

UConn

A photograph of a man in a red and white historical uniform, possibly a British Redcoat, sleeping on a bus. He is wearing a red coat with white lapels and a white waistcoat. The bus is yellow and has "C & W TRANS." written on its side. Other passengers in similar uniforms are visible in the background.

MAGAZINE

FALL 2026

WHO IS AMERICA?

A UConn journalism professor
crosses the country to find out

SNAP!

A new climbing class at the Rec Center? School of Engineering students doing solar panel research? In fact, it's the iconic Gampel Pavilion roof undergoing a full replacement, part of a two-phase building renovation that includes upgrades for players, coaches, doctors, refs — and fans, who will find upgraded concessions that promise to alleviate those octopus lines outside the bathrooms.





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UConn professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Steven G. Smith crosses the country to find out. Above, from his series, a young woman waits for a Lunar New Year celebration in Alhambra, California, to begin.

20 THE SEVEN WONDERS OF WALDEN POND

Please join us in Concord, Massachusetts, for an eye-opening trip around the kettle lake that Henry David Thoreau made famous more than 170 years ago.

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In his 13th major league season, UConn's most successful baseball player is still having fun.

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To really know America, argues history professor Micki McElya, you need to know *Miss America*.

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UConn Now

Breaking down the politics of pop culture from Taylor and Olivia to "Star Wars" and "Sinners," ruling the LA art scene, tagging tiny butterflies, and growing grand oak trees.

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UConn Nation

Teaching at Palisades High after the fire, advocating for animals, investing in yourself, a bloom and bake shop, a baby named Storrs, and much more.



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Page 2 Steven G. Smith; Concord Free Public Library; Peter Morenus; Alix Kates Shulman, Alix Kates Shulman Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; Peter Oumanski

Job Envy Peter Morenus

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FROM THE EDITOR



Smith in
Lancaster
County,
Pennsyl-
vania.

WE THE PEOPLE

The death of his father is one of the things that propelled recently retired professor Steven G. Smith to his latest photojournalism project, a study of people across this country and what unites them that was partially funded by the Carnegie Foundation. "My dad always inspired me to be civil and not to judge other people," says Smith, who watched his father in his recent final years "really wrestle with all of this incivility."

The way for Smith to better understand what was behind the divisiveness in this country was second nature. "Photography and storytelling, journalism in general, does that for me," he says. "It's an opportunity to learn about things that I need to learn about."

Smith spent a good chunk of his childhood in Lagos, Nigeria, attending the international school where his father taught. Surrounded by kids from dozens of countries, he was fascinated by the different cultures, and his dad consistently urged him "to see beyond those cultural and tribal judgments that pop into our minds at the click of a finger." But there was another equally important piece of how his dad raised him in Lagos that helped nurture the Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist. "It was his adventurous spirit, you know? I'm in Lagos, Nigeria, a very big city that was just coming out of the Biafran War. And I played street soccer. I could have been one of those kids that was inside, protected because your parents worried about you. It was a judgment on his part to let me experience life."

His dad never stopped reinforcing the same overarching themes "of not judging, not being condescending, of reaching out, helping, interacting," says Smith.

It's a formula he recognizes in all great reporters and photographers. "We want to earn people's respect, to earn the right to tell somebody's story. And to tell their story well at a high level, you need to have rapport. And rapport can't happen with judgment or condescension."

A motto Smith has lived by since he first heard it at age 25 comes from the late social documentary photographer Sebastião Salgado, who said, "Photos aren't taken, they're given."

"And stories aren't taken, they're given," adds Smith.

Lisa Stiepock



FEEDBACK

We want to hear from you! Please share thoughts, insights, discrepancies, recollections, photos — and how’s your Tom’s Trivia win-loss percentage coming? Post to our website at magazine.uconn.edu, email the editor at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu, or send by regular mail to UConn Magazine Letters, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06269-3144.

Here’s a sampling of web, social media, mailed, and emailed comments on our last issue, edited for clarity and length. Find more and join the conversation at magazine.uconn.edu.

In Love With Lizzie’s

➡ I was a habitual patron of Lizzie’s outside Arjona from like 2001 to 2008. Loved reading this in the magazine and seeing it here! She made special vegetarian nachos when I was in my no-meat decade.
Craig Albert ’09 Ph.D.
Augusta, Georgia via LinkedIn

➡ I still miss that brisket sandwich.
Micah Nemerever ’13 MA
Greater Seattle, Washington via LinkedIn



Thank you Everyone for the Great comments about the UConn Magazine Article!! What an HONOR!!! I will be back on Campus soon, in our original location on Whitney Road!!!! FINALLY!!! Enjoy SUMMER!!!!❤️❤️❤️❤️

➡ Back where you belong!
Ali Stevens
via Facebook

Husky Pride



➡ I saw an article you published a year or two ago featuring alum Brian Frencese. After the UConn athletic department decided to replace Gampel’s floor after the 2022–23 season, he won a floorboard in an auction and had it framed.
I connected with him, and he said the auctions were over, but he put me in touch with the company that did the auctions. They still had pieces that weren’t yet used or sold, so I purchased two — the “X,” where

players checked in by the scorer’s table, and the “H” from “Huskies” that was on the sideline. I got the “H” made into a coffee table about a year ago and just had the “X” framed, combining it with signed jerseys I’ve collected over the years.
Andy Goldstrom
’87 (BUS), ’90 MBA
Atlanta, Georgia



➡ Having graduated from UConn in 1956, I was thrilled to be back on campus in 2006 to celebrate my 50th reunion with several of my fraternity brothers.
Sad to say I won’t be able to make the 70th on campus, nor will most of my contemporaries, but as you can see from the photo, I’m still a Husky and proclaim it proudly to all of South Florida!
Roger Shatanof ’56 (CLAS)
Coral Gables, Florida

GameDay Conor Is Everywhere
➡ GameDay Conor (Conor Geary) is a treasure who lights up and makes every venue he’s a part of special and so very much more enjoyable! It’s easy to see why he’s so successful and in demand!
Tony Retartha ’63 (CLAS)
Avon, Connecticut

➡ One of the most recognizable faces in the whole state.
[@just_michelle_o](#) via Instagram

History Lesson
➡ At graduation season this year, as I pored over the many UConn related social media feeds I follow, a wonderful story from my days working at UConn came back to me. One of the best decisions I ever made as associate director of University Communications was hiring Meg Malmborg to be the director of the newly created Philip and Christine Lodewick Visitors Center. Meg and I worked closely to build the visitors center program — though Meg was always the visionary, as you’ll see.
The story of Jonathan’s shiny nose goes like this: One day I was lamenting to Meg the fact that over its history UConn hadn’t established many long-standing traditions, as some other flagship public universities had done. Always one to seek opportunity, tackle challenges, and rectify problems, Meg responded to me, saying something along the lines of, “All traditions have an origin story. Someone started doing something that some others repeated, and it just lasted.” With that, she suggested that she and I join the next tour leaving the visitors center.

We walked along with the tour guests, listening at each stop to the remarkably well-trained tour guide. When we got to the stop at the statue of Jonathan in front of Gampel Pavilion, Meg moved to the front of the group. When the tour guide finished her remarks, Meg spoke up. “You know,” she told the guests, “at UConn we know choosing a college can be a difficult task. You will need all the help you can get and so we invite our guests to rub the nose of Jonathan the Husky for good luck in their search process.” Every person in the tour group stepped up to Jonathan and rubbed his

nose. This tradition continued day after day, tour after tour.
When we started, Jonathan’s nose had a dull finish consistent with the rest of the statue. Today, that nose shines a brilliant bronze color from the tens of thousands of hands that have helped to enshrine this (now) long-standing tradition. I’ve rubbed it myself whenever I’ve returned to campus. I’ve smiled at the many, many photos I’ve seen online of people stepping up to rub Jonathan’s nose. Each time, I think back to my walk with Meg and the single event that started what has become a powerful UConn tradition.
John M. Barry ’82 (CLAS), ’84 MA
Richmond, Virginia

Suggestion Box
➡ Hello to all of you. You do a fantastic job with the magazine. I love each and every issue. I only wish there were more issues to read. I have a request for the next issue: Can you give Azzi Fudd a shoutout for being the first rookie in the W to win the 3-point contest? She is amazing and so graceful in all aspects of the game.
Roger Bushhorn
Shelbyville, Indiana

Corrections
UConn DNA
➡ I love the story you wrote about Leonard and his family — strong UConn ties continuing through the generations! You mentioned the number of commencement ceremonies we have as 19, but we currently have 16. If you counted the listings on the schedule, three are duplicates because they include both bachelor’s and master’s degrees, so they are listed twice — once in each section.
Lauren Schaller ’05 (CLAS)
University Events and Conferences

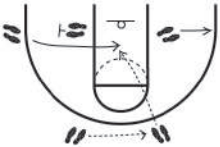
Class Notes


➡ Norma Spector’s daughter wrote to tell us we’d spelled her mother’s name Wegner as Wedner, and that Norma (Wegner) Spector ’55 Ph.D. had turned 102. She shared this photo of her mom, too.

CONNECTICUT STATE BIRD*

Sue Bird

Vitrix canis

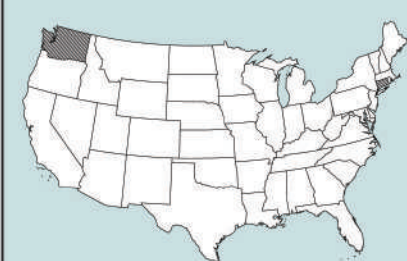


Hunting: Groups of five can often be found working cooperatively to vanquish prey — exhibiting outsized speed, agility, and vertical leaping.

Eastern Variety Known for red and blue striping along sides paired with a distinctive red and blue mark at mid-chest and -back that resembles the numeral “10.”

Western Variety Primarily dark green with yellow stripes along sides paired with a distinctive bright yellow mark at mid-chest and -back that resembles the numeral “10.”

Identification: Distinguished by size and wingspan. Eastern subspecies known for blue, red, and white plumage, while the Western is primarily green with bright mottled yellow markings. Both varieties are brown-capped and gold-crowned.



Range: Unusual discontinuous bicoastal range often found in the northeastern and northwestern corners of the U.S. Also spotted historically in Russia. Sightings in Athens, Beijing, London, Rio, Tokyo, and, recently, Berlin.

Habitat: Primarily found in deconstructed hardwood forests.

Prey: Chiefly leprechauns. In recent years, evolving to gamecocks. Hunts in formations of five.

Vocalization: Clear, distinct, repeated *kutkut*; contact call is a loud emphatic *eymopen*.

Behavior: Semi-flightless bird that can leap great distances to protect and retain possession of territory; known for speed and agility, aggressive territorial disputes, and cooperative flock behavior. Comfortable in a storm. Reacts adversely to whistles, especially those from birds of black and white plumage; recently has been associated with the peacock in mixed-species flocks.

Length: 69"	Wingspan: 69"	Weight: 2,400 oz
Social: Small flocks, cooperative groups of 12–15		Status: Extremely rare

*every March, with Jordan Hawkins

Rochester at his LA studio with one in a series of portraits of friends.

CHECKING IN WITH

SOMETHING BORROWED

The artist turns a canvas toward the camera on a Zoom call.

It's a young man in profile, a deep red cap densely pinned with medals, coins, and small charms — a fish, a flag, what might be a passport stamp — a yellow bandana wrapped beneath the brim. He's dressed in a deep blue satin jacket, a strap crossing his chest, a trumpet resting against his shoulder, its bell pointing skyward.

"I just finished this last week," says Jacob Rochester '16 (SFA) from his downtown Los Angeles studio.

The young man is borrowed from a 19th-century French painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose 1868 portrait of an Ottoman mercenary soldier hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rochester transformed it using his own process: painting it first in black and white, then building up layers of glazed color to give the finished work what he calls a "jewel-like quality." He added the trumpet. The cap. His own contemporary point of view. It's the piece he's proudest of.

When Rochester was in kindergarten, his teacher called his mother, astonished that at five he'd sketched a drum set in three dimensions — cylinders carefully shaded into snares and toms — a technique his father had taught him at home. His mother wasn't surprised. She'd watched her son draw since before he could talk in full sentences.

Now 31, he's fresh off a trip to Mexico City, still turning the "walkable, art-driven city" over in his head. He's also recently back from Paris, where Construct, the clothing label he founded, showed for the first time at a fashion-week showroom.

Wearing a black T-shirt with white "USA" lettering and Olympic rings, he gives a studio tour, laptop in hand, revealing an expansive warehouse flooded with afternoon light and a lounge-like seating area. Large and small paintings hang on the walls. A

He taught himself tags, what he calls "bombs," from grainy internet photos of artists working in Berlin and New York. He also spent hours copying comic books and video games, learning about anatomy and how to draw figures. He filled sketchbooks with his own versions of the characters. "I'd put Hulk in street clothes I was interested in wearing," he says, smiling.

Applying to art schools went less smoothly. "I applied to Pratt — got rejected. I applied to RISD — got rejected," he says. "Where else? I forgot the other one."

UConn was the exception: accepted with a scholarship. "I'm so thankful for that," he says, "because if I'd gone to Pratt or Parsons or RISD, who knows if I would've gotten to Central Saint Martins [for a graphic design course in London] or met the people I met."

He credits professors Mary Banas, Mark Zurolo, and the late Edwin Yegir with shaping how he thinks. He says his classmates — like his friend Renald Louissaint '17 (SFA), who just helped redesign Instagram's logo — were "like a family. We all grew from each other."

Shortly after graduating, he moved to L.A. The adjustment wasn't instant, but once he found his footing, commercial work followed, with several marquee clients: Nike. Apple. Kendrick Lamar. The Tupac Estate. Fine art took hold later with a 2018 painting referencing "Bloodsport," a movie his father often had playing in the background when he was growing up. "I hate to say 'pivot,' because I've been painting and drawing my whole life," he says. "But that's when I started taking it more seriously." —TOMMI LEWIS TILDEN



Rochester's Pride: "Boy with Trumpet," 2026. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.

clothing rack sits beside unfinished canvases. A synth and turntable mark off his music space. Behind him, a minimalist sculpture turns out to be a metal grid holding dozens of tubes of paint, each suspended in its own square.

Rochester grew up in Bloomfield, Connecticut, in a house he describes as "vibrating with creative energy." His mother is a figurative painter; his father played drums in a reggae band. Rochester learned to play the kit himself, drumming for his church.

Graffiti was an early obsession.



OFF CAMPUS

WINGING IT

This summer, as part of her master’s research, Natural Resources and the Environment graduate student **Charlotte Brennan ’26 MS**, oversaw a team of researchers doing daily capture-mark-resight research at the Mansfield Hollow Restoration Area and UConn’s Hillside Environmental Education Park, often called HEEP.

The group sought the rare frosted elfin butterfly, a species in decline to the point of being considered for federal protection under the Endangered Species Act due to factors like habitat loss and fragmentation.

“They’re called ‘elfin’ because they’re so little,” says Brennan. “Spotting them is hard, but this is what we do every single day, and we get used to it. We mark them and then release them from the net. Sometimes, after we release them, they crawl on us and hang out.”

Work to recover the species in Connecticut is focused on habitat restoration and habitat expansion. “We’re trying to figure out where the species lives throughout the state, how far they can move, and how we can expand their habitat. Since habitat loss is the main threat, expanding their habitat is the main way that we’re going to help them,” says Brennan, who credits the group of researchers, including talented undergraduate students, for the team’s success in locating the butterflies.

One of those students, **Kayla Gilbertie ’27 (CAHNR)**, is shown at left at Mansfield Hollow with the frosted elfin marked 1 Blue, 1 Green, 2 Red. “The four dots are an individual identifier,” says Brennan. “Every butterfly gets a different code so we can track its individual movements and life history.”

Find more on this story by *Elaina Hancock* with video by *Sydney Herdle* at s.uconn.edu/elfins.

UConn TALKS

On methods of “tanmaxxing” to achieve the darkest tan possible, like lying outside during peak UV index levels and using tanning oils:

“That is absolutely not recommended. That is the exact opposite of what we love to see people doing.”

Dermatology professor Dr. Hao Feng, CT Insider, June 16, 2026

On watching “The Lion King” every morning for a year as a UConn student:

“I was a little too old. I probably should have been going to class.”

Actor Bobby Moynihan ’99 (SFA), People magazine, March 1, 2026

On the upsides of his hemp-derived plastic:

“Because this plastic is made of CBD, you could upcycle and sell it, converting it back to CBD.”

Chemistry professor Greg Sotzing, Forbes, May 18, 2026

On the quick spread of conspiracy theories after shots were fired at the 2026 White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner:

“Getting out the truth and establishing facts and reliable information takes time. But our audiences really don’t have that kind of patience.”

Journalism professor Amanda Crawford, The New York Times, April 26, 2026

On the most underrated city she’s ever been to:

“Storrs, Connecticut.”

Azzi Fudd ’25 (CLAS), ’26 MBA, in a WNBA social media video, July 20, 2026

On the study he co-authored that calculates there are up to 20 million insects on Earth, not 6 million as previously thought:

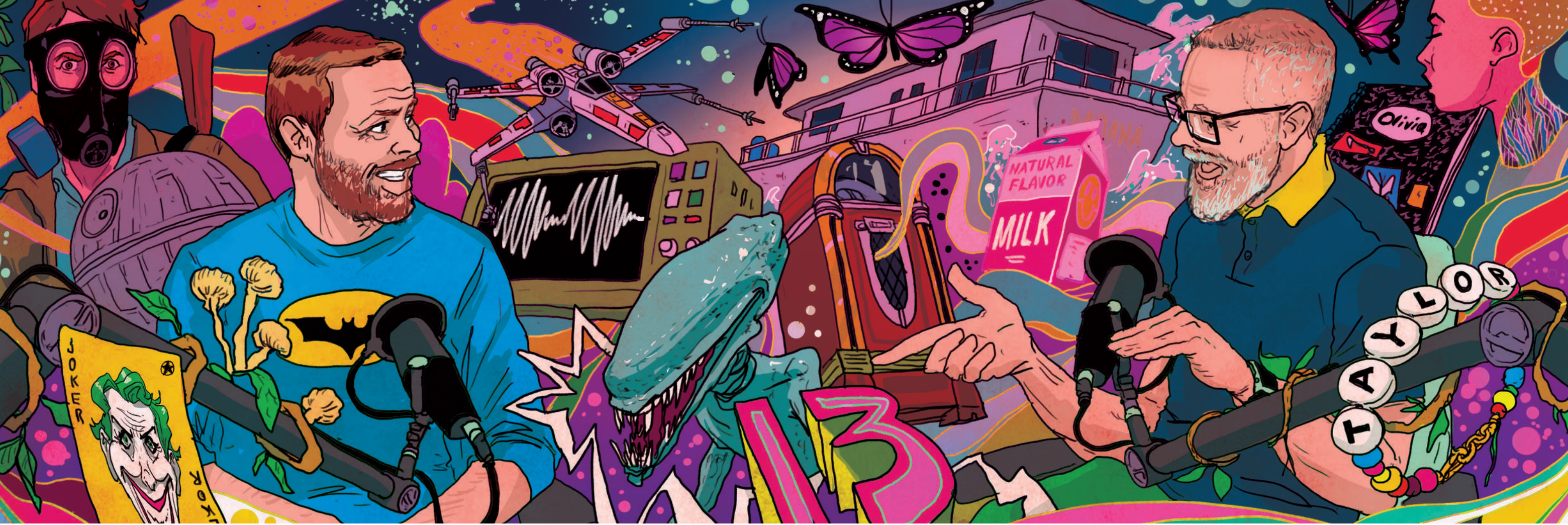
“The statistical challenge is estimating not just what you’ve seen, but how much you’re missing.”

Ecology and evolutionary biology Professor Emeritus Robert Colwell, Popular Science, June 29, 2026

On whether we really need 64 ounces of water per day:

“Hydration is highly individual.”

Korey Stringer Institute COO and kinesiology professor Rebecca Stearns, Inc. magazine, July 31, 2026



ON CAMPUS

POPPING OFF

“Olivia Rodrigo is one of the premier swearers in contemporary popular culture” might not be the type of analysis expected from top poli-sci profs, but it’s the flavor that UConn’s Stephen Dyson and Jeffrey Dudas are dishing out regularly with their deep-dive podcast, “The Pop Culture Professors.”

Perhaps more expected, their thought-provoking discussions also tease out political or philosophical themes in everything from “Sinners” to “Interstellar,” “Star Wars: Andor” to “The Last of Us,” and Taylor Swift to last year’s Oasis reunion tour.

Since their August 2022 debut episode, “The Weird Politics of ‘Star Wars,’” Dyson and Dudas have attracted 2,500-plus YouTube subscribers, plus thousands of listeners on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

The show’s top four most-viewed YouTube episodes all discuss “Andor,” with the most popular at 25,000 views. Why? Dyson and Dudas note that not only was the show itself about a political revolution (plus a ratings smash), but the professors intentionally released their analyses the day after new installments dropped on Disney+.

The quick turnaround of the medium allows them to participate in up-to-the-minute conversations on pop culture happenings, a stark contrast to the cadence of peer-reviewed publications or their forthcoming book analyzing pop culture, inspired by the podcast’s success.

“You work on an article for a year or more, then another six months to a year to get feedback from a journal, then longer than that before it hopefully starts to find purchase among the public,” says Dyson, who is director of graduate studies for UConn’s poli-sci department. “But with videos that reach at least a certain number of views, you

tend to get a certain amount of comments. Some thoughtfully disagreeing with you! But most of these people aren’t in academia. That’s not something you find much with academic writing.”

The professors bring not only differing specialties to the table but also, Dudas notes, differing tastes.

“Stephen maintains a notion of higher and lower levels of culture, that we should focus on ‘prestige’ storytelling, while I’m of the mind that all culture has something to offer, even the kinds of movies TBS or TNT airs on Saturday mornings,” Dudas explains, citing their episode on reality television. “Even stuff that doesn’t tend to be self-consciously ‘important’ nevertheless contributes something meaningful to a broader conversation, what society is saying about who they are and what they believe.”

New audience members can dive into the podcast by finding an episode on a favorite movie, album, or show — or, if looking for just one installment, Dyson and Dudas cite as a personal favorite

their compare-and-contrast of 1986’s “Top Gun” and 2022’s sequel, “Top Gun: Maverick.”

“Jeff had gone in thinking the original was this awful pro-war propaganda piece, but I convinced him [during the episode] that it was this anti-war and anti-institution piece, about a young man getting bullied by ‘the state,’” Dyson explains.

“Those two movies, particularly the first one, are seen as about as mainstream pop culture as you can get, not saying anything of particular subtlety,” Dudas elaborates. “That episode was when I started to realize what we could do with broader perspectives on these texts.” —JESSE RIFKIN ’14 (CLAS)

POP QUIZ

How many of the 16 pop culture references in the above illustration can you identify? Take our quiz at s.uconn.edu/popquiz.

The Pop Culture Professors on:

Whether “Star Wars” Is Science Fiction: “We’re told in the opening crawl that this is a story that takes place in a galaxy far away, a long time ago, so in principle, as the audience we should be primed for a backward-looking tale. The problem, it seems to me, is almost everything we see onscreen is high-tech. ... Lucas is trying to have it both ways.”

“Sinners”: “The nature of a vampire is that it offers seductive ... benefits. ... In the same way that getting rich through capitalism offers you very seductive, real benefits. These are genuine goods, but are they the best thing that’s available? Are they the truest thing that’s available? Or are they, in the end, ‘the vampire’s promise,’ which is the whispering siren song?”

Taylor Swift’s Endorsement of Kamala Harris in the 2024

Presidential Election: “There isn’t really much evidence that would suggest that any kind of endorsement, even the endorsement of someone as popular and prominent as Taylor Swift, is going to be a meaningful entry into the dynamics of the race.”

Post-9/11 Parallels in “The Dark Knight”: “A sort of great play is made of Batman ... turning everyone’s cell phone into a microphone and a camera. Of course, we actually know [now] that was happening, that was what the National Security Agency was doing, and this was not at all a fantasy situation. It’s a situation that existed then, and I think we have to assume exists now.” [Professor Dyson turns to face the camera and waves.] “Hello, President Biden.”

TOM'S TRIVIA

IT'S QUIZ TIME

Challenge yourself, then see page 48 or s.uconn.edu/fall26 to find out if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

1. Though little noticed at the time, a 1976 event signaled the start of a momentous change at UConn. What was it?
A: Women's basketball became Division I
B: The first student thesis was written on a computer
C: The last commencement ceremony was held at Hawley Armory
D: UConn dining halls stopped serving beer
2. In March 2009, for the first time, Homer Babbidge Library patrons could borrow what item — inside the library only?
A: A laptop computer
B: An iPod
C: A portable document scanner
D: A pair of headphones
3. In 2017, about 300 students at UConn Stamford moved into residential housing, the first time such accommodations were available at a regional campus since 1950, when a temporary campus established in the wake of World War II closed. In what town was that campus located?
A: Bridgeport
B: New Haven
C: Milford
D: New London
4. June 1995 saw two major UConn milestones. One was the signing into law of the UConn 2000 legislation that supercharged the University's transformation into a top public university. What was the other?
A: The first residence halls connected to the internet via ethernet cable rather than modem
B: The debut of Husky Tracks ice cream
C: The first visit to the White House by a UConn basketball team
D: The closing of Fairfield Way to auto traffic

5. Thomas Worthley, a UConn Extension professor of forest sustainability, is leading a project that involves distributing about 100 white oak seedlings — including some collected from the scion of the famous Charter Oak in East Haddam — across the state to highlight the important historic, economic, and ecological role of the white oak tree. A previous tree that came from the Charter Oak scion stood at UConn until 1938. What happened?
A: It was mistakenly chopped down by an overzealous forestry class
B: It was removed to make room for a new parking lot
C: It was uprooted during a hurricane
D: It caught fire during a student prank and had to be chopped down

WORTHLEY'S OAKS

Last fall, longtime UConn Extension professor Thomas Worthley collected many acorns from a few old white oak trees, most notably a scion of Connecticut's legendary Charter Oak, which was planted at the Nathan Hale Schoolhouse in East Haddam in 1902. From those acorns, 100 newly germinated seedlings now sprout in black plastic pots under wood-and-wire frames behind the Horsebarn Hill Sciences Complex. Worthley is working with the nonprofit Connecticut Humanities to distribute these seedlings to community partners around the state to mark our country's 250th anniversary. "Here I am," says Worthley, "a white-haired gentleman. I'll never see the tree that's being planted today that will grow for another 250 years, but I care very deeply that it happens."

Find more of this story by Jaclyn Severance with video by Izzy Harris at s.uconn.edu/oaks.





WHO IS AMERICA?

WORDS AND PICTURES BY STEVEN G. SMITH

Driving through rural Pennsylvania in June, Steven G. Smith debated whether to stop to photograph an Amish farmer. The man was walking his horse on a lead, the light just perfect from the setting sun — but he would never allow a photo, Smith thought.

“I drove a half mile past and hit the brakes, put it in reverse, got out with my camera, and asked him, ‘Can I take a picture of you walking your horse?’” recounts Smith, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist who retired as a UConn journalism professor this summer. “He goes, ‘Oh yeah. You betcha.’ And we just continued with a really wonderful conversation about how he was training his horse to be on the road.

“He was fascinating,” Smith says. “The sad part about stereotypes is we so quickly write people off, and we miss out on these opportunities to learn from them and to enrich our lives. People want to tell their story.”

For the past three years, Smith has visited 42 states to document American life today. Named an Andrew Carnegie Fellow for 2025, Smith dedicated his fellowship year and \$200,000 grant to completing the project he called “These United States.”

“It’s such a negative time right now politically, I just wanted to bring it back to humanity. That’s really all I wanted to focus on,” says Smith. “There’s such a depth to our culture in the sense that we can go to all these different places and see vastly different people. That’s a richness we don’t want to miss out on.

“My hope is that the work encourages viewers to look a little longer and perhaps see one another with greater understanding and empathy.”

Though he snapped more than 20,000 frames, Smith has been curating his work along the way for a forthcoming photography book, museum exhibitions, and a digital multimedia experience. We asked him to pare way down, choosing one photograph that challenges a stereotype, one that surprised him, and one that represents what it means to be an American today. Here’s what he had to say about the choices.

STEREOTYPE BUSTER

*“His First Rodeo”
Chama, New Mexico
August 10, 2025*

Matthew Sanchez, 3, of Cuba, New Mexico, prepares to compete in barrel racing at a rodeo in Chama. His brother Joseph, 7, waits nearby on horseback.

Documentary photography begins with careful observation. I am always searching for that elusive moment of visual poetry, when gesture, light, and composition come together, even while knowing there is no such thing as a perfect photograph. In the



end, authenticity matters more than perfection.

One of the great gifts of this project has been learning that every community carries stories that challenge our assumptions. In the American Southwest, I was often reminded of the phrase “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,” a reflection of the region’s deep cultural and historical roots that long predate contemporary borders and belonging.

There is something beautiful about watching two young cowboys waiting patiently for their turn. This ordinary moment quietly brings together family, culture, and tradition. It reminds me that American identity is neither singular nor fixed. It is layered, evolving, and carried forward across generations.

MOST SURPRISING

“Cardettes”

Washington, D.C.

July 4, 2026

While working near the U.S. Capitol, I met a group of young women from Trinity Valley Community College in Athens, Texas, who were taking a picture in front of the building. They had traveled by bus to march in Washington, but shortly after arriving, they learned the National Independence Day Parade had been canceled because of extreme heat and humidity.

Photography is one of the ways I make sense of the world. I try to observe quietly and remain open to the small lyrical moments of everyday life. I feel paying attention is a form of respect, and often the photographs that stay with me are the ones I never expected to make.

This was not the photograph I expected to make that day, but it became a quiet story about perseverance and making the best of an unexpected situation. It also reminds me that American culture often lives in the gatherings, in the small moments of tradition and shared experience.

BONUS — ON OUR FRONT COVER

“The British Are Coming”

Lexington, Massachusetts

April 19, 2025

I’ve often thought about how to connect the past and present for this project. The 250th-anniversary reenactment of the Battle of Lexington gave me a rare chance to try. During a break in the action, I got on a shuttle bus with the reenactors and found this scene. The early morning had clearly worn everyone out.

I’m drawn to moments of contrast and quiet irony, where history and daily life meet.



BONUS — ON OUR BACK COVER

“The Second Line”

7th Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana

October 26, 2025

Before going to New Orleans, I had read about second lines, but I had never seen one. Spending time with the people there and taking photos showed me how these processions became celebrations of community, strength, and joy. What first looked like a jazz parade meant much more.

Projects like this remind me that documentary photography is as much about learning as it is about taking pictures. Every place I visit has its own history, customs, perspective. My best photos come when I slow down and stay curious.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AMERICAN

“Naturalization Ceremony”

Boston, Massachusetts

March 12, 2025

Of all the places I photographed for “These United States,” the naturalization ceremony in Boston stands out as one of the most memorable.

I emailed ahead and asked permission to photograph the ceremony at the John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse. Still, I was surprised by the extraordinary diversity of people gathered in the room. Participants waved small American flags. Strangers hugged one another. As they took the Oath of Allegiance and began a new chapter as Americans, it was a proud moment, and almost everyone I met wanted their photograph taken to remember the day.

Projects like this remind me that photography is most powerful when it connects people rather than separates them. I want to photograph America not as an outsider but as someone who is truly paying attention. For me, paying attention is a form of respect. The camera becomes a bridge rather than a barrier.

This photograph means a great deal to me, not because it offers a simple answer to what it means to be American but because it reminds me that America is always changing and growing. You can see it in our cultures, our differences — and in our shared hopes for the future. ☺

As told to Julie (Stagis) Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA and Kimberly Phillips. Read more about the project and upcoming book at s.uconn.edu/smith.



The Seven Wonders of Walden Pond



Please join us in Concord, Massachusetts, for an eye-opening trip around the kettle lake that Henry David Thoreau made famous more than 170 years ago.

Our tour guide today is Professor Robert M. Thorson — Thor, to his friends — professor of earth sciences at UConn since 1984. He is, specifically, a surficial geologist: “I’m interested in the origin of landscapes — what they’re made of and how they’re put together.”

Thorson has walked this beaten path around Walden Pond countless times, studying the lake and woods geologically, of course, but also as they relate to Thoreau’s two-year living

experiment and his subsequent 1854 masterpiece “Walden; Or, Life in the Woods.” Thorson honed this public tour over the 15 years he led field trips here, a high point for his UConn honors students taking Walden and the American Landscape.

It’s been a big year for Thorson. Last fall he co-wrote “Why Concord?” about the geological origins of the American Revolution for The Atlantic’s special series “The Unfinished Revolution.” Last spring, he was a featured expert in the PBS documentary “Henry David Thoreau,” produced by Ken Burns. And “The Walden Experiments: The Science of Henry David Thoreau,” his fourth book on the topic, was released earlier this fall by Princeton University Press. Thorson’s important message throughout is still not widely recognized: By bridging the sciences and the humanities, Thoreau anticipated and documented, with

uncanny insight, the environmental challenges of our day — climate change, ecological collapse, and the global stressors of agribusiness and technology. He was not a philosopher and writer dabbling at being a naturalist; he was a prophetic scientist who sought the divine in nature, then wrote about his experience.

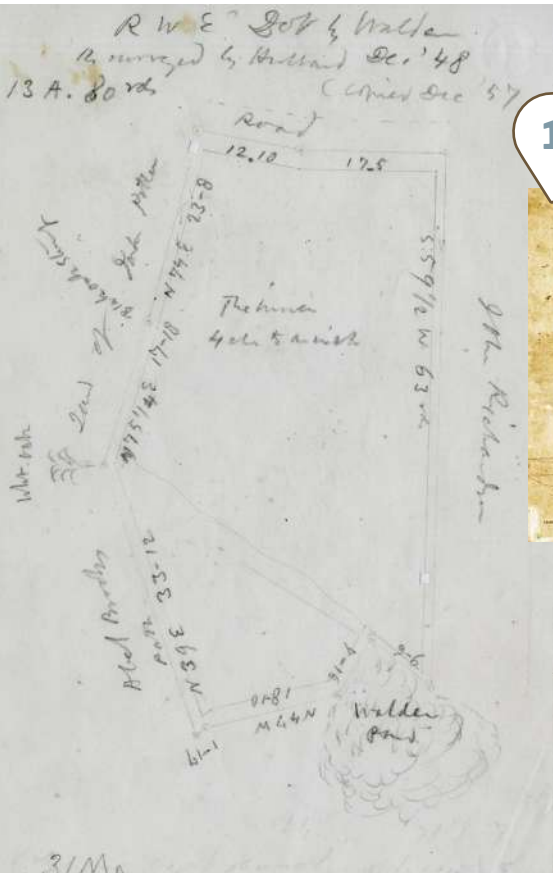
If you’re feeling rusty on your literary history, let’s pause to get our bearings. In the mid-19th century, Thoreau’s hometown of Concord was a small New England community bursting with intellectual debate about spirituality, self-reliance, and the best ways to reform a society and economy built on slavery and the subjugation of women. Ralph Waldo Emerson, father of the transcendentalist movement, was Thoreau’s mentor, friend, and neighbor. Emerson’s groundbreaking 1836 essay “Nature,” which made the case for rejecting societal norms and

instead seeking enlightenment in the natural world, made a profound impression on his young protégé.

In 1845 Thoreau built a simple house on Emerson’s woodlot overlooking the pond and lived there for two years: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” He was no hermit, though: “I had more visitors while I lived in the woods than at any other period in my life.” His brainy circle of friends who visited included Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa May, revered author of “Little Women”; Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote “The Scarlet Letter”; and the women’s rights advocate and journalist Margaret Fuller. His family’s boardinghouse, which he visited regularly, was a 20-minute walk away.

It’s not surprising Thorson has found a kindred spirit in Thoreau. Growing up in different parts of the upper Midwest, he wasn’t much of a

By Alexandra Kennedy Portrait by Peter Morenus



1

Terrace Edge

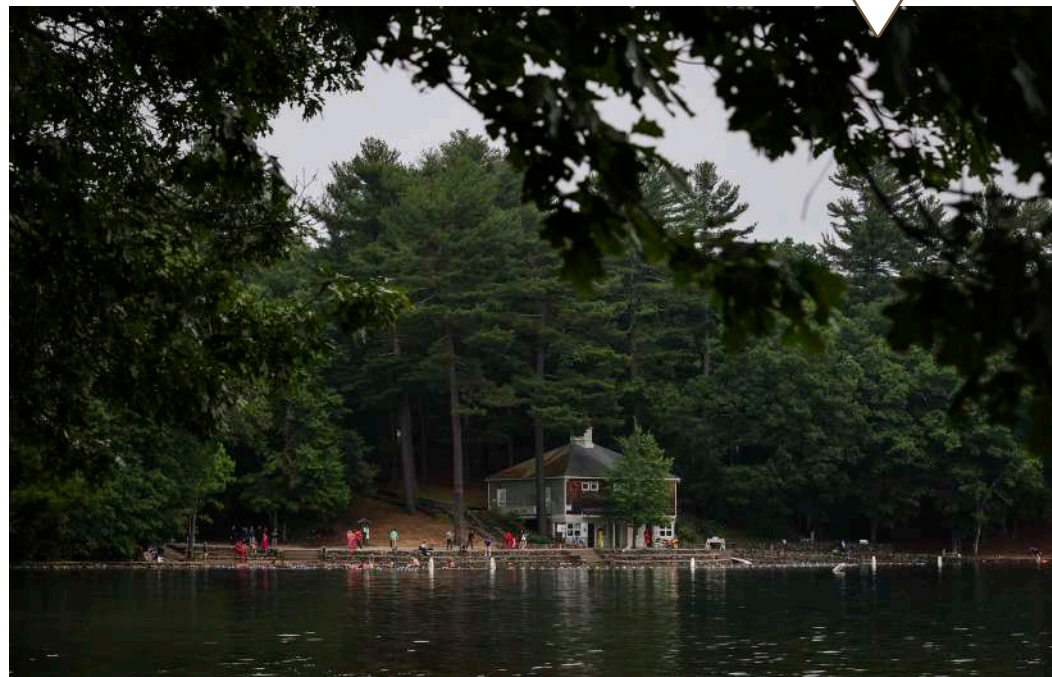
GPS coordinates
42°26'25.22"N,
71°20'04.93"W, 197 ft.

"Many have believed that Walden reached quite through to the other side of the globe."
— *Thoreau in "Walden"*

Walden Pond is the deepest natural lake in Massachusetts. As we exit the visitor parking lot, Thorson asks us to pause and note that we're leaving behind the plateau — an ancient delta plain — and descending into a massive sinkhole. Formed about 14,000 years ago when buried chunks of glacial ice melted, the giant depression eventually exposed groundwater, creating Walden Pond as we know it today. "It's like a threshold. You walk into a sinkhole and you're in a different world," says Thorson. "That was very important for Thoreau, for solitude and for getting away."

Concord locals were convinced the pond was bottomless. "Thoreau had a lot of time on his hands, and he was incensed by misinformation," says Thorson. So in his first winter, he drilled more than a hundred holes in the ice, lowering a stone tied to a cod line to measure varying depths. "He used his survey to do triangulation," says Thorson. "It was brilliant." Did he get it right? Yup. Walden Pond is 102 feet deep.

Opener: Sandy Beach, Walden Pond, 1933;
Thorson at UConn's Swan Lake, 2026.
1: above, aerial view of Walden Pond, 2015;
left, lot and pond surveys, 1848 and 1846.



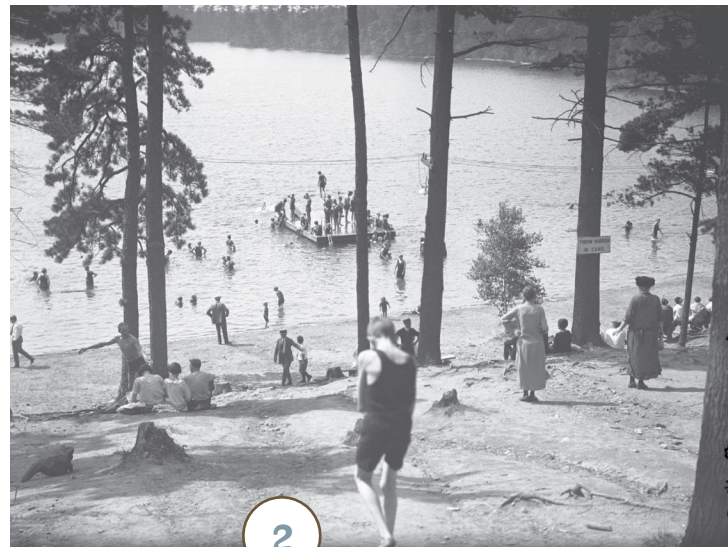
2

Eastern Shore

GPS coordinates
42°26'21.98"N,
71°20'05.14"W, 154 ft.

"The shore is composed of a belt of smooth rounded white stones like paving stones, excepting one or two short sand beaches, and is so steep that in many places a single leap will carry you into water over your head."
— *Thoreau in "Walden"*

Thoreau wouldn't recognize today's Eastern Shore. Because of the lake's perilously steep slopes, he only reached the thin strip of pebbly beach here by boat or over ice. Thorson beckons us down a long, steep ramp. At the bottom, we pass a new bathhouse and



2

2: above and left, swimming beach, 1924 and 2024 — a summer that found the beach largely covered with water.

step right onto a sprawling beach. Early birds with beach towels pick their spots. Fishermen cast off to the north.

At the turn of the 20th century, Thorson tells us, an intrepid entrepreneur turned this shore into a swimming hole when he dragged a raft and diving boards out onto the water, cleared a path, and — despite not owning the property — started collecting fees from swimmers. The crowds poured in, increasingly by automobile, and the most dramatic human-made reinvention of Walden Pond was set to begin.

Over the 20th century, local governments constructed bathhouses, cut a path around the pond, built stone walls to mitigate erosion, and imported sand to widen the beach. "This entire thing,



3

3: left, house illustration from the title page of the original 1854 "Walden"; below, the granite monument that marks the site today.

what I call the Eastern Shore," Thorson explains, "is all made up. It's all engineered. The sand is hauled in from somewhere; the stone from somewhere else." The acceleration of changes directly corresponds to car ownership and the completion of nearby Route 2. "On one hot Sunday in 1935, 35,000 people showed up. It was mobbed."

Today, park officials keep crowds in check by offering a finite number of parking spaces, as Walden Pond continues to be one of the most beloved swimming holes in America.

3

House Site

GPS coordinates
42°26'31.23"N,
71°20'33.20"W, 184 ft.

"Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine." — *Thoreau in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"*

Only a 10-minute trek on the path brings us to a spur with a sign: "House Site." This is the trail to the shrine, the mecca, "the epicenter of 'Thoreau's World,'" as Thorson calls it in "The Guide to Walden Pond." When it comes into view, it's both moving — *here's where he lived!* — and strangely disappointing. Nine imposing posts of chiseled granite, all linked by a thick



chain, mark the perimeter of the original 10-by-15-foot structure. Created by a local wealthy architect in 1948, the memorial rankles Thorson. Thoreau found monuments, and especially cut stone, offensive. "He would have hated it," Thorson says. To its left, the cairn, more heap than sculpture, proves a great climbing spot for the schoolchildren who've just overtaken us. Two boys knock stones out of place and root around for the best shapes and patterns. Thor welcomes the distraction.

It's a good time to sit and think about not what we *do* see here but what we don't.



3

3 continued: from left, restored daguerreotype of Henry David Thoreau in 1856; his friend and onetime mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1859; Lewis Hayden, an enslaved fugitive who in 1846 spoke at one of Thoreau's abolitionist gatherings co-hosted by his sister, Helen Louisa Thoreau (at right), of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society.

In August 1846 Thoreau hosted a meeting of the highly influential Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society at his little house. "Women were in charge of the local abolition movement," says Thorson. "And Thoreau's mother and two sisters were important members of the society." Together, they recruited Thoreau, Emerson, and other local intellectuals to aid them in the Underground Railroad. "As many as 30 people attended the meeting that day. Thoreau jokes about how there wasn't much room for getting around." Lewis Hayden, an enslaved fugitive from Kentucky, was the special guest, sharing a harrowing account of his experiences.

In the years to come, Thoreau would become increasingly vocal in his opposition to slavery and his outrage over the Commonwealth's complicity. In a withering speech in 1854, "Slavery in Massachusetts," Thoreau tried to rally his fellow citizens to defy the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and prioritize "laws of humanity." After the Civil War, Hayden was elected to the Massachusetts state legislature, where he advocated for civil rights and women's suffrage until his death in 1889. Thoreau, who died in

1862, would not live long enough to see slavery abolished in the U.S.

4

Bean Field

GPS coordinates
42°26'33.77"N,
71°20'33.81"W, 200 ft.

"The farmer is endeavoring to solve the problem of a livelihood by a formula more complicated than the problem itself."
— *Thoreau in "Walden"*

It's time for us to head to the terrace above the house site in plain view of the old carriage road to Concord village. This is where Thoreau experimented with farming. Modern agriculture, he argued — with its focus on mass production and its dependence on bank loans — was a disaster for both humans and the land, turning farmers into "serfs of the soil."

As a response and in a bit of theater, he grew white bush beans — the variety used in Boston baked beans — as a cash crop, planting, hoeing, and harvesting them himself. Curious neighbors would stop to watch, waving to him from the road. Thorson did the calcu-

lation and found that the combined length of Thoreau's 2.5 acres of bean rows planted 18 inches apart would amount to 7.5 miles.

Looking through the grove of trees that have filled those fields, Thorson tells us, "He was desperately doing what you or I would call regenerative agriculture." Equally important, he was connecting to the people who had come before him. "This was his chance to do archaeology. He was disturbing the ashes of what he calls 'unchroni-cled nations.' People were hunting or migrating or warring on this sand plain and he finds musket balls and broken glass and ceramics from the colonial period. So he's putting it all together."

5

Ice Fort Cove

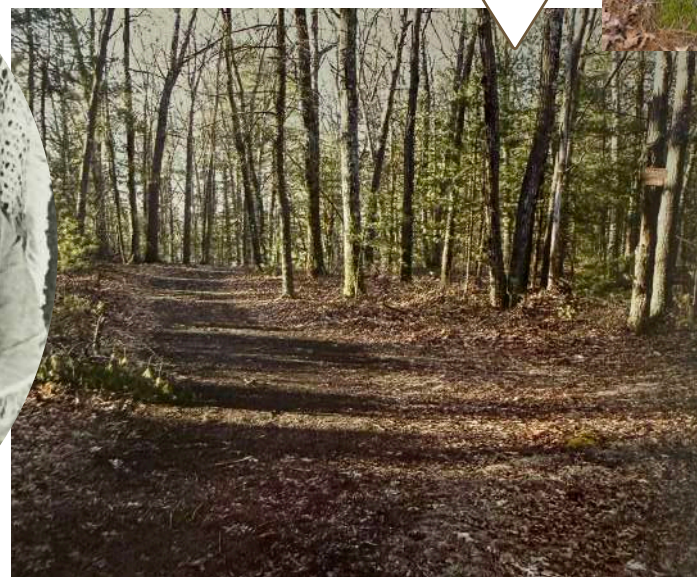
GPS coordinates
42°26'20.36"N,
71°20'41.86"W, 154 ft.

"A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone."
— *Thoreau in "Walden"*

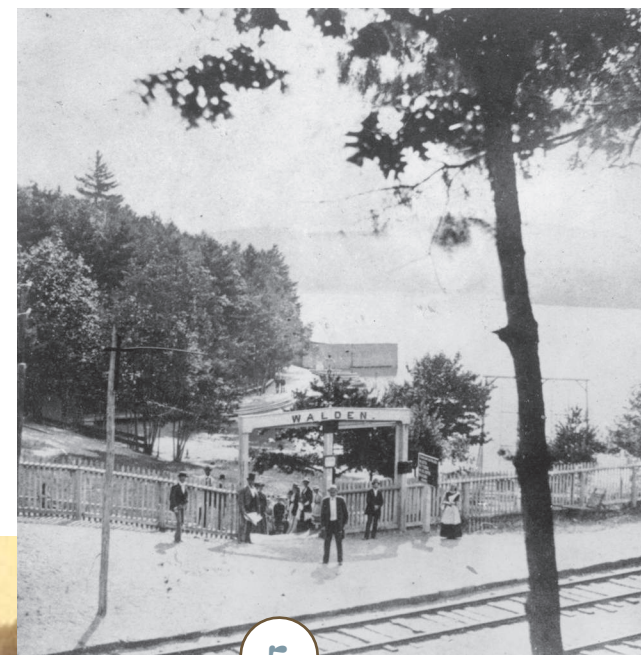
Many businessmen sought their fortunes at Walden Pond. From the path

4: below and right, the trails near where Thoreau grew his 2.5 acres of white bush beans are some of the most popular among today's hikers.

4



5: below, the entrance gate to the amusement park, which was built at Ice Fort Cove in 1866, complete with its own train station; and today, looking across the pond to the Eastern Shore's bathhouse.



5



5: above, boating at the amusement park, looking west over Ice Fort Cove, 1868.

above Ice Fort Cove, Thorson prompts us to imagine what Thoreau saw during his first winter: a hundred Irish laborers cutting and stacking 300,000 cubic feet of ice cakes. That's five football fields' worth. Though intended for Boston, the ice was, inexplicably, never loaded onto the train. Over the next two years, it melted.

In 1866, four years after Thoreau's death, the Walden Lake Grove Ex-

cursion Park opened its gates on a hill overlooking Ice Fort Cove. The amusement park attracted thousands of Bostonians, who arrived by train for water recreation, camping, dancing, music, and baseball.

It closed in 1902 after a fire burned most of it to the ground. ("You can see the outlines of the pavilions on lidar," says Thorson.) Thankfully, many other plans, like a site for a slaughterhouse

and pig farm, never materialized.

In 1922, the commercial exploitation of Walden Pond finally came to an end. Recognizing how popular the pond was for locals, the Emerson, Heywood, and Forbes families donated most of its perimeter to the state, and Walden Pond State Reservation was born.

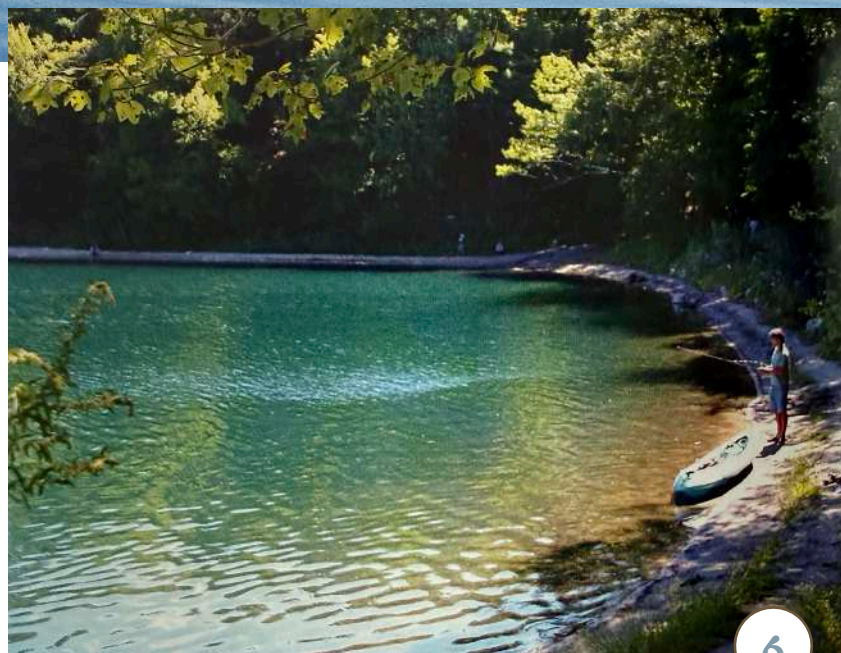
The park is an admirable, if tricky, outcome, says Thorson: "Walden Pond



7

*“He was a prophetic
scientist who sought the
divine in nature.”*

7: In the 1800s people believed Walden Pond, the deepest natural lake in Massachusetts, was bottomless. Thoreau measured its 102 feet of depth by drilling more than 100 holes in the ice and lowering a stone tied to a cod line, then putting those depth soundings onto a map made by triangulation, arriving at the same number later scientists did.



6

**Sandbank
Cove**
GPS coordinates
42°26'13.44"N,
71°20'37.54"W,
167 ft.

“I watch the passage of
the morning cars with
the same feeling that I
do the rising of the sun,
which is hardly more
regular.” — *Thoreau
in “Walden”*

Hear that train?
Thorson cuts right
and up a hill so we
can investigate.
Shortly before
Thoreau built
his house, the
Fitchburg Rail-
road connected
Concord to Boston.
A thousand poor
Irish immigrants



6

laid the tracks a stone’s throw from the
western edge of the pond.

To create the straightaway that
a train requires, Thorson explains,
pointing down a long corridor of
tracks, they notched a canyon into the
slope and then dumped megatons of
sandy debris into nearby Sandbank
Cove. It remains today, just a fraction
of its original size.

When Thoreau moved to the pond,
many laborers lived in a shantytown
nearby. He purchased boards for his
house from one of them and mixed
plaster for his walls using sand he
hauled from the bank. “Watching the
coming and going of the train became
a pleasant part of Thoreau’s routine,”
Thorson says. “It united him with the
rest of the globe.”

By the time he had “Walden” ready
for publication, Thoreau’s feelings
about trains had changed. He resented
the railroad industry for its endless
appetite for wood fuel and complained
about how the new technology was
changing American culture. It was
all about speed and commerce: “We
do not ride on the railroad; it rides
upon us.”

7

Panorama
GPS coordinates
42°26'17.36"N,
71°20'18.39"W, 163 ft.

“It is life near the bone where it is sweetest.”
— *Thoreau in “Walden”*

On the southeast side, along the re-
turn, Thorson leads us down to a sandy
spit. “Nowhere else on the lake are
we in a better position to ponder how
Walden has changed through time.” To
the west, we see the coves and wooded
hills Thoreau once called home —
where, as Thorson says, “he lived in a
hollow in a hollow.” To the east, we see
the bathhouse and pale golden beach
still filling with sunbathers. A long-
distance swimmer cuts quietly through
the water in front of us. The panorama
is a study in dichotomies and Ameri-
can dreams.

After Thoreau moved back to
Concord village, Emerson leased the
empty small house to his Scottish
gardener, who hauled it away. It served
for a while as a corn crib until it was
eventually salvaged for parts. Nearly a
decade after Thoreau’s death, Bron-

son Alcott brought one of Thoreau’s
admirers, a woman from Iowa, out to
the site. The two of them laid the first
stones to mark where Thoreau’s house
once stood — the start of the cairn that
continues today.

For more than a century, many of
our great thinkers — Walt Whitman,
John Muir, Rachel Carson, Jack Ker-
ouac, Emma Lazarus, Bill McKibben,
E.O. Wilson, E.B. White, B.F. Skinner
— have made pilgrimages to Walden
Pond, some laying stones on the cairn
at the house site. They came, like we
did, to learn and pay homage.

For Thorson, a committed envi-
ronmentalalist, Thoreau has been a
galvanizing teacher. “Earth’s global
sustainability crisis requires that we
lead with our aesthetic hearts and fol-
low with our utilitarian heads,” Thor-
son concludes in his new book. “That
we let our love of nature motivate us to
manage Earth with the scientific skill
and respect it deserves.”

“We’re part of nature,” Thorson tells
us, summoning Thoreau. “Let’s just
love it. Let’s be in the moment. Let’s
appreciate the sunshine. Let’s give
thanks.” ☺

6: right, Sandbank
Cove’s curved shoreline
is a 1900s phenomenon;
below, a locomotive
steaming away from
Concord above Ice Fort
Cove during the early
20th century.

presents a management trade-off
between being conserved as an
international cultural icon and
being overdeveloped as a local
swimming hole for residents of
greater Boston.”

More than 600,000 visitors a
year come to swim, fish, hike, and
get inspired by Thoreau.



GEORGE

In his 13th major league season, UConn's most successful baseball player is still having fun.

**By Pete Croatto
Photos by Peter Morenus**

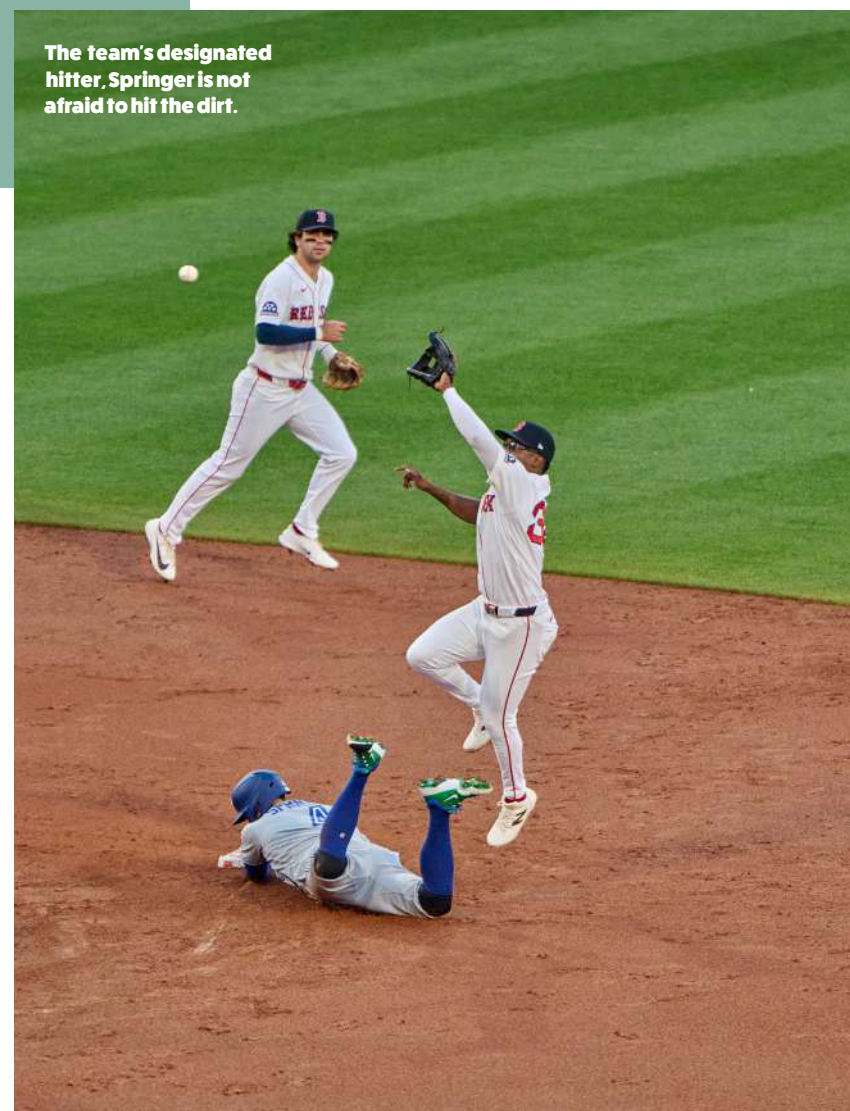
SPRINGER



"... His career has regularly entered are-you-kidding-me? territory."



The team's designated hitter, Springer is not afraid to hit the dirt.



At UConn Springer was named the 2011 Big East Player of the Year.

Future baseball historians will not rhapsodize over this mid-June Toronto Blue Jays–Boston Red Sox game. The Sox at this moment are hapless — in late April, management purged their coaching staff and they're still in smoothing-out mode. The Jays, after nearly winning the World Series last year, are below .500. Boston fans have seemingly agreed to enjoy a beautiful day in a classic ballpark. Save the rancor for the Yankees.

It is a good day — and a safe one — to be a Blue Jays fan. Hours before the first pitch, Brent Moorcroft of London, Ontario, Canada, and his wife, Ednalyn, stroll outside Fenway Park. Moorcroft, who wears a baby blue George Springer jersey, loves Springer's old-school approach. Stats, fame, and flash take a back seat to winning. "He's always enthusiastic," says Moorcroft, a Blue Jays fan for nearly 50 years.

Ashley Mercuri, 36, of Mississauga, Ontario, wears a "Springer 4" jersey like Moorcroft's. "He's got a ton of heart, a ton of energy, and he's clutch in big moments," says Mercuri, who's here with her mom, Andrea. "You can see how much he cares."

Springer, the Blue Jays designated hitter and the most successful baseball player to come out of UConn, hit his 300th career home run last night as part of this series. Currently, he sits in the visitors' dugout half-dressed, a green glass bottle of water at his side, enjoying the pause.

Still hours before the shouts of "peanuts" and the laughing young women in shorts and the intense preppies with dim chins and the chants of "So good! So good! So good!" Fenway Park is almost meditative, punctuated by PA music and the steady rhythm of a ballpark: that lullabying thud of a ball hitting well-oiled leather.

In the middle of his 13th big-league season, Springer's baseball life has been a string of exclamation points. If he had never played another game after leaving Storrs, he would have enjoyed a lifetime of bragging rights. As a junior, he was the 2011 Big East Player of the Year and was named a first-team All American by at least three organizations. When he left after that season, Springer held UConn career records in runs scored with 220 and home runs with 46. He ranked second all-time in total bases (452), stolen bases (76), runs batted in (196), and hits (242).

Since being drafted 11th overall by the Houston Astros in 2011, his career has regularly entered are-you-kidding-me? territory. A four-time All-Star, he was the most valuable player of the 2017 World Series, now cemented in sign-stealing infamy. Last year, Springer became a mythical figure in Canadian

sports lore. His three-run, seventh-inning homer against the Seattle Mariners in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series propelled the Blue Jays to their first World Series since 1993.

Blue Jays manager John Schneider believes Springer, who has been with the team since 2021, is one of baseball's all-time great lead-off hitters. Last night's 300th homer is a major accomplishment — and a sign of mortality. He turns 37 in September. Handsome and almost comically strapping, Springer is a young man in the world of bills and rush-hour traffic but an increasingly creaky asset in the multi-billion dollar world of professional sports. More playing days lie dormant than expectant. His contract with the Blue Jays, worth \$150 million over six years, ends after this season.

Springer has not thought much about his second act. He is the national spokesperson for the Stuttering Association for the Young, which is something he would like to continue. Talking with other stutterers, who thank him, has been a revelation. "They've helped me more than they realize, because I can't spread a message and say certain things if I'm not willing to go do it myself," he says. And he wants to spend more time with his family after all the years he spent pursuing a dream.

His wife, Charlise, a former University of Albany softball player, provides a calming presence on "the nights when I'm sitting there staring at the ceiling wondering if I can figure this out." Their two sons witnessed last night's 300th homer.

Springer loves that the boys are at an age where they can experience baseball with him, but he will not push the game. He knows the sacrifice required to get where he is: early morning trips coffee cannot penetrate, arrivals home

in disorienting, late-night darkness. It takes a toll on parents, too. “I told my mom and dad last night, I owe all this to them,” Springer says.

Last night’s home run had a significance beyond the statistical for Springer. “I spent a lot of time in these seats as a kid,” he says. The Red Sox, wrapping up their lengthy theatrically tortured era, were his team. Growing up in New Britain, Connecticut, Springer took in countless games at Fenway with family and friends.

Baseball was practically stitched in the family’s DNA. His father, **George Jr. ’85 (CLAS), ’88 JD**, played in the Little League World Series in 1976, and his grandfather George Springer Sr. pitched for what’s now Central Connecticut State University after emigrating from Panama. Springer’s sisters, Lena and Nicole, were softball stars who played internationally and at Ohio State and Central Connecticut, respectively. When little George (aka George Springer III) practiced, the kid’s energy was inexhaustible. He’d be in his Little League uniform a day before the game, thinking about his approach.

Springer was drafted by the Minnesota Twins out of high school, but in the 48th round. UConn head baseball coach **Jim Penders ’94 (CLAS), ’98 MA** remembers George Jr. and Laura making it clear that it was too soon for pro ball. College was next.

Springer’s parents are, to use Penders’ phrase, “UConn people.” It’s where they met — George Jr. played Huskies football, and **Laura M. (Rivera) Springer ’87 (CLAS)** was a standout UConn gymnast. The family did not require a hard sell.

Penders had known Springer for

years. As a freshman at Avon Old Farms School, Springer attended a UConn baseball camp. Penders looked at the 5’3”, 95-pound specimen and noted “NP.” Not a prospect.

By his junior year, the body caught up. Those first weeks at UConn, Penders “had virtually no concerns about him developing as a baseball player. You’d catch stuff out of the corner of your eye that would just blow your mind. He’d do a backflip while we were warming up one day and you’d do a double take. Did I really just see that?” The physical feats came with an instinct for playing the game that Penders deems “a sign of real genius.”

The foundation for adulthood was laid in those three years. On teams ripe with future pros including Matt Barnes and Nick Ahmed, Springer faced top competition every day, and as the Huskies’ schedule grew more competitive, Penders noticed his star player never stuttered on the field, an observation that led Springer to a deeper truth.

Penders believes Springer, like most young adults, had to find his comfort level. “He stuttered a lot in my office in that first freshman fall semester when I asked him, ‘Hey, what’s going on in that history class? Why don’t you have that intro assignment done?’” Penders says. “But I think he knew that I cared. There’s an old saying: Nobody cares what you know until they know that you care. I think he realized quickly that we cared about the whole person and not just the player.”

In Springer’s words that connection “helped me be who I want to be and understand who I can be in the locker room, but also helped me off the field to have compassion, love, feel, the whole nine.” The stutter is just about gone now.

The game is personal for Springer. Among his many assets, Jays manager

Schneider says, is that he knows when to lock in and when to keep things light. Rob Dowling, Springer’s baseball coach at Avon Old Farms School, remembers a bus trip to an important game. The mood was too intense. Springer, the team’s DJ, cranked up the volume on the radio and started dancing. The team loosened up — and returned home with a win.

Today at Fenway, Springer still “loves every single guy that’s in the locker room.”

Before the first pitch, during a light, loosely defined bout of calisthenics, he dons star teammate Vladimir Guerrero Jr.’s hideous green shades. He leads the playful mocking chatter, the athlete’s mother tongue, his voice gleefully rising above the conversational, offering a glimpse into life on the other side of the foul line. “I figured you out!”

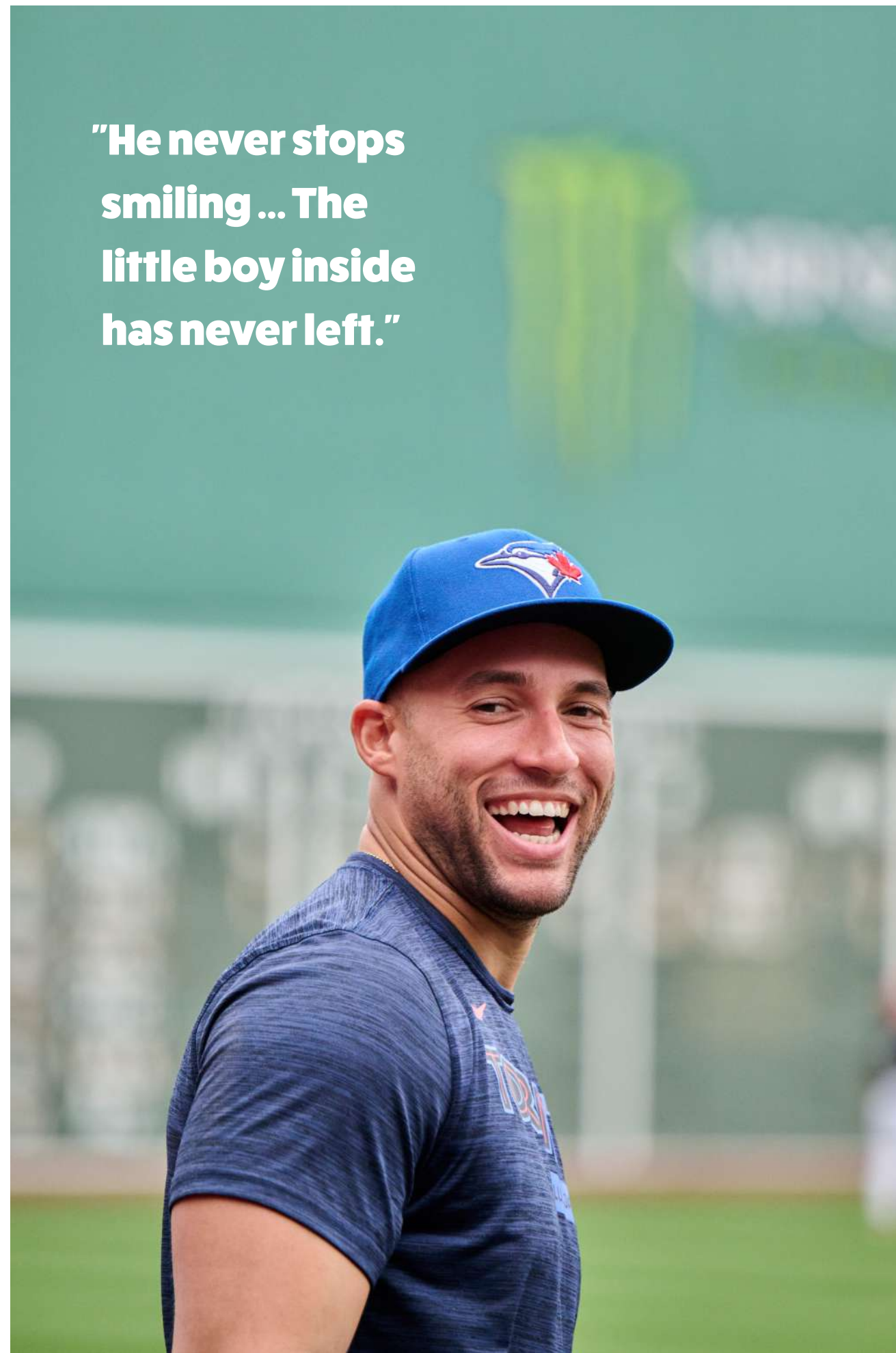
He never stops smiling. Penders says that when Springer hits a home run, “it looks like he’s never done it before.” The little boy inside has never left.

“I’m so grateful for everything that this game has given to me, which is why I feel like I have to give this game everything every single day,” Springer says. “The memories that I have — the friendships, the relationships — are something that I honestly can’t put into words.”

The peace shatters as the Blue Jays’ batting practice ends. Fenway’s organist unleashes a peppy, frantic barrage of Top 40 classics, including Naked Eyes’ remake of “Always Something There to Remind Me.” Anybody raised by Martha Quinn can instantly summon the lyrics: “You’ll always be a part of me.”

Right now, the field is pristine. It’s a sparkling afternoon. It’s time for George Springer to be a kid again. ☺

“He never stops smiling ... The little boy inside has never left.”



Liberating MISS AMERICA

BY EMILY GOLD BOUTILIER

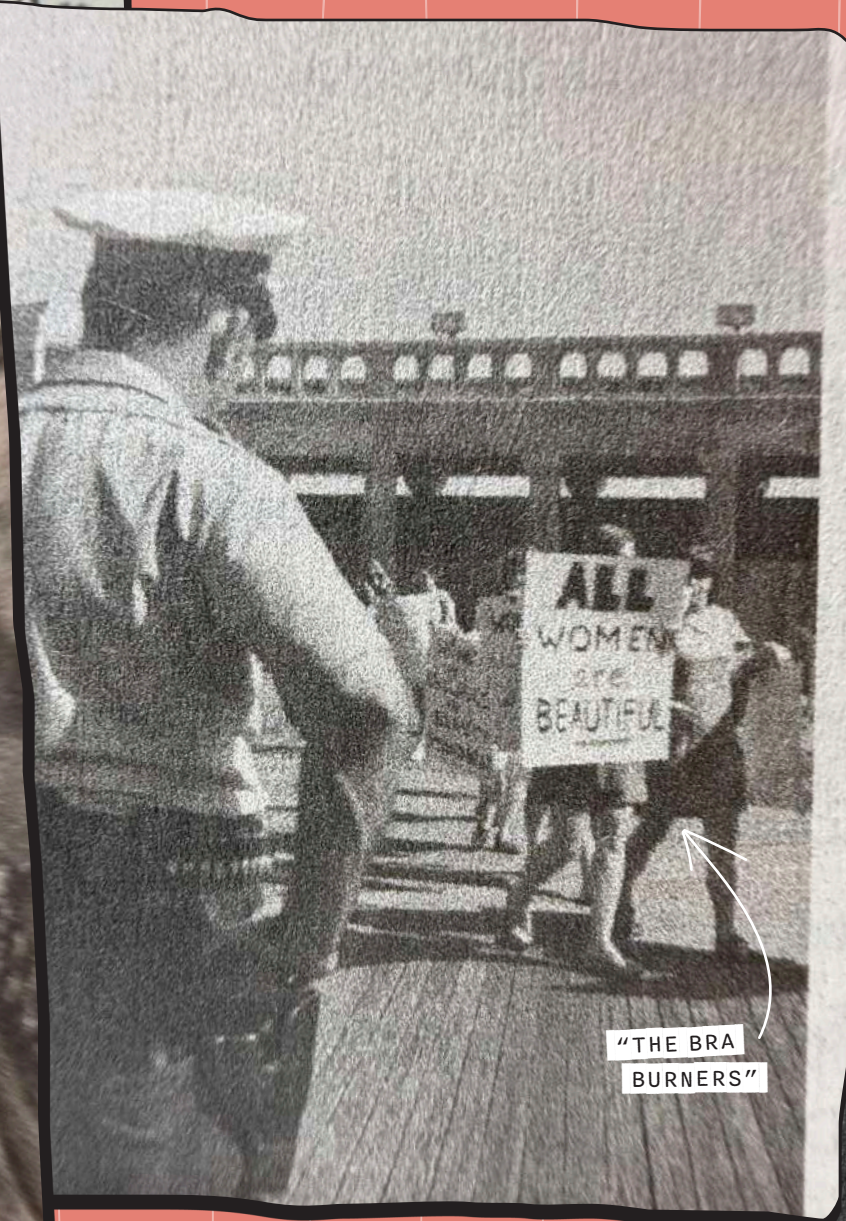
UConn professor of history Micki McElya thought she knew Miss America. Specifically, she thought she knew the pageant that took place in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in late summer 1968, amid one of the most tumultuous and consequential years in U.S. history.

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, Robert F. Kennedy in June. It was the deadliest year of the Vietnam War for American troops. In August, the Republican National Convention in Miami nominated Richard M. Nixon for president, and outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, police violently attacked anti-war protesters. “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” premiered nationally in 1968 — so did “Rosemary’s Baby.”

Back then, Miss America was part of the monoculture. Millions turned their dials to NBC on Sept. 7, 1968, to watch Illinois’ 18-year-old Judith Ford, a world-class trampolinist, sob while being crowned as “your ideal ... the queen of femininity ... with her all-American face and form,” to quote the pageant’s anthem.

But that year’s contest is best known for what happened right outside. On the boardwalk, a women’s liberation protest sparked a media frenzy. It introduced mainstream Americans to the very term “women’s liberation” and to the lasting impression of feminists as “bra burners” (which they weren’t; more on that later). Featuring signs that read “Can Makeup Cover the Wounds of Our Oppression?” and “Let’s Judge Ourselves as People,” the protest is widely considered a defining moment in second-wave feminism.

Whether in upper-level seminars or in the history department’s survey course on the U.S. since 1877, McElya



loves to teach the pageant and protest, because the news photos are so striking and her students are so interested.

But when the professor came across a book by sociologist Maxine Leeds Craig, it shook up everything she thought she knew about those events. “Ain’t I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race” introduced McElya to a second pageant — and protest — held a few hours later and a few blocks away: the first Miss Black America contest. Like Miss America, Miss Black America continues today. It’s helped launch the careers of Oprah Winfrey (1971’s Miss Black Tennessee) and the Jackson Five, which had its first national TV appearance at the 1969 pageant.

Reading the book in 2009, McElya was floored that she had never heard of Miss Black America, especially given that her expertise is race and gender in U.S. history.

“I have failed so hard,” she thought. “How did I miss this?”

That crisis of confidence is the origin story for McElya’s book “Liberation Summer,” a sweeping work of U.S. history published in July by Avid Reader, a Simon & Schuster imprint. Like her 2016 book on Arlington National Cemetery, which was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, “Liberation Summer” was released to critical acclaim. It’s written for a popular audience rather than a scholarly one, which comes out of McElya’s teaching.

“I wouldn’t write the way I do if I didn’t also teach,” she says. In both settings, she aims to reach as broad an audience as possible. “We have to be held accountable by other scholars, but I’m not interested in a contained environment where the only people who can understand what I’m saying are historians,” she says.

McElya started “Liberation Summer” while wrapping up “The Politics of Mourning: Death and Honor in Arlington National Cemetery.” While the two titles would seem to have little in common, both explore race and gender and both concern a question Americans have sought to answer for 250 years: How do we decide who is worthy of honor?

The new book spotlights and contextualizes the 1968 Miss America Pageant and its two protests. Flashing back in time to Thomas Jefferson and forward to trad wives, McElya makes the case that beauty is a central

**"LOOK BEAUTIFUL
no matter the cost in
time and money
SMILE
no matter what you're feeling
AND DON'T
ROCK THE BOAT."**

CAROL HANISCH

force in U.S. history. “It saturates everything,” she says. “You can’t understand American politics without acknowledging how women are expected to represent themselves, how much the currency of appearance can gain for women, and how much can be lost because of it.”

To really know America, she says, you need to know *Miss America*.

“Liberation Summer” opens on Saundra Williams in an evening gown atop a convertible. Soon she’ll be crowned the first Miss Black America. McElya writes:

At the semifinals the night before, Williams had performed her own poem, “Awareness,” as spoken word set to music. The poem was about a little girl ashamed of her hair, her lips, and her dark skin, convinced that she is ugly and always will be. In the course of the poem, she learns that she is beautiful; by the end, she’s proud to say, “I am Black!”

It was a message Williams had needed to learn herself. She had stopped straightening her own hair a few months earlier. She hadn’t been trying to imitate white women before — not consciously anyway; like everyone else she knew, Saundra had grown up understanding the difference between “good hair” and “bad hair.” Straight and smooth meant pretty and presentable, and could

make a real difference in a Black woman’s life. Now her short Afro said: *I refuse to imitate white women. I am Black, and I am beautiful.*

The New York Times described Williams as a slim, “curvy, hazel-eyed coed” who’d helped lead a successful protest against a whites-only restaurant, who drew boos from some in the pageant hall when she said husbands should do equal housework, and who “looked bored when asked about the 100 women demonstrators, mostly white, who had picketed the Miss America Pageant.”

The article ran next to one on the new Miss America. Times reporter and editor Charlotte Curtis asked a still-tearful Judith Ford for her thoughts on everything from whether 18-year-olds should get the vote (yes), to whether a Black woman could be Miss America (“as long as she’s the prettiest”), to the Democratic National Convention (“I hate to talk about this. It’s so controversial”), to whether blondes have more fun (“I don’t know. I’ve never been a brunette to compare it with”).

These three women — Williams, Ford, and Curtis — are among a long cast of characters in McElya’s book. Many of their stories converge in Atlantic City, like that of counterprotester and future Miss America Terry Anne Meeuwsen sporting a “Nixon for President” button. Many go on to work in or around politics; Meeuwsen, for example, became cohost of “The 700 Club” on the Christian Broadcasting

Network.

McElya writes about Carol Hanisch, who came up with the women’s liberation protest idea, and J. Morris Anderson, who founded Miss Black America to give his daughters, in his words, “something to look forward to that wasn’t fantasy or a lie.” The book connects the 1955 debut of Bert Parks crooning “There she is, Miss America,” on live TV with the funeral days earlier of the Black 14-year-old Emmett Till, “who’d been tortured and murdered in Mississippi after supposedly whistling at a white woman.” McElya continues:

The pageant song celebrated idealized womanhood and national beauty by encouraging looking, assessing, and wanting — or wanting to be. But Till’s murder, and the long line of American lynchings it joined, served as a reminder of the deadly consequences of the “wrong” person’s admiration.

Phyllis Schlafly and Hillary Clinton (an intern at the 1968 RNC) are both in “Liberation Summer,” as are many less famous women, like Eva Nichols, a member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe who in 1948 protested the Miss America rule that contestants must be white. That rule was official until 1950 and unofficial for much longer.



“THERE ARE SO MANY WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN LOST TO THIS STORY, IGNORED, OR ASSUMED TO BE THE KIND OF PRETTY PAGEANT CONTESTANT WHO DOESN’T HAVE HER OWN SET OF POLITICAL IDEAS AND HER OWN RELATIONSHIP TO CHANGING FEMINISM.”

MICKI MCELYA, HISTORY PROFESSOR

“I’m not usually seeking to repopulate the past,” the professor says, “but that was very much a part of my work here. There are so many women who have been lost to this story, ignored, or assumed to be the kind of pretty pageant contestant who doesn’t have her own set of political ideas and her own relationship to changing feminism.”

Black, white, feminist, beauty queen: “Our categories are so insufficient for describing how human beings actually operate,” McElya says. “I wanted pageant contestants to be recognized in the fullness of what they’re doing, what

they’re hoping for themselves, what they’re expecting for others. Arguably, everyone’s imagining a different world in this moment. These women are imagining it through beauty.”

Hanisch imagined it differently. “Shaving your legs, doing your hair, putting on makeup — those are political acts that from the women’s liberationists’ perspective reinforce structures of oppression” and prevent true equality “because of the punishments and rejection that come to women who don’t do those things,” says McElya. “Liberation Summer” describes the moment when Hanisch proposed the action:

To unite women, they must take on issues that speak to the oppression they all experience in daily life, she said. And here’s “this American icon — the Miss America Pageant — telling women what to look like, what to wear, how to wear it, how to walk, how to speak, what to say (and what not to say) to be considered attractive. In short: look beautiful (no matter the cost in time and money), smile (no matter what you’re feeling), and don’t rock the boat.”

In Atlantic City, women threw girdles, hair curlers, and yes, bras, into a “Freedom Trash Can.” But nothing





Organizers say the “Glory” installation channeled the 1970s, “an era that symbolizes cultural pride and transformation.”

Pomp and Circumstance

➤ **Juanita Austin '16 (SFA)**, who goes by Juanita Sunday professionally, has been making her mark in Connecticut’s arts community as a curator, cultural producer, and exhibition designer based in New Haven. She’s currently a curatorial fellow at NXTHVN, an internationally recognized New Haven arts center, where she recently co-curated “Glory,” an immersive exhibition that transforms the gallery into an imagined 1970s-inspired Black American home. It explores “the ways working class Black Americans have built beauty, community, and meaning inside the walls that held them.” Sunday was named a 2024 Connecticut Arts Hero and received a 2025 Connecticut Arts Excellence Award from the Connecticut Office of the Arts. She’s gearing up for her next chapter, having been accepted into the Maryland Institute College of Art’s MFA curatorial practice program with the support of the competitive Leslie King-Hammond Graduate Fellowship.

CLASS NOTES

1950s



➤ **George Raczkowski '56 (BUS)** and his wife, Joan, were named Hop Brook Heroes at Hop Brook Golf Course in Naugatuck, Connecticut. They were awarded lifetime memberships and their own parking spot, which George describes as “very convenient.” George, 92, served in leadership positions, repaired divots by hand, planted flowers around the property, and was Hop Brook’s unofficial resident historian, recently narrating a historical video of the course. A lifelong Naugatuck resident, he still golfs twice a week at the course where he and Joan have been playing since the early 1950s, including on many of their anniversaries over the past 75 years. These days, George says, “you’ll either find me at home or at the golf course.” He tasked their helpful and tech-savvy daughter, **Gayle Marengi '92 (BUS)**, with cluing us in to the news.

1960s



➤ **Jeffrey Urman '67 (PHARM), '77 MED-RES** is happy to report that the peace garden he and his friend and former UConn classmate **Lewis Cohen '66 (CLAS)**

conceived and helped establish along Academic Way was dedicated this September as the Marian Urman Peace Garden for Urman’s late wife. The green space features sculptures intended to promote reflection, tolerance, and mindfulness. Urman, a professor of medicine and rheumatology at Stanford University Medical Center and a consultant for the Medical Board of California, patented Qbrexza, an FDA-approved medication for hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating). He has lived in Palo Alto for 50 years and, with Marian, has two sons and five grandchildren.

1970s

➤ **Murray Bloom '71 (CLAS), '73 MBA** and **Karen Shlevin Fink '76 MSW** were married in January 2026 in Providence, Rhode Island. The couple plan to reside in Fairfax, Virginia.



➤ This year, **Brenda Bean '73 (CLAS)** was promoted to senior representative at Vitas, an end-of-life care provider.



➤ Using material from the Charles Olson Research Collection, part of the UConn Archives and

Special Collections, **John Faulise '73 (CLAS)** and his scholarly partner, Ralph Maud, produced a revised and expanded edition of one of poet and literary theorist Charles Olson’s most notable works of prose, “The Special View of History.” Olson, a major shaper of postmodern American poetry, is credited with first using the term “postmodern” and is known for his association with the Black Mountain poets. The original book, now out of print, was a transcribed, edited, and organized collection

➤ Growing up, **Len Carlson '62 (ED), '63 MS** says he loved basketball so much that he slept with a basketball — and a dog — in his bed. The future Husky leading scorer and captain was raised in a “tough, industrial neighborhood” of Worcester, Massachusetts, and started blue-collar work at age 13. “It created an urge in me that, hell, I don’t want to live the rest of my life like this, I’ve got to go to college somehow.”

His father told him that meant either being the smartest kid in school or the best basketball player in the city — and he didn’t think he was the former. So “I basically lived on a basketball court,” says Carlson. “Every chance I got, I practiced.” It paid off.

Carlson was offered a UConn basketball scholarship and jumped on it — literally. The former high school long jumper could lunge nearly 23 feet — the distance from the three-point line to the hoop — and had a serious vertical leap to match. By graduate school he was helping men’s basketball head coach Hugh Greer coach the freshman team. One evening, he recalls saying good-night to Greer in the locker room and getting a phone call as he walked in his door. In the minutes since they’d parted, Greer had died of a massive heart attack. Carlson was asked to put



Playing against Maine in the old field house.

on a suit, come back to campus, and help coach the varsity Huskies.

After a successful season, he left to pursue an NBA career — but instead was drafted into the U.S. Army. He played All-Army and then professional basketball in Belgium, which resulted in two

blown knees, 24 surgeries, and a pivot to coaching — notably at Augusta State University (now Augusta University) in Georgia, where he desegregated the team, a first for the state. The new team had to make careful travel plans, since there were places in the South that barred Black and white people from eating and sleeping at the same establishment.

Carlson was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013, and he became a member of the Augusta University Athletics Hall of Fame in May. At age 86, Carlson is a “fitness nut” and still works as a broadcast basketball analyst. He’s struck by the evolution of UConn, both its campus and its basketball program, which he says is “on another level now,” though he’s stolen only rare glimpses of the new generation of Huskies — “They guard their practices like it’s nuclear war.”

of material from a class Olson taught at Black Mountain College in 1956. Now, Faulise and Maud have published a more accurate and expanded version of this course material through Clemson University Press. ➤ **Timothy E. Gil-lane '73 (CLAS)** was re-elected to the Pomfret Public Library Board of Trustees last November after serving a six-year term. He is also a member of the Pomfret Democratic Town Committee. ➤ After a 50-plus year physician assistant (PA)/associate career and top leadership roles in three major PA professional organizations, **William "Bill" Kohlhepp '74 (CLAS)** became president of the PA History Society this year. A few years ago, he retired from Quinnipiac University as dean of its School of Health Sciences and remains professor emeritus of PA studies. Beyond professional leadership, this Durham, Connecticut-based alum says he fills his retirement with traveling with his wife, Peggy, and spending much more time with his four grandchildren and two sons and daughters-in-law. Sailing and golf occupy his summer days, while Quinnipiac hockey and UConn basketball get him through the winter. Despite the miles between them, Kohlhepp maintains a close friendship with his senior year roommate, **Frank Kane '74 (CLAS)**, who lives in New Jersey. ➤ **Anthony T. Camarco '74 (BUS)** has published a new nonfiction book, "Three Years, No Justice: When the Law Was Clear and the Connecticut Probate System Didn't Follow It."

➤ **Marcie Gordon Strum '77 (ED)** is a medical and scientific writer for Endeavor Health in the Chicago area, supporting clinical research and medical education and contributing to scholarly publications. She earned a Master of Health

Administration from Washington University School of Medicine and says her UConn education honed her project management skills and her ability to translate complex information into accessible language.

➤ Six "forever friends" from Hollister in West Campus reunited this May in the Isle of Palms, South Carolina, to celebrate 50 years of friendship. From left, top row: **Sandy (Anderson) Murphy '78 (CAHNR)**; **Paula (Saimond) Tamburro '77 (CLAS)**; **Kathy (Kozlo-wski) Nelson '78 (NUR)**, '82 MS; and **Nancy Fey-Yensan '78 (CAHNR)**, '84 MS, '95 Ph.D. Bottom row: **Ellen (Dorsey) Alcaarez '78 (CLAS)**, '86 (NUR) and **Noreen (Giglio) Dari-go '78 (BUS)**.

1980s

➤ After spending three decades in the insurance industry, **Andrea Ezerins '84 (BUS)** traded risk assessments for plot twists. Her new book from She Writes Press, "When the Forest Dreams," is a retelling of L.M. Montgomery's 1926 "The Blue Castle." The contemporary fairy tale follows a young woman who leaves her tedious life to pursue a whirlwind adventure — featuring a chance at love and an obsession with a rare and elusive forest bird. Ezerins lives in Hebron, Connecticut, with her husband, two daughters, and identical twin sons. ➤ **Daniel Waxler '85 (BUS)** and his wife, Donna, shared the wonderful news that their daughter, **Han-nah Waxler DiPanfilo '19 (CAHNR)**, '21 MS, and Michael DiPanfilo welcomed a beautiful baby boy, Malcolm, on Nov. 14, 2025. Here's



"Mac" engrossed in UConn's buzzer beater win over Duke on March 29 this year. ➤ **Susan Weber '87 (BUS)** has been vice presi-

dent, business development, at Aramark's Avendra International since 2020. She has twice been honored with the company's sales leadership award for outstanding sales performance in the hospitality industry. "My time spent attending the UConn School of Business provided the strong foundation for my rewarding and successful sales career." ➤ After 11 years as a marine military police officer and 25 years as the deputy director, **Bonnie Mitchell Swanson '88 (CLAS)** has been named the director of Capstone, Keystone, and Pinnacle programs at the (continued on p. 42)



➤ Alumni from Beta Sigma Gamma gathered in Storrs last September to celebrate the 75th anniversary of their fraternity. Beta Sigma Gamma was founded on April 18, 1950, the first fraternity on the UConn campus to intentionally welcome members regardless of race, religion, color, or creed. Inspired by the ideals of the national fraternity Beta Sigma Tau, the founders sought to establish an interracial, inter-religious, and intercultural brotherhood. Despite initial resistance from the University's fraternity council, which questioned its legitimacy as a fraternity, Beta Sigma Gamma became a recognized and active part of UConn's Greek system. It rejected traditional exclusionary practices such as blackball voting and hazing, and by 1951, more than 10% of its members were Black, an uncommon statistic for the era. In a groundbreaking move, the fraternity amended its constitution in 1973 to admit women, becoming one of the few co-ed fraternities in the country at the time. In 1975, declining membership led to its disbandment, marking the end of a 25-year legacy of progressive values and inclusive brotherhood. This group of alumni raised more than \$3,000 for the Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute.



MAKING GOOD



A COACH'S COMEBACK

On the morning of Jan. 7, 2025, Ray Marsden '99 (ED), '00 MA looked down a Los Angeles beach and saw a wall of smoke enveloping the coastline. That night, from his home nearby, he watched flames engulf the Pacific Palisades neighborhood where he'd worked for 17 years. By morning, he says, "The town was just gone. It was like an atom bomb went off."

A third or more of the campus at Palisades Charter High School, where Marsden coaches and teaches physical education, was destroyed in the Palisades Fire. His office and numerous classrooms were reduced to wreckage. The football field was burned, the track melted, and the palm trees blackened at the once-picturesque campus that served as the backdrop for "Carrie," "Teen Wolf," "Freaky Friday," and "Modern Family." Some 1,000 Pali High students had lost their homes.

Two weeks later, says Marsden, "I turn on my Zoom, and there are 60 faces staring at me from all over LA. One's crashing on an uncle's couch in Florida. I had a kid who was in England. I had a kid on a houseboat. They were everywhere." The Neag School of Education's last-ever sports pedagogy (physical education) graduate found himself once again teaching online gym class. It was muscle memory from the pandemic.

That experiment had taught Marsden's PE department a thing or two about remote teaching (read, asking students to keep up with live Zoom calisthenics will result in a glitchy mashup of moving limbs, playing out across 60 small windows on a screen). So he tried a different tack: daily pep talks. "My job when I talked to them each day was to convince them: Get up from your computer or couch, get out, get some sunlight on your face, get some fresh air, find some friends to play with — and just move, especially during this stressful time." Students could do an online exercise class or explore a park in their temporary neighborhood, then show him their pedometers or fitness journals.

A couple months later, Pali High resumed in-person instruction at a once-abandoned Sears building. "It was emotional for everybody to see each other finally, for the first time since the fire. These are teenagers, and they need each other and — whether they admit it or not — their teachers and coaches as well." In the four-story former department store, windowless classrooms were sectioned off by drywall, with shower curtains or cardboard for doors. Restrooms were trailers in the parking lot. "It was kind of like studying abroad," Marsden says. "But the novelty wore off real fast." Each day, Pali teams, including those Marsden coaches (offseason strength and conditioning for football, baseball, and softball), scoured Los Angeles for a school field, park, campus, or even a beach where they could practice or compete — sometimes ending up an hour away in LA traffic.

Marsden says the resilience he's drawn on throughout this period and his entire teaching career comes from his time at UConn. "When you are doing your student

Palisades Charter High the day after the fire; Marsden over a year later on the first day of classes back on campus; the first day of lessons back at their normal surf break off Will Rogers Beach in Pacific Palisades.

teaching at UConn, they put you in multiple schools with different atmospheres. So you teach inner city, you teach rural, you teach suburban, you teach high school, elementary, middle school. I taught everything — and that was a really positive experience that's helped me always be able to adapt."

In late January, Pali High opened the remediated, industrially cleaned campus, where a full rebuilding effort is still underway.

"Spirits are high now that we're back on campus," Marsden said when we caught up with him in May. "You can't see any real scars on our campus anymore. But the second we step off campus, all the destruction is still there. You just see home foundations. You see entire city blocks of just foundations."

Around the same time, Marsden was able to resume teaching his quintessentially Californian surf class at the local break in the Palisades. After the fire, the area was ground zero for staging the firefighting effort, and the beach was too polluted from fire debris to use. Now, he and the students are back in the water. "We're nowhere near back to the way it was," he says, "but we're on our way." —SIOBHAN MOYNIHAN MURRAY

National Defense University in Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C., where she educates the country's senior military leaders.

1990s

➔ **Ritu Chaudhri '90 MBA** won a 2026 Maritime Women Empowerment Award from Marex Media of India for her leadership career focused on marine fuel treatment chemicals that keep vessels running. ➔ Longtime hospice nurse, leader, and educator **Maureen Groden '90 MS** published "When a Loved One Is Dying: Conversations About Care, Connection, and Coping," from Johns Hopkins University Press. She examines real stories, such as the experience of a colon cancer patient and his family, to explore how the palliative and hospice systems work when a family member is seriously ill, what decisions families may need to make, how to care for their loved ones, and how to say goodbye. ➔ **Ann Marie (Hurley) McCusker '92 MS** earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice from the University of Hartford in May 2025. She works at UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, as senior director of acute care services. McCusker lives in the Bay State with her husband and daughter. ➔ Transit company Transdev recently appointed **Brian Costello '93 (BUS)** as vice president of finance.

➔ **Eric Panke '93 (SFA)** has been promoted to executive creative director at Adams & Knight, a marketing agency in Avon, Connecticut. Panke, an award-winning art director, illustrator, and creative director, has spent over 25 years working in the Connecticut advertising and marketing community. He serves on the board of the Advertising Club of Connecticut and is happily

married to **Elizabeth (Dzilenski) Panke '93 (SFA)**. ➔ **Carol Rando '93 MBA** was named head of Telus Brokerage Connections, a marketing organization that's part of Crump Life Insurance Services, which is an AmeriLife company. ➔ Couzens, Domingos, Allen & Associates, a Glastonbury, Connecticut-based private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, is proudly led by **Matthew Couzens '94 Cert., '99 (CAHNR); Michael Domingos '03 (BUS);** and **Sean Allen '05 (BUS)**. Couzens founded the team in 2006. The practice was named to the 2026 Forbes Best-in-State Wealth Management Teams list.



➔ **Jill Arvanitis '96 (CLAS)** has been named director, ecommerce performance marketing and partnerships, at global toy company Mattel. She has more than 25 years of marketing experience and recently completed four years on the American Marketing Association Connecticut's board of directors. She remains engaged with UConn, connecting with students interested in marketing careers. She and her husband, **George Arvanitis '95 (BUS)**, are parents to two daughters and recently celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in Paris. Daughter **Isabella Arvanitis '25 (CLAS)** is pursuing her MBA at UConn and is on the women's rowing team. ➔ **Lisa Rylant '97 (CLAS), '99 MA**, a pediatric audiologist, wrote "Oakley Gets a Hearing Aid (and a Hearing Test Too!)," which follows a real dog through a fictional audiology visit. Kids see Oakley listen for the beeps, get an ear mold made, and take his new hearing aid home. Rylant



➔ Last spring, artists **Christy Corey '16 (SFA), Jasmine Jones '17 (SFA),** and **Diana Abouchacra '17 (SFA)**, shown from left, organized an art show at the Windsor Art Center in Windsor, Connecticut, showcasing Corey's illustrations, Jones' video and photography work, and Abouchacra's installation and printmaking works. The trio created the interactive event in part to reconnect after their UConn years, during which they were frequent collaborators on coursework and personal projects. One such memorable project happened while studying abroad together in Florence, Italy. Corey live-sketched strangers in markets, shops, and plazas across Europe, while Jones photographed the moment of connection when Corey gave each subject their portrait. The Windsor show explored the nature of artistic collaboration with such pieces as a collective sketchbook and artwork created in conversation with poets, singers, and songwriters. "We hope this exhibit is a reminder to get your art friends together, get your musician friends together, and build community through collaboration in your own life, at whatever scale you can. Family, friends, teachers, anyone that gives you that little bit of encouragement along the way — that's a spark that keeps me coming back," says Corey, who teaches illustration at UConn.

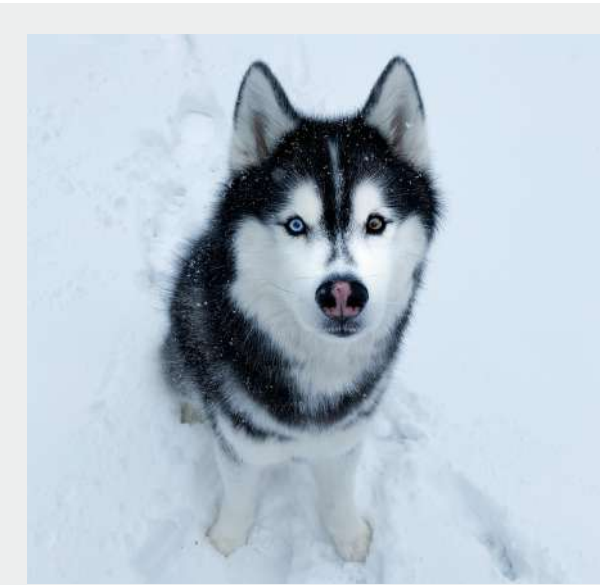


hopes the story will help children feel more confident as they navigate hearing loss. She also adapted the book into a learning tool for other pediatric audiologists. ➔ **Nick Beasley '98 (CLAS)** is co-owner

and director of production at Boston-based custom builder Adams + Beasley, restoring everything from sleek, skyline-peeking penthouses to net-zero homes to historic red New England barns. ➔ **Chris Schmidt '98 (CLAS)**, athletic director at Nipmuc Regional High School in Upton, Massachusetts, was named State Athletic Director of the Year by the Massachusetts Secondary Schools Athletic Directors Association. **Adam Giardino '11 (CLAS), '26 MA**, who was a student of Schmidt's at the nearby Franklin High School, shared

the news. He says teacher and coach Schmidt encouraged him to consider UConn and set up opportunities for him to try sports broadcasting. Giardino went on to earn two communications degrees and works full time as a sports broadcaster, calling UConn games on Fox Sports Radio and ESPN+ and Big East basketball on NBC/Peacock. You might have caught him on air during this year's Winter Olympics. "I don't know what life would look like if [Schmidt's] guidance

toward sports broadcasting in high school never happened, but I'm sure glad it did," he says. ➔ **Antoinette Padula '99 (NUR), '23 DNP** and **Emilee Binette '01 (CLAS), '13 MS, '23 DNP**, who became friends during their Doctor of Nursing Practice days, recently returned from a surgery-focused medical mission to Kenya with Kenya Relief. A group of 19 healthcare professionals provided care to about 250 patients for everything from cleft lips to hernias. "I have



➔ **George Gerard '12 (ENG), '18 MS** and **Samantha Martone Gerard '13 (CLAS)** joyfully remember their sweet dog, Gatsby, who passed away in February. "Gatsby embodied what it means to be a Husky: spirited, expressive, bold, and profoundly loyal," says George. "He was a steady shadow at our side." The pup led a storied life, delightedly jumping aboard for cross-country road trips to nearly every state alongside his travel-loving parents. He garnered attention wherever he went — "people acted as if he were something mythical." In Storrs, he literally stopped traffic, flocked by members of UConn Nation who, certain he must be Jonathan, happily stayed for photos after discovering he was not. Gatsby left behind traces of himself in every place he stayed, with a Cleveland Airbnb host perhaps capturing it best, saying, "Very nice, very hairy dog." Adds George, "He was, in every way, unforgettable." The Gerards live in Deep River, Connecticut, where Samantha directs training for a nonprofit and George is a structural engineer and project manager at a local engineering firm. Their continuing connections with UConn include George's role on the advisory board for the College of Engineering's School of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

benefited and been shaped as a person and a practitioner by the comprehensive and global humanistic approach reinforced throughout my education at UConn," says Binette. "UConn and the UConn School of Nursing inspire clinician scholars to use their skills and abilities in the service of others and our world. As a Husky, it feels natural to critically appraise, question, and seek to change — when needed — the status quo, to walk confidently but gently along with others as they live, bearing witness first and, second, uplifting and intervening with great care and respect from a place of acquired wisdom and skill when invited and welcomed to do so." ➔ Private wealth advisor **Matthew Udal '99 (BUS)** received Circle of Success recognition at Ameriprise Financial Services as one of its top advisors over 26 years with the company. Udal works for Waypoint Wealth Solutions in Farmington, Connecticut, a private practice of Ameriprise.

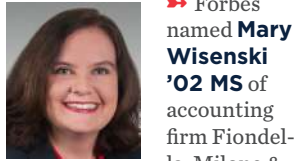


➔ Check out this pack of UConn-trained educators who work together to support students at Laurel Literacy Academy in Bloomfield, Connecticut. From left: family resource center director **Gail Nolan '99 MSW;** speech and language pathologist **Emma Kelleher '23 (CLAS), '25 MA;** preschool teacher **Evoni (Graham) Davis '96 (ED), '96 MA;** math coach **Erin (Kelly) Marella '95 (ED), '96 MA;** second-grade teacher **Abigail Mullings '24 (ED), '25 MA;** principal **Jennifer (Hernandez) Dwyer '03 (ED), '04 MA;** and first-grade teacher **Abi Buckley '23 (ED), '24 MA.**

2000s



➔ **Angela Burke Kunkel '02 MA** will have her fifth picture book, "Snow Geese Season," published by Random House Studio this fall. It tells the story of a boy caught between two homes who finds peace and belonging with his grandfather and the snow geese that return year after year.



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➔ **Nancy Kennedy '05 JD, Cert.,** intellectual property lawyer at the West Hartford office of Stites & Harbison, received the Connecticut Bar Association's 2026 Ladder Award for outstanding service in the legal profession and for "letting the ladder down" for other women to follow in her footsteps. Kennedy has taught at the UConn School of Law and given guidance to the School's clinics, including providing her animal law expertise to the Animal Law Clinic. ➔ **Maggie Lord '06 (CLAS)** was named to Inc. magazine's 2026 Female Founder's 500 list. Lord is co-founder of the Whisper Group, which helps female business owners build and prepare their businesses for high-value sales. The firm's mission is to close the "exit gap" — the disparity in which women receive a relatively small share of wealth generated from sales of their businesses. (continued on p. 45)

TRAJECTORY



ONE WAY TO USE A PSYCH PH.D.

As a student, this alum helped shut down UConn’s only primate testing lab. Now she’s training a new generation of animal advocates.

After protesting for the closure of UConn’s only primate laboratory as students, Stacy Lopresti-Goodman ’09 Ph.D. and her husband, Justin Goodman ’05 (CLAS), ’08 MA, realized they wanted to devote their lives to animal protection.

A student group that the couple founded, the UConn Animal Rights Collective, tipped off the U.S. Department of Agriculture to animal welfare violations at a UConn Health lab, which ultimately led to the lab’s closure. “This was the first time that we had this concrete experience of, ‘Oh my God, we have power to effect change for animals,’” says Lopresti-Goodman.

Goodman went on to a leadership career at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and, now, the bipartisan government watchdog organization White Coat Waste Project.

Lopresti-Goodman has been using her experimental psychology doctorate to examine the psychological toll that animal testing takes on its subjects. She’s published in academic journals and commercial media, including The Hill, The Washington Post, and

The New York Times; testified before lawmakers; lobbied for legislation; and served as an expert witness in animal cruelty trials. And after 17 years as a Marymount University professor teaching courses on primate psychology and animal advocacy alongside more traditional psych fare, she’s become director of animal law education and scholarship for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), where she works with law school students, faculty, and staff to strengthen and expand animal law education across the country. We spoke with Lopresti-Goodman this spring as she began this latest endeavor.

How will you help ALDF train a new generation of animal advocates? Right now I’m developing a template syllabus for an introductory animal law course to make it easier for faculty to offer these classes. Creating a new course can be a heavy lift, so this lowers that barrier. It also gives students a tool they can bring to faculty if they want to see animal law taught at their school.

The course introduces students to the legal frameworks that govern how

“These beagles make amazing companions. That’s why they’re used in laboratories, because of how docile they are and easy to handle. Those same traits that make them great companions make them vulnerable,” says Lopresti-Goodman.

humans use and interact with animals — everything from animal cruelty laws and dog fighting cases to custody disputes involving companion animals, wrongful death claims, endangered species protections, and federal regulation of animals used in research. The syllabus offers assignments and activities designed to get students actively engaged — not just reading about the law but also thinking about how it operates in practice.

I care deeply about teaching in a way that actually reaches students and has philosophy built into the course design.

What issues do students who study animal law often end up working on IRL?

Animal law shows up in more places than people expect: custody disputes involving companion animals in divorce cases, trusts that provide for an animal’s care, housing policies that restrict pets, animal cruelty prosecutions. It is less a narrow specialty and more a set of issues that cuts across many areas of law.

How did you gain the legal background for this role?

I’ve worked within the legal system through public records requests, legislative advocacy, and policy efforts aimed at improving protections for animals. As students at UConn, my husband and I used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain records from a primate laboratory, which uncovered violations of the Animal Welfare Act, which in turn contributed to the lab shutting down. Then, as a professor at Marymount, I taught students how existing laws often fall short. That came up in courses like Primate Psychology, where we looked at the Animal Welfare and Endangered Species acts, and Food Ethics, which discussed the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act.

I also worked with students on advocacy efforts, including lobbying for legislation such as the Captive Primate Safety Act and Violet’s Law, which would require adoption options for animals used in nonlethal research. So while I’m new to ALDF, I’ve been working at the intersection of animal protection and the law for a long time.

Has your UConn dissertation on human perception and action informed your animal protection work at all?

In some ways, yes. Ecological psychology — what used to be called experimental psychology — emphasizes that similar processes underlie how all animals interact with their environments, which aligns with how I think about animal cognition and welfare. But more directly, my doctoral training shaped the skills I rely on most today. Research, writing, critical thinking, teaching, and public speaking have all been central to my work as an advocate.

I read that you were involved in the Ridglan Farm beagle case, the one that made national news this spring when the facility was shut down and 1,500 beagles raised for lab use were rescued and adopted out.

Yes, I submitted expert testimony in two lawsuits involving dogs confined at Ridglan. My role was to assess the behaviors visible in footage from inside the facility.

I observed stereotypic behaviors, such as repetitive circling and pacing, which are well-documented indicators of psychological distress. These behaviors are associated with barren environments, overcrowding, and lack

of meaningful social interaction with other dogs and humans.

Are you seeing a move away from animal testing in this country?

There are still more than 100 million animals in U.S. laboratories, so we have a long way to go. Under the Animal Welfare Act, animals like dogs and primates can still be subjected to invasive and painful procedures. Amendments in the early 1990s acknowledged their social and psychological needs, but the regulations remain weak, and enforcement is limited. Primates can still be housed alone despite their complex social lives. Dogs may be kept in cages only slightly larger than their bodies, and minimal movement can count as exercise. So the law recognizes these animals’ needs on paper but does very little to protect them in practice. Stronger standards are needed, especially ones that address psychological well-being and create pathways for animals used in nonterminal studies to be retired to sanctuaries or adopted into loving homes.

But I am encouraged by the increasing shift at both the state and federal levels toward more ethical, human-relevant alternatives to animal testing.

Do you see other causes for optimism?

What keeps me going, even when it’s hard, is knowing that I’m documenting these experiences to show how closely they mirror human responses to trauma, which can inform both scientific understanding and advocacy efforts. When people understand that the way other animals experience the world and suffer is similar to the way we do, it

helps build empathy, which I hope then turns into action to help animals.

The first time I visited the Save the Chimps sanctuary in 2011, I was brought to tears. The chimpanzees, all rescued from biomedical research, were living on large open islands, lounging in the sun, and grooming one another. Knowing where they had come from made the contrast incredibly powerful, especially seeing how resilient they were. I had a similar experience last year at Kindness Ranch Animal Sanctuary. I sat on the floor while a group of beagles rescued from testing climbed all over me, and I couldn’t help but cry. It was a mix of sadness for what they had endured and joy in knowing they were headed to loving homes. I guess I cry a lot!

What’s something you’d like people to understand about your work?

I think that we all have the power to improve the lives of animals just through our everyday actions. Deciding what products to buy, you know, were they tested on animals? If you hear about something that’s happening and you don’t agree with it, you can contact your representative about legislation that would either prohibit that or would support other ways to help animals. For example, there are a lot of statewide bills that require adoption as an option for animals who are used in nonlethal studies, like dogs coming out of labs. People can read about animal protection issues online, tweet, share, all the things — we really do have a lot of power to make small changes in our lives for animals. If people feel compelled to do so, I hope that they do. —SIOBHAN MOYNIHAN MURRAY

2010s

➔ In March, CopperPoint Insurance Companies appointed **Mark Woods ’10 MBA** senior vice president and head of product; he now leads the company’s workers’ compensation and commercial property and casualty insurance products.



➔ **Asha Bhandary ’11 Ph.D.** published her second philosophical

monograph. “Being at Home: Living Autonomously in an Unjust World” explores how race, gender, and caregiving

relationships reshape our understanding of autonomy.



➔ **Bethany O’Brien ’11 (CLAS)** celebrated the third release in

her “Adventures with Jonathan” series of children’s

books. “Campus Construction” follows her popular “The Lucky Husky” and “Dairy Bar Disaster.” She and her husband, who met as first-years in West Campus, live in Tolland with their two children. ➔ **Megan (Wittel) Howe ’12 (SFA)** received (continued on p. 48)

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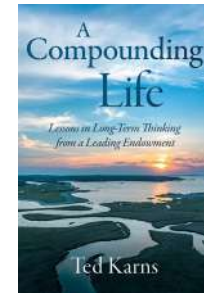


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LIFE LESSONS

INTERESTING

Financier Ted Karns believes you can build character exponentially by building upon each of your good choices in the same way investors compound interest to grow wealth.



Ted Karns '01
JD learned early in life to value things that last, informed by the harshest of life experiences — losing his father to cancer when he was 8, followed

by a house fire two years later.

“The takeaway was watching my mom,” Karns says. “It was just amazing how she reacted to some really tough challenges — losing her husband, the house fire. She also got Parkinson’s when she was 50. Through all of that, she remained incredibly optimistic and supportive and welcoming. I learned the meaning of resilience and how to keep things in perspective. When colleagues would get worked up about a missed promotion or a lost deal, I always had the sense that ‘This is important, but it’s not everything. There’s much more to life.’”

Karns spent 15 years mastering the world of investing as the managing director for Princeton University’s \$34 billion endowment. His recent book, “A Compounding Life: Lessons in Long-Term Thinking From a Leading Endowment,” details a philosophy of life seen through the lens of investing. It suggests you can grow more than just your bank account by making intentional value-driven decisions about things like relationships, character, and purpose that build in value over the course of a lifetime.

“I wrote the book especially for students and young professionals,” Karns says. “If I could tell them one thing, it’s that the small, values-aligned

choices matter more than the dramatic ones. You probably won’t see the payoff right away, but that’s how compounding works. If you think about compound interest, about interest on interest — small decisions each have an additional impact, and then each of those has additional impact, until you have a kind of exponential growth.”

Those decisions include the people you work with or for. Investing in a hot new idea might be compelling, but the trendiness of the idea isn’t as important as the character of the people building or running the business, says Karns.

He tells the story of a dinner meeting with a new venture capital team who, instead of wining and dining him at a fancy four-star restaurant, treated him to a simple chicken parmesan. “They were just themselves. They were not trying to impress. One of the things that was most impressive about that team was that they very much wanted to be continual learners. They wanted feedback. We were having a dialogue. They wanted to build a firm that would be continually getting better. We would actually help each other get better.”

Through experiences like that while managing the endowment, Karns learned to value humility and curiosity over bravado, the kind of character that endures while the world changes all around it.

In the professional and the personal, says Karns, demonstrating character builds trust and pays off over time. He cites an enduring relationship with his mentor, Mark, a pioneer in the private equity industry who was also a friend of Karns’ in-laws. “Over the years, he was always very supportive, but he never glossed over things. If I asked him something, I knew I would get the

truth. I called him when Princeton offered me the job — it was a step down from what I had at the law firm where I worked, and I was stuck on that. Mark listened, and then he told me to think less about the title and more about the kind of learning and community I wanted around me, and to see it as more than a job change.”

According to Karns, that conversation shaped the next 15 years of his life, and he worked to continue building the trust he had with Mark. “I started with a balance and added to it slowly over the years, one email and one lunch at a time.”

Having good mentors, says Karns, makes you want to pay it forward. His mission now is to help people understand the value of continual investing in what endures. It’s one reason he left Princeton to teach courses on venture capital and the principles of finance at Boston University’s Questrom School of Business. There, he explains to students how starting a savings account that earns interest when they’re young will set them up with financial security when they reach retirement age. And helping others might be the greatest investment of all — a lesson Karns learned after his father died.

“No one person filled that role,” he says. “Many, many people stepped up to be helpful to my family. There were a number of Holy Cross priests who were incredibly generous with their time. One of my friends’ fathers, a stepfather, my sister, my Nana, my grandmother in Dorchester, my aunt and uncle — it was just a community of family and friends who were incredibly supportive of my family, for which I am grateful.”

In his teaching and in his book, Karns hopes to pay forward their kindnesses.
—PETER NELSON

TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS

1: B According to author John McPhee, the first student thesis at UConn written on a computer rather than a typewriter was composed by a pharmacy student using the University mainframe computer in 1976. 2: A Ten Apple IBook laptops were made available to students and other members of the University community for three hours at a time according to an article in the UConn Advance. 3: D UConn Fort Trumbull, located within the city limits of New London, lasted from 1945 to 1950. Nicknamed “Siberia” because of its distance from Storrs, it included a bookstore, dining hall, radio station, and weekly campus newspaper called the Trumbull Tide. 4: C After defeating Tennessee 70–64 to claim its first national championship, the women’s basketball team made a June visit to the White House, where the team — minus Rebecca Lobo, who was playing in Italy with the USA national women’s team — met with President Bill Clinton. The men’s team had its first White House visit, also with Clinton, four years later. 5: C After the famous hurricane of 1938 hit Storrs, two students made a survey of all the trees that had been brought down on campus, and counted 1,762 — including the ill-fated Charter Oak descendant.

SHARE YOUR NEWS!

➔ To submit a Class Note, email alumni-news@uconnalumni.com or write: **Alumni News & Notes UConn Foundation**
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Submissions may be edited for clarity and/or length.



➔ **Rhegan (Fisher) Murphy '17 (CLAS)** and **Brandon Murphy '17 (PHARM), '19 Pharm.D.** are the proud new parents of Benson Storrs Murphy, whose middle name pays tribute to the campus where his parents met their senior year. Benson was born at 28 weeks in August 2025 and spent 68 days growing stronger and healthier in the neonatal intensive care unit under the protection of a UConn flag. He joins a loving family chock-full of UConn grads, including his grandparents, **Nancy Cavaliere-Fisher '80 (CAHNR)** and **Stephen Fisher '74 (CLAS), '76 MBA**, and his uncle and aunt, **Barrett Fisher '12 (CLAS)** and **Laura (Niquez) Fisher '12 (CLAS)**, who also met at UConn. “We are thrilled to see the Storrs legacy carried on through the next generation,” writes happy grandmother Cavaliere-Fisher.

(continued from p. 45) a joint doctoral degree in education from the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College after successfully defending her dissertation, “Youth at the Center: Developing Interests, Addressing Adversities, and Reimagining Spatial Justice in a Networked Afterschool Learning Ecology.” She and her husband, **Matthew Howe '12 (CLAS)**, celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary in June. ➔ **Devin L. McMahon '13 (CLAS), '16 JD** recently joined Hartford, Connecticut-based law firm Halloran Sage as an attorney in the insurance and commercial litigation practice groups. ➔ **Devon Kulinski '14 (CLAS)** is a member of the Auditory Studies Investigation Group at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, which received the 2026 Safe-in-Sound Award for Innovation in Hearing Loss Prevention. The group conducts research to help service members protect their hearing from blasts and other noise exposure. ➔ **Riley (Houle) Ives '15 (CAHNR), '16 (NUR), '26 MS** played soccer on a full scholarship and earned a bachelor’s degree in allied



health sciences before taking advantage of the School of Nursing’s accelerated second-degree program. She and her husband, **David Ives '15 (NUR)**, spent several years working together as travel nurses before returning to Connecticut. Riley earned her nurse practitioner master’s degree in Storrs this year, and David is working on his Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice through Central Connecticut State University.



➔ Cheers to **Lauren Tracey '19 (CLAS)** and **Jake Rothstein '19 (CLAS)** who tied the knot on Sept. 6, 2025, in Stonington, Connecticut, with a pack of attendant Huskies.

2020s

➔ Whoa! Veradermics, a biopharmaceutical company co-founded by **Reid Waldman '21 MED-RES**, raised \$256 million in its initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol MANE.



➔ The proud moms of **Frederick A. Zering IV '21 (ENG)** and **Meagan (O'Donnell) Zering '21 (CAHNR)** tell us the two, who met as first-years in Air Force ROTC, are both captains in the U.S. Space Force. They married in 2023, are stationed at Vandenberg Space Force Base, and live in Santa Maria, California, with their rescue pup, Sadie.



➔ And congrats to **Nick Saracco '22 (CLAS)** and **Ciara (Hale) Saracco '22 (CAHNR)** who recently married in South Carolina.



JOB ENVY

BUSINESS IS BLOOMING

On a late-summer Thursday, **Alexandra (Beaudoin) Pilon '13 (CLAS)** and **Monica Beaudoin**, owners of Pratt Street’s Bloom Bake Shop, are preparing floral centerpieces, coffee, and desserts for a gala benefiting the same Hartford nonprofit that ran the community gardens where Pilon grew flowers more than a decade ago.

“It’s full circle,” says Pilon, who left her government relations career in 2021 to join the business her baker sister had started the year prior. “People often are confused by my pivot, but in my mind, I really do a similar job. I advocate for Bloom Bake Shop, for Pratt Street, for our city.”

A centerpiece of the brick-paved pedestrian thoroughfare since opening in 2022, Bloom’s temptations include cinnamon coffee cake and raspberry lemon scones, a blueberry latte with house-made syrup, locally sourced gifts from caps and shirts to pickles and jams, and Pilon’s bailiwick: florals. Bouquets are everywhere, from dried arrangements for sale to sunflowers, sweet pea, cosmos, and more awaiting tonight’s event. Pilon and Beaudoin helped launch the nonprofit Pratt Street Merchants Association to promote and champion the historic street, which frequently hosts street markets, salsa dancing nights, and seasonal events like the late summer Pratt Street Yacht Club Coastal Cookout and October’s Great Pratt Street Autumn Festival.

While the neighborhood gatherings are special, Bloom itself has become part of its customers’ everyday routines. Some 60% of their clientele are regulars.

Besides working alongside her family, that’s Pilon’s favorite part of the gig. “We get to celebrate their milestones with them. We meet them when they’re planning a wedding, and then sometimes we get to make a baby shower cake, a first-birthday cake, they’ll come in for Mother’s Day flowers,” she says. “It’s really exciting to grow with our clients in that way.” —*JULIE (STAGIS) BARTUCCA '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA*

Bloom added seating, soft-serve ice cream, and more grab-and-go options for students moving into the new UConn Hartford residence hall a few doors away. “We’re so excited to have them downtown,” says Pilon.

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OF PHOTOJOURNALIST AND PROFESSOR STEVEN G. SMITH'S
"THESE UNITED STATES." SEE PAGE 14.