

IN THIS ISSUE: THE FIXER, THE SECRET KEEPER, AND RELATIONSHIPS 101

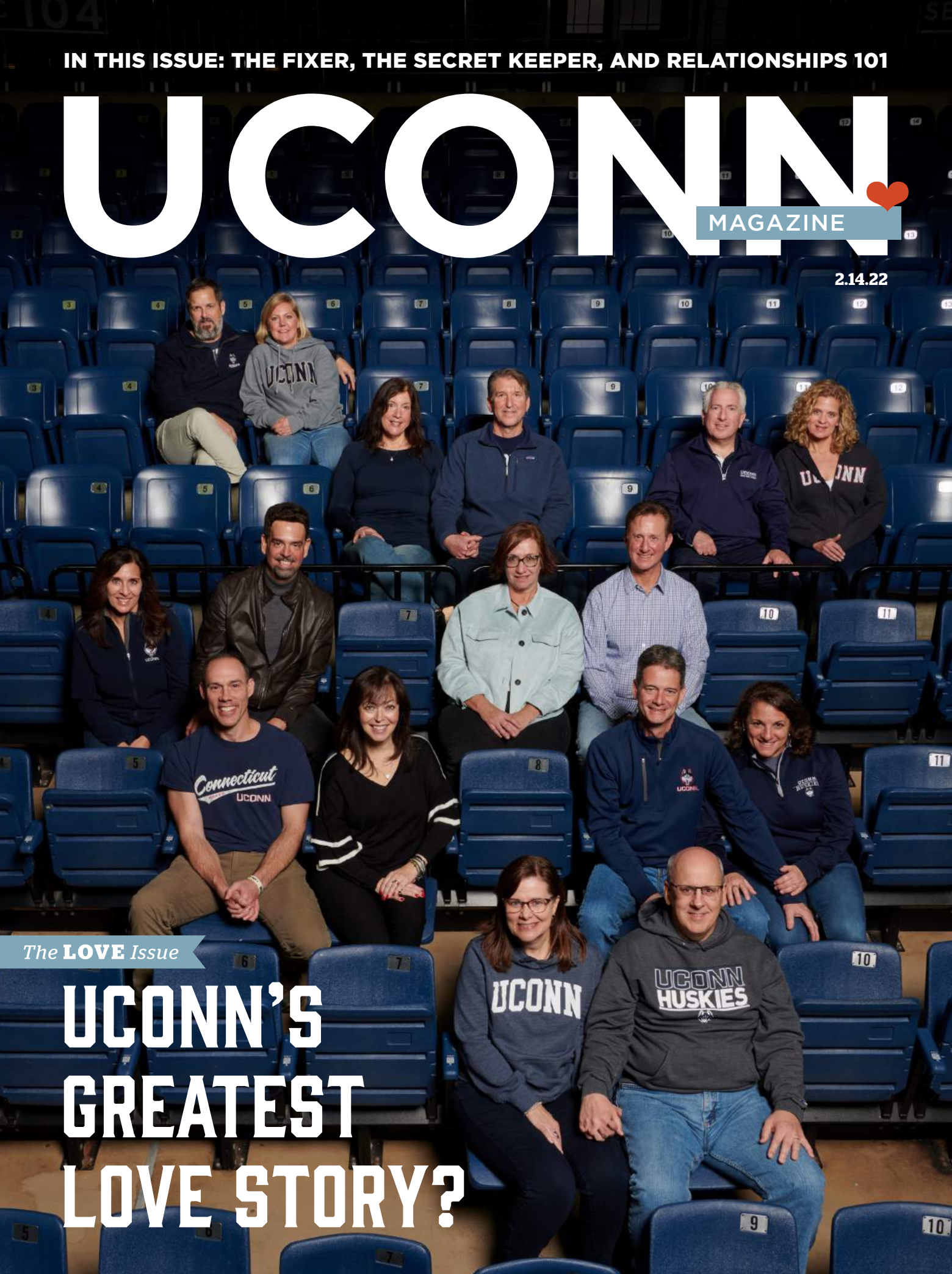
# UConn

MAGAZINE

2.14.22

The **LOVE** Issue

# UConn's GREATEST LOVE STORY?



# UConn BOOKSTORE



## SNAP!

### Dogged

Named for Connecticut's Revolutionary War-era governor Jonathan Trumbull, Jonathan the Husky has been the face of UConn since 1935 after students selected the mascot via a survey in the student-run paper "The Connecticut Campus." Six versions of the Husky logo began with a simple black and white line drawing in 1959. In 2013, UConn Athletics collaborated with Nike for the current logo, which women's basketball coach Geno Auriemma described as "looking right through you and saying, 'Do not mess with me.'"

See all the logos at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).



## FEATURES

### 18 An Epic UConn Love Story – in Eight Acts

This story begins in McConaughy Hall, aka The Jungle, back in 1986. It is still developing.

### 24 The Secret Life of Dexter Gabriel – aka P. Djéli Clark

In which the separate worlds of a sci-fi novelist and professor of history collide.

### 30 Walk This Way

An alum and Guggenheim Fellow whose art is about nature, adventure – and sneakers.

### 36 Call Cowen!

The more extraordinary the challenge, the more likely UConn Distinguished Alumnus Scott Cowen will be called on to help.

#### On the Cover:

From Top, Row 5: Kristine (Nolen) & Thomas Russo; Row 4: Elise (Berman) & Russ Siegel, Christine & Joshua Hawks-Ladds; Row 3: Carol (Marques) & George Barrios, Michele (Rutsky) & Alan Hankin; Row 2: Arianne (Iannone) & Taylor Beerbower, Beth (Gedansky) & Ken Young; Row 1: Kim (Foran) & Charlie “Chas” Turecek.

The Fixer page 36, The Secret Keeper page 24, Relationships 101 page 16

## SECTIONS

### 1 UCONN NOW

A sitting U.S. President in Storrs; fierce women of art, engineering, and agriculture; why our dining halls serve restaurant-level meals; the course kids call Relationships 101; Husky trading cards; and more.



### 40 UCONN NATION

Alums share their love for wheelchair dance, vaccine creation, soccer where it's called football, speech therapy, marathons, and horses named Handsome. Plus Class Notes and more.

## UConn Magazine VOL. 23 NO. 1

UConn Magazine is produced three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Fall) by University Communications, University of Connecticut.

- Editor Lisa Stiepock
- Art Director Christa Yung
- Photographer Peter Morenus
- Class Notes Grace Merritt
- Student Worker Maria Mantas '22 (CLAS)
- Copy Editors Sheila Foran '83 (BGS), '96 Ph.D., Gregory Lauzon, Elizabeth Omara-Otunnu

### University Communications

- Vice President for Communications Tysen Kendig
- Associate Vice President for Communications Michael Kirk
- Senior Director of Creative Strategy and Brand Management Tracy Anderson '09 MA

Email: [uconnmagazine@uconn.edu](mailto:uconnmagazine@uconn.edu)  
 Letters to the editor: [lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu)  
 Address changes: UConn Foundation Records Department, Unit 3206, 2390 Alumni Drive, Storrs, CT 06269

Cover Peter Morenus  
 Snap! Sean Flynn  
 Table of Contents Peter Morenus, Simone Martin-Newberry, Matthew López-Jensen '08 MFA  
 Tom's Trivia Archives & Special Collections, UConn Library

The University of Connecticut complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding non-discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, sex, age or other legally protected characteristics in all programs and activities and supports all state and federal laws that promote equal opportunity and prohibit discrimination, including the provision of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. To request an accommodation or for questions related to the University's non-discrimination policies, please contact: Title IX Coordinator, Office of Institutional Equity, 241 Glenbrook Rd., Unit 4175; Storrs, CT 06269; Phone: (860) 486-2943; [equity@uconn.edu](mailto:equity@uconn.edu) (non-discrimination policies); ADA Case Manager, Department of Human Resources; 9 Walters Ave., Unit 5075; Storrs, CT 06269; Phone: (860) 486-3034; [hr@uconn.edu](mailto:hr@uconn.edu) (accommodation requests).

### FROM THE EDITOR



The adults replicating a photo from younger days, with children along for the ride this time, are, from left in front: George Barrios '87 (CLAS), '89 MBA, Carol Marques '88 (BUS), '97 MBA, Beth Gedansky '90 (CLAS), Ken Young '89 (BUS), '01 MBA, and Taylor Beerbower '89 (CLAS). From left atop and behind car: Kristine Nolen '88 (CLAS), Thomas Russo '90 (ENG), and Arianne Iannone '90 (NUR). Circa 2010.

## NEXT LEVEL

For some of us, one of those rare pandemic silver linings has been re-connecting with old friends. You'll see, say, Hawaii turn bright red on a Covid-transmission map and track down a former roommate you think is living there, or a Zoom invite from grad school friends you've not spoken with in years pops up in your inbox.

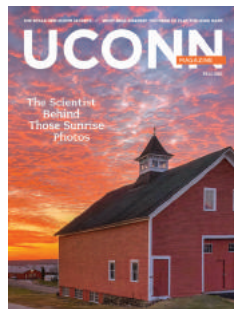
We've needed all the friends we can get lately, and these old college friends seem to bring a unique measure of comfort. Maybe it's the days so halcyon in memory or the particular bonds that forge in 24/7 dormitory togetherness. Maybe it's the fact that we knew one another before we were employers and employees, moms and dads – while we were still, together, figuring out who we were and who we'd be. For whatever reasons, college friends are uniquely indelible.

The 16 UConn friends on this issue's cover, though, are entirely next level. It's been three decades since they graduated, but they've never had to track anyone down. They've been there to support one another throughout. The group gets together often to celebrate the ups, commiserate the downs, and re-create the glories – including staging re-enactments of favorite Husky moments, sometimes with their children, who call each other “friend cousins,” in tow, as in the photo above.

To find out what's incredibly uncommon about these 16 alumni, and to discover why their kids are just a little ticked off about it, turn to “An Epic UConn Love Story – in Eight Acts,” which begins on page 18.

To see the 1988 version of the photo above and to share your own UConn love stories (please do!), visit [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

*Lisa Stiepock*



## YOUR TURN

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](http://magazine.uconn.edu), email me at [lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu), or send by regular mail to *UConn Magazine Letters*, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06268-3144.

Here's a sampling of feedback from our last issue. Find more at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).



### Bee Good

➔ Very worthy cause! Great job!

@cthuskiefan

➔ Great job Raina! Keep it up girl

@rachel.laemle

### And Now I Spill the UConn Secrets

➔ This is awesome. Make it a shirt and sell them please

@uconn140point6

➔ Love this rendition of my old stomping grounds at UConn

@maynooth1998

### The Scientist Behind Those Sunrise Photos

➔ The drone photo of Mirror Lake and the surrounding campus and hills taken by Milton Levin is an absolute stunner. Easily one of my favorite photos to ever appear in the *UConn Magazine*. It is, however, a sunset photo despite the caption on the cover "The Scientist Behind Those Sunrise Photos." Enjoying the magazine as always.

Dave Partyka, UConn parent, via email

*Reply: You are indeed correct that the cover shot is a sunset, but the headline on the feature opener refers to the photo there, which is a sunrise. With Milton we get the best of both!*

➔ Milton always has some amazing photo in the works. You know you're serious about drone photography when you jump through FAA hoops. Some people take their hobby to the next level; people like Milton go all in.

Jeremy Chartier, via our website

### INSTAGRAM



Posted by Eric Panke '93 (SFA) @twopank on the announcement of Paige Buecker's Gatorade deal

### Doug Glanville

➔ I read with great interest the Doug Glanville take on today's society. Boy does the world need more clear thinkers like Mr. Glanville. I believe his sustained application of sound logic to society's serious ills will not be carried forth howling in the wind, but fervently promoted by the clear thinking students he may influence.

Ralph M. Stanzione '72 MBA, via our website

➔ One of the best classes I took at UConn!

Kory Powell @koryapowell via Twitter

**I just spent a nice sunny fall afternoon in my backyard in Woodbridge devouring the magazine! Another excellent issue. As a proud Husky — may I gloat, I am the (self-proclaimed) head of UConn's Biggest Family, per an Alumni Association designation a few years ago.**

*Greg Stamos '77 (CLAS), via email*



### ON CAMPUS

## PRESIDENT BIDEN IN STORRS

In October President Joe Biden became just the second sitting chief executive of the United States to visit UConn. The first was former President Bill Clinton who in 1995 dedicated the original Dodd Center, named for former U.S. Sen. Thomas Dodd, who had been a prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes trials following World War II. Clinton mentioned that previous presidents had sorely missed out by not visiting UConn, and praised the UConn women's basketball team, which had won its first NCAA championship that spring. "Dedicating this research center today, we remember that when the Nazis came to power, one of the very first things they did was burn books

they deemed subversive," the 42nd president said. "The road to tyranny, we must never forget, begins with the destruction of the truth."

Almost exactly 30 years later President Biden dedicated The Dodd Center for Human Rights, noting how the Center had in the past few decades put UConn at the forefront of academic scholarship and activism in the field. "As we rededicate the Dodd Center, let's also dedicate it to future generations; let us dedicate and expand our shared understanding," Biden told a crowd in the plaza in front of the Dodd Center.

"Let's dedicate it to the students here in the audience today, who may discover and defend human rights as

the passion and purpose of their life. Let us dedicate it to expanding our shared understanding ... to ensure liberty and justice for everyone. And let's dedicate it to the unending fight to bring our own nation closer to a future where every human being is free to pursue their highest dreams and reach their full potential."

During his remarks, the 46th president offered a ringing defense of the rule of law and democracy, and condemned authoritarian forces he said are gaining strength around the world. The United States should always seek to "lead by the power of our example, not the example of our power," Biden said. —ELAINA HANCOCK

CHECKING IN WITH

# FIERCE WOMAN: MICAELA LEVESQUE

Last August, Micaela Levesque '17 (CLAS) was commissioned to paint her first mural, and admits she was overwhelmed. Up until that point in her career, she had done oil paintings and portraits on a much smaller scale. But Levesque says she lives for a good challenge. So she got certified to use a scissor lift, put on her harness, and took a chance.

The result, unveiled in November, is Hartford's newest mural, honoring the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and four other trailblazers in women's history: U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris; Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor; former First Lady Michelle Obama; and former Connecticut Governor Ella Grasso, who was the first elected female governor in the United States.

The vibrant two-story mural sits on the side of the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Women's Empowerment Center, a resource hub for women in Central Connecticut. Levesque says this project was personal to her because women's rights and diversity have always been at the core of her work. She was inspired to push through her initial nerves thanks to the fierce women on the wall, and hopes viewers young and old can do the same when faced with their own battles.

"I feel amazing," she says. "I feel like I created my own personal billboard."

### How tough was it to paint at this scale for the first time?

I went from painting on 2-by-3-foot canvases to painting on a 30-by-100-foot wall. But just like I would with any other painting, I broke down everything into smaller sections and just took a chance. You could find me there at least six times a week looking at it from the roof across the street or on my scissor lift fine-tuning every little detail. It took a lot of painter's tape and patience, but I got it done.

### The mural is loaded with symbols and details. What was your favorite to paint?

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She's the anchor and the one that draws in viewers. Throughout her lifetime she was a champion for several causes, and I wanted to convey that.

So I started off with her expression — her gaze is both fierce and wise because she was always ready to get down to business. She's wearing gender symbol earrings to portray her commitment to equality. Her dissent collar is the last one she wore during her lifetime. It portrays her commitment to justice and making a space for women.

Lastly, she's holding a book. She wrote a lot about her law experience, and I wanted to add a reference to that with my own twist. The book is empty and invites the viewers to write their own stories, like Ginsburg and the other four icons did despite all roadblocks.

### You worked on the mural for almost two months and people stopped by throughout the process. Who was the most memorable?

I had a lot of people come up to me and share personal stories or spark conversation about the mural. A little kid came up and I asked him if he knew who Kamala Harris was. He innocently said "Yeah, that's Joe Biden's wife." That was an educational moment. So I hope this mural encourages people, especially kids, to ask questions about these role models and their importance in history.

### You majored in psychology at UConn. How does that seep into your art today?

I've always liked art, but didn't know how to make a career out of it when I was younger. Psychology was my second option and I'm so glad I took

that step. It completely ties into my art today.

It would be so easy to just paint a pretty picture, but I want people to feel certain emotions when they look at my pieces. I want them to be drawn in by the expressions and symbolism. When people look at this mural I want them to connect to the women, reflect, and realize their own power.

### Where did you spend most of your time on campus?

I was a transfer student so I only did two years at UConn and I was often working. But when I was on campus, you could often find me under the Diana Taurasi painting in Homer Babbidge Library studying, snacking on an M&M cookie from Insomnia Cookies, or at the Colombian Student Association.

### What's next for you?

I'm off to Spain to study hyperrealism under international artist Marissa Oosterlee. Art for me is always about challenging myself. I want to dedicate my life to it and see how good I can get. What better way to do that than by traveling and expanding my understanding of the world? It's not your typical 9-5 job, but I like to say I'm a free spirit. As for the money, I know that will come eventually. —CAMILLA VALEJO '19 (CLAS)

*Levesque has known that art was her calling for some time. "A couple months ago I found my middle school yearbook and there it was — under dream job I wrote 'artist.'"*



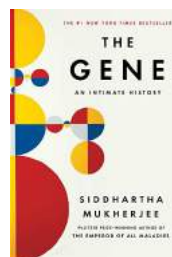


3 BOOKS

STEPHEN SLOTA

A triple alum and double professor — in educational psychology and digital media & design — Stephen Slota '07 (CLAS), '08 MA, '14 Ph.D. specializes in educational game development and says his voracious childhood reading of science fiction and comics molded him into “the kind of adult who proudly displays Legos as art, owns an anthology of every ‘Calvin & Hobbes’ strip ever printed, and has amassed a strange array of autographed books from authors I’ve gotten to meet: ‘House Calls’ by Patch Adams, ‘Orbit of Discovery’ by Don Thomas, ‘The Selfish Gene’ by Richard Dawkins, and ‘Maus’ by Art Spiegelman.” He tends to listen to his books — sped up to 1.2 or 1.3 — particularly when authors do their own narrations.

Just Finished:

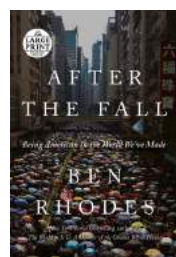


“The Gene: An Intimate History” by Siddhartha Mukherjee

Growing up amid the race to sequence the human genome, I was fascinated

and excited by the prospect of genetic engineering — the Human Genome Project was one of the most influential factors in my decision to major in molecular and cell biology as an undergrad. Through artful and personal writing, Siddhartha Mukherjee brings that fascination and excitement roaring back. His expert synthesis of science history and contemporary research forms a compelling non-fiction chronicle centered on the past, present, and future of that funny little molecule called DNA.

Reading Now:



“After the Fall: Being American in the World We’ve Made” by Ben Rhodes

In his latest volume, Ben Rhodes, former Deputy National Security

Advisor for Strategic Communications and Speechwriting under President Barack Obama, examines how America’s post-Cold War and post-9/11 actions laid the foundation for a global crisis of democracy and rise in authoritarianism. This pulls-no-punches critique of our “pointillist empire” is interwoven with rich perspectives, conversations, and strategies shared by pro-democracy leaders and movements spanning Hong Kong, Hungary, and Russia. Perhaps best capturing the book’s themes and spirit is a quote from interviewee Bo Pau, a Hong Kong publisher and dissident, “The 20th century was a century of ideology; the 21st century is a century of identity.”

On Deck:



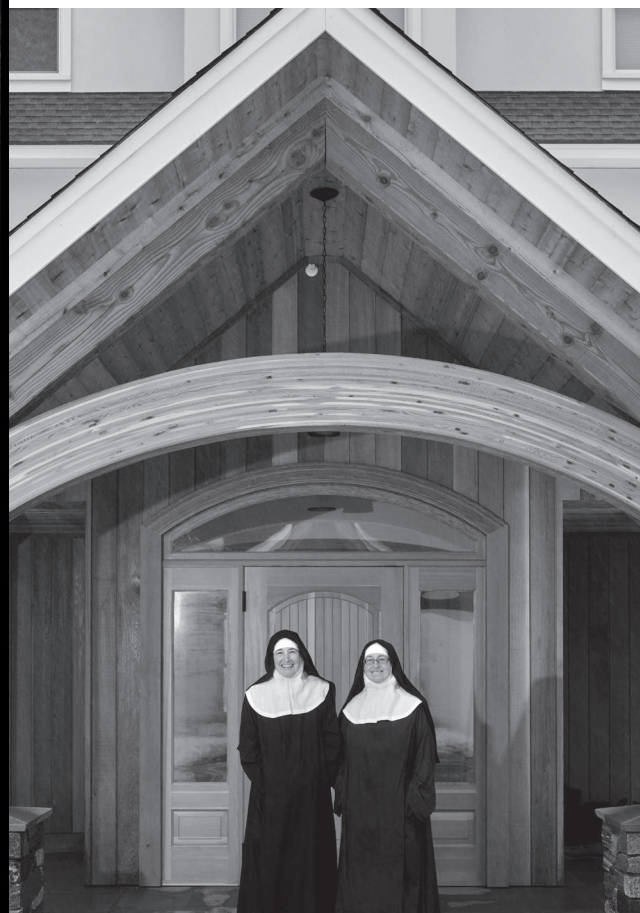
“Mistborn: The Final Empire” by Brandon Sanderson

As someone immersed in fictitious video game and virtual reality spaces for

work, I tend toward historical and scientific non-fiction for the bulk of my non-work reading. However, having been gifted a copy of “Mistborn” by a former student, I am eager to rekindle my childhood love of written science fiction and fantasy (particularly given that I will wither to dust before George R. R. Martin finishes “The Winds of Winter” and “A Dream of Spring”). I’ve heard nothing but positive commentary about Sanderson’s worldbuilding and storytelling, so I’m optimistic his novels will be a perfect fit for the instructional media and interactive storytelling courses I teach for UConn’s educational technology and game design programs, respectively.



Our Summer 2005 cover story featured Sister Augusta Collins '00 Ph.D. plant science/agronomy (left, top) and Sister Telchilde Hinckley '00 Ph.D. animal science/reproductive physiology (left, bottom) working their farm in Bethlehem, Connecticut.



THEN & NOW

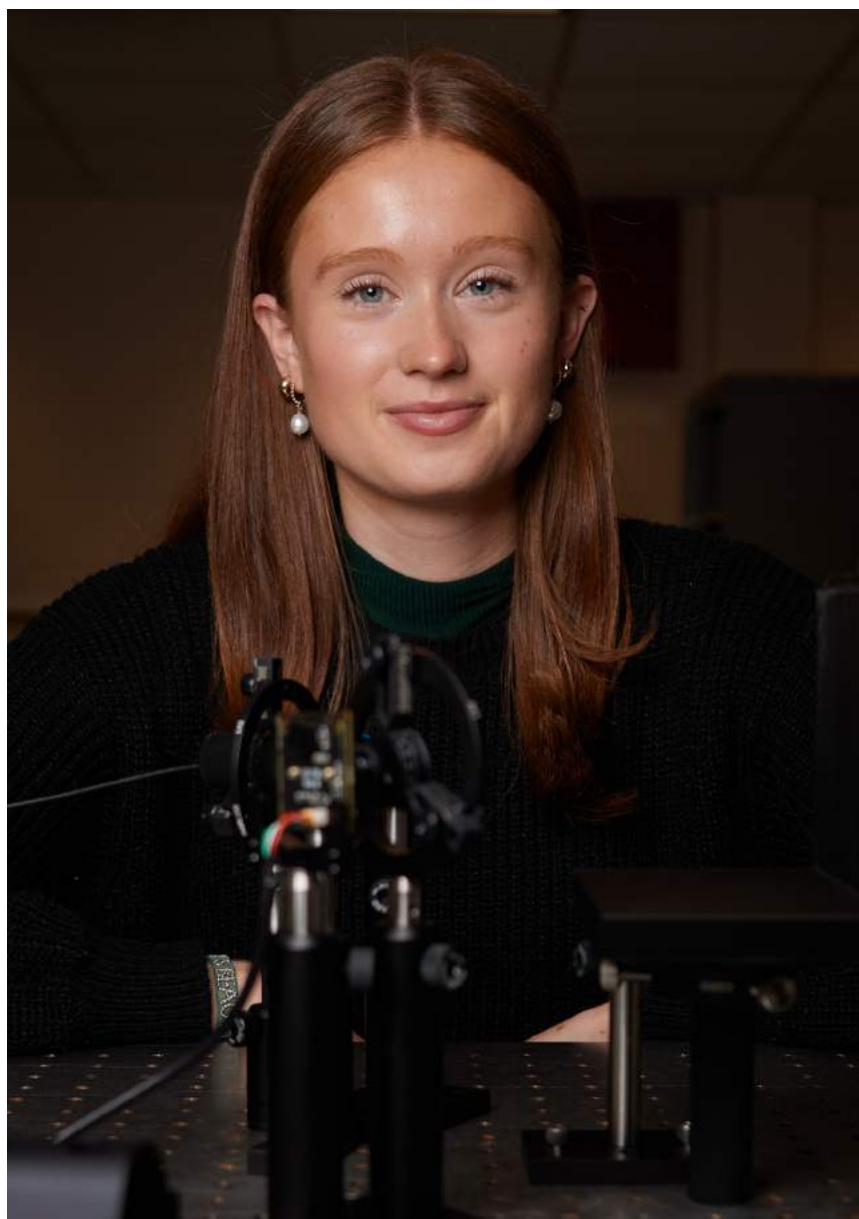
BACK TO BETHLEHEM

Not long ago we checked in on the famous farming nuns at their monastery in Bethlehem, Connecticut, and found Sisters Augusta and Telchilde still plying their science degrees raising Belted Galloways and making the Gouda cheese that quickly sells out when offered to the public. They posed in front of a nearly finished monastery addition (above). Cheesemaker Mother Noella Marcellino '03 Ph.D. was working overseas when we visited.

IN DEVELOPMENT

\$40 MILLION FOR NMR RESEARCH

The School of Medicine recently received the largest research grant in UConn’s history. The \$40 million grant was awarded by the U.S. National Science Foundation to establish a collaborative research network focusing on nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR). NMR allows researchers to analyze the structures of small molecules, which can open the doors to valuable advancements in the biomedical field, such as accelerating the identification of disease biomarkers and the discovery of new medical treatments and pharmaceutical ingredients. The Network for Advanced NMR is a joint effort with the University of Wisconsin and the University of Georgia, and is led by UConn’s Jeffrey C. Hoch, a professor of molecular biology and biochemistry.



OUR STUDENTS

# ENGINEERING HER BEST SELF

It's no surprise that Courtney Luker '22 (ENG) enjoyed Playmobil when she was a kid. Lots of children do. But not too many mention their devotion to this iconic, people-centric, role-playing, let's-build-something-fun collection on their college applica-

tions. She did.

A native of Glastonbury, Connecticut, Luker will graduate with a degree in biomedical engineering in May. And yes, her father is an engineer. And yes, her sister Kelly graduated from UConn with a degree in chemical engineer-

**“It’s 2022. It’s crazy that being a woman in engineering is still such a big deal.”**

ing in 2012. Both have been good role models. But Luker’s interest in figuring out how things work by taking them apart and putting them back together again was obvious from the time she was a toddler.

She laughs when she describes one of her nascent experiments that involved making a snow sled from cardboard and duct tape she found in the family garage, and then using her creation in an attempt to slide down Buttonball Hill in her hometown. “That experiment,” she says with a sigh, “did not go particularly well.”

After two years of summer internships with medical device company Medtronic, Luker has accepted a full-time position with the company following graduation. She’ll begin a two-year rotational program in their medical surgical department in North Haven, Connecticut. That will be followed by further experience the following year in either Boston or Boulder, Colorado. An avid hiker, she says Boulder sounds enticing. Then again, she considers herself an “East Coast person,” so if Boston wins out, that’s okay, too.

Luker is part of a growing contingent of women entering the engineering profession. She says she’s proud of UConn’s commitment to eliminating gender inequality in this field, and also of the fact that women make up 31% of this year’s freshmen engineering majors — the highest percentage to date.

She’s quick to point out, however, that, “It’s 2022. It’s crazy that being a woman in engineering is still such a big deal.”

As president of the UConn chapter of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE), Luker is intent on paying it forward to honor the upperclassmen who helped her get acclimated when she arrived on campus in the fall of 2018.

“I can’t tell you how much I appreciated the women in SWE who mentored me when I was new to UConn,” she says. “I asked them all sorts of questions, from what to wear to interviews for internships to advice about courses.”

Luker talks about how it felt, in her second year, to be one of only three women in a discussion/lab section of an electrical engineering course. “To be honest, that was intimidating. But with the support and encouragement of junior and senior women, I made it

through. That’s something I’ll never forget.”

Now she’s intent on mentoring other inquisitive girls and young women who are considering engineering as a career. One way she does that is through Multiply Your Options, which reaches out to 8th-grade girls in local schools, providing demonstrations and hands-on exposure to various engineering disciplines. “With more programs like this we can continue to decrease gender inequality in engineering.” Thanks to her experiences with SWE,

Luker has been inspired to be what she calls “the best version of myself.” To that end, her immediate goal is to become an expert in medical product development, and ultimately share her knowledge with surgeons in hospital settings.

But, she adds with a smile, “I’ve really enjoyed the management side of being a leader — in SWE — and helping people perform their duties. I’m now actually thinking that an MBA might be in my future, too.” —SHEILA FORAN '83 (BGS), '96 PH.D.

UConn TALKS

On testing guaranteed basic income in Stockton, California:

**“Classic economic models imply that if you have more money then you work less, but in the Stockton experiment it was the exact opposite.”**

Stephen Ross, economics professor, *Yahoo! News*, Nov. 7, 2021

On the number one reason for teacher shortages in New England:

**“The stress.”**

Lisa Sanetti, professor of educational psychology, *New England Public Media*, Dec. 8, 2021

On evidence there really has *not* been any great pandemic migration:

**“When there’s insecurity, people value what they already have.”**

Thomas Cooke, professor of geography, *AP News*, Nov. 17, 2021

On difficulties studying conifer genomes to breed disease-resilient Christmas trees:

**“They’re about eight times the size of the human genome.”**

Jill Wegrzyn, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, *Scientific American*, Dec. 17, 2021

On research showing turkeys may be much smarter than we thought:

**“Turkeys probably can’t do multivariable calculus or explain string theory, but then neither can most people I know (me included).”**

Christopher Elphick, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, *Salon*, Nov. 25, 2021

On car crashes in Connecticut:

**“Our year-to-date trends are around 30 to 40 fatalities higher than they have been, probably in the past 20 to 30 years.”**

Eric Jackson, professor of engineering and director of the Connecticut Transportation Safety Research Center at UConn, NBC Connecticut, Nov. 9, 2021

TASTE OF STORRS

# KEEP THE CHANGE

Dennis Pierce '15 MBA never got the memo about how humans tend to be change averse. During his 34-year tenure at UConn Dining Services the recently retired Pierce created a culture of change. "They embrace change," he says of dining employees. "On Friday we look different from what we did on Monday." We asked Pierce to list a few things about running what, under his watch, has become one of the largest self-operating dining services in the country. It has its own catering department and bakery, employs 450 full-time workers, and serves some 3.6 million meals a year.

**FIVE things you recall from those first late-'80s years when you started at UConn:**

- 1 Technology was nonexistent. We had no computer in the office. When we got one, we got literally one. Now of course we rely on tech.
- 2 The state system was outdated. It required us to use only certain vendors and left us little flexibility in purchasing. Now we have large multi-year contracts with many vendors. Unique to dining we run an operation separate from Human Resources — we have nontraditional employees and our own HR and benefits group.
- 3 Students were required to dine only in their respective dining halls — if you lived in McMahon, you were required to eat only in McMahon.
- 4 In the early days, students just wanted food and a lot of it. Dietary needs, preferences, allergies were practically nonexistent. There were a handful of vegetarian students. They'd



"Getting a college degree is hard enough; getting good food shouldn't be," says Pierce, shown at Whitney Dining Hall, which specializes in vegetarian and vegan dishes. Pierce brought sustenance to students in the form of comfort food and cozy places to enjoy it.

tell me they wanted to get off the meal plan. I'd ask how long they'd been vegetarian, and usually it was a week or two. We'd have a conversation. I'd say there's a book out there, "Diet for a Small Planet" by Frances Lappé. Lappé had come to UConn and given a talk at the bookstore, so I had a stack of her books by my desk — right up until the day I left. I'd say, "Here's a book on how to be a healthy, strong vegetarian. Read it, and come back and tell me if I am not meeting your needs."

5 Students relied on comfort food to center themselves. We were feeding them emotionally as well as nutritionally.

**FOUR ways things have changed — or not — since then:**

- 1 We have so many menus now to meet student's medical needs and preferences. You need to offer variety, meet student preferences. I always felt we

should be flexible, get away from traditional college food. Students come to UConn now because we can meet their dietary needs. We are known for being the best school to meet a gluten-free diet. We provide vegan, halal, vegetarian, kosher, alternativore, all of it. And we work with local suppliers when we can — students want to know where their food comes from.

2 Our food waste management is now state of the art. Through a partnership with Quantum Biopower in Southington, Connecticut, all of our dining hall food waste is transformed into compost and energy.

3 Our chefs, staff, and management team are now industry professionals and very well trained. When I got here, workers in the large units were variously trained. Now we hold a chef's contest every year and what they put on the menu is as good as anything in restaurants up and down the East

Coast. They are extremely talented.

4 Students still rely on comfort food to center themselves and always will. They are emotional diners. I remind staff that getting a college degree is hard enough, getting good food shouldn't be. We have to be there for them, be the provider of comfort food 24/7 — or pretty close to it. And that means whatever their comfort is, whatever culture, religion, and so on.

**THREE of the biggest challenges your team has faced in 33 years:**

- 1 Covid-19. No question. We were building the plane as we were flying it. How do we get the students fed? How do we support them? We had to close down units, lay off people. Every day was completely new — you never knew what was coming at you on the next phone call.
- 2 Lack of student employees. It's happening now and we had the same thing 20 years ago. We need to hire some 1,100 students at a time and we're down about 250 right now. We don't know why.
- 3 The constant budget pressure. Pressure to always find extra money at the end of every fiscal year.

**TWO favorite Dining Services recipes:**

- 1 The lemon bars our Catering Services makes.
- 2 I'm a big fan of our New England clam chowder we serve in the dining halls.

**ONE Anecdote from your time here you'll never tire of telling:**

It was a convocation weekend mid-'90s and I wanted to do something different. I said, "Let's do a half-mile-long sub." It went from North Eagleville to that stop sign in front of McMahon. We created bridges so you could go under them from one side to the other. It would have made the "Guinness

Book of World Records," except that it wasn't one continuous loaf of bread.

It was the kind of thing you have to plan forever, prep it all, troubleshoot everything. The night before, we chalked the curb with markers for employee stations — you're at 47, you're at 48, and so on. Then it rained overnight, and all my numbers disappeared, and everyone just had to figure things out.

Another thing I failed to foresee: In those days we used walkie-talkies, which worked fine. But I hadn't thought about covering the distance myself! You get a call that you're needed immediately at McMahon and you're standing by the road at North Eagleville. That's a hike. I definitely should have had a golf cart or something.

Another story was when we were honored to have President Clinton come for the dedication of the Dodd Center — we were setting up coffee break areas everywhere. They didn't want his schedule out there — where he'd be when — so we just had many set-ups all across campus. —LISA STIEPOCK

Find the recipes for Lemon Bars and New England Clam Chowder, at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).



THIS JUST IN

## INTERIM PRESIDENT RADENKA MARIC

UConn's new interim president Radenka Maric brings a background of talents and interests as multi-faceted as the University itself, along with the same cardinal commitment to place students front and center. UConn's vice president for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, Maric has been a faculty member and researcher here since 2010, and is a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor. She succeeds Dr. Andrew Agwunobi, who is leaving for private industry.

This appointment came as the magazine went to press. Please see our website for more on Radenka Maric.

KUDOS

## STUDENTS TOP NEARLY 500 TEAMS TO WIN BLOOMBERG GLOBAL TRADING CHALLENGE

A team of Stamford-based business graduate students who won the highly competitive 2021 Bloomberg Global Trading Challenge credited its success to professor Yacov Kopeliovich's advice to make smart and bold decisions, an investment strategy that identified underdog companies responding to market demands, and a UConn education that prepared them for thorough assessments of prospective investments. Their trading portfolio surpassed a Bloomberg benchmark by \$467,961 to best second-place Prince Sultan University in Saudi Arabia by more than \$100,000. The team of graduate students in the Financial Risk Management program in Stamford included leader Sayem Lincoln and member Jayabhushan Nallakannu, who are pursuing a master's in the program, and alumni Varun Katari '21 (BUS), Justin Keish '21 (BUS), and Matt Ciaburro '21 (BUS), who are in a 4+1 bachelor/master's program. The team adviser is finance professor Michel Rakotomavo. —CLAIRE HALL







COLLECTIONS

HERITAGE CARDS

There are many ways to identify the pinnacle in the career of an athlete. Money, fame, medals, and trophies are some of the obvious ones. Dating back to the 19th century, being pictured on a trading card is another one of those benchmarks. From the early days of tobacco companies to present-day formats, a trading card means you have made it.

Former UConn student-athletes have graced trading cards dating back to baseball's **Walt Droppo '48 (CLAS)** with the Boston Red Sox. Since then, former Huskies from basketball, football, soccer, and hockey have joined their baseball counterparts on thousands of trading cards.

Many of these cards are part of a special display at the J. Robert Donnelly Husky Heritage Sports Museum in the Alumni House at UConn Storrs. They feature legends like **Sue Bird '02 (CLAS)** and **Diana Taurasi '05 (CLAS)** of women's basketball, and **Donald Brown '10 (ED)**, who signed with the Indianapolis Colts after his junior year, becoming UConn's first-ever first round NFL draft pick.

The cards shown at left commemorate Olympic gold medalist and three-time all-star **Charles Nagy**, current standout **Matt Barnes** of the Boston Red Sox, and Droppo's 1950 American League Rookie of the Year win. Former UConn women's basketball great **Shea Ralph '02 (ED)** is now the head coach at Vanderbilt University, while **Jessica Moore '05 (CLAS)**, **Ann Strother '06 (CLAS)**, and **Ketia Swanier '08 (CLAS)**, all enjoyed WNBA careers. **Roberto Hernández**, **Brian Esposito**, and **Jason Grabowski** all saw time "in the show."

In addition to the trading card exhibit, Husky fans can see memorabilia from all UConn teams, including NCAA championship trophies from men's and women's basketball, men's soccer, and field hockey.

Find more about the museum at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu). To donate athletic memorabilia, please contact Mike Enright at [mike.enright@uconn.edu](mailto:mike.enright@uconn.edu).

KUDOS

BE OUR GUEST

**Kate Copeland '15 (MBA)**, UConn's assistant director of University Events and Conference Services, was named 2021 Member of the Year by Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the largest professional association in the meetings and hospitality industry. MPI officials noted, in particular, Copeland's thoughtful leadership during the pandemic. "She has really pushed crisis leadership — empowering people to make good decisions quickly."

COVETED CLASS

**HDFS 1060  
CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS  
ACROSS THE LIFESPAN**

Students who take “Close Relationships” learn the reasons why some relationships work out and others don’t. After taking the class we still might not always do the right thing. But at least we’ll know what went wrong.

**The Instructor:**

Foreign relations is a natural captivation for anyone growing up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and Kari Adamsons was no exception. But when, in college, she volunteered helping mothers prevent child abuse, her focus zoomed in from relations between countries to relations between people. The organization asked her to search the literature for information on fathers and child abuse, and she found almost nothing. Much of Adamsons’ work since has focused on fathering and parent-child relationships.

“I’ve always been the type where if we don’t know something, I’m going to go find out,” Adamsons says. And unlike most areas where we know a lot about men and not as much about women, in parenting the opposite is true. At UConn, this led Adamsons to teach a Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) class called Men and Masculinity, as well as regularly taking on HDFS 1060 Close Relationships (two other professors also teach this requisite course).

**Class Description:**

“It’s a very real class. Everybody has relationships. We might as well learn to be better at them,” Adamsons says.

Classified as general education and often fully enrolled with 350 students, it’s a survey course that touches on friendship, romance, parenting, attraction, communication, independence, lying, and betrayal — all the good stuff. There are plenty of multiple choice tests, but that doesn’t



mean they don’t go deep. Adamsons gives several assignments in which the students must apply something they learned in class to their own life, and then write about it. And toward the end of the course she has them write a two- to three-page reflection on one specific thing they’ve learned.

She gets a lot of disclosures in those writing assignments. Sometimes she refers students to mental health services. Sometimes she offers to be available just to bounce ideas around.

“I’m always struck by the number of young men who come to talk to me about their relationships. I assume they discuss stuff with me that’s not necessarily socially acceptable among male friends,” Adamsons says. “I’m not a therapist, I’m not a friend, I’m not their mom, but I do have some life experience and expertise to share.”

**Teaching Style:**

Authentic. Adamsons shares real examples from her own life and the

lives of people she knows, and then she encourages the students to find examples of their own. This class is not meant to be book learning — she wants her students to apply it.

She does a lot of myth busting in the course. Her favorites are that opposites attract, jealousy is healthy, and that everything that happens is simply fate. “*Not!* What a horrible idea! Try something different and you might get different results. Similarity is much easier to handle over the long term. And jealousy is not healthy,” she emphasizes. Then she makes her students classify their own attachment style. Some people are very worried they love a partner more than their partner loves them, which leads to jealousy. Others are very comfortable, trust their partner, know if they break up, they’ll still be okay. Different still are the people who’ve been burned multiple times and feel they’re better off alone. “Once students are aware of their own style, they can examine it, and maybe change how they relate to their own feelings and to their partner.”

At this point in the interview, we

stop and have a laugh about how parents worry that they might cause a dysfunctional adult attachment style in a child. Actually it’s not really a laugh. More of a shiver of fear. But Adamsons is reassuring. “Kids are really resilient,” she says. “And parents are just one of many influences — kids learn from all of the relationships around them!” A relief — and we come back to basics. Although the class covers all types of relationships, the average age of the students does lend itself to romance.

“I’ve had people start dating in these classes. For men, the odds are pretty good. And women — these are men willing to learn about relationships!” She’s seen relationships end during the course of the class, too. “People learn some things won’t work, these behaviors aren’t healthy, and they can let go,” Adamsons says. They’re applying the lessons.

**Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:**

In a world that can seem full of dysfunctional relationships and bad communication, Adamsons’ class provides knowledge you can use every day. And

it comes from a very real place of true experience, and sometimes heartbreak.

Adamsons has no children of her own, but she parented foster children for several years — a challenging relationship model to be sure. “You have all the responsibility and none of the authority. You have to get your child to all the doctor appointments, but can’t schedule any of them,” she says. And you can’t make promises or long-term commitments. The family that adopted her foster children decided it would be easier to not have Adamsons as a continued presence in their lives. And just like that, she was cut off. Sometimes relationships end, whether we want them to or not. Some lessons are harder than others.

In terms of course takeaways, Adamsons says her fondest dream is for her students to learn both practical knowledge and some self-acceptance. “Students tell me, ‘You must have a perfect relationship.’ I laugh and laugh and laugh. I just tell them no — I just know the terms for what I’ve done wrong. I know what it’s called!” —KIM

KRIEGER

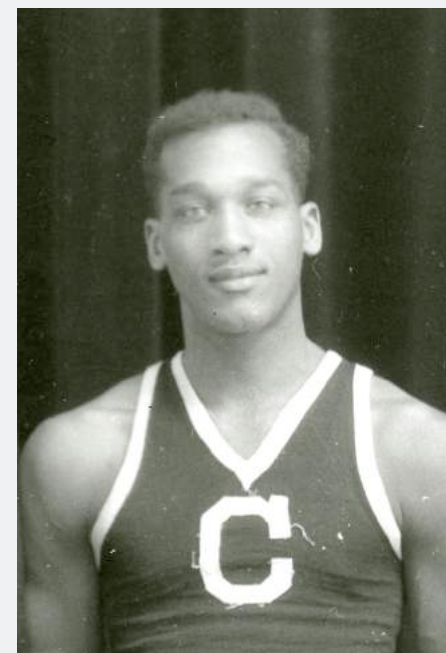
W

**UConn ON WIKI**

Harrison Brooks “Honey” Fitch (c. 1912–June 11, 1984) was UConn’s first Black basketball player and the only Black student at the time — 1932 to 1934. Popular among his fellow students at what was then known as Connecticut State College, Fitch routinely faced racism from opposing players and fans, culminating at a match against the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, on Jan. 27, 1934. The Coast Guard team refused to play against a Black athlete. UConn’s coach John Heldman caved under pressure and kept Fitch on the bench the entire game. An outraged UConn student body voted 169–7 to fire Heldman, who resigned a year later.

More about Fitch and this incident are now on Wikipedia thanks to UConn librarian Michael Rodriguez, who has made a mission of getting UConn better represented on the world’s largest encyclopedia. He has written 80-plus Wiki articles on faculty, alumni, and others associated with the University. Fitch’s bio ended up being featured on Wikipedia’s front page and was read 11,945 times in one day — giving long overdue recognition to one of UConn’s own.

Fitch was just named a Husky of Honor. Find more on our website.





*Pictured as couples seated in front of/behind each other, from left:*

Elise (Berman) & Russ Siegel, Arianne (Iannone) & Taylor Beerbower, Carol (Marques) & George Barrios, Michele (Rutsky) & Alan Hankin.

Beth (Gedansky) & Ken Young, Christine & Joshua Hawks-Ladds, Kristine (Nolen) & Thomas Russo, Kim (Foran) & Charlie "Chas" Turecek.

# AN EPIC UCONN LOVE STORY — IN EIGHT ACTS

You might think that what is possibly the greatest love story in the history of UConn would have ignited at a place like Mirror Lake or the Dairy Bar. But this epic Husky love story has its roots in The Jungle, as McConaughy Hall on the Storrs North Campus was iconically known. It was there in the late 1980s that eight women — most freshman residents of the third floor — and eight men — most freshman residents of the fourth floor — met and began dating.

Not so surprising in and of itself.

More surprising is the eight marriages that resulted.

And what truly defies belief — and all accountable odds — is that three decades later, all eight couples are still married. (Among them, they've had 21 children — six of whom, so far, have become Huskies themselves.)

Their friendships, too, have endured over time and distance. The couples still get together regularly for dinners, celebrations, Pearl Jam and Foo Fighters concerts, and, of course, Husky games. In fact, they gather so frequently that they keep a spreadsheet of which couples are attending each event. Still, some had not been back in Storrs for many years, and none had stood center court at Gampel Pavilion. Until now. *UConn Magazine* reunited the entire group in early December, at the Alumni Center's Great Hall and at Gampel, to share photos, stories — and some marriage advice.

## WHO'S WHO IN THIS GAME OF LOVE



**Alan Hankin '88 (ENG) & Michele (Rutsky) Hankin '88 (BUS), '92 MBA**  
*Live:* Westport, Connecticut  
*Work:* She was in marketing; he's in software sales at IBM  
*Married:* 28 years  
*Children:* 3  
 "Our UConn friends are a second family. Our children think of each other as cousins."



**Beth (Gedansky) Young '90 (CLAS) & Ken Young '89 (BUS), '01 MBA**  
*Live:* Bethany, Connecticut  
*Work:* He's a digital technology manager at Collins Aerospace; she's a counselor at Masuk High School  
*Married:* 29 years  
*Children:* 3, 2 UConn alums, 1 current UConn student  
 First date was watching a UConn football game.



**Thomas Russo '90 (ENG) & Kristine (Nolen) Russo '88 (CLAS)**  
*Live:* Chester, New Hampshire  
*Work:* He's a VP at Lactalis US Yogurt; she was in commercial lending and sporting goods buying  
*Married:* 29 years  
*Children:* 2, both UConn alums  
 Have a 5-foot UConn fathead at the entrance to their house — the 1980s Husky.



**Carol (Marques) Barrios '88 (BUS), '97 MBA & George Barrios '87 (CLAS), '89 MBA**  
*Live:* Fairfield, Connecticut  
*Work:* He was co-president of WWE and is founder and co-CEO of Isos Capital; she was in marketing  
*Married:* 30 years  
*Children:* 3  
 Carol made George re-create their first kiss many times in the fourth-floor dorm hallway where it first happened.

## WHAT WAS IN THE WATER?

**Carol (Marques) Barrios '88 (BUS), '97 MBA**, who met her husband **George Barrios '87 (CLAS), '89 MBA** when they lived on those third and fourth McConaughy floors, says the romances blossomed organically among friends who just greatly enjoyed one another's company.

"No matchmakers were necessary. Love was in the air," she says. "I think it was because there was no social media then, and we were a very social group." She doesn't think something similar could happen again today, as young people are more likely to text than start traditional conversations.

But **Taylor Beerbower '89 (CLAS)**, who met his wife **Arianne (Iannone) Beerbower '90 (NUR)** during their first McConaughy Hall meeting, is more of a romantic. "I'm an ordained minister and my belief is that love finds a way," he says. "I do think the same thing could happen today. It's fate, finding someone meant for you. Sure, there's luck involved too, but I like to believe that when it comes to love, it was meant to be." Despite the couples' relationships originating as teens, he recalls no breakups or time outs among the group. "They're all very solid relationships."

**Elise (Berman) Siegel '89 (CLAS)** met her husband **Russ Siegel '89 (CLAS)** the day of an exam in their shared introductory psychology class. Thinking he was both cute *and* nice, she says she decided to skip her next class, a philosophy discussion course, so they could walk back to their connecting dorms together. After that, she chose walking with Russ over that philosophy discussion course more often than not. At the end of the semester, her future husband was surprised to learn that she had had a class at the time he had been flirting with her.

"All of us met our partners when we were teenagers. We grew up together," says Elise. "Statistically, half of us should be divorced — but we've all had successful marriages and fulfilling careers. We all remember when our friends met their spouses. We know each other's stories." She fondly recalls Taylor Beerbower returning from rugby practice, sweaty, dirty, a little beat up, and yelling down the hall, "Ariaaaaaanne!" They all recognized how smitten Arianne was — and how lucky it was that she was a nursing major.

## "I DO" DOMINOES

**Christine Hawks-Ladds '88 (CLAS), '91 JD, '10 MA** and **Joshua Hawks-Ladds '87 (CLAS)** were both English majors. Josh says he spotted Christine in a Shakespeare class in the fall of her sophomore and his junior year, but didn't have the nerve to approach her. The next semester, when he spied her in an antebellum literature class, he got special permission from the professor, Ross Miller, to over-enroll in the class. Sparks flew. They were the first couple to marry, and a host of weddings soon followed.

"We went to weddings constantly," Carol Barrios says of the years after graduation. "We were in each other's weddings and I had a closet full of bridesmaid dresses. Every wedding was a weekend-long event."

How have all these marriages had such staying power? **Kristine (Nolen) Russo '88 (CLAS)** and **Thomas Russo '90 (ENG)**, who also met in the Jungle, shared a few of their secrets to success: You can never say "I love you" too many times. Don't sweat the small things. Don't hold a grudge — accept that we all have faults and move on. "You have to not only listen but you have to hear an issue, concern, or problem, or that someone just needs to be held," agrees Taylor Beerbower. "I tell my daughter to, 'Marry your best friend. Choose a spouse who is always going to be there for you. But also have your own goals.'"

**Michele Rutsky Hankin '88 (BUS), '92 MBA** met her husband-to-be **Alan Hankin '88 (ENG)**, in the study lounge of Hurley, an adjacent dorm.



## WHO'S WHO IN THIS GAME OF LOVE



**Charlie "Chas" Turecek '89 (ENG), '94 MBA & Kim (Foran) Turecek '90 (CLAS), '97 (NUR)**  
*Live:* Portland, Connecticut  
*Work:* He's at Pratt & Whitney; she's an RN  
*Married:* 27 years  
*Children:* 3, 1 current UConn student  
 Chas liked Kim but was afraid of being rejected; he finally kissed her at a party spring semester.



**Arianne (Iannone) Beerbower '90 (NUR) & Taylor Beerbower '89 (CLAS)**  
*Live:* Fairfield, Connecticut  
*Work:* Own and manage Mulberry Street Appraisals  
*Married:* 29 years  
*Children:* 3  
 Met at the first McConaughy Hall dorm meeting.



**Joshua Hawks-Ladds '87 (CLAS) & Christine Hawks-Ladds '88 (CLAS), '91 JD, '10 MA**  
*Live:* Bolton, Connecticut  
*Work:* She's a former lawyer and current high school English teacher; he's a lawyer  
*Married:* 30 years  
*Children:* 2, plus a current UConn student from Ghana, whom they've sponsored for 3 years  
 Started dating on Valentine's Day 1986 after having their first dance at the old Huskies Bar.



**Elise (Berman) Siegel '89 (CLAS) & Russ Siegel '89 (CLAS)**  
*Live:* Sharon, Massachusetts  
*Work:* She's a counseling psychologist; together they own and operate Attleboro Veterinary Clinic  
*Married:* 28 years  
*Children:* 2  
 Elise regularly skipped a class to instead walk back to McConaughy with Russ.

"Alan used to try to make me laugh while we were studying," she recalls. "We all have a sense of humor," notes **Beth Gedansky Young '90 (CLAS)**, who married **Ken Young '89 (BUS), '01 MBA**. She thinks the group was inherently compatible in many ways. "We all started with the same values," she says. "We were all hardworking, we had one, sometimes two, jobs in the summer. We came from honest, hardworking, tight-knit families. Our parents knew our friends."

At Christmas, Elise Siegel's dad would rent a van and take them all to New York City, a first trip for many, to go shopping and out to dinner in Manhattan before returning to her home.

Back on campus, the dorm was the center of everyone's social life at that time, offering semiformal and picnics. No meals were served on weekends, so the friends would cook together. In those earliest days, that camaraderie may have helped prevent any breakups. "The group was so fun and cohesive, you didn't want to walk away," says Beth Young. They graduated before the time of ubiquitous cell phones. "We all had to get together to see each other because to call everyone would have been too big a phone bill," says Beth.

### A HIGH BAR

Over the years, they've continued to travel together, vacationing as couples, and with children. When George Barrios was co-president of WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment), the group attended WrestleMania together, hanging out before and after the events. They all acknowledge talking so much when they go to dinner that they inevitably close every restaurant. And though they don't always agree on politics, everyone is comfortable stating his or her views, and then leaving it alone.

"I think that one of the common threads is that each of us has a little irreverence in our personality," says George Barrios. "We don't take life, each other, or ourselves too seriously. I realized pretty early that it was unique that a group of teenagers who met contemporaneously would get married. That we've stayed married for 25 to 30 years seems more than unique, almost crazy," he continues. "There's something special about any lifelong friendship — I have a couple outside of UConn too. But it's a true blessing to have an entire 'family' of lifelong friends."

"I don't think at the time we set out for a 35-year friendship, but we were going through life stages together," says Beth Young. "We've helped each other, we've helped each other's kids. When someone loses a parent, everybody is there. It's a really unique situation." She and Ken met in McConaughy, went on their first date within the first two weeks of her freshman year, and have been inseparable since. All three of their children went to UConn, too. "UConn has been such a large part of our lives, as well as the starting point for our family. We can't help but bleed blue."

Taylor Beerbower also appreciates the effort the group has made to stay together. "A lot of people come and go in your life," he says. "I work 80 hours a week. This group is so social, always inviting people and reaching out, saying they're thinking of you, and including you. That's a big part of it."

"This is something unique, to have such a special group of friends that you've shared so many life experiences with. It is something so treasured," says Elise Siegel. "If at any point in time one of us needed anything, we could call on each other without hesitation. It really is such a gift."

For **Kim (Foran) Turecek '90 (CLAS), '97 (NUR)** and **Charlie "Chas" Turecek '89 (ENG), '94 (MBA)**, romance evolved somewhat slowly. He was "a bit afraid of being rejected." But after a party in spring semester, they kissed for the first time and that was that. Day trips to campus, from their home in Portland, Connecticut, were always part of their plans.



The group and a surprise visitor at the Alumni Center's Great Hall. Do you have your own UConn love story? Or know of one even greater than this? We'd love to hear — please share at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

"Our kids grew up very familiar with UConn. This is one of the key reasons our daughter, Avery, is attending UConn," says Chas. It turns out they, and the others, were setting a bit of a false expectation.

Their children, who call one another friend-cousins, say they all went to

college expecting to meet their future life partners — and feel a bit cheated they didn't have the same success as their parents.

"We set the bar very high," says Carol Barrios. ☺

---

# The Secret Life of Dexter Gabriel — aka P. Djèlí Clark

By Christine Buckley  
Photo by Peter Morenus  
Illustrations by Simone  
Martin-Newberry

In May 2016, UConn history professor Dexter Gabriel was trudging up a hill, robes swishing around his ankles and cap in hand, en route to receive his Ph.D. hood at Stony Brook University in New York, when he received an email addressed to P. Djèlí Clark.

The message congratulated Clark on his novelette, “A Dead Djinn in Cairo,” which had just been published on the sci-fi website Tor.com. It was Clark’s biggest publication to date.

Gabriel grinned, a thrill running through him, and slipped his phone back in his pocket. He approached the stage — the first in his family to receive any degree, let alone an advanced one — and received his doctorate of philosophy in history; but when he sat back down he kept surreptitiously checking his phone.

What were people saying about the story, about Clark? Did they like it? Did they hate it? “It was kismet, fate, the way it turned out,” says Gabriel. “I mean, this was Tor. Tor! On the day of my hooding!” Tor, that famous name Gabriel grew up with, the one printed on the spines of his favorite fantasy and sci-fi books, would now publish the work of P. Djèlí Clark.

A few days later, settled back into his Washington, D.C., apartment, Gabriel set about making some late-night coffee. He sipped the warm brew, then sat down at his desk and woke up his computer, its bright light streaming onto his face. He took a deep, satisfied breath.

And P. Djèlí Clark began to write.





## DOCTOR WHO?

Dexter Gabriel, aka P. Djèlí Clark, was born in Queens, New York, but his first memories are of Trinidad and Tobago, where his immigrant parents sent him to live with his grandparents at age 2.

He describes himself as a typical kid growing up in the West Indies, in “the cultural milieu of African and Caribbean music and folklore, and Hindu culture and foods.” He ate lots of roti and curry chicken, and he loved it. During Carnival season, he watched costumed and head-dressed dancers line the streets to calypso and soca music. He’d scamper around, collecting dropped sequins. “I thought they were magical,” he says.

When he returned to New York at age 7, he found a toddler girl clinging to his mother — his younger sister — and an urban Staten Island a world away from his former strong Black Caribbean community. And in contrast to his lenient grandparents, his parents were more firm with work ethic and rule following.

His mother was firm in other ways, too. The public elementary school wanted to hold Gabriel back a grade, assuming his West Indian education had been poor. “My mother marched me in to see the principal, took a book from his wall, and told me to read it.”

Gabriel, who had learned to read at

age 4, read every word. The principal allowed him to enter second grade.

He also recalls his mother sitting him in front of “ABC World News Tonight” and ordering him to listen and learn. “People will think you are less intelligent with your accent,” she’d tell me. She could always code switch easily back and forth, dropping in and out of her Trinidadian accent easily. But my father never did.”

Both parents cultivated a love for science fiction in their son, whose childhood was filled with “Dark Shadows,” “The Twilight Zone,” the BBC’s “Doctor Who,” and other sci-fi favorites. But his mother forbade him to watch the “Star Wars” movies — because there were no Black characters. “I think it was because of her early like of ‘Star Trek,’ with its diversity, that she had problems with ‘Star Wars’ lack of diversity. ‘What are they trying to say?’ she would huff. ‘That there are no Black people in the future?’” Still, Gabriel read all the sci-fi, fantasy, and horror books he could get his hands on at the local library. He loved immersing himself in the alternative universes and histories.

When Gabriel was 11, the family moved to Spring Branch, Texas, so his father could seek work in a developing oil boom. Gabriel dreaded leaving New York and all his cousins there. And when they arrived in Texas, he says, the race-related

problems began immediately.

A pickup truck in Gabriel’s apartment complex had a Ku Klux Klan sticker on it. People drove by their family in the daytime, shouting the n-word. Gabriel’s mother ran home at night from her job as a telephone operator at Southwestern Bell, for fear of being accosted. Students in his school made racial jokes, and the one other mixed-race student in Gabriel’s class was labeled a “problem child,” and was regularly suspended.

“There was an enduring racial animus there,” he says. “These were things I didn’t understand at the time, and I didn’t have words for it.”

As soon as his family could afford it, they moved to the southwest side of Houston, which at the time was predominantly Black and Hispanic. For high school, Gabriel’s mother got him into an arts magnet school. He remembers feeling conflicted: The local public school had lots more Black and Hispanic kids, but the magnet school had a better curriculum. He remembers a Black chemistry teacher and, while Gabriel admits to not caring much about the subject, the teacher set a powerful example. “He did not suffer fools lightly. He was there to be your teacher, not your friend. As a Black male, to run the classroom that way was fascinating to me.”

After high school, Gabriel studied political science and history at Texas State

University. One of his history professors there noted his keen interest in the subject, telling him he had a knack for it, and asking if he’d considered going into academia. “It seemed like something in the sky,” scoffs Gabriel, who didn’t think anything more of it. He just couldn’t see himself as a professor. So after graduation he got a job as an IT systems analyst at a small corporation, where he spent much of his time “helping people reboot their computers.” It wasn’t long before he felt the academic world calling him back. “Turns out I liked the academic world more than I thought I did,” he says. “It shaped my understanding of life, especially my own. I was drawn to cultural anthropology, and the history of scientific racism.”

Gabriel returned to Texas State for a master’s in history. His thesis examined the last surviving ex-slave narratives from the Works Progress Administration. Although his thesis focused on violent acts by enslaved women to protect themselves from abuse, it was clear that some slaves were concealing the truth, depending on who the interviewer was. Some believed that they would be compensated if they told mostly white interviewers what they wanted to hear.

“It became necessary at times to read between the lines for cleverly disguised meanings, or to make note of the shift in tone when there was a Black interview-

“For years now, P. Djèlí Clark has quietly been cranking out short fiction that is as fantastical as it is attuned to social justice. Through captivating characters unlike any we’ve ever seen before and sumptuous worldbuilding that twists the familiar into something exciting and new, Clark works his own magic.” — Alex Brown of *Tor.com*, in a 2019 review of *The Haunting of Tram Car 015*

er,” says Gabriel. “I found them heavily informative.”

Throughout his education his love for New York never waned, so after he graduated he moved to Brooklyn and took another break from academia, accepting a “weird temp job” on Wall Street. For the next four years he worked at Standard & Poor’s, entering and analyzing data on securities. In 2007, he says, he began to notice many more mortgage-backed securities than usual. “We would get stacks of them, all with AAA ratings. I would see it every day, and people were like, ‘Wow, another AAA+ rating.’ Everyone was flying high. Then, well, the bottom fell out of housing.”

He arrived one morning and instead of the usual stack of hundreds of securities to enter, he had one. “That was the moment when I was like, ‘Okay, I’m out of here.’” Taking the stock market crash as a sign, he applied and was accepted

to the Stony Brook doctoral program in history.

In line with his previous interest in the process of emancipations, he began studying the Black Atlantic: the history of the movements of people of African descent from Africa to Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas (primarily through the transatlantic slave trade) and their many cultures and communities. For example, Britain abolished slavery by decree, and in its wake, pamphleteering both for and against this method of emancipation proliferated in the U.S. “Abolitionists said: We know this can be done. We can end slavery by decree. It’s the safe way and the right way,” says Gabriel. But the movement was thwarted, he argues, by exaggerated evidence that these steps had collapsed Britain’s Caribbean economies.

His work in this arena earned him a Frederick Douglass Institute fellowship



“My sibling book club picked ‘Ring Shout,’ by P. Djèlí Clark. It’s the story of a Black woman in 1920s Georgia who discovers that the KKK is actually composed of demons. It’s paced wonderfully so it will not be over too soon.” — *Stacey Abrams, author and voting rights activist*

at Indiana University of Pennsylvania for his final year, which helped him to the finish line for his dissertation — a line he crossed while feverishly checking his phone for updates on his newly published fiction.

#### A DOUBLE LIFE

Gabriel’s life had been influenced at the outset by his West Indian upbringing, rich in folklore and mysticism. He later dove into those Western science fiction book and television classics. But much of his beloved sci-fi and fantasy fiction didn’t pass, or barely passed, his mother’s litmus test: It lacked Black and Latino characters, women, and LGBTQ people at the center of the stories.

Gabriel had from a young age written fiction as a hobby, loving the idea of world-building, of dystopias, of a kernel of history spinning out into a new alternative reality. And the absence of people like him in those stories colored his writing from day one.

“I felt a need for more diverse tales

with more diverse characters drawn from more diverse sources,” he says.

Thus was born Phenderson (P.) Djèlí Clark.

The pseudonym stems from family history: Phenderson was his grandfather, Clark was his mother’s maiden name, and Djèlí is a take on a West African word for “storyteller.”

Gabriel says that writing fiction was always his reward for completing some other “serious” task. Finished your dissertation proposal? Now finish that story and send it out to a magazine. Passed your generals exam? Make some “night coffee” and have a 2 a.m. writing session.

“All my creative writing happens when the sun is down and everyone is in bed,” he says. “I always kept them separate because I was doing the fiction writing for fun,” he adds. “I never expected to publish anything — I would send something off and forget about it.”

However, as the years progressed, and he began publishing short stories on speculative fiction websites, Gabriel

realized the themes were not nearly as separate as they seemed.

His first published short story, “The Machine,” is a 600-word tale about a contraption that “keeps the world going,” and the groups of people trying to worship, fix, or destroy it. But fast-forward to 2015 — six years of graduate school and eight published stories later — and you find him with a 10,000-word story called “A Dead Djinn in Cairo.”

By then, it had become obvious to Gabriel that his history work was influencing his speculative fiction. “I was just immersed in the things historians think about, and it came out on the other side. In history we speculate when we don’t know things. But we wouldn’t speculate there would be, for example, werewolves,” he jokes. “That’s the fun of speculative fiction.”

And so more years passed, with Dexter Gabriel working down his windy path toward an academic career, while P. Djèlí Clark came out at night to write about racist demons and supernatural disturbances. So separate were his worlds that when Gabriel landed an assistant professorship at UConn in 2016, he didn’t tell a soul about his fiction.

Since then, a few of his colleagues have uncovered his double life, with versions of the same reaction: “Why didn’t you tell me you’re a fiction writer? That’s so cool!”

The answer is complicated, he says, and wrapped up in academic, class, and race issues. “I’m a first-generation college student, and I took it all the way to a Ph.D., so I really don’t have a role model to look to,” says Gabriel. “My issues of identity, of being a Black man, an immigrant, and a first-generation college student, all weighed in consideration of how I should present myself.”

Academia has not always been kind to people who publish nonacademic writing, let alone people of color who do so, he says with frankness. So he used a pen name, and proceeded with caution. He says he knows professors at other universities who write fiction, but may never go public with their pen name. And to top it off, he says, being in academia and being a man of color are both obstacles in the sci-fi writing world.

He might even have kept things relatively under wraps for many more years — at least until he achieved tenure — if not for the great success of his most recent novella, “Ring Shout.”

In the story, Maryse, a monster hunter in a dystopian Macon, Georgia, leads her band of resistance fighters through a world where white supremacists conjure demons from the Earth, called Ku Kluxes, to spread fear, violence, and hate. The book takes its name from rituals performed by African slaves, in which worshipers move together in a

circle, stomping, shuffling, and clapping.

The novella was a finalist for the 2021 Hugo prize, received national Nebula, Locus, and Alex awards for 2020, and was a finalist for more than seven other national and international awards, making it one of the most decorated new works of speculative fiction this year.

It was a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice book, was reviewed by NPR and *Publisher’s Weekly*, and was recommended by Stacey Abrams, whose book club read it in May. And it’s currently in development as a television series with producer Skydance Media, known for its production on “Star Trek,” “Terminator,” and “Mission: Impossible” films. “Technically I’m an executive producer, but I don’t really know what that means,” says Gabriel with a laugh.

Gabriel loves hearing interpretations of his fiction, even those that reach beyond his intended connections to history. Some readers have likened scenes from “Ring Shout” to the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. It’s made for good discussions in his classes this year, especially in his “Slavery in Film” class. “I like to hear how people make connections between my stories and the real world,” says Gabriel, who also teaches “Comparative Slavery in the Americas” and “Making the Black Atlantic,” both

courses he created when he arrived at UConn. He’s also taught a graduate course on the Black Atlantic, and a senior seminar on historical craft and writing.

#### NEXT UP

Gabriel — or should we say Clark? — has come full circle with a full-length novel that takes place in the universe of his first big story. “A Master of Djinn” came out in May, with themes of colonialism and the history of the Egyptian city, along with mystery, fantasy, and romance.

Gabriel hasn’t used his fiction in class (although some colleagues have used “A Dead Djinn in Cairo” in their courses), yet somehow, he says, his students figure out that he writes fiction. And he’s become OK with that — geek culture is popular now, he says, and anything that helps him look cooler to his students can only be a good thing.

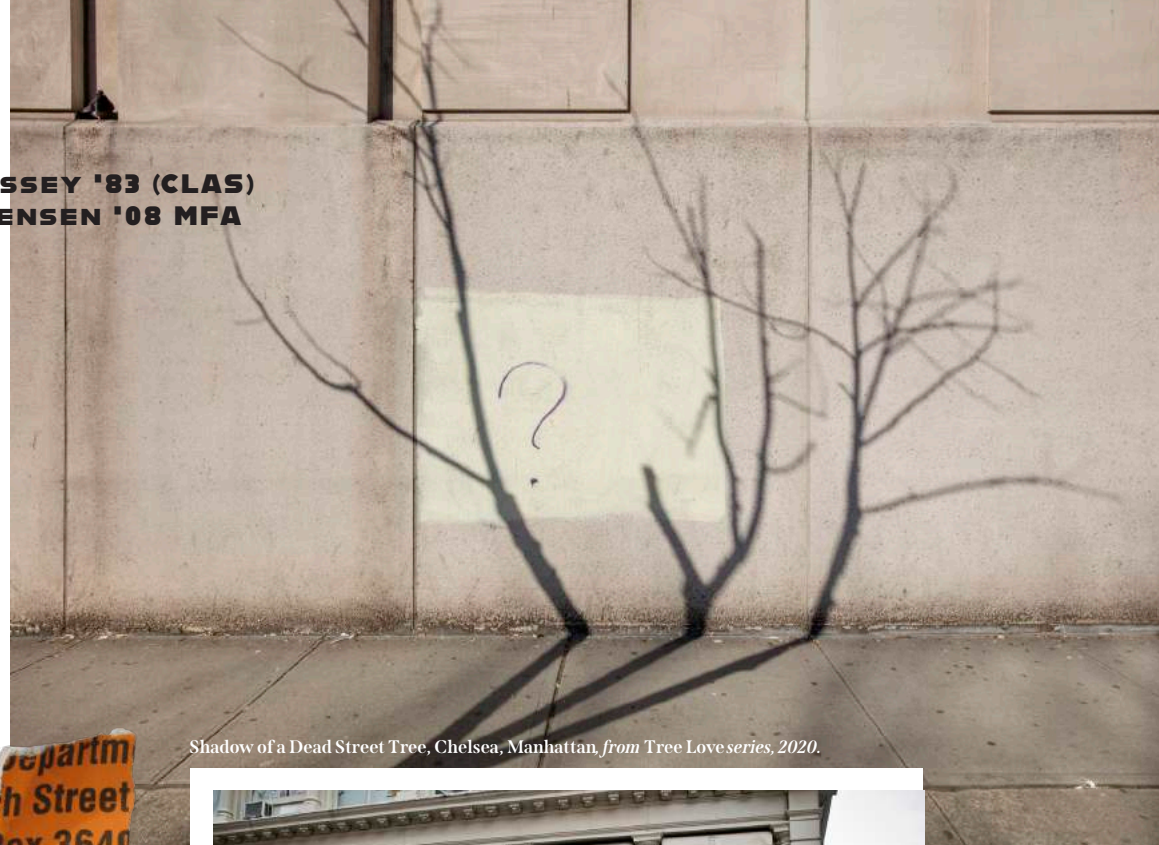
Doubling up as ever, Gabriel also has an academic book in its final stages and planned for publication later this year, “Jubilee’s Experiment: The British West Indies and American Abolitionism.” After that comes out, he’ll of course deserve a reward — perhaps another Djinn book, written in the wee hours?

“It’s been an unorthodox ride,” says Gabriel/Clark.

“But a good ride, a very good ride.” ☺



BY JACKIE FITZPATRICK HENNESSEY '83 (CLAS)  
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LÓPEZ-JENSEN '08 MFA



Shadow of a Dead Street Tree, Chelsea, Manhattan, from Tree Love series, 2020.



Left: Inwood Vista from Nowhere in Manhattan series, installed as a 26-foot-wide billboard on Thompson Street in SoHo in 2010. (The work is still installed, but the color has faded).

Below: Artifacts collected from the surface of disturbed landscapes throughout New York City — Barren Island, Swindler Cove, Washington Square Park, Governors Island, and Central Park.

# WALK THIS WAY ↴



An alum and Guggenheim Fellow whose art is about nature, adventure — and sneakers



López-Jensen speaking to participants on Collecting SoHo artist walk, 2013.



The first thing Matthew López-Jensen '08 MFA needs is a pair of shoes. Not just any shoes, but shoes for climbing fences, tromping in and around marshes, and walking 20 miles. He laces up his latest pair of New Balance sneakers, grabs his camera, notebook, and a backpack and sets out. That is how, at the beginning of the pandemic, you'd find López-Jensen. He had been asked by Mary Miss, the director of City as Living Laboratory — a nonprofit that works with artists, scientists, and residents of urban communities to find solutions to environmental issues — to create a virtual walk along Tibbetts Brook. So he followed the brook from the Bronx to Yonkers,

mapping out a path that could serve as an online respite for people stuck indoors. "I ended up in a field of marsh marigolds, and it's swampy, and there are no planes overhead because it's in the middle of Covid, so it's super quiet," he says. "A great blue heron emerges out of the grass up ahead, and it flies off, and I'm sitting there by this little muddy trickle of a stream in the middle of what feels like nowhere, but it's the middle of New York City. I have versions of that experience in almost every landscape. It's quiet. I'm alone, and nature's being nature, and it's wonderful." A Guggenheim Fellow, López-Jensen is an "interdisciplinary lens-based artist" whose pieces are part of

the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, and the Center for Fine Art Photography. His projects have received National Endowment of the Arts funding. He takes photographs and gathers into artful bundles the flora he finds along Brooklyn's Flatbush Avenue or the banks of a winding river — common mullein, ragweed, couch grass, sycamore, or seaweed, entwined with treasures he's discovered. One such treasure, a porcelain cane topper in the form of dice from the 1920s is "sort of symbolic for walking and chance," he says. "I'm trying to build a subtle portrait of a place with objects and plants."

As much as he loves exploring, he also loves research. "I try to learn about the folk histories, medicinal uses, and ecological realities surrounding the plants and trees that feature in my work," he says. "I'm always reading one natural history or another. Every tree has its own book or books. And every weed cures something." The Bronx-based artist tells the story of a landscape in words, photos, video, and found-art sculptures. He also makes extensively detailed maps, thousands of which have been available at museums and parks for people to use on their own walks. It all "begins with looking," he says. He searches for beauty in seemingly inelegant or even destroyed places. "And I always find it."

**A TREE CLIMBING KID**  
He's had this spirit since he was young. Sugar maples, white oaks, spindly tall trees in the woods — how high could he climb? How far could he see into the world? Those were his summer days, as seen at left trimming a yew at age 11. "I spent all my time back in the woods, up in the trees," López-Jensen says.



"I was good at climbing, and I liked heights, so I was a bit of an adrenaline junkie. If I found the right spot in a tree, I could read a book or bounce around or just look out." As luck would have it, Killingly High School had a photography program with "a photo professor who knew his stuff and fought for funding." López-Jensen bought a 35-millimeter camera he could afford and took every class he could. "I was always in the darkroom," he says. He walked around Killingly and surrounding towns, stopping to explore and take photos of old, abandoned mills and barns. "It was what I would end up doing for the next 20 years, focusing on the place where nature and the history of

the landscape collide,” he says.

Still, during undergrad at Rice University in Houston, Texas, he wasn't ready to believe that art could become his career. “When you grow up in a certain realm without an exposure to art, the idea of being an artist doesn't exist, so I thought ‘I'll major in photography — which I love — and political science — where I'll get my job.’ I didn't know how to make money or survive as a photographer or an artist.”

After graduating, he worked for about five years on political campaigns, which eventually took him to New York City. He was about to pursue a master's in public policy, “When I said, ‘Wait a minute.’” Instead, he decided to work on his photography portfolio, applied to MFA programs, and chose UConn.

#### BECOMING AN ARTIST

He had space at UConn — two whole studios — and time to return to the landscapes he knew, this time with a more critical, discerning, artistic eye. It was important to him, too, that UConn had a teaching program. “I knew I wanted to teach,” he says.

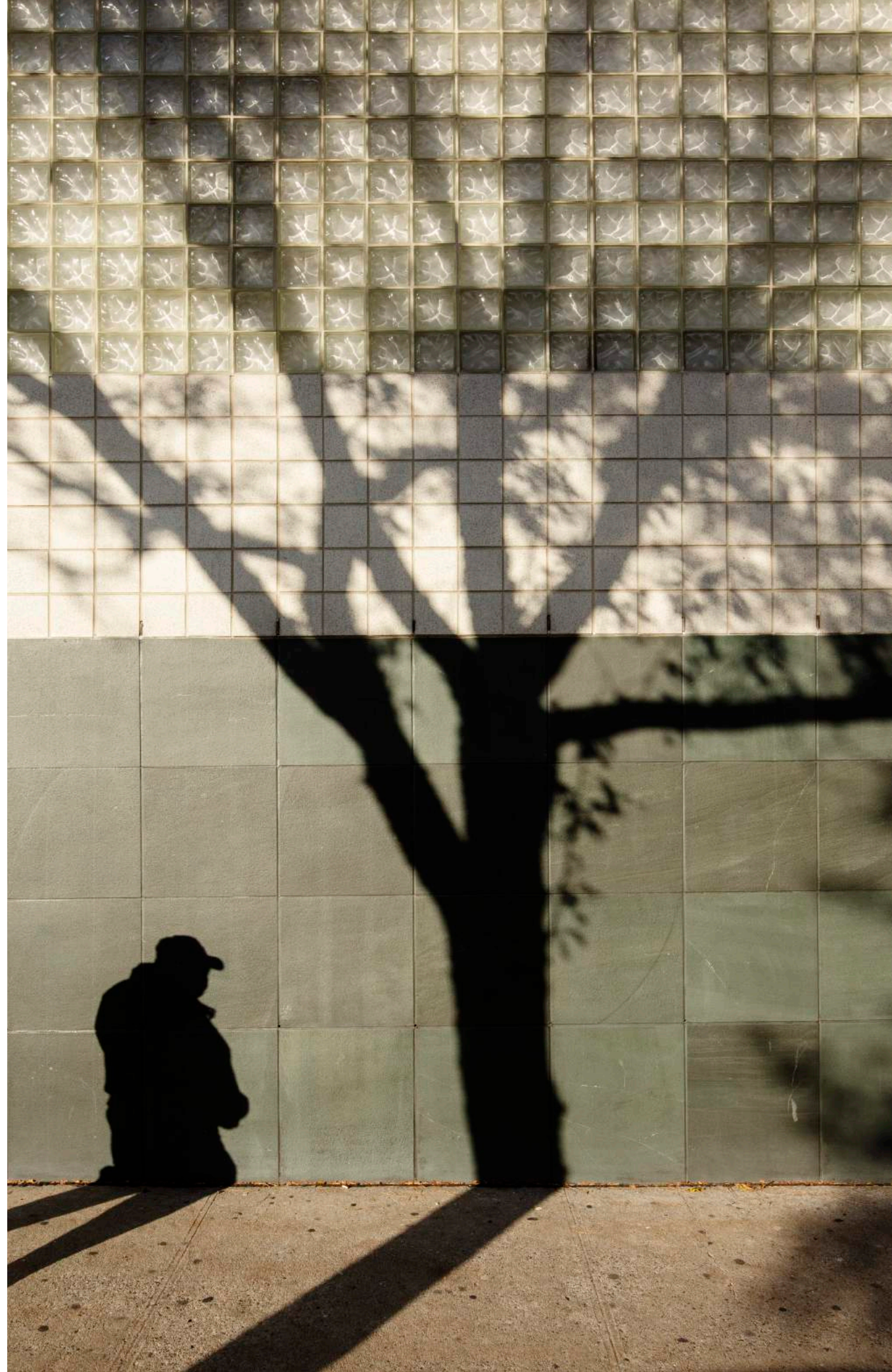
For his first major MFA project, he decided “to walk every street in Willimantic and photograph every spruce tree,” he says. “The first wave of immigrants was from northern Europe, and they brought their love of spruces here and planted them everywhere.”

He liked the connection back to this history. “Spruce trees are the last living link to the industrial revolution in that town,” he says. “I also love trees, and it was a way to photograph trees.”

He carried a paper map and crossed off each street as he went. He wore down his walking shoes traversing neighborhoods; it turned out there were some 3,000 spruce trees in the city. He culled thousands of photos into “Every Tree in Town,” a book and

Left: *Shadow of a Man and a Honey Locust*, Norwood, Bronx, from *Tree Love series*, 2020.

Right: *The Glaciers Might Be Gone Soon but They Will Always Be a Part of Me*. For this work from 2007, exhibited in 2013, he traveled to Labrador, Canada, to see an iceberg and take a selfie eating a bit of a bergy from the shoreline.



## "BLOCK AFTER BLOCK, I WAS SPURRED ON BY EACH NEW INSTANCE OF PEOPLE CARING FOR TREES."

an exhibition at the William Benton Museum of Art and in downtown Willimantic.

"Every Tree in Town' is a stunning and committed book. I remember the project for many reasons, but first and foremost because it was so Matt," says Janet L. Pritchard, a professor and graduate advisor in UConn's School of Fine Arts. "With this work and his companion piece, 'Hometown Stones,' I felt Matt had come into his own."

It was UConn, López-Jensen says, "that brought me to that sublime place, walking far and suddenly finding a ruined red brick building in the midst of a forest of white pine, having these beautiful experiences that I want to share, that are an extension of an art practice."

### FINDING WONDER IN THE ORDINARY

"Wonder — that's the word Mary Birmingham, curator of the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, says truly captures López-Jensen's work.

"It's an innocent wonder, unspoiled by the world, and it begins with unbridled curiosity," she says. "Matthew

has given himself permission to be in awe of what he discovers as he walks — about nature and man's interaction with nature. Once you give yourself that permission, there's so much to see and wonder about."

Birmingham worked closely with López-Jensen for almost two years as he developed "Park Wonder," a project exploring four historic New Jersey landscapes — the Passaic River, the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, the Watchung Reservation, and the Gateway National Recreation Area at Sandy Hook, in a 2017 exhibit, a book, maps, and a series of public walks.

During that time he applied for, and was awarded, a Guggenheim Fellowship in photography, "which was huge," Birmingham says. "The fellowships are so hard to get. It enabled him to go the extra mile and do exactly what he wanted to do."

Adds Pritchard, herself a Guggenheim Fellow, "A Guggenheim Fellowship is a special honor and rare opportunity, which is widely recognized and can open doors. I imagine Matt's beautiful and genre-challenging

book 'Park Wonder' would not have come about otherwise. I am proud to have a copy from him in my library."

### SOMETIMES ALL IT TAKES IS ONE TREE TO TURN A PERSON INTO AN ENVIRONMENTALIST

While his eyes are trained on beauty, López-Jensen can't help but notice the

blight on so many species of trees as he travels along the Taconic Parkway or up into Connecticut, the effects of warming winters and climate change-related pestilence. "It's depressing," he says.

But he's heartened by the next generation of emerging artists and environmental activists. He teaches art and photography at Parsons School of Design at The New School and at Fordham University, where he created the course "Art and Action on the Bronx River," working with the university's Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) and the Bronx River Alliance.

"Matt incorporated hands-on experiences — walking, boating, collecting, and performing ecology and clean-up activities — into a visual arts course," says Julie Gafney, executive director of the Fordham CCEL. "Another similar course might have seen students spending nearly all of their time in the studio. These hands-on experiences better acquainted students with the ways that the neighborhoods

near Fordham adapt, grow, and build solutions, and provided inspiration for students' original visual art projects."

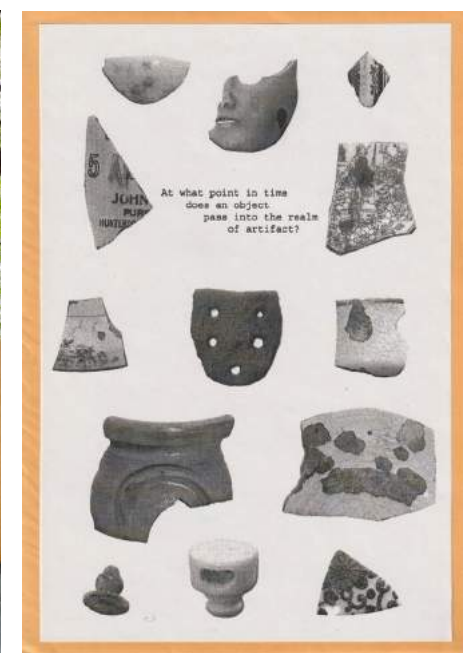
All it takes sometimes to get people to care about the environment is the chance to engage with nature up close, says López-Jensen. "By getting people more engaged through the arts in a specific landscape, I hope they become engaged in all things landscape."

López-Jensen takes action another way — as a member of Citizen Pruners, part of Trees New York, which trains volunteers in tree care, biology, identification, and pruning. He's inspired, he says, by the tender ways people tend to an urban tree in their midst. For "Tree Love: Street Trees and Stewardship in New York City," a recent photo series featured on Terrain.org, he walked hundreds of miles in neighborhoods all over the five boroughs.

"Block after block, I was spurred on by each new instance of people caring for trees," he notes. "Old growth, self-planted, stunted, scarred, broken, coppiced, blighted, blight-resistant, rare, overpruned ... each tree exhibits



Left: Honey Locust and Scaffolding, *East Village, Manhattan, 2019*, from *Tree Love* series.



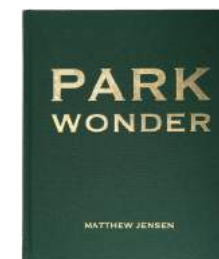
Right: A page from *Walking Inwood, 2011*, an artist book featuring artifacts collected on walks in *Inwood Hill Park*.

time and circumstance in its own way."

In one photo a precariously leaning small red plum tree stands in the Woodlawn section of the Bronx. Someone cared enough for this tree to cut a two-by-four to the exact size that

would perfectly prop it up, marvels López-Jensen, finding hope in that "small gesture."

It's a lovely way to fashion a working life, he says — walking, creating, teaching, and forever looking. ☺



Left: *The 49 States*, a landscape series on exhibit behind *Blue Lake Pass* by *Maya Lin* for the show *Surveying the Terrain* at *CAM Raleigh* in 2014.

Above: *Park Wonder*, 140-page book of essays and photographs, available online at *Guttenberg Arts*.



# Call Cowen!

**The more extraordinary the challenge, the more likely UConn Distinguished Alumnus Scott Cowen will be asked to help. Cowen moved Tulane University past Hurricane Katrina and was tempted out of retirement recently to guide Case Western Reserve University through the worldwide pandemic.**

**S**cott Cowen '68 (BUS) knows what it means to lead during a major crisis. His savvy and sensitive style as the Tulane University president who helped the city of New Orleans recover after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina spurred folks at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland to lure him out of retirement to see them through the beginning of the Covid pandemic.

It begins, he says, with lists.

In the earliest days after Hurricane Katrina, when he and his team were evacuated to Houston, Cowen remembers not being able to sleep and calling his wife, who was in New York. "I told her I had no idea what to do. I'd never encountered anything like this," he recalls. "I didn't even know if the university was going to survive. I remember her saying to me very, very calmly, 'What have you always done when you feel overwhelmed?' I said, 'I usually make a list and I prioritize things.' So she said to me very calmly, 'You better start making a list.'"

From that first list, he and his team devised a plan that would help Tulane return after having 70 percent of its main campus flooded and all of its health science campus underwater, a plan that would send students, faculty, and staff to universities around the country and find 87 percent of the students returning when the Tulane campus opened months later. It was a plan that meant making hard choices and reimagining the university through big ideas like a public service graduation requirement that meant all Tulane students would be involved in the rebuilding and strengthening of New Orleans. The university fundraising campaign he led that year surpassed its \$700 million goal.

Leading through a crisis, says Cowen, means continually communicating with and listening closely to every stakeholder. That is exactly what he did in the days and months after Katrina, says Dr. Karen DeSalvo, who was then on Tulane's medical school faculty and is now chief health officer at Google Health. "When the streets were still flooded and the city was under martial law, he came to where we, the team of Tulane medical residents and faculty members, were delivering care. He spent hours with us visiting each site and taking the time to listen to the people he met, so that he could understand the impact of Katrina on their lives and families and understand how Tulane could be there to help. He stood by our side, stood up for us," she said in a tribute to Cowen on the occasion of his transition from Tulane president to professor. He saw to it, she said, that hundreds of thousands of people received care who "otherwise would have gone without."

Cowen's work on behalf of the university and the city of New Orleans and its

**by Jackie Fitzpatrick Hennessey '83 (CLAS)**



public schools brought him countless accolades and awards. *Time* magazine named him one of the country's 10 Best College Presidents, and he received the 2009 Carnegie Corporation Academic Leadership Award. In 2010, Cowen was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2013 he was named a UConn Distinguished Alumnus.

The year 2020 found Cowen leading another university through an unprecedented crisis. He was still teaching at Tulane when he was asked to step in as interim president of Case Western Reserve after Barbara R. Snyder left to become president of the Association of American Universities. "It helped that I knew Case Western and I knew Cleveland well," says Cowen, who had worked at Case Western for 23 years — as a professor and as dean of the Weatherhead School of Management. "Snyder had a great team in place, and they had created 24 subcommittees to deal with the pandemic," he says.

Still, "For the first month or so as I was shadowing Barbara, I really wondered if I could grasp the complexity of what was going on and be able to lead the team forward," he says. "Interestingly enough my old instincts of being a university president for many years and being in a crisis situation suddenly came back — how to process and think about these things."

His number one goal was to ensure the safety, well being, and health of the faculty, staff, and students, he says, adding that communication and transparency would be key. Information on Covid-19 testing, the number of students in isolation and quarantine, and other key metrics were posted each week on the university's dashboard.

Listening really mattered. "I met by Zoom with every single student group, with all faculty of

every school, and the staff as well," he says.

From the moment he arrived on campus, even before becoming interim president, Cowen was listening — to faculty, to students, to staff. Joachim Voss, the Independence Foundation Professor of Nursing Education at the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing and chair of the Faculty Senate, says student leaders continually sent out surveys to take the pulse of the student body to make certain that the administration, faculty members, student support services, and staff knew how students were doing "emotionally, psychologically, what they needed in terms of technology, in terms of access. We wanted to know the students, to help them, to make things better for them."

That tone was set, from the start, by Cowen, Voss says. Cowen kept seeking out creative ways to maintain a college feel when the pandemic conspired against it. He brought in ice cream trucks and sent care packages to students who had been displaced to reduce housing density.

When students from China were stranded because restrictions wouldn't allow them to return to campus, Cowen quickly found a sister University in Sian, China, where 240 students could study remotely and live. "He's very student-centric and will make things happen quickly," Voss says. "He sees an opportunity — he jumps on it."

Hunter Stecko, an electrical and computer engineering major who was president of the undergraduate student government, remembers the first meeting he had with Cowen and the student general assembly. Cowen gave opening remarks, introduced himself, and then "flipped the script. He said to the 50 representatives, 'You'll have plenty of time to ask me questions,

**Cowen's hands-on, student-centric leadership style saw Tulane through the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and won him a bevy of national awards and accolades.**

## "How are you doing is the question he asks every time he meets with a student group."

but how are you doing?"

A nursing student spoke about how stressed she was trying to learn during a pandemic and how she needed more support and even more stringent safety protocols. "That seemed like it really struck him, and I can say that things improved dramatically right after," Stecko says. "How are you doing is the question he asks every time he meets with a student group — and I've been to multiple Zoom meetings with him. Just by observing him it seems like he would be more than pleased if the entire meeting was that kind of discussion."

That concern reassured the campus community as it faced something so unnerving, Voss says. Right before Thanksgiving, after the University had made it through the semester and students were heading home, Cowen sent out a personal email to the campus. Voss said many students told him how touched they were by it.

"He wrote about what he was thankful for, and the students felt he cared about them," Voss says. "The message was written so that everybody felt personally seen, heard, respected. He acknowledged what a challenging time this was and how thankful he was to everybody, especially students, for really distancing and mask wearing. We have a community pledge the students, faculty, and staff developed together and he was very proud of the pledge — that we kept our community, the campus, the staff, students, and faculty healthy by promoting the rules on campus."

Cowen says the Case Western students have been remarkably resilient. He tells them the lessons they're learning and skills they are using in this uncertain time will serve them well throughout their lives.

He's found that to be true again and again in his own life. "I have dyslexia and it wasn't diagnosed until I was 22, so I had a really hard time growing up," he says. "I didn't do well in school, people interpreting that you're not a smart guy, that you're lazy. In high school I began to come into my own and over time more and more so, but just overcoming the fact that I had a disability helped develop a sense of resilience."

That was further strengthened when he was at UConn playing football for his position coach Lou Holtz. "I learned about discipline and toughness from him," he says. His time serving in the U.S. Army in the Middle East in the 1960s and those early days after Hurricane Katrina reminded him that no matter what challenge life puts in front of you, "You have to find ways to move forward."

Cowen, who is now back to teaching at Tulane, says his biweekly messages to the Case Western community focused on that. "Each one talks about my own experiences and why, during a time like this, we always have to have a sense of hope mixed with reality. What's the hope part? How can we work toward it? We have an obligation — those of us who have been through a crisis — to make something good come of it." ☺



Weurding at Sharp Grossmont rehab in San Diego, where she created her popular wheelchair dance program.

### “The Wheels Are Part of the Dancing”

When Beverly Weurding, 84, who attended UConn in the 1950s, was diagnosed with limb-girdle muscular dystrophy in 1993, she thought her days on the dance floor had come to an end. But then she took some aquatic classes at Sharp Grossmont Hospital in San Diego. “I could be out of my wheelchair in the pool and I would dance,” she says. The instructor took note and recommended she start a wheelchair dancing organization. “They said the hospital would sponsor me and do the public relations, but I would need to find a dance instructor willing to get certified in teaching wheelchair dance.”

Weurding did just that, and the first eight-week ballroom dance offering was a huge success. Since then, Wheelchair Dancers has added many other classes, such as Bollywood and hip-hop, to the repertoire. “We adapt every move to being in a wheelchair. The wheels are part of the dancing.”

Weurding has had students of all ages — the youngest was 4 years old and dances to this day — which inspired her to take a six-week program into area schools. “There have been people who have changed so much through the class,” says Weurding. “It’s the communication, it’s the social component. It creates friendships, physical activity, a place where we come together and support each other. It’s beautiful. Dancing is beautiful.” —ERIC BUTTERMAN

#### CLASS NOTES



➤ Congratulations to **Malia Sedgewick Johnson '56 (NUR)** on becoming chair of the South Maui Learning Ohana and one of the founders of Kihei Charter School in Maui, Hawaii. She’s a patient advocate who serves as a Maui member on the Advisory Council of Kaiser Permanente.



➤ **George Wedberg '64 (CLAS), '66 MS** is carving out a new hobby for himself since he retired from a career in information technology and project management — he has taken up abstract wood sculpture. Wedberg would love to hear from the New Haven Hall gang of the early '60s and can be reached via his sculpture website at [georgewedberg.com](http://georgewedberg.com). ➤ In other retirement news, **John Copeland '68 (CLAS)**, head men’s track coach at the University of Rhode Island, has made it to the finish line. After 39 years on the job, he is retiring. During the span of his career, his track teams won 25 Atlantic 10 Conference track titles and 16 team titles in the New England Championships. Here’s to a good run. ➤ Fairfield, Connecticut, author **Arno B. Zimmer '68 (CLAS)** recently published his sixth novel, a murder mystery titled “Reservoir Man: The Disappearance of Tommy Dwyer.” ➤ **James J. Coffey '69 MBA**, lawyer and professor emeritus of accounting, was appointed to the SUNY Plattsburgh College Council. Coffey currently serves as attorney to the towns of Plattsburgh and Ellenburg, New York.



➤ For the 28th consecutive year, **Edward Nusbaum '70 (CLAS)**, a Westport, Connecticut-based family lawyer, was recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America* for 2022. Congrats! ➤ **Harold J. Pantely '72 (SFA)** and **Susan P. Pantely '72 (SFA), '73 MFA**, who met in 1971 as undergrads when Harold photographed Susan for a show, sent a life update. They live in a house they built together in Torrington, Connecticut, and are both retired after long careers as co-founders of the Clockwork Repertory Theatre in Watertown, Connecticut. He was a producer as well as director, playwright, set designer, stage carpenter, and actor in more than 250 productions. He also wrote and produced 17 plays and was an adjunct drama instructor at UConn Hartford and Storrs. Susan, meanwhile, was the theater’s artistic director as well as costumer, set designer, actress, box office manager, and even puppeteer, putting her experience with former professor Frank Ballard to good use.



➤ “The Saga of Marathon” by **Nick Checker '77 (SFA)** tackles the tale of legendary Greek foot courier, Pheidippides, who ran the very first marathon in 490 B.C. Checker’s novel won an endorsement from 1968 Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot. Checker told us that, being of Greek heritage and a past marathon runner himself, he was the right person to compose this work about Pheidippides. The young courier raced 26 grueling, perilous miles from



➤ **Larry Livernois '73 (CLAS)** reports that classmates had a lot of fun trying to recognize each other at a 50th reunion of students who spent their junior year abroad in France in 1971 — especially since the men back then all had beards and long hair. They shared lots of laughs, memories, and photos at a reunion dinner held last October in Southbridge, Massachusetts, at The Metro Bistrot (*sic*), a French restaurant owned by Larry’s brother and fellow Husky **Jay Livernois '79 (CLAS), '89 MA**.

Joining Larry at the restaurant were **Joe Marlowe '73 (CLAS); Ann (Belter) Torrey '73 (ED); Phil Kenney '73 (CLAS); Margaret (Meg Gilbert) Cook '73 (ED); Karen (Day) Girondel '73 (ED); David Cunningham '73 (ED); Susan (Silverstein) Millner '73 (ED); Courtney Shea '73 (CLAS), '76 JD; Leslie (Yorke) Casanova '73 (CLAS); Jimena Vignola '72 (CLAS), '76 MBA; Connie (Lainas) Carrington '73 (CLAS); Carolyn (Farr) Cimino '70 MA; Karen Sayers '74 (CLAS); and Crisanne Colgan '72 (CLAS), '81 6th year, '84 Ed.D.** Meanwhile, **Donna (Bass) Cohen '73 (CLAS); Judy Kahn '72 (CLAS); Jay (Ron Drybread) MacIntyre '73 (SFA), '74 (CLAS)**, and **Mary Stober '74 (CLAS)** took part via Zoom.

**Benedicte Naudin '08 MA**, the daughter of the late trip director Marie Naudin, also joined the party. Larry says they all agreed that their study abroad experience had significantly changed their lives, noting that seven went on to become French teachers and several others married French spouses. The group also decided to set up a new scholarship to help UConn students studying abroad in France with out-of-pocket expenses. Find more on the French Junior Year Abroad '71-'72 Experiential Scholarship at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

the Battlefield of Marathon to the ancient city-state of Athens on a mission to save the future of democracy from a temperamental tyrant. That stunning achievement was commemorated in the revival of the Olympics in 1896 in Athens, which in turn gave rise to the first Boston

Marathon in 1897. ➤ **Amy Errett '79 (CLAS)** reports that she has joined the board of directors of home insurance group Hippo. She is founder and CEO of the Madison Reed beauty brand, a partner at True Ventures, and a 2021 *Forbes* “50 over 50” lister. (continued on p. 42)



➔ Kudos to **David Samuels '83 (BUS)** who received the H. Goldman Humanitarian Award at the annual meeting of the Charles E. Smith Life Communities, a provider of eldercare services. He has served on its board of governors and as a trustee for nearly two decades. ➔ **Barbara (Solomon) Josselsohn '83 MA** published her newest novel, "The Lily Garden," about a mother and daughter on a college road trip. ➔ **Gretchen Ginnerty '84 (CLAS)** is helping children on two continents in a unique way. Ginnerty, an architect and interior designer in Pipersville, Pennsylvania, helps vulnerable children in South Africa and the United States through The Love Quilt Project, a charity she founded. Raising funds to provide better access to education for South African children who were orphaned or live in foster care, the charity also gives these children quilts made with messages hand-



➔ Best wishes to **Jill Silos '90 (ED)** and Thomas Kincaid, who tied the knot last summer in Edgartown, Massachusetts. She's a professor of history and political science at MassBay Community College and Emerson College in Boston who recently was named editor of the newest edition of "A People and a Nation," a U.S. history textbook. The newlyweds live in Bradford, Massachusetts.

written by American children on fabric squares. In turn, the South African students write messages on quilt squares that are sewn together and given to U.S. children affected by HIV/AIDS. ➔ Business consultant **Michael Caprio '84 (BUS)** was appointed to the board of directors of Elios Therapeutics, an immunoncology company. Caprio, a certified public accountant, was an audit partner with KPMG for 32 years. ➔ **Jill Fitzgerald '86 (PHAR)** made a major contribution to Connecticut's fight against Covid-19. She is collaborating with the Connecticut Department of Public Health to develop a training and certification program to expand the number of Covid-19 immunizers in Connecticut. As a result, more than 800 additional auxiliary health care workers have been certified as Covid-19 immunizers and 45 student pharmacists have been doing contact tracing. She was honored for her efforts in September with the 2021 Bowl of Hygeia award at the Connecticut Pharmacists Association's annual banquet. ➔ Congrats to **Martha Poulter '88 (ENG)**, who was named vice president and chief information officer for Royal Caribbean Group.



➔ **Dat T. Tran '90 (BUS), '93 MBA, '94 JD** was named president of PowerSecure. Tran has more than 27 years of legal and business experience in the energy, utilities, and transportation sectors. ➔ **Larry Davis '90 MA, '01 Ph.D.** reports that he was reappointed to a three-year term as center associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. ➔ **Joseph Azary '91 (CLAS)** has launched a new business, Aztech Regulatory & Quality LLC, providing



➔ From left: **Hanna Basile '20 (NUR)**, **Barbara Graf Larson '56 (CLAS)**, and **Roberta Larson Basile '87 (NUR)** pose for UConn's 2021 public service TV ad with a photo of the entire class of 1921 at what was then Connecticut Agricultural College. Among all students, faculty, and staff pictured were Barbara's father, **Daniel Graf**, and uncle, **William Graf**, both 1921 Agriculture graduates. The family's four UConn generations also includes **Charles Larson '85 (ENG)**, **Mark Basile '87 (ENG)**, **Thomas Basile '16 (CLAS)**, and **Mark Basile II '15 (PHAR), '17 Pharm.D.** Daniel Graf spent the rest of his 89 years in Storrs, working as UConn's Farm Service Manager and as a Mansfield First Selectman. "No doubt, he would be so proud to know that three generations have followed in his footsteps," says Roberta.

consulting services for the medical device industry. ➔ Career and life coach **Mark Danaher '90 (CLAS), '94 MA** is making career moves of his own. He was awarded the National Career Development Association's Fellows Award, one of its highest honors, in recognition of his service as president, trustee, and training and education council member. ➔ **Tom Rizzi '92 (BUS)** was named president and CEO for OTR International in the Greater Atlanta, Georgia, area, having previously served as EVP and COO for JSJ Corporation. ➔ **Thomas Carroll '92 (CLAS), '00 JD** is moving up. He was promoted to principal counsel in ESPN's legal department. ➔ **Ryan King '93 (CLAS)** was hired as director of human resources at Northeast Delta Dental, bringing nearly two decades of experience with him in the same role at both the McLane Middleton Professional

Association in Manchester, New Hampshire, and Pioneer Behavioral Health in Peabody, Massachusetts. ➔ Kudos to **Nicole Hughey '93 (BUS)**, vice president of diversity and inclusion at SiriusXM, who was recognized by the National Diversity Council as one of the Top 50 Leaders in Entertainment. ➔ Also on the move is **Jean Homere '93 (ENG)**. He was appointed as an administrative patent judge at the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, where he hears appeals pertaining to adverse decisions of patent examiners on patent applications in electrical, computing, and business methods. ➔ **Chris Liberti '94 (CLAS)** was promoted to vice president of operations at Eagle Environmental in Terryville, Connecticut. He started at the company 22 years ago as an entry-level technician, performing hazardous building materials inspections (continued on p. 45)

MAKING GOOD

IN THE VACCINE TRENCHES



Not long after graduating with a degree in molecular and cell biology, **Jason Bennett '16 (CLAS)** took a job with the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. As an associate scientist in the company's Clinical Diagnostics and Assay Development Department in Pearl River, New York, he helped develop procedures to measure and test different drugs and biochemical agents. It was interesting if relatively routine work, part of the elaborate process by which big pharma creates, assesses, and brings treatments to market. Then Covid happened and overnight everything changed. Now working as an automation engineer at Foundation Medicine

Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jason talked to us about his earlier experience in the vaccine trenches.

**How did the pandemic affect your work?** When Covid hit, Pfizer quickly made the decision that it was going to be involved in the race for a vaccine. All the different groups within the company basically were told to drop our current projects and spearhead vaccine development. All of a sudden, it became the job of my group to devise some way to test the efficacy of a trial vaccine.

**What was it like to be present at the birth of game-changing mRNA**

**technology?** It was exciting, the fact that what we were doing could change the world. Once the sampling really ramped up for the clinical trial, we were operating from 6 in the morning to 6 at night, and we had groups coming in on Saturday and Sunday. We got it down to where we could do a test in 45 minutes, and we were running 48 samples at a time. At our peak, we did almost 10,000 samples in a week. It was testing, testing, testing.

**Was there a point in the process when you thought, these numbers are starting to look good?** There were times when I was like, "I haven't seen a positive. Are we running placebo? Are these people vaccinated?" You need to get a certain number of positive results, and it was taking us a lot of time. We had to extend our population size because we had not gotten enough positives. So that was a good thing. The vaccine was 95% effective, which was unheard of. But it also meant we couldn't wrap up the testing, because we had not hit the target required by the FDA for approval!

**Why did you choose a career in science?** My passion for science was grounded in the desire to make a difference in people's lives. As an undergrad studying molecular and cellular biology, it can seem like you have two career choices. You can go on to get a Ph.D. and become a scientist. Or you go to medical school. People don't realize there's a giant world of biopharma out there where you can try different things and find where your passion lies — research and development, project management. At Pfizer I realized I could get the satisfaction of helping people in different ways. I just didn't realize my contributions would be part of such a big deal.

**Talk about a Covid story.** Definitely something I'll tell my kids. —KEVIN MARKEY

ALL STAR

## BEND IT LIKE REMBRANDT?



Yatrakis goalkeeping for Greece against Australia during the Athens 2004 Summer Olympic Games.

Maria Yatrakis '02 (SFA) was recruited for the Greek Olympic team while she was playing soccer for UConn. As a host nation for the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece was automatically qualified to have an Olympic women's soccer team even though the country didn't have a particularly strong women's soccer program at the time, she explains. As a result, the team was recruiting Greek Americans to help

fortify the team. Her Husky coach, Len Tsantiris, recommended her for a spot. So Yatrakis, whose parents are of Greek descent, applied for dual citizenship, trained with the team, and headed to Athens.

"It was really exciting, and it was also a culture shock for me," she says. "Being Greek, you grow up with all the cultural aspects of Greeks in America. But then, when you're actually there, it definitely had a different cultural environment. Women's sports in general in Greece weren't really looked at as something women should be doing. It wasn't encouraged," she says, adding that the attitude has changed since then.

Speaking on a Zoom call from Sweden, Yatrakis, 41, is perched on her bed and wearing a navy soccer jacket with her hair pulled back into a ponytail. She says soccer is still a big part of her life and is the reason she now lives in Sweden. "I was playing soccer professionally and then I met my wife and I got stuck here," she says, laughing. "Call it happenstance, call it luck, it was meant to be."

That was 14 years ago. Yatrakis is now fluent in Swedish. She and her wife, Lisa, a civil engineer, and their two young sons live in Karlstad, a pastoral town that reminds her of Storrs. There, she

played on a professional team and is a goalkeeper coach for the local women's and high school teams. In her spare time, she is studying to become an assistant preschool teacher.

Yatrakis grew up in Brooklyn, New York, where her father ran a real estate business and her mother was an academic dean at Columbia University. Her parents always stressed the importance of giving back to the community, she says. And, despite her fond memories of playing on the UConn women's soccer team, when Yatrakis decided recently that she wanted to give back to UConn by sponsoring a scholarship, it was art history that tugged at her heartstrings.

"I have a learning deficit, so school was always very tough for me," she says. "During my freshman year we had to take an art history class. I took Professor [Jean] Givens' class and fell in love with art history. From then on out, I took every class that she taught. She was the type of professor I needed for my learning: very structured and very direct."

"It was important to give back to a program that was very supportive of me," she says. "I just hope the scholarship gives students who may need a little financial help the ability to pursue art history." —GRACE MERRITT

and asbestos abatement monitoring and has been promoted over the years as the company tripled in size. He lives in Southington, Connecticut, with his wife of 22 years, **Lori Lesko '95 (CLAS)**, '97 MA, and daughter, Olivia. ➔ **Michael D. Horan '95 MBA** joined Worcester Polytechnic Institute as executive vice president and chief financial offi-

cer. ➔ **Tracey Scraba '95 (BUS)**, '04 MPH, JD joined Signify Health as senior vice president and deputy general counsel. Previously, she was chief privacy officer at CVS Health, worked for Aetna for 23 years, and served as an adjunct professor at the UConn School of Business. ➔ **Gary F. Borla '97 MPH**, a retired Eversource executive, spent the summer of

2020 volunteering for the U.S. Census Bureau, assisting in census efforts in Connecticut and several other states. ➔ **Sofia Samuels '97 MBA** is making moves. She recently joined Ruan, a family-owned transportation management company based in Des Moines, Iowa, as vice president of marketing and communications. ➔ **Patricia Buxton '97 6th Year** was named executive director of the Lutz Children's Museum in Manchester, Connecticut. She most recently served as an assistant professor of education at the University of Bridgeport and is a member of Vernon Public Schools' Board of Education. ➔ **Robert "Bob" Quinn '98 (CLAS)**, '20 MA was hired as a senior consultant for the Cleveland Browns professional football team. Previously, he served as the general manager for the Detroit Lions. ➔ **Brian M. Annino '99 (CLAS)**, '03 JD is general counsel of the Georgia Student Finance Commission, which administers the state's HOPE Scholarship Program and student loan programs. ➔ It's a long way from Mansfield, Connecticut, to Mansfield, Texas. That's where **Steven T. Rogers '99 MBA** was appointed vice president of business development for Gamma Aerospace.



➔ Congratulations to **Alison Burke '14 (CLAS)** and **Colin Treanor '14 (CLAS)**, who met on the first weekend of college and got married 10 years later in June.

Army Institute of Surgical Research Burn Center in May. Previously, he served as vice chair for logistics in the department of anesthesia at the Brooke Army Medical Center and commander of the NATO Role Two Medical Treatment Facility at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Afghanistan. ➔ **Meghan Wilkosz '01 (PHR)**, '03 Pharm.D. won the 2021 Daniel C. Leone Pharmacist of the Year Award at the Connecticut Pharmacists Association's annual banquet in September. ➔ **Adam Laudati '01 (BUS)**, along with his wife and two sons, has written and self-published a short memoir called "Itchy Brain" about their journey as a family with ADHD. "We did this in hopes of shedding light on what parents go through and how we, as a family, have dealt with ADHD and persevered," he says. "We took a negative stigma, embraced it, and turned it into a positive experience for all." ➔ Speaking of family projects, psychotherapist **Marsha Polanco '02 (CLAS)**, along with her husband, **William Polanco '02 (BUS)**, and their daughter, Millenia Polanco, a senior in UConn's School of Engineering, published a wellness journal, "Sparkle Wellness: A Journal to Practice Gratitude, Reflection & Self Love." ➔ **Matthew Necci '03 (CLAS)**, a partner at Halloran Sage, (continued on p. 48)



➔ Twins **Brent Young Jr. '16 (CAHNR)**, pictured far right, and **Shaylyn Young '15 (CLAS)**, bottom left, are making great career strides just a few years out of college. Brent is a chiropractor at a Veterans Administration medical center in Jacksonville, Florida. He is the first African American man to hold a chiropractic position in any of the 170 VA centers in the U.S. Sister Shaylyn recently published "Sadie and Jace: Make a Friend, Be a Friend," a book that teaches communication skills to young children, with a focus on those on the autism spectrum. A behavioral analyst and counselor at a center for children with autism in Vernon, Connecticut, she sees a need for curriculum materials and hopes to expand "Sadie and Jace" into a series, with videos and songs.

The twins attribute their patient-centered focus to being raised in a compassionate, empathetic household. Their parents **Shanyelle '92 (CLAS)**, pictured front center, a real estate broker, and Brent Sr., back right, an insurance agent, are active community volunteers in South Windsor, Connecticut, where they grew up. Like many twins, they are close and shared a kind of secret language when they were little. "We still communicate nonverbally really well, but I don't know if I can read her mind just yet," Brent says with a smile.

The Youngs are a true-blue family. Younger brother, **Shane '21 (BUS)**, pictured back left, is an investment banking analyst at Goldman Sachs in New York City.

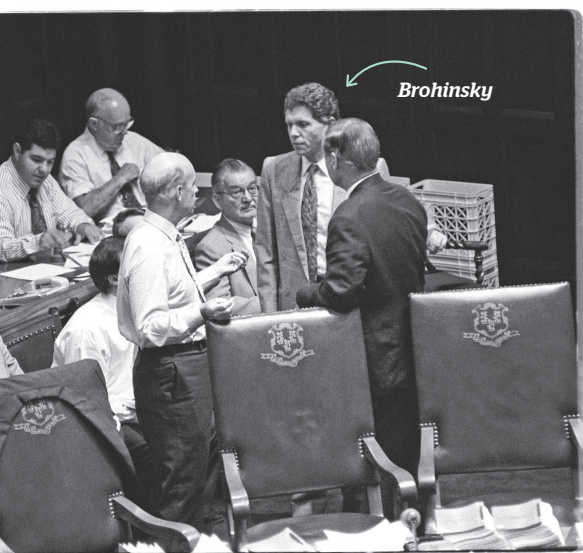


➔ **Daniel Raboin '00 (PHAR)**, '02 Pharm.D. was promoted to lieutenant colonel and assumed duties as chief of anesthesia for the U.S.

KUDOS

### University Medal to Scott Brohinsky '76 JD

Last summer Scott Brohinsky, who served more than two decades at UConn in roles that were critical to its transformation into a national model of excellence in higher education, was awarded the University Medal, UConn's most prestigious honor. Brohinsky led UConn's governmental relations and communications functions for 21 years, and after his 2009 retirement, served as an active volunteer and advocate, including by rallying support for the Next Generation Connecticut initiative approved by the General Assembly in 2013. Brohinsky worked with state legislators, governors, trustees, alumni, philanthropic supporters, and many other constituencies to raise UConn's profile and successfully advocate for more local fiscal and managerial authority. He was a key player in envisioning, formulating, and promoting UConn 2000, the state's massive 10-year, \$1 billion investment program approved in 1995 to overhaul the University's infrastructure; and its second iteration, 21st Century UConn, which was approved in 2002 and carried \$1.5 billion in capital improvement funding. Find more on our website.



Brohinsky



MAKING GOOD

Viva Voce

“You brought me back.” When Carol Krusemark ’90 MA heard those words, she knew she’d gotten another professional singer back to the stage. In this case, the pandemic and lengthy time away from singing had caused the vocalist to lose her original singing style. Krusemark, a voice pathologist and singing specialist at the Mass General Voice Center, used movement and vocal exercises to distract her from the mechanics of singing — which resulted in regained function.

Patients often need voice recovery due to trauma, such as surgical damage or cancer. One young man had been exposed to a noxious gas, which scarred his lungs and vocal folds. “His voice got ‘stuck’ in a strained whisper,” Krusemark says. “This impacted his ability to work, his closest emotional relationships, and how he viewed himself.”

She says the blueprint for finding ways to treat a diverse array of patient needs comes from her time in UConn’s Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences and the general environment on campus.

“If I don’t quite know it yet, I can learn it. I gained that from UConn,” says Krusemark, who started out as a performer. Early in her career she sang with companies like North Bay Opera in California and Pflztheater in Germany. She still sings in community theater and teaches vocal pedagogy at New England Conservatory. “Singing is still a really big part of my life,” she says. “What I like about my job is I’ve been able to combine my love of singing with speech pathology and voice rehabilitation.”

When therapy sessions end, Krusemark wants patients to become their own voice therapists. “My whole job is essentially making sure patients no longer need me — that they can manage their voices without help,” she says. “Five former clients have chosen to pursue degrees in speech therapy with a specialization in voice therapy after our work together. For me, there is no higher compliment.” —BRIAN HUDGINS



LIFE LESSONS

HOW TO RUN A MARATHON — OR A 5K

After her top-10 finish in the 10K final at the 2021 Olympic trials, Emily Durgin ’17 (CLAS), who won nine American Athletic Conference individual championships at UConn while earning her journalism and communications degree, decided to take it up a notch.

She plans to move to marathon distance for a run at the 2024 trials. “I knew going for an Olympic team in 2021 was a bit of a reach,” Durgin says. “I was very happy to finish ninth. It told me — hey, I can make this team. Just have fun with it.”

Moving to marathons will include a buildup period and the Standish, Maine, native is looking at the Boston Marathon as a possible early measuring stick.

However, she says, “Boston can be challenging because of the downhill and uphill. I have to make sure the first one doesn’t beat me up.”

Taking things too fast is a trap both professional and novice runners can easily fall into, says Durgin. She advises

against overtraining and trying to do too much too quickly.

“We all want to get in shape quicker. But over the years, I have definitely learned you have to listen to your body.”

Her best advice is to tackle things gradually, slowly working up the distance on big runs. “You can go from an hour to 90 minutes,” she says. “You want to work up slowly to get used to being on your feet for a long time.”

Another pro tip is to mix it up. Cross-training activities like swimming, kayaking, or golf keep runners fit while giving them a break from training for a 5K, 10K, or marathon.

Durgin is grateful for her time as a Husky team captain.

“UConn taught me how to be a leader to others,” she says. “I have continued to be a leader when it comes to representing my brand, Adidas, and myself. I take a lot of pride in being an example for younger runners wanting to run after college.” —BRIAN HUDGINS

UConn

HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE

humanrights.uconn.edu

THE DODD CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Next Generation of Human Rights at UConn

In recognition of two generations of service from the Dodd family and two decades of transformative philanthropy from the Gladstein family, we have launched the next phase of human rights at UConn. At the Human Rights Institute, we are:

EDUCATING A NEW GENERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS

CONDUCTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH ON PRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO BUILD A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

Senator Chris Dodd welcomes President Joe Biden on stage at the dedication of The Dodd Center for Human Rights on October 15, 2021.

**KEEP THAT NEWS COMING! WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

➔ To submit a Class Note, email: [alumni-news@uconnalumni.com](mailto:alumni-news@uconnalumni.com)

or write: Alumni News & Notes, UConn Foundation, 2384 Alumni Drive, Unit 3053, Storrs, CT 06269

➔ Alumni obituaries can be found at [foundation.uconn.edu/obituaries](http://foundation.uconn.edu/obituaries). To submit an obituary, please use the email and postal addresses above.

Submissions may be edited for clarity or length.

**TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS**

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

was named to the Best Lawyers in America 2022 list. ➔ **Christina (Nikki) Kupec '03 (ED), '04 MA**, an educator at Martin Elementary in Manchester, Connecticut, was named Teacher of the Year for Manchester Public Schools.



➔ Cool job alert: **George Philbrick '10 (ENG)**

recently graduated United States Naval Test Pilot School and became a project officer on a team that researches, develops, tests, and evaluates all Navy and Marine Corps unmanned aircraft systems.

➔ Kudos to **Brian Hendrickson '10 6th Year**, who was appointed superintendent of Salem Public Schools in Connecticut.

➔ **Adam Behling '12 (ED), '13 MA**, a seventh-grade math teacher at John F. Kennedy Middle School in Enfield, Connecticut, was chosen as Enfield's Teacher of the Year. ➔ **Justin Paluch '12 (BUS, ED)** was hired as coordinator of competitive sports for UConn Recreation. Welcome home!



➔ **Kelley Huber '15 (CLAS)** and **Jonathan Kulakofsky '15 (CLAS)** were married in August on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. The bride was given away by her parents, including **John Huber '80 (BUS)**. The couple met at *The Daily Campus*, where the groom hired the bride to join the photography staff. ➔ **John Ewen '16 (CLAS)** was hired as director of athletic communications at Manhattanville College in Harrison, New York, in August. ➔ Colleen McGuire, former executive director of the



➔ When **Bruce Berger '72 (CLAS)** was an undergraduate at UConn, he wrote his final exam for analytical chemistry in the form of a short story. Some might have taken that as a sign that they should become a writer. But Berger decided a career as a trial attorney might be a little more stable.

"It was only when I started thinking about retirement and what did I want to do after my law practice when it occurred to me that I wanted to pursue the writing that had been at the back of my mind for 40 years," he says.

He enrolled in an MFA program in creative writing at American University. Now, at 71, he has published his second novel, "The Music Stalker." Set in mid-1970s New York City, the story is about a child piano prodigy who fears being stalked by a murderous fan. "The Music Stalker" is the prequel to his first published novel, "The Flight of the Veil," a story touching on the Holocaust in Greece.

Berger has already started writing his third novel and is pulling together a book of poems he has published over the years in various literary magazines. In addition to writing, he plays in a senior baseball league, spends time with his wife, Laurie, at their Silver Spring, Maryland, home, takes care of his two grandchildren, and teaches creative writing as an adjunct professor at American University.

"When you retire, you need to fill up your day somehow," he says. "I didn't want to be a retiree and just sit around doing nothing."

Mission accomplished. —GRACE MERRITT

UConn School of Business, teamed up with **Julia Winer '16 MBA** and **Christopher Tucker '18 MBA** to found Silver Fern Healthcare in Hartford. The company's mission is to transform care for people with chronic disease by focusing on whole person care that addresses the biological, psychological, and social issues impacting care management and prevention.

➔ *Felicidades* to **Andrew Almazan '18 MA**, who was given the Emerging Leader in Gifted Education award by the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. The award is given to an individual in the first 10 years of their career who has impacted teaching, research, and/or advocacy on gifted education

in their country and shown outstanding promise for leadership. He works at Centro de Atención al Talento, Mexico.

➔ Kudos to **Gabrielle Julia Bachoo '19 (ED, CLAS), '20 MA**, a fifth-grade teacher at Governor William Pitkin School in East Hartford, Connecticut. She was recognized by the National Council of Teachers of English as a 2021 Early Career Educator of Color.



➔ **Gail Lanza '20 Ed.D.** was named executive director and CEO of Ben Bronz Academy in West Hartford, Connecticut.



Peter Morenus

**JOB ENVY**

**So Handsome**

**LaShawnda Phillips '20 (RHSA), '22 (CAHNR)** says her 33-year-old horse, Handsome, is a big reason for her growing career at the Hartford therapeutic riding center Ebony Horsewomen. It wasn't love at first sight, though. "I was terrified, very terrified," admits Phillips. "He was considered an aggressive horse, but maybe that was the reason that we connected, because I was a little aggressive at home and I didn't like that. And I guess he knew."

When the two met, the pressures of school and family life were taking a toll on Phillips, the second oldest of nine children whose mother was battling mental health issues. "I was shy and nervous, I didn't like to share my struggles at home and my background, so I would just keep it to myself," she says.

The two ended up being a perfect match — behind Handsome's harsh exterior hid an encouraging, empathetic personality. "He's the one, every time I'm down, he pinpoints it right away," notes Phillips. "He was the one that taught me how to be OK."

She pays that forward heading the Leadership Academy & Riding Team and Weekend Academy programs at Ebony Horsewomen, therapeutic riding courses tailored for older and younger students respectively. She plans to stay there while pursuing her bachelor's in animal science, noting that the center was a significant part of why she was able to apply to UConn and get her associate's degree. "I don't think I would've made it to college if I didn't get involved," she says. —MARIA MANTAS '22 (CLAS)

👉 How did Phillips first meet horses in Hartford? And how exactly did Handsome teach her "to be OK?" Find that and much more at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).



**THIS JUST IN**

Want to support alumni-owned businesses where you live? Or let fellow alums know about your own business? Now it's as simple as visiting the global site: [foundation.uconn.edu/alumni-owned-businesses](http://foundation.uconn.edu/alumni-owned-businesses).

**TOM'S  
TRIVIA**

**CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!**

Go to [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu) or p. 48 to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

- 1. By late March 1920, Route 195 between Storrs and Willimantic had been closed to automobile traffic for five weeks because of winter storms, prompting then-President Charles Beach (of Beach Hall fame) to do what?**

A: Call on the governor to send the National Guard  
B: Shovel snow  
C: Enlist a team of sled dogs to transport students back and forth  
D: Cancel the spring semester

- 2. A new monument in front of Greer Field House honors the 50 (and counting) alumni and coaches who have competed in the Olympics and Paralympics. Which of these alumni Olympians competed in both the Summer and Winter games?**

A: Melissa Gonzalez '11 (ED)  
B: Sara Whalen '98 (CLAS)  
C: Svetlana Abrosimova '01 (BUS)  
D: Phylcia George '10 (CLAS)

- 3. In 2022, the Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center celebrates its 50th anniversary. What was the first name of the center when it was established in 1972?**

A: La Casa Borinqueña  
B: The Puerto Rican Student Movement (PRSM)  
C: The Latin American Center  
D: El Centro



*Students on the Great Lawn in 1944*

- 4. In 1962, Elizabeth T. Noftsker, dean of women, wrote to the UConn Security Department (precursor to the UConn Police) asking them to enforce rules which she felt students were breaking too often. Which of these activities did Noftsker say was acceptable?**

A: Women wearing slacks on Sundays  
B: Students lying down on the grass around campus  
C: Holding hands  
D: Smoking cigarettes in class