new field – regenerative engineering, which is the convergence of technologies that we can utilize for the purposes of regeneration of complex tissues.

I first outlined this vision for the new field of regenerative engineering in 2012 and since then we have continued to work and expand the field. We now have a society called the Regenerative Engineering Society and our work has been successful in terms of developing new science, new technologies, and new ways of thinking for the regeneration of complex tissues and organ systems. We have been fortunate to be funded by the NIH Director's Pioneer Award and the National Science Foundation has awarded us two Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation awards for this new field.

You have recently been awarded the Herbert W. Nickens Award by the AAMC – congratulations! Please tell us briefly about that award, why you won it, and how that makes you feel.

I was very excited and very proud to receive the Herbert Nickens Award. It's the American Association of Medical Colleges' highest award for social justice and equity, and it recognizes the work that I have been involved in

over the past almost 40 years in the area of social justice and equity.

It recognizes my efforts to create a fairer society for all in work that has ranged from boots on the ground programs seeking to increase the numbers of Black and Brown people working in engineering, science, and medicine, to larger programs such as the creation of The W. Montague Cobb National Medical Association Institute program looking at ways in which one can address disparities in health, medicine, and science for Black people, to launching a new journal – the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* – which is now the leading journal working in the space, to our new work in terms of Chairing the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine Roundtable on Black Men and Black Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine.

I have been involved in a broad gamut of endeavors that have at their core the aim of making the U.S. and the world a more fair, just and equitable society.

You have received singular honors for your years of work. You were the first individual in history to receive both the oldest/highest awards from the National Academy of Engineering (the Simon Ramo Founder's Award) and the National Academy of Medicine (the Walsh McDermott Medal). The American Association for the Advancement of Science recently awarded you with the prestigious Philip Hauge Abelson Prize for your innovative research, contributions to national policies regarding science, and for dedication to supporting diversity in the field. How will regenerative engineering shape the future?

At the Connecticut Convergence Institute our main focus is on regenerative



engineering, which as I mentioned is defined as the convergence of advanced materials sciences, stem cell science, physics, developmental biology, and clinical translation, for the regeneration of complex tissues and organ systems. Our Institute aims to regenerate human limbs, not robotic limbs but rather real, organic, flesh-and-blood ones that grow on the person receiving treatment. This type of breakthrough will have a tremendous impact on global public health and in the lives of those with amputations due to bone cancer, diabetes, dangerous infections, trauma accidents, or children born with missing or impaired limbs.

The ultimate goal of the Hartford Engineering A Limb (HEAL) project, under active research in my laboratory, is aimed at helping wounded warriors as well as others who have lost limbs or experienced joint damage. Other patients who could benefit from the future breakthroughs are those with amputations due to bone cancer, diabetes, dangerous infections, or trauma accidents, or even children born with missing or impaired limbs.

What would you say are the main challenges still hindering equity in healthcare?

Our main challenge in terms of equity for Black people in both the U.S. and the world is the persistence of racism. We know that there are excess deaths each year of Black people linked to racism and we have known this for a very, very long time — this is not new news. In the 1990s, the National Medical Association had a consensus report examining racism and its effects on health and the creation of health disparities. The National Academies followed up with a study called “Unequal Treatment,” which examined the unequal treatment of Black people and others in the U.S. and found racism to be a primary reason why this is happening.

Recently, we have seen the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor garner widespread media attention. This injustice translates to the

medical establishment, too, in terms of medical care, which translates to higher mortality for Black people. That is the major challenge we have to address in terms of healthcare and something that I am very passionate about.

We recently made the case for why we need to see more Black professionals working in medicine, along with science and engineering. On the medical side, Black physicians treating Black patients obviously do not exhibit the levels of unconscious bias and conscious racism that take place among white physicians and some new studies — for example in Covid-19 — have suggested that clinical outcomes are improved where Black physicians have taken care of Black patients.

So what challenges are still faced by Black and Brown students who aspire to careers in STEM industries, such as healthcare?

Number one is that there are so many systemic racism issues. It was extreme when I was growing up — I still remember walking into a classroom at MIT and having a professor block me from coming into the door. Is it still this extreme? Probably not as blatant, but just as damaging.

As an active mentor helping address this, what are your top tips for others hoping to be good mentors?

I was very fortunate to win the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Math and Engineering mentorship from President Obama and the American Association for Advancement of Science Mentor Award, so mentoring is a big component of my life.

I think for mentors it is important that there is a dedication to that individual and to their long-term future. I have been fortunate to have mentorships that have been lifelong; I am still in contact with people I have mentored who are now full professors and chairs or deans. I think it is also important that the mentorship is a two-way relationship — meaning that

there are expectations from both the mentor and the mentee. The mentees have to follow up with and listen to their mentors. It is not necessarily that the person has to agree with what their mentor says, but there has to be a clear relationship in which the counsel or guidance is provided and has been well thought through. Finally, there has got to be an open dialogue about successes, setbacks, and plans.

You touched earlier on studies showing the availability of Black physicians reduces unconscious bias and improves care. Do you think that a representative workforce is requisite for equitable healthcare?

Yes, I think you do need to have a representative workforce in order to be able to have equity in medicine, for a number of reasons. Number one — because, as we alluded to, when you have Black and Brown physicians, you reduce the levels of unconscious bias and racism in the system as a whole and that results in better quality of care. Number two is that to a great extent the under-representation of Black physicians in medicine right now is a symptom of a system that has at its roots systemic racism.

One marker for how we progress is to examine the numbers of Black people who are in medical school. We had a historic low in terms of Black men in medicine around 2014–2015. Those numbers have rebounded a bit, but that shows that even in a world in which we talk about diversity and equity, such a phenomenon can happen. That’s why I published my piece “The Context of Diversity” in the journal *Science*. You cannot think of diversity as an old Kumbaya general feeling. We have to look at what’s happening with specific groups and with the specific challenges that are taking place in specific groups. With Black people, especially in the U.S., we know that racism plays a role in every aspect of their life.

I wrote a paper recently on racial profiling as a public health issue speaking to how racial profiling by police in America has serious health effects. This is an area that really needs to be addressed.

You’ve done much for the state of Connecticut. You were the faculty architect for Bioscience Connecticut, which revamped UConn Health, and even serve as a Commissioner for Boxing for the state. You’ve been awarded the Connecticut Medal of Technology and Innovation for your work not only in research, but in entrepreneurship. You have a large social justice footprint in the state. You serve on the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Advisory Board and you were recently named a *Connecticut Magazine Healthcare Hero*. Tell us about your work that earned you that title and what your vision is for the future.

In the “Healthcare Hero” article I discussed how and why the coronavirus was and still is disproportionately affecting Blacks. I recall that when Covid-19 first hit, there was a myth of Black immunity that was circulating on the internet and social media, so I set out to examine that because I was really concerned if that misinformation got out it could be disastrous for the Black community.

I published the first peer-reviewed study in the nation with these findings in April. It exploded the myth and created an early warning that the disease could be particularly bad for the Black community.

It’s important to understand that the reason the levels that we’re seeing are this high is because of the history of discrimination that has taken place in this country.

When thinking about remedies for the issue at hand, I developed the concept of the IDEAL Pathway to creating a just and equitable society. Currently, we’re in a world of discussions about diversity, inclusion, and equity. While we have had some gains in these areas, they have not really sufficiently addressed the issues of racism that we see in this country. So my belief is that we need to move to inclusion, diversity, equity, anti-racism, and learning (IDEAL). Understanding ways in which Black people are affected by the specific kinds of racial discrimination called anti-Blackness. Understanding



Dr. Laurencin’s interest in social action led to the creation of the Laurencin-McClinton Greeting (LMG) in conjunction with his research fellow Dr. Anceah McClinton. The handshake alternative was created in an effort to reduce human contact and protect public health. The LMG was published in *Science* under the editor’s blog.

the history of Black, Indigenous, and all people of color. Moving from ally to what I would call a ride-or-die partner in the anti-racism movement — these are some of the ways that I believe learning can be used in a constructive way to bring about the ideal pathway to move forward.

Finally, what have been some of your proudest moments during your career thus far?

The proud moments are too numerous to count. I am blessed and highly favored. The moments surrounding my family (meeting and falling in love with my wife, and the birth of my children probably count as the best moments).

Speaking of moments, I want to

share some of my philosophy. There are actually three “most important” dates of your life. They are the day you are born, the day you realize your purpose in life, and the day you are truly carrying out your life on purpose.

For me, starting the new field of regenerative engineering, taking care of patients as a surgeon, working for social justice, and mentoring the next generation, all while doing the most important thing: staying connected to my family, my values, and my God — collectively represent my purpose.

A life on purpose is where I am, which is the ultimate goal.

Portions of this interview originally ran in the journal BioTechniques. ☺



Emt curling in Norfolk, Connecticut, in 2016. Find more info, photos, and video at s.uconn.edu/emt.

Husky, Coach, Paralympian – and now Author

Fresh off a cameo appearance in the Michael Jordan doc, “The Last Dance,” former UConn basketball player and Team USA Paralympic curler Steve Emt is on a virtual book tour for “You D.E.C.I.D.E.” The inspirational speaker says his debut book gives readers an inside look at his secret recipe for turning adversity into opportunity. Emt was forced to do just that when, after earning a walk-on spot from legendary coach Jim Calhoun and playing alongside future NBAers Ray Allen, Donyell Marshall, Kevin Ollie, and Scott Burrell, Emt flipped his truck late one night on I-84 and severed his spinal cord. Emt tried different sports after his accident, even handcycling the New York City Marathon in 2010, and coached high school basketball for 20 years. But, he says, it was the discovery of wheelchair curling in 2014 that changed everything about his life — again.

CLASS NOTES



➔ Congratulations to **Roland A. Boucher '54 (ENG)**, who recently published “Ancient Measurements,” which examines the ways Sumerians and other ancient civilizations created precise measurement standards. Boucher was engineering program manager for the Hughes Aircraft Company’s space division. He lives with his wife, Nancy, in Irvine, California. They have two adult children and a 12-year-old grandchild, Catie.

➔ **Kenneth Burack '54 (PHARM)** retired after a long career as director of pharmacy at Griffin Hospital in Derby, Connecticut, and pharmacy manager at Brooks Pharmacy in Stratford and Cheshire, Connecticut. He says he’s spending time with friends, children, and grandchildren and volunteering at the Long Wharf and and Shubert theaters in New Haven.

➔ **Alvin Berger '57 (CLAS)**, who served in the U.S. Army’s 32nd Army Band and attended Temple University Dental School, published “We Love You, Madam President,” about a brilliant young woman who rises from the tumult of a dysfunctional Washington establishment to break the glass ceiling, relying on her own intuition and the goodness of humanity.

➔ Congratulations to retired U.S. Ambassador **Philip S. Kaplan '59 (CLAS)**, whose debut novel “Night in Tehran” was published by Melville House in November.



➔ **Bill Howard '60 (CLAS)** reports that the pandemic has made 2020 the only year since 1950 that he has not added to

the number of 1,416 separate golf courses he has played on across all 50 states and 23 countries over his life as a student, soldier, insurance underwriter, and international corporation insurance risk manager. He retired in 1996 and lives in Chesterfield, Missouri, with Dolores, his wife of 60 years.



➔ Congrats to **James N. Lasbury '70 (BUS)** and **Sharon Neuhauser Lasbury '69 (CLAS)**, of Odenton, Maryland, on a long-lasting Husky love story: They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2020. ➔ **Edwin Slade '70 (CLAS)** is the new chair of the board of directors of the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. Slade is a fellow of the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and the American and International College of Dentists. ➔ The Physician

Assistant Education Association presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to **William Kohlhepp '74 (CLAS)**, professor emeritus of physician assistant studies at Quinnipiac University. Kohlhepp, who joined Quinnipiac in 1996, held several administrative positions there including dean of the School of Health Sciences. He was a physician assistant for more than 40 years variously at Yale New Haven Hospital, the Hospital of Saint Raphael, and the Community Health Care Plan; and a hospital administrator. ➔ **Marc Summerfield '74 (PHARM)** retired after 45 years of pharmacy management. He published a book on leadership, “Three Key Employee-Centered Elements with Case Studies.” ➔ **Charles E. Connerly '74 MA**, a professor at the University of Iowa School of Urban and Regional Planning, published “Green, Fair, and Prosperous: Paths to a Sustainable Iowa.” Connerly previously wrote “The Most Segregated City in America: City Planning and Civil Rights

in Birmingham, 1920–1980.”



➔ **David Fetterman '76 (CLAS)** is reaching new heights. He trekked to the Mt. Everest Base Camp with his family, including then-12-year-old son David. Their adventures ranged from a harrowing helicopter ride from Katmandu to the trek’s starting point to summiting at over 17,500 feet, where he says, “the lack of oxygen on the moonrock-like landscape above the tree line literally takes your breath away.” He served as a faculty member in the School of Education, and director of evaluation in the School of Medicine at Stanford University. He’s past president of the American Evaluation Association, re-

REMEMBRANCE



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

Margaret “Peggy” E. Sczesny '69 (NUR), '79 MS and I met in 1965 as we started our undergraduate years, living on the 7th floor of Brien McMahon Hall. We both came from working class families and experienced the whirlwind of change that followed. During our freshman year, we women students (only) had curfews, we had mandatory study hours in the dorm, we needed parental permission slips to be out overnight, and we were prohib-

ited from wearing slacks to class. I still shiver recalling frigid winter mornings trudging across campus, barelegged but for oh-so-thin nylons, to make an 8 a.m. English class. By the time we were seniors in 1968, flower power prevailed, men were allowed in women’s dorm rooms, and bra-burning parties were not uncommon. Although our professional paths diverged, we maintained a close friendship for more than 54 years. Peggy went on to obtain her master’s degree in nursing; I ultimately obtained my law degree from the University of New Hampshire. As we each pursued demanding professions — she in Virginia, and I in New Hampshire — we shared a profound gratitude for the educational foundation we received at UConn. After I retired as a justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court, I helped Peggy relocate to an assisted living home in Richmond, where she passed away in March 2019. Peggy always lived quite modestly, and I learned only after her death, as her executor, that she had gifted more than \$1.5 million to UConn’s School of Nursing. I shall always remember not only her deep commitment to nursing, but also her contagious enthusiasm for the UConn women’s basketball program, which sparkled until the very end. —*CAROL ANN (KNOTT) CONBOY '69 (ED)* Above: Sczesny, left, with Conboy in 2009 when Conboy was sworn in as a justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court.

ceived numerous awards, and written 17 books.

➔ **Mary Kuechenmeister '76 (PHARM)** is the founder and executive director of Story Preservation Initiative, an oral history-based educational nonprofit, headquartered in New Hampshire. She has personally recorded the oral histories of more than 60 people whose work or life experience has had

significant impact in the fields of the arts, sciences, and humanities. Recordings include those of U.S. poet laureates, internationally recognized artists and sculptors, noted environmentalists and naturalists, recipients of the National Book Award, astronauts, astrophysicists, Holocaust survivors, and others. She recently recorded the oral history of Charles Yarish



➔ It was eight years ago that **Allyson (Valentine) Schrier '82 (BUS)** had her life turned upside down when her husband was diagnosed with dementia at age 47. Their sons were just 12 and 15 at the time. Then, within a few years, both of her stepparents developed dementia as well. Schrier became determined to learn all she could about the condition so she could provide excellent care.

Two years ago, she put her newfound knowledge to work. She left her job in technology to start a new company, Thriving with Dementia. She teaches a program called "How to be Friends with People Living with Dementia" to friends and family members. She also trains professional caregivers, and, as a program manager at the University of Washington, teaches primary care providers about dementia detection, diagnosis, and support. And she co-founded Zinnia TV, which provides gently paced videos that provide identity and connection for people living with dementia.

"Zinnia TV is kind of my passion project," says Schrier. "I was so unhappy to find that, when he moved to a care community, my sweetheart spent hours on end parked in front of a television watching programming that was completely inappropriate for a person no longer able to track a plot, tell fact from fiction, or process rapidly moving images and audio."

Recently she was honored with a 2020 Maude's Award for Innovation in Alzheimer's Care for her work providing support for family care partners. The award is named after Maude Ferry, a Seattle philanthropist, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. —GRACE MERRITT

of UConn's Yarish Seaweed Marine Biotechnology Lab. Mary started her career at Save the Children in Westport, Connecticut. ➔ **John Wenke '76 MA, '81 Ph.D.** published a short story collection "The Critical List," which tells the stories of people teetering on the edge — a former jailbird under house arrest; a soap opera writer tangling with fraying family ties; a former philosophy professor, now homeless, living in the subway underground. "The Critical List" is published by Regal House Publishing and received pre-publication endorsements from writers Richard Ford, Cary Holladay, and **John Surowiecki '66 (CLAS), '78 MA.** Wenke teaches American literature and literary writing at Salisbury University in Maryland. His books include "J.D. Salinger" and "Melville's Muse." He was a T.A. in the UConn English department from 1974 to 1981. ➔ **Richard Gannon '77 (PHARM)** retired after 35 years at Hartford Hospital, where he was director of the pharmacy pain control service. He and his wife, **Judy Wiechniak Gannon '78 (ED),** have three adult children, all of whom followed him into the health field: **Stephen '08 (PHARM), '12 MD** is an interventional cardiologist at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts; **Denis '12 (PHARM), '14 Pharm.D.** is an emergency department pharmacist at Middlesex Hospital in Middletown, Connecticut, and Ryan, who graduated from the University of Rhode Island, is a clinical nurse leader at Hartford Hospital. ➔ **Elaine W. Viens '78 (CLAS)** writes to say she has retired as a speech and language therapist. She loved UConn, where she played JV basketball. She reports she now has grandchildren, who are growing up quickly, and loves reading about UConn. ➔ **Brian Loffredo '78**

(CLAS) plans to retire this spring after 25 years in management for Walmart, where he is a food and consumables coach at the Putnam, Connecticut, store. Brian lives with his wife, Colleen, and 19-year-old daughter, Brianna, in Thompson, Connecticut, where he is involved in town activities, including the Thompson Trails Committee, and is chair of the Thompson Turkey Trot 5K. Previously, he lived in Waterbury, Naugatuck, and Southington, where he helped raise four stepchildren with his late, first wife, Evelyn. He is a proud Husky, as his license plate will attest.



➔ **Rita M. Renzoni '78 (BUS)** reports that she is a work skills instructor in adult education in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and volunteers for the American Red Cross and Literacy Volunteers. She remembers her days on campus fondly: "Thanks for the memories, they are great!"



➔ **CEO Dan Delventhal '81 (BUS)** is celebrating the dramatic growth of his company, MowGreen, of Fairfield, Connecticut, a zero emission, gasoline-free lawn service. UConn is a family tradition for Dan, whose father **Elmer "Del" Delventhal '82 Ph.D.,** daughter **Kayla Delventhal '15 (CLAS),** and wife, **Cynthia (Baena) Delventhal '81 (CLAS),** are all Huskies. ➔ In other climate-related news, **David Samuels '83 (BUS)** was appointed to the board of directors of private equity-backed SemaConnect, a leading provider of electric

Student Malachi Bridges has been interviewing residents of New Haven about home ownership on streets like this one, in the Foxon section where he lives.



MAKING GOOD

IS THE AMERICAN DREAM FOR ALL AMERICANS?

Malachi Bridges '21 (CLAS) of New Haven, Connecticut, is a political science and Africana studies major, but it was a sociology class that spurred him into his area of research. "Race and Ethnicity" looked at rates of housing among whites, Blacks, and Hispanics since the 1960s, says Bridges. "Of course, whites had the highest rate of home ownership and amassed wealth because they were the first group of people allowed to own property and purchase housing. Blacks were not so far behind, especially with the passage of the Fair Housing Act in the 1970s. So, from the 1970s to the 1990s, white families had an average of about two to three times the wealth of an average Black or Hispanic family. Then we saw how those numbers have changed. Currently, the difference in wealth amassed by white families is almost six times that of Black families. So, the question is why we think that the white population continues to grow in wealth and home ownership, and even Hispanic populations are growing, but Black home ownership lessened after the 1990s."

Bridges' study "Blacks and the American Dream" has two focal points: The first is the measurement of the extent to which Black Americans' social immobility is due to cultural factors or external conditions, like the federal and municipal policies that prevent Black homeownership.

The second examines the effects of those disparaging laws on today's housing markets. The goal, he says, is to provoke critical thought and provide education and resources to citi-

zens and policymakers.

Bridges has been doing interviews with people in New Haven about their home-buying experiences.

"I hope that will support the initial claims in my thesis, which speak on the initiatives by our government to prevent Black home ownership. I argue that a lot of the initiatives in specific urban cities have contributed to the collective economic destitution. I also talk about urban containments, in which cities constructed neighborhoods to confine Black people into pockets of poverty. In addition to the interviews, I am studying the likelihood of families leaving a city for more opportune areas. I am using New Haven court documents and Ancestry.com for that."

Bridges is passionate about home ownership himself. "My parents own their home, and they had to go through a lot of the same things I talked about to do that. When I graduate from college, I want to purchase a home."

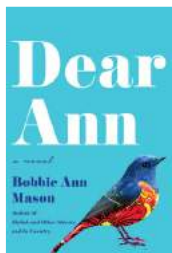
He graduates in May and is already enrolled in UConn's master's of public administration program. After that, he says he'd like to open a real estate firm and launch a nonprofit organization that has an educational component about financial literacy, credit, and home ownership.

"I want to facilitate workshops and provide programs to increase Black and Brown home ownership in New Haven," says Bridges. "After that is all over, I might want to be mayor of New Haven!" —MIKE ENRIGHT '88 (CLAS)



ALL STAR

BOBBIE ANN MASON — THEN AND NOW



very center of her family, but even as a young girl, she knew she wanted a different life.

Growing up on her family's dairy farm in Kentucky, **Bobbie Ann Mason '72 Ph.D., '02 H** explored the natural world unfolding all around her. The farm was at the

She loved to read, she says — “The Bobbsey Twins,” Nancy Drew mysteries, and “Little Women.”

“Books made me want to know so much more about the world.” She knew her future would involve words. “I wanted to write,” she says. “But I knew you couldn’t make a living from it.”

As it turns out, writing has made for quite a life. Mason’s latest book, “Dear Ann,” was released last September. At 80, the celebrated, bestselling author is navigating the uncharted terrain of

a book tour during a pandemic, doing Zoom interviews, and giving talks at bookstores around the country, where she is introduced as one of America’s greatest writers.

What If?

“Dear Ann” hinges on the kind of wistful question that can take hold and tug at you: What if I’d chosen a different path? Ann looks back to the sixties wondering what if she had gone to Stanford in California instead of a small college in upstate New York — maybe she wouldn’t have met Jimmy. Through her imagining, she tries to escape difficult memories of that time when the Vietnam War was escalating. But memory triumphs over imagination. She can imagine California, but she can’t imagine a life without Jimmy.

“What if . . .” is a question Mason has mulled over herself. When she graduated with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Kentucky, several of her classmates from a creative writing class were headed to Stanford on Stegner Fellowships. Mason went to New York City where she wrote for a fan magazine, eventually leaving the city for a graduate assistantship at Harpur College and then to Storrs for her Ph.D.

Mason has wondered what it might have been like to have gone to Stanford, “where others from Kentucky went before me and paved the way.” Moving to the Northeast from the South, she says, was “a culture shock.” But so many things she loves about her life would not have happened had she made a different choice.

“I loved it at UConn,” she says. “It was one of the most significant times of my life. It was where I met my husband. Things were in such flux at that time; I was changing. It was a time of great upheaval. It was liberating and exciting and unnerving because of the war.”

About “Dear Ann,” she says, “I didn’t want to write about the sixties as the sixties with all those iconic images. This was about innocence and about young people trying to find out who they are and experimenting and going through incredible self-doubt and insecurity, and all those things are normal probably for that age, but several things had shifted. There was the draft, which

was restricting people and making them scared. And another thing that made a huge shift in the culture was the birth control pill, and that was liberating.”

As Mason wrote “Dear Ann,” she thought often about UConn, about the beauty of campus in the fall, about her many “great professors and the best professor I ever had, Milton Stern.” She chuckles thinking about how he would often break into recitations of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells.” His enthusiasm for American literature was catching. She thought too about her own love story, meeting Roger Rawlins, getting married, and living in a farmhouse in Chaplin “just down the road from Diana’s Pool, which was delightful.”

Hidden UConn

Mason was a graduate assistant at UConn and then taught journalism part time at Mansfield State College in Pennsylvania, where she and her husband moved after graduating. “I was not a natural teacher,” she says. What she was was a writer, though she says it took some years before she would have the confidence to say it.

Her start in short fiction has “a bit of a back story” with a UConn connection, she notes. Ann Beattie, another acclaimed alum writer, and Mason attended UConn at the same time, but the two did not meet until Mason attended a writer’s workshop in 1977. “I was just starting to write stories and met Ann there, and we had a lot of background to share about UConn,” she says. Beattie “was a hot young writer” who published stories in *The New Yorker*. “And I thought, ‘Well, I’ll send a story to Roger Angell at *The New Yorker*,’” Mason says. “I was so naïve. I thought I’ll just start at the top!”

It worked. The longtime *New Yorker* editor “took an interest in me and helped build my confidence and encouraged me,” says Mason, who turned her focus to the people and places in Kentucky that she knew so well. “He was listening and saying that I was on the right track. He wouldn’t tell me how to do it, but he would kind of nudge me to find out for myself.”

Over a period of about two years she submitted 19 stories to Angell, who

always responded with encouragement. “Offerings,” the 20th story she sent to *The New Yorker*, was accepted, and she’s been writing short fiction and “Talk of the Town” columns since.

Two years after that first *New Yorker* publication, her collection “Shiloh and Other Stories” arrived to great notice. It won the PEN/Hemingway Award for First Fiction and was nominated for National Book and Book Critics Circle and PEN/Faulkner awards. Her novel “In Country,” which she says is one of the works she’s most proud of, followed shortly after. Like “Dear Ann,” it focuses on the Vietnam War. It was made into a film starring Bruce Willis and Emily Lloyd and, along with “Shiloh,” has been taught in colleges around the country for decades.

A Life

The career she thought she couldn’t make a living at has spanned four decades and includes O. Henry Award-winning short fiction and the memoir “Clear Springs,” the story of her family’s farm and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She was inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame and won a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Arts and Letters Award for Literature.

In the introduction to “Patchwork, A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader,” George Saunders wrote, “Her stories exist to gently touch on, and praise, even mourn, what it feels like to be alive in this moment.” Each book, each of those stories is its own journey, says Mason. “You start with a blank page and a blank mind, and you have to wait to get a surge of creativity, and that’s fun and that’s kind of timeless, but it doesn’t always happen every day,” she explains.

“It took six years to write this novel,” she says of her latest. “I kept abandoning it.” She refined “Dear Ann” working in the quiet of her home back in Kentucky, where she returned with her husband more than two decades ago.

“I tend to jump in over my head and figure I’ll get out somehow. I take unexpected directions,” she says. “The beginning is always the hardest part. The fun comes in the later stages when I can say ‘I see where I’m going now. I know what this is.’” —**JACKIE FITZPATRICK HENNESSEY '83 (CLAS)**

vehicle charging stations across North America. He is also chair of the company’s audit committee.

► Congratulations to **Barbara (Solomon) Josselson '83 MA**, who recently published “The Lilac House” and “The Bluebell Girls,” the first two books in her Lake Summers series. ► Speaking of authors, **Stephen A. Black '86 (CAHNR)**, an assistant professor of rehabilitation sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University, reports that he also recently published a book, “Healthy Knees Total Knee Replacement,” with Robin Robertson. ► Congratulations to **Barbara Evans '88 (CLAS)**, who became associate executive director of the Foundation for City College, the oldest City University of New York senior college. Prior to CCNY, she worked in fundraising for the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Challenged Athletes Foundation, and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, among other nonprofits.

► **Mary Kay (Karp) Tshonas '88 (ED)** is the new principal of Hall Memorial School in Willington, Connecticut. She had been principal of Quinebaug Middle College High School in Danielson, Connecticut.



► Mazel tov to **Edina (Riebman) Oestreicher '90 (CLAS)**, who has returned to campus to become executive director of UConn Hillel, the Center for Jewish Student Life. She says she is excited to be back at UConn and looks forward to collaborating with students, families, faculty, staff, and the greater Storrs community to create a vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive Hillel.

► Another Husky love story! **Michael '90 (BUS)** and **Jennifer Marzano '92 (CLAS)**, who first met at an alumni event in Atlanta in the mid-'90s, are celebrating 21 years together. Michael is chief commercial officer of Aon’s Human Capital Solutions business and Jenn is head of marketing at the Cliff Valley School. They live in Atlanta, Georgia, with their children, Lily and Alex.

► **Bonnie Heatzig '91 JD** sells upper-echelon waterfront properties in South Florida. She and her husband are the proud parents of a

daughter, who is a freshman at Cornell University, and two sons, a junior at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a University of Michigan graduate. ➔ **Leslie Bilo-deau Placzek '91 MBA** reports she has written a bestselling humor book, "The Audacious Adventures of Zazoo Plazz Part-time Superhero, Full-time Mom." In it, she describes growing up in the Hartford area in the 1970s, her big-hair school days in the '80s, and life today as a career woman, wife, and mother of Ben, 20, a junior at the University of New Haven, and Zach, 17, a high school senior. "I treasure the memories of my years at UConn, which set me up for my quirky quest to spread a little light and laughter in the

world." ➔ Classmate **John Maciulewski '91 MBA** has been retired from the Hartford post office for 15 years, after an 18-year career there. ➔ **Stephen P. O'Mahony '92 (ENG), '96 MD** is senior vice president, chief health information officer at RWJBarnabas Health in West Orange, New Jersey. In 2011, he won the John D. Thompson Award from the Connecticut Hospital Association for excellence in the delivery of healthcare through use of data. ➔ **Jill Hunter '93 (PHARM)** founded UpLevel To Lead, which helps companies change their culture to become places where everyone wants to come to work every day. She launched UpLevel after she noticed, while working as a pharma-

cist, that some healthcare professionals were empathetic with their patients but not necessarily with their staff. Good luck on the new venture! ➔ **Nicole Hughey '93 (BUS)** joined SiriusXM in New York as vice president of diversity and inclusion in July. She was senior director in the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Mass General Brigham. Previously she worked at Travelers Companies, where she held several roles of increasing responsibility, including second vice president, office of diversity and inclusion. ➔ **Maggie Balch '94 MA** recently was appointed dean of students at Westfield State University, where she oversees student activities and leadership, student conduct, residential

engagement, and the career center. She held a similar position at the Rhode Island School of Design for the past five years and previously held several positions in student life at Brandeis University. ➔ Meanwhile, Maj. **Michael Amato Salvatore Goba '94 (BUS)** retired July 1, 2020 as a U.S. Army JAG after 20 years of legal service. ➔ Goba, practicing law, was assigned in Baghdad and Taji, Iraq, as well as in Germany; Bosnia; Kosovo; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. ➔ Congratulations to **Andy Yorkin '95 (BUS)**, who was just named president of BrandHive, a global branding firm specializing in the healthy lifestyles industry based in Salt Lake

City, Utah. Yorkin joined the company as an account director six years ago. ➔ **Leslie Brody '95 MA, '98 Ph.D.** has published three books, most recently "Sometimes You Have to Lie," a biography of Louise Fitzhugh, the author of the Harriet the Spy series. Brody, a playwright, journalist, and biographer, has taught creative nonfiction in the Creative Writing Department at the University of Redlands in California since 1998. ➔ **Tom Hooten '95 (CAHNR)** told us what he's been up to all these years. He retired in July from Colorado State University, where he worked in extension service for nearly 22 years. He earned a master's in plant science from Utah State University, worked as a research associate at the Southwestern Colorado Research Center Agricultural Experiment Station, and as an extension agent and director in Montezuma County, Colorado. Along the way, he earned a Distinguished Service Award for Excellence in Extension Education Programs from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents. He and his wife Diana Donnelly plan to stay in southwest Colorado, but he remains an enthusiastic Husky: "I love UConn! And will always remember my time there!"

(CLAS), '02 MA reports that he and his wife, Victoria, welcomed a new Husky to their family. Caroline Johnston Boecherer was born in February 2020 and joins elder Husky, Nora — UConn class of 2035.



➔ Congrats to **Melissa Oliveira '01 (CLAS)**, whose essay "Ruin Value" was published in the fall 2020 issue of the prestigious *Ploughshares*. Oliveira is working on a novel in Berlin, Germany. ➔ Kudos to **Kristen (Gudlewski) Keyser '02 (ED), '03 MA**, who won her first election — to the West Allis-West Milwaukee school board in Wisconsin in April. She teaches at a private school for Indigenous students in the Milwaukee area.



➔ Faced with the challenge of remote learning for the arts, Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy II theater teacher **Margot Littlefield '05 (SFA)** had to think outside the box. She reached out to fellow



Peter Morenus

MAKING GOOD

READY TO LEAD — AND SERVE

Caesar Valentin '20 (CLAS) can say he opened for President Barack Obama! The Obama Foundation asked Valentin to be one of four students across the country to introduce Obama's virtual address to 2020 graduates last spring. The Foundation says Valentin "exemplifies the promise and resilience of the year's graduates, and is living out our mission to inspire, empower, and connect people to change their world."

Growing up, Valentin says he felt disconnected from his Latinx identity and culture, so at UConn he became a leader at the Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center (PRLACC), organizing events and speakers and giving voice to the Latinx community (above, he and **Madison Maynard '19 MA** question John Quiñones during a PRLACC "Illuminating the Path" lecture at Jorgensen).

As part of the Community Leadership Corps Hartford, Valentin developed a peer mentoring program at a local high school and his alma mater, Connecticut River Academy. His team drew from their own personal experiences of feeling as if they didn't have a voice when they were younger, and created a way for younger students to feel seen, supported, and cared for. What started as an idea for a student "care package" morphed into a peer mentoring program. Valentin and his team presented the idea at the school in the fall, and then did additional work to survey students and tweak the plan so that it would best serve their audience's needs.

"Community leadership is more about giving people the resources to be their own leaders and develop their own leadership pipelines," says Valentin, who is now pursuing a joint MA/MPA. "It's unfair for anyone to look at themselves as a failure before they get the chance to succeed."



Pictured left to right: **Timothy Barnett** and **Erica Meiners**, co-directors of the University Without Walls program at Stateville Correctional Center, and 2019 graduates **Eric Watson**, **Devon Terrell**, **Raul Dorado**, **Antonio Kendrick**, **Darrell Fair**, **Joseph Dole**, and **Marshall Stewart**.

MAKING GOOD

EDUCATED

As activist and scholar **Angela Davis** spoke, **Chance the Rapper** performed, and seven students stood in their caps and gowns holding their new bachelor's degrees, **Timothy Barnett '86 (CLAS)** sat quietly taking it all in.

The students studied at Stateville Correctional Center (a maximum security facility outside Chicago) as part of a prison University Without Walls Program co-directed by Barnett, professor of English at Northeastern Illinois University. They were the first prisoners in Illinois, and among the first in the country, to receive BAs since Pell grants were halted in the prison system more than 25 years ago. They studied justice policy advocacy, community organizing, and the arts and published books and articles and poetry, worked with outside programs on criminal justice reform, and created Parole Illinois to advocate for changes in parole policies.

While it was a momentous day for the graduates, Barnett says the experience has also been life changing for him. "You come to realize how limited your experience is and how much you need to go places you haven't been, meet people you've been told not to talk to, to try to figure out all the things you don't know," he says. "I went to a place where I met people who are incredibly intelligent, with integrity and commitment to issues around justice and academics. I've learned so much at Stateville; I'm doing work that has sustained me in these last 10 years of my career."

It was a career path Barnett says he could not have imagined when he was a high school senior. "I was good at English, but it seemed silly just to find the symbols in poems," he says. He wanted to do work that got at the world's larger questions. Taking English classes with the late **Jeremy Richard** at UConn Stamford showed him that literature "could help you understand economics, religion, philosophy, social justice, all kinds of things. He was doing phenomenal work that affected the rest of my life."

Barnett has taught literature and writing, helped create a university minor in LGBTQ studies, and won three faculty excellence awards at Northeastern Illinois. He is teaching a new cohort of Stateville inmates and collaborating with the recent graduates on a book about formerly incarcerated people who have gone on to work in the fields of law and social justice. "It centers on the idea that people who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution," he says. —**JACKIE FITZPATRICK HENNESSEY '83 (CLAS)**



Michael A. Pascucilla '02 MPH is the CEO/Director of Health for East Shore District Health Department of Connecticut. His work researching, developing, and funding the world's first Solar-Electric Pump-out Vessel, which is in use in Connecticut and for which a U.S. patent application has been submitted, was published in the *Journal Water Practice & Technology* last July. ➔ Another Husky pup! **Michael Boecherer '00**



Anti-monopoly crusaders Daniel Hanley, left, and Jackie Filson at the UConn Law School in Hartford last December.

James Kwak, Hillary Greene, and Robert Langer, who taught me antitrust concepts and how they can remedy broader social injustices.

Jackie: Studying human rights and English set me up perfectly for my first job in strategic communications for Food & Water Watch, an environmental advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. I learned a lot there about the governmental failures that allow giant corporations to monopolize markets while treating workers poorly and manipulating prices. That's how I ended up at Open Markets working to stop Big Ag, Big Tech, Big Pharma, Big Everything — in hopes of helping to create a more just, fair, and equitable democracy for all people.

What are some of the major fights you're in now?

Jackie: Open Markets is leading an effort to unify antitrust with other movements in labor, racial justice, and farm reform. We work closely with prominent groups like the Athena Coalition, Family Farm Action, and Color of Change to stop predatory monopolies, especially those in Big Tech. Last September, Daniel co-authored a report exposing Amazon's abusive union-busting surveillance practices and detailing clear policy solutions. Right now, we're focused on presenting the Biden administration with antitrust remedies it can implement without Congress, such as bright-line merger rules to limit the power of corporations.

What role did UConn play in landing you at Open Markets and this line of work?

Daniel: The School of Business equips students with the essential skills necessary for critical analysis, while also encouraging independent thought. At UConn, there were plenty of opportunities to test these acquired skills. For example, as an undergraduate, I founded a chapter of Alpha Kappa Psi, the oldest professional business

fraternity. This allowed me to hone and solidify the skills I acquired in the classroom before entering a formal work environment where the stakes are much higher.

Jackie: I had countless exceptional professors at UConn, including Ruth Fairbanks, Glenn Mitoma, Anne Gebelein, Jelani Cobb, and David Richards. They transformed my analysis of the world while also facilitating many of my most valuable experiences such as interning at WNPR and collecting data for Social Progress Imperative. I also wouldn't have found my way to the anti-monopoly movement without everyone I worked with at EcoHusky, *The Daily Campus*, WHUS, and on alternative breaks.

Why should regular people care about anti-monopoly/antitrust?

Daniel: Monopolies harm all of us — from consumers to small businesses to workers. They use their dominance to impose restrictive “non-compete clauses” on workers that prevent them from obtaining other employment in similar industries even if they're fired or laid off. Right now, many healthcare workers are unable to utilize their skills to help give care during Covid-19 because of non-competes.

Meanwhile, monopolies also reduce consumer choice in their vendetta against fair competition. Amazon is a great example. The corporation has routinely copied third-party products listed on its marketplace and then

boosted its own version first on the search page.

Maybe worst of all, monopolies have also been known to use their financial might to influence state politics, the news, and the free flow of information. For example, when Tennessee wanted to expand broadband access, the telecommunications giants AT&T and Comcast used their financial war chest to subvert the effort. And other monopolies are able to control what is aired on television and manipulate algorithms to suppress what is available on the internet. In essence, monopolies pose a direct threat to democracy and to the autonomy of each of us, no matter what you do, who you are, or where you live.

MAKING GOOD

MONOPOLY BUSTERS

America's economy is dominated by monopolies like Google and Tyson Foods that harm workers, suppress innovation, and threaten democracy, say Daniel Hanley '12 (BUS), '19 JD and Jackie Filson '16 (CLAS). The alums lead a growing anti-monopoly movement at the Open Markets Institute, a Washington-based nonprofit seeking to restore antitrust laws to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of opportunity, wealth, and power. We asked these alumni about the growing movement and the exciting work they're doing.

How did each of you end up working at Open Markets?

Daniel: After graduation, I committed myself to public service, joining Teach For America in Lowndes County, Alabama. There I came to understand how monopolistic companies such as Walmart are destroying economic opportunities for individuals. I became curious about how to use antitrust law to tame dominant corporations, so I pursued my law degree at UConn where I took classes with exceptional professors, such as Alexandra Lahav,

Husky and Brooklyn-based puppeteer **Julia Darden '07 (SFA)**, who created more than 100 custom hand puppets for the students. The scholars now use the puppets in their theater lessons and as a tool for social emotional learning. ➔ A shout out to **Tatiana Melendez-Rhodes '06 MA, '10 Ph.D.**, who was promoted to associate professor and granted tenure at Central Connecticut State University. She's in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. ➔ And congrats to **Matthew Biron '06 (CAHNR)** and **Caitlyn Willox-Biron '06 (CLAS)**, who welcomed their second daughter, Luna, in October 2020. ➔ **Rachel Fain '07 (CLAS)**, a partner at Halloran Sage, is getting noticed. She was just named to the *Hartford Business Journal's* “40 Under Forty” list. She is co-chair of the firm's insurance coverage litigation practice group and works with the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center on a pro bono basis to manage eviction defense cases for veterans facing homelessness. ➔ Pediatrician **Barbara “Basia” Szajda '07 MD** joined Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Center in

Hartford, where she provides pediatric medical care to infants, children, and teenagers and offers medical visits in Spanish, Polish, and English. Previously, she was lead pediatrician for the Venice Family Clinic in Venice and Culver City, California. ➔ And **Rob Amenta '07 (BUS)** was promoted to lead portfolio manager, U.S. High Yield, and to co-lead portfolio manager, Global High Yield, at NN Investment Partners. Amenta has worked in their New York City office since 2012.



➔ Congratulations to **Mark Daigneault '07 (ED)**, who was promoted to head coach of the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team. Daigneault, who has been with the franchise for six years, replaces Billy Donovan.

He came to the Thunder from the University of Florida, where he was an assistant coach, and previously was at the College of the Holy Cross. During his years as an undergraduate at UConn, he was a student manager under Hall of Fame men's basketball coach Jim Calhoun. ➔ **Adam Dreyfus '07 (BGS)** writes that he loves getting *UConn Magazine* and checking out what fellow Huskies are doing. Since getting a master's from Columbia University, he has been working on supporting autism programming in public schools in Virginia. He is director of the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism, where he raised funds to build a new facility. He co-founded AnswersNow, a telehealth platform that connects parents to certified clinicians. “None of my success would have been possible without my time at UConn,” he wrote. ➔ **Jean Rush '08 MBA** was appointed to the strategic advisory board for Decode Health, a Nashville-based predictive analytics company, to aid in tracking Covid-19. She was recently executive vice president of government markets at Highmark and previously was senior vice president of complex care

Centene Corp. ➔ Meanwhile, **Thomas Wise '08 (ED, SFA)** and **Jennifer (Susin) Wise '08 (ED, SFA)** of Boonton, New Jersey, welcomed son Thomas “TJ” Joseph in September.



➔ How's this for romantic? **Benjamin Arsenault '10 (CLAS)** and **Jessica Potrepka Arsenault '08 (CAHNR), '10 MS** announced the birth of their third child, James Ellsworth — named for Ellsworth Hall where his mom and dad met. Both are pursuing advanced degrees at UConn: Benjamin is earning his MBA and Jessica her DNP. James, born in July, joins brother David and sister Evangeline, both future Huskies, according to Mom and Dad. The family lives in Southington, Connecticut. ➔ Kudos to **Shane R. Goodrich '10 (CLAS), '13 JD**, a lawyer at Morgan, Brown & Joy, who was recently recognized by Best Lawyers in America in its new category, “Ones to Watch.” ➔ And to **Richie Kremer '10 (CAHNR)**, who was

MAKING GOOD

ESTHER PAHL IS STILL VERY MUCH MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Esther Pahl's parents ran a neighborhood grocery store in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the 1940s. While they made ends meet, there was not much left for anything else, let alone money to help their daughter pay her graduate school tuition.

That's one of the reasons **Esther Pahl '52 MSW** was motivated to create an endowed fellowship to support graduate students at UConn's School of Social Work.

"I realize there are students who are struggling now as I did when I was a graduate student," the 97-year-old says over a Zoom call from Potomac, Maryland, where she lives with her daughter Jamie Borns and her family.

"I wanted to set up a program for students who are marginally making it so they can study without the stress of worrying about paying the bills that are involved in basic living."

In 1946 Pahl was one of UConn's first eight MSW graduates. "It was a bit of a pioneering experience," she says. "At the time, the School did not have its own building, so we met at Hartford [Public] High School. Most of our professors were visiting professors from Trinity College, the University of Chicago, Boston University, and Yale."

Going Strong

Sharp and energetic, Pahl remains a voracious reader, devouring a new book every few days. She recently finished a book about Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel. Until a couple of years ago, Pahl swam every day and took college courses for fun on international affairs or current events at Florida International University, near where she used to live. Borns attributes her mother's longevity to clean living.

But Pahl's life hasn't been easy. As a young mother, she got divorced and single-handedly raised three children on a social worker's salary. Along the



way, she instilled in children her fierce sense of self-reliance and a compassion for others.

"She always gave me the love, support, and confidence to go out into the world and make something of myself," says Borns, a nurse. "She taught me to never rely on someone else for anything. She showed me by example to be patient and kind to people."

Strengthening Others

Pahl began her long career as a social worker at the Family Service Society in Hartford and eventually found her dream job at the Jewish Social Service Agency in Washington, D.C. Over the years, she helped scores of families, children, and immigrants settle in the area, overcome trauma, and move on with their lives.

In one memorable case, she helped a 10-year-old boy who was suddenly alone when his mother was brutally murdered. His parents had divorced, and his father had moved away to Florida with his older brother. The boy was placed with a foster family, but it was a poor match and he was struggling. Working with a team, Pahl found a more suitable foster family for the boy and began to counsel him.

"It was difficult because I had to build up a relationship of trust with him and then slowly settle him into a new school situation, where he would not only be comfortable but be able to produce," she says. She spent the next several months helping him process his mother's death. "Part of the therapy involved taking him to the cemetery where the mother was buried and spending a lot of time with him talking about his mother and the tragedy around her death."

Another time, she helped an intergenerational family from Russia resettle here. "They were having adjustment problems, mainly because the grandmother felt so guilty about leaving Russia," she says. "Her oldest daughter had died unexpectedly just before they moved here. She felt that by moving out of Russia she was abandoning her daughter, and this made her feel very guilty. I spent a lot of time with the grandmother, encouraging her to really talk about the relationship she had with this daughter. Because of my social work training, I focused on helping her treasure the opportunity she had to spend all the wonderful years living together with her."

Though she retired 40 years ago, Pahl found that setting up the UConn fellowship for future social workers reconnected her with her profession and gave her a great sense of purpose.

"Donating money and setting up a scholarship fund gave me the feeling that I was still contributing — not on a professional level — but certainly as a humanitarian who is truly concerned about the problems in our society that need attention," she says. "One of the most effective ways of dealing with these problems is to prepare committed graduate students who want to make a difference." —GRACE MERRITT

To give to Esther Pahl's scholarship fund, visit s.uconn.edu/pahl.

I'm so grateful that I can get through higher education debt free. This is a huge blessing, especially during the pandemic.

— Sana Qureshi

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TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS

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

named the new golf course superintendent at Hop Meadow Country Club in Simsbury, Connecticut. ➔ A new book by former UConn Humanities Institute fellow **Alea Henle '12 Ph.D.** offers a vital account of how local history organizations formed, built collections, and operated across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, laying the groundwork for professional practices that are still embraced today. ➔ Congratulations to **Shane Kelly '14 (ENG)**, who reports that he earned his doctorate in theoretical physics from the University of California Riverside and is now working as a postdoctoral scholar in a

research group on non-equilibrium universality in quantum matter at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany.



➔ **Tyler R. Morrissey '14 (CLAS)** and **Mariah N. Monroe '14 (CLAS)** married in October in a small ceremony in Hartford, Connecticut. While a global pandemic curtailed a much larger ceremony, it could not stop this UConn love story. Tyler and Mariah look forward to a celebration with family and fellow UConn alumni soon. They also look forward to attending basketball games at Gampel Pavilion and stopping at the Dairy Bar. ➔ And kudos to **Dustyn C. Nelson '14 (CAHNR)**, who became the Connecticut Nursery & Landscape Association's youngest president. Under his tenure, the group plans to spearhead a state-approved apprenticeship program. Last year, he helped commission an economic impact study for the green industry in Connecticut, which he presented to state legislators. ➔ **Paola Chanes-Mora '14 MPH, '17 Ph.D.** has been

awarded an American Association for the Advancement of Science fellowship. She will work in the Department of State Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator and says she is excited to be starting at Dr. Deborah Bix's office. She is one of 284 scientists and engineers who will spend a year serving professionally in federal agencies and congressional offices as a Science & Technology Policy fellow. ➔ The Snyder Group, a Norwalk, Connecticut, marketing firm, recently hired **Stephanie Suarez '15 (CLAS)** as a marketing specialist. Previously, she held a similar position at Trace Analytics in Austin, Texas. ➔ Caps, gowns, and . . . romance? Four years after meeting at their UConn graduation ceremony, **Jaimie Farkas '16 (CLAS)** and **Peter Miraglia '16 (CLAS)** happily announced that they are engaged and planning a destination wedding. ➔ Kudos to **Tina Iraca '17 Ph.D.**, who was promoted to associate professor at Dutchess Community College, State University of New York in Poughkeepsie, where she teaches writing and English literature.



➔ **Sidney Allmendinger '17 (CLAS)** and **Taylor Borowiec '17 (CLAS)** were married in a small ceremony in October 2020 surrounded by their families.

Now living in Boston, Sidney works in emergency management for Boston Children's Hospital and Taylor serves on the marketing team for an infrastructure firm.

➔ **Caitlin Kingston '18 (CLAS)**, of Abington, Massachusetts, has known she wanted to be an archaeologist since she was in the sixth grade. Now she's the assistant site supervisor for Southwest Archaeological Consultants, working on the El Segundo Archaeology Project in New Mexico. Kingston earned her master's in field archaeology in January last year from the University of York in York, England. While in England, she increased her knowledge through internships at AECOM and Council for British Archaeology. ➔ **Ria Bhattacharya '19 Ph.D.**, who came to the U.S. in 2014 to attend graduate school at UConn, wrote about her fond memories of the University: "This place has given me happy memories, great experiences, and lifelong associations. There is this vibrant energy present in the campus, which lifts your mood all the time. I had some great students to teach, took classes with inspiring professors, and made lifelong friends."



➔ Congratulations to **Joshua Fennessey '20 (BUS)**, who has joined independent advisory firm ICR, based in Norwalk, Connecticut, as an investor relations associate.



Peter Morenus

JOB ENVY

Teaching Taekwondo to Autistic Kids

They stood assembled, dressed in their crisp white uniforms, belts tied, ready — and absolutely excited to begin: **Andrew Chasse '85 (SFA)** can picture it like it was yesterday, the Taekwondo class he was about to teach for 15 students — ages four to 12 — with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). "They hadn't even done one second of Taekwondo yet, but they felt like they were really a part of something," Chasse says. "Just that moment alone was so powerful."

Fourteen years later TKD for ASD is a thriving and popular part of Hansoo Taekwondo Academy in Glastonbury, Connecticut, where Chasse, a Taekwondo master who holds a 5th degree black belt, is head instructor and owner. Chasse piloted the class after an adult student who is a behavior analyst told him she thought children with autism spectrum disorder would respond to and enjoy Taekwondo. The classes are tailored to students' specific learning styles with a focus on structure, and Chasse works with a team of assistants. "The kids are graded every class on things like, 'How was your listening today? Did you follow directions?' and they like to find ways to improve and get a better score next time. Taekwondo training helps with confidence and helps improve their physicality; it's loaded with all kinds of exercises, a lot of kicking, and specific forms."

Parents have told Chasse that the positive benefits extend into their children's lives at school and at home. Students move on to integrated classes when they feel ready. "We have one student who is 17 who started when he was 6. Now he's running warm-up for integrated classes," Chasse says. "He's become a great role model. It's something to watch students in front of you grow in so many positive ways."

Exercising mind and body is what struck him when he took his first martial arts class at UConn. "I'd been a sports guy my whole life, and this was a nice way to segue into staying physical and continue learning a lot," says Chasse, who majored in fine arts. "All the good things you hear about martial arts training, how it helps with focus, with confidence, things that are healthy for people to be developing, it's all there in Taekwondo." —*JACKIE FITZGERALD HENNESSEY '83 (CLAS)*

IN MEMORIAM

Please visit s.uconn.edu/febobits2021 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.

TOM'S TRIVIA

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!

Go to s.uconn.edu/spring21trivia to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

- 1. UConn made international headlines in 1999 when researcher Jerry Yang and his colleagues successfully cloned the first animal from non-reproductive related cells. What was the name of this famous cow?**

A: Edwina B: Jonnie
C: Amy D: Aspen

- 2. UConn didn't grant honorary degrees until 1982, although three were conferred on members of the university community in 1918 and 1934. Who was the first official recipient of an honorary Doctor of Letters from UConn?**

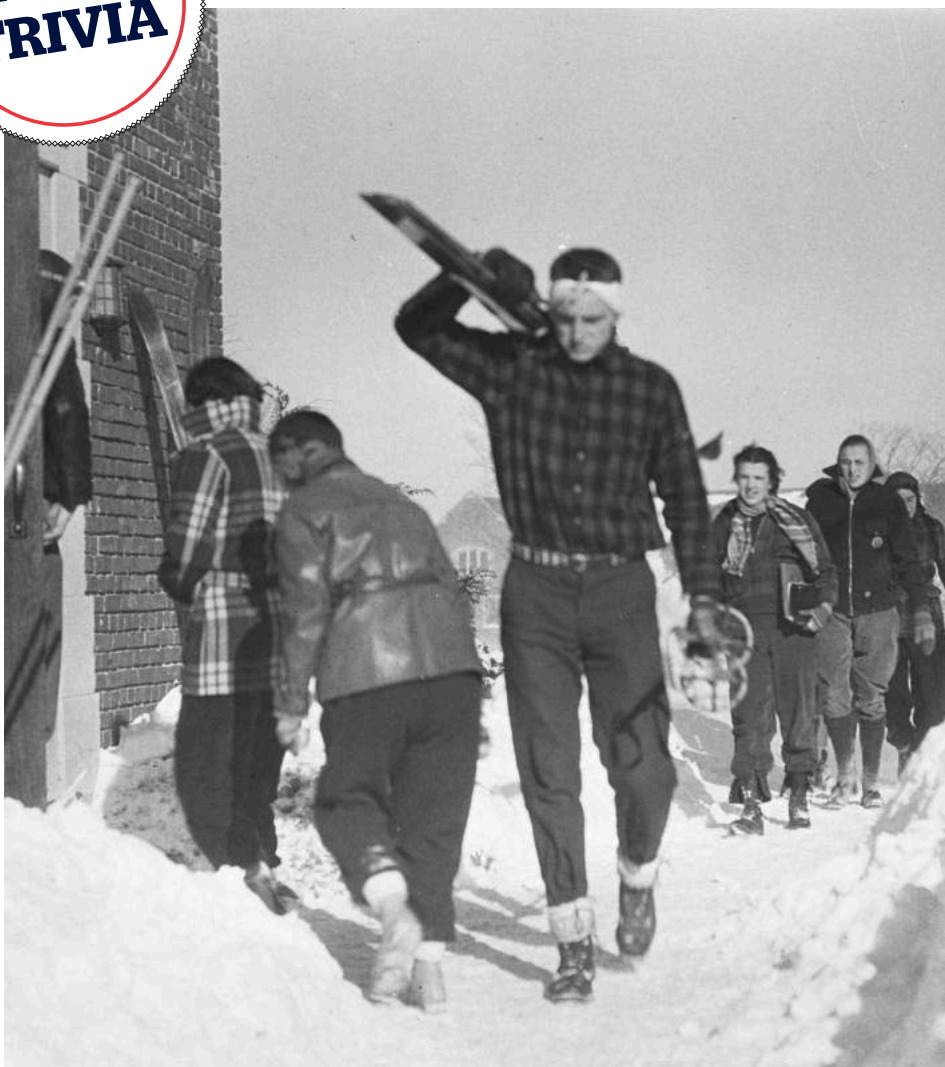
A: Maurice Sendak
B: Isaac B. Singer
C: Fred Rogers
D: Barbara Tuchman

- 3. For 30 years, the *Daily Campus* has occupied its own building near the Buckley Residence Hall. Where was the newspaper based just before that building was constructed?**

A: The Student Union
B: A former sorority house
C: The basement of Wilbur Cross
D: Ted's

- 4. What was the informal name of the ski slope that was located east of Horsebarn Hill, complete with two rope tows, a warming hut, and nighttime lights?**

A: Husky Hill
B: Mount Jonathan
C: The Connecticut Matterhorn
D: The Horsebarn Run



Skiing on campus in 1935. That's Beach Hall, which at the time held the library, the post office, the book store, a cafeteria, and classrooms.