We looked to the west across the vast plain that lay at our feet, far below the high summit we had recently ascended by ski lift. An ominous wall of darkness rushed toward us, enveloping everything in its path. Someone muttered, “Sauron, the Lord of Darkness, comes now in all his might!” We all then turned from this foreboding view to the sky above to watch the most astonishing and spectacular event in all of nature. This was the moment for which the two of us had been preparing for seven years. Totality had begun for 200-plus Pomona College alumni, their families and friends, in the Pomona College Solar Eclipse Reunion of 2017.
A hundred families, all of whom shared some connection to Pomona College Classes of ’64, ’65, and ’66, had assembled atop Fred’s Mountain in west ern Wyoming. We had flown or driven to the area in the days before, ridden a mile long ski lift to the top of the peak and watched with growing excitement as the dark disk of the moon gradually ate its way across the surface of the sun. In just over two minutes, the total portion of the eclipse was over. Light began to return to the sky and we could see our classmates would be able to see the shadow of the moon racing across the valley floor below. We calculated that from atop Fred’s Mountain, with very clear air, one might be able to see the eclipse at 1,662 miles per hour, it would take only a bit more than a hundred miles to make it to the top. We also calculated that from our location, the eclipse event would take place at an early 1:00:00 p.m. on 8/21/17. The sum of these data and time numbers equals 47! What’s more, the exact geo graphic location of the top of Fred’s Mountain is N 43° 73.7’ W 110° 934’. The de grees of latitude/longitude position also add up to 47!”

The 47 Eclipse

One for all of this writing, the Phelps twins said, was the opportunity to revisit Pomona’s mystical number 47 on communications related to the event. In four short words, their description of the event to classmates, they wrote, “No meridians savants will note that at our location, the eclipse event was at an early 1:00:00 p.m. on 8/21/17. The sum of these data and time numbers equals 47! What’s more, the exact geographic location of the top of Fred’s Mountain is N 43° 73.7’ W 110° 934’. The digits of our latitude/longitude position also add up to 47!”

Interested in an informal class reunion built around the eclipse? The response was enthusiastic. With a goal of completely filling the resort’s 95 rooms, we first solicited sign ups from our classmates and then expanded the proposal to our two adjoining classes, ’64 (Dionysus) and ’66 (Pele). And so we brought together the god of thunder, the god of wine and ritual madness, and the goddess of life, volcanoes and capriciousness quite a volatile mix. From those three classes, we drew enough participants to fill the entire ski resort, counting spouses, children and grandchildren of classmates.

Then came two years of intense planning, including two inspection trips to the resort, negotiations over fees, menu planning for group dinners, contracts with vendors, identifying speakers (who would a Pomona gathering be without strong intellectual content?) and much more. We even included four night sky “state parties” opportunities to view gorgeous objects in the night sky through telescopes opened by experienced amateur astronomers organized by Franklin McBride, March ’17.

We approached the resort’s management well before they had a clear sense of the enormous enthusiasm that would later emerge for the Great Eclipse of 2017. Thus we were able to negotiate a very favorable deal a four night minimum stay at only moderately higher than normal room rates. In the months just preceding the eclipse, commercial tour operators were asking and getting three or four times as much per person in nearby Jackson Hole, Wyoming. On eclipse day, rooms in a Motel 6 in nearby Driggs, Idaho, were going for $1,000 a night. In the last year before the eclipse, as people began to focus more on the upcoming event, the resort’s marketing team received inquiries from numerous other groups, including eclipse chasers affiliated with Brown and Oxford uni versities. Sadly for them, but happily for us, Pomona College got there first.

For our speaker series, Pomona College sponsored two Pomona faculty members. Professor of Geology Robert Gaines and former Brackett Professor of Astronomy Bryan Penprase. And from the ranks of our alumni, we added Ed Krupp ’66, director of the Griffith Observatory in L.A.; Larry Price ’65, part of the team that proved the existence of the Higgs boson with CERN’s Large Hadron Collider; Barbara Becker, historian of astronomy and spouse of Hank Becker ’66; and, James A. Turrell ’66, the world famous artist who manipulates light and space. To our considerable relief, the morning of the eclipse dawned with almost completely clear skies.

Left: The ski lift up Fred’s Mountain brings more participants to the summit. Below, Skypals watch the slow progress of the moon across the sun from their mountain perch.
The glorious halo of the solar corona was much more expansive than we had calculated, thanks to the haze, the smoke enhanced our eclipse experience. Thanks to the haze, the smoke from vast forest fires in the Pacific Northwest. As it turned out, however, smoke from the resort to watch. From left: Professor Robert Gaines, “Chasing Cosmic Explosions,” by former Pomona Astronomy Professor Bryan Perriera; “De-Mooning by Darkness,” by Ed Krupp ’66, director of the Griffith Observatory; “The Scientific Discovery of the Century,” by physicist Larry Price ’65, “Truly Business: The Search for the Soul of the Sun in the Shadow of the Moon,” by historian of astronomy Barbara Becker; and “The Art of James Turrell,” a conversation between Knapp and noted light-space artist James Turrell ’65. Photo opposite page by Martha Lassenberg; following photo by Robert Gaines; inset photo by Alex Bentley and Hunter Bell.
Excelling Wisely

POMONA IS EXTRAORDINARY. We remind ourselves of this proudly when we marvel at the brilliance of our students and faculty, the accomplishments of our alumni, the talent of our staff, the amazing marks Sagehens leave on the world. How many high-achieving people, who never grow up, do we see every day?

What a wonderful thing! Yet I wonder something else, too. How much room do we give ourselves and each other to slow down? To choose which amazing thing we are going to do—today? There’s a lot of pressure on everyone to take advantage of all of the gifts and opportunities in front of us. We advise each other to excel. Maybe we can talk about excelling wisely.

Sometimes people ask me for advice, and this column seems a good place to give some, if you’ll allow me. Most of us acknowledge that you have to seek balance in life; equally, we need other reminders. Creativity requires up the pressure to achieve. There’s good reason for all of that. Everyone needs to be re-energized. There is a lot of pressure on everyone to take advantage of all of the gifts and opportunities in front of us. We advise each other to excel. Maybe we can talk about excelling wisely.

Parents, friends, professors, bosses, coworkers and mentors routinely use language that discriminates against people who need help. The stories in this issue are about dealing with timeless, and timely, discrimination—how to find and flourish outside of the expectations of society.

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The two gentlemen sitting in the dirt talking with Seaborn and Dickson are almost surely William, who was team captain in 1906 and strikingly handsome, but who tragically died in a mining accident soon after graduating, and Willard W. Charles Greenie (Charley) Wharton 1907, my grandfather, who later became a sociologist in the Sierra Madre town of Baldwin, Calif., and then in downtown Los Angeles, after graduating from medical school at Bowdoin. All three of them were distinguishable from their Pomona mates by their six-foot-plus height and wild curly hair—as was their sister, Minnie 1902, who taught school in Pomona and was vice president of the Pomona Alumni Association after World War I. I knew how to communicate with those Wharton twins, largely because I learned Wharton Dickson, as per the wishes of the hosts of the “Hidden Pomona” podcast, who had little informal work with aside from old photographs. The Wharton family surely knew them very well.

By the way, that early 19th-century Wharton family “thing” about Pomona College (the entire family attended to Pomona for a decade so the children could attend) has persisted. If my children had matriculated at Pomona as I hoped they might they chose Princeton and Occidental instead, they would have been the 31st and 32nd extended Wharton/Alexander/Cigars/Gannon/Wyse/Wiederanders family members to do so (alongside also my father, Walter L. Cigars, who chaired the Physics Department for many years). To further the Pomona cause, my grandfather, Charley Wharton, and my grandmother, Aileen, in addition to being substantial direct donors to pomona during their lives, also contributed financially and otherwise to the successful passage through the Pomona of my siblings, Thomas Cigars ’82 and Kathryn Cigars Sum ’88. How I managed to miss Pomona’s siren song is not clear.

—Walter C. Cigars
Williams College ’78
Winchester, Mass

I Do Belong
I’ve been meaning to write since reading the touching, inspiring article by Carla Guerrero ’06, “I Do Belong Here,” in the Summer 2017 PCM. Then, this week, President Starr asked us to write our Pomona stories to her, and I responded. It was only right that I also write to you, for it was Carla’s story that inspired me to be in touch with Pomona College again after over 60 years. In 1952–54 I was a freshman and sophomore at Pomona College. As the only Japanese American in my class (these were the two Asians—no Blacks or Latinx) and coming from an immigrant, working-class family in Los Angeles, I was very aware I did not fit at Pomona in terms of race or social class. I was even invited to join the International Club. I suppose the well-meaning people who invited me did not understand that people of color were not necessarily born outside the U.S.

Your story, the information that more than 30 percent of this year’s new class are domestic students of color and President Starr’s appointment fill me with joy. Pomona has always been a fine academic institution. I’m glad it is also moving toward being a welcoming home for multiethnic students who reflect the current demographics of our country.

Carla, and thank you to Carla and others who were part of the wise group of people who brought President Starr to Pomona College.

—Amy Iwasaki
39
El Cerrito, Calif.

The Mind of a Psychopath
I enjoyed reading the article titled “How to Understand the Mind of a Psychopath” in the Summer 2017 PCM I was impressed with 2017 graduate Kelly Lawson’s view of the cognitive science and what goes on inside the mind of what most consider to be a “serial killer.” I found it interesting that many prominent figures in today’s society have traits found in psychopaths.

Now, when it comes to famous serial killers whose acts spawned an utter distrust among Americans, it is hard to determine how the legal system should treat these individuals. An example of this is Ed Kemper, infamously as “the Coed Butcher.” Although he was found guilty of his horrible crimes and received seven years to life in prison, he remained himself in the police and ultimately fell remorse for what he had done. In his most recent parole hearing, he rejected attending it because he deemed himself unfit to return to society. He suddenly recognized that his crimes were morally wrong and was not in a position to do so.

But what caused this sudden change in rehabilitation obviously has a great interest in this branch of psychology, and I completely understand when she says that “our country’s” combination of therapeutic traits, where people can be placed on a spectrum of “good” or “bad.” Once again, I enjoyed reading this article, and I hope we, as a human society, can find success in her future career. I also wish her the best in her effortful influence public policy in our legal system.

—Jules Winfield
Inglewood, Calif.

Extreme Individualism
The summer issue of PCM contains three letters from readers shocked by the simplistic right/wrong mentality of the modern occupants of Pomona College. I studied philosophy with Fred Santag and W.T. Jones in the ’50s and sang in the glee clubs. But for the last 50 years of a good group of peoples, and with the support of wonderful faculty and staff, I thrive. The excitement she described in the hiring of Gabe Starr as Pomona’s new president is felt deep within Claremont. I’ve talked to many of my Pomona friends, and we all agree—we’re so very proud of Pomona and can’t wait to see how President Starr will influence and inspire the entire community. Thank you, Carla, for writing a piece that truly captured not only a shared experience of the past but also a shared enthusiasm for the future of our college. I’m very excited.

—Juliette Cigars ’98
Whitaker, Calif.

I hope certain letter writers in the Summer 2017 PCM who accused the Cal Poly Pomona police of official “political correctness” is simply treating those different from them with basic dignity and respect. They should try it sometime. They might learn a few things that four years at Pomona evidently failed to teach them.

—Bruce Mirkin ’78
San Francisco, Calif.

Correction
In your abridgments in the Summer 2017 PCM, you listed Robert Shelton as Robert “Bob” H. Shelton ’47. He was always known as “Robo.” I hope Robert Shelton at Pomona. I should know because I married him.

—Miriam Cross Shelton
Laguna Beach, Calif.

I have been a student of Sanatana Dharma, the timeless path of the ancient riches in India. Before that I was interested in Chinese thinking for decades.

My background leads me to see what is going on at Pomona College as a unique form of individualism in the still adolescent culture that is the United States. What we need today is the ability to open our hearts to everyone and use our minds to try to understand what our hearts tell us about others. Pomona is of course a bootless place.

I take issue also with the idea that climate change is the major issue. Doris Lessing’s futuristic novels suggest what the world might look like after catastrophic changes. They are lost but surviving. However, I would say that the major issue is the fallout from corporate social irresponsibility, our corrupt capitalism and our apparent inability to live together in a crowded landscape without resulting in wars between cities blocked up into nationalities.

There are so many good people in America, although one might think money is the main value for most people. So I also hold the thought that Trump may save us by pulling us so close to self-destruction that we may suddenly experience a mess aphasia and find in our midst unknown new leaders who can lead us, hopefully without too much humor about how foolish we were to be taken in by our dogmatic old beliefs.

—Thomas (Mahaj) Jelacicsek ’59
Concord, Calif.

“Hidden Pomona” and the Whartons
I was recently visiting my mother (Mayrene Gor- don Cigars ’49) in Arcadia, Calif., and noticed the cover photo of the Spring 2017 issue of PCM depicting Pomona’s first Black graduate, William Dickson 1904. The magazine was doing secondary duty under a flower pot, but the water-stained photo nevertheless looked familiar. And indeed, it depicts Dickson boxing with my great-uncle, William Wharton 1906. Then, inside on pages 28 and 29 was a wonderful double-page spread photo of Dickson in a year and a half after his graduation, socializing with the 1905–06 Pomona College football team—umably relaxing and receiving pans playing a football game. (In those years, Pomona routinely beat USC, among others.)

The great-great-great-grandson on his back to the camera wearing a drenched suit coat was very likely Seaborn Wharton 1901, who stayed on as Pomona football coach for a number of years before returning to Falla, Calif., to manage the family farm.
A Gift of Wilderness

Pomona College is expanding the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park with a gift of 463 acres to the city of Claremont. The land, including Every Canyon and three Padas Hills parcels, is to be preserved in its undeveloped state and remain available to the public for hiking, biking, horsemanship and other passive recreational uses. With the new addition, the size of the park will increase to nearly 2,250 acres.

“The Claremont Wilderness area is a natural jewel and provides an important connection to nature,” says G. Gabrielle Starr, president of Pomona College. She adds that the commitment to sustainability of her predecessor, David Oxtoby, “is reflected in his support for research. The lower portion of the park will be used by the College’s Biology Department, used by the College’s Biology Department, and by the College’s Biology Department.

“Every Canyon is home to the Herman Garner Biological Preserve, used by the College’s Biology Department for research. The lower portion of the canyon consists of a type of riparian woodland that is becoming rare in Southern California. Every Canyon’s varied topography and vegetation, combined with a permanent stream, result in a rich bird and insect diversity.

SURF’S UP!

Camille Malraux ’21 begins her first year at Pomona College in uniquely Southern California fashion, with surfing lessons at Mondo’s Beach in Ventura. Again this year, as part of New Student Orientation, Pomona’s efforts to connect with surfing lessons at Mondo’s Beach in Ventura. Again this year, as part of New Student Orientation, Pomona College will bring together students from across the nation, who are working to make a difference in a variety of fields. The group includes Kara Tuler ’07, the subject of “Life and Death in the Desert” on page 30.

Jobs for the Homeless

Pomona College’s efforts on behalf of the homeless expanded this semester with the launch of the Pomona Employment Partners (PEP) initiative by the Draper Center for Community Partnerships. It’s the newest of three programs that make up the Center’s Hunger and Homelessness Initiative. Unlike its sister programs—the Food Recovery Network and the Homeliness Action Team—which focus on such urgent needs as food and shelter, PEP will focus on long-term solutions by connecting the homeless with actual employment opportunities.

Conceived by Sophie Rose ’19 and Mariel Diaz ’18, the program will combine the work of job researchers with that of on-site volunteers to locate possible job openings and help homeless clients create résumés and apply. “Most employers don’t like being asked whether they do drug tests on applicants or whether they are tolerant,” job researcher Sarah Burch ’21 told Pomona’s student newspaper, the Student Life. “Coming out of jail definitely brings many barriers to getting a job. We try to find specific jobs that meet the needs of the homeless community, taking into account the obstacles that formerly incarcerated people have.”

WORKING DOG

The newest member of the Campus Safety team wears his tall baby as he strides across campus, pausing to home his back scratched or his ears scratched. But don’t be fooled. Officer Red Dog is hard at work.

He is built more for comfort than speed at this point, says Campus Safety Director Stan Skipworth, who adopted the 10-year-old beagle mix from a rescue organization. But he is also certified as an emotional support animal, and he has a more modest training for that.

Skipworth had been considering adding a canine to the staff, and when he happened on Red, he decided it was worth a try. He is a good natured dog, and thought it would be a nice way to build on our community oriented policing policy.

The response, he said, has been remarkable and not just when Red is out patrolling, wearing his official red collar and his Campus Safety insignia on a red and black bandana.

We actually get several visitors a week who come here specifically to see Red and pat him, and then they go on to class. Skipworth says. Red really ears his keep, however, when people come to Campus Safety to make a report. He doesn’t do real police work. Skipworth says, but he’s our official greeter, and when people who have a bad experience come in to do a report, he comes and sits with them, and I think he makes a real difference.
To be honest with you, I didn't realize just how dangerous this environment was until I was actually in it. Now, I'd been warned. People talked about it and I was fully briefed. But I dismissed those warnings, thinking, “It’s exaggeration. This is for people who’ve never been in a wilderness before.” I assumed they were giving us the worst-case scenario. I didn’t take it all that seriously. Then I entered that jungle environment and realized it was even worse than described.

PCM: Were you afraid when you arrived and you realized just how dangerous it was?

Preston: Oh, I wasn’t at all afraid in the beginning because it was gorgeous. It was amazing to be in a place where the animals had never seen people. They weren’t frightened of us. But where I had the come-to-God moment was when I saw that gigantic fer-de-lance coiled up that first night, highly aroused and in striking position, tracking me as I walked past.

The head of the expedition, a British SAS [Special Air Service] jungle warfare specialist, tried to move the snake but ended up having to kill it because it was so big. The fight was terrifying. That snake was striking everywhere and there was venom flying through the air. It was really shocking. After that, I felt a little shaky. I thought, “Well, this is sort of a dangerous environment, isn’t it?”

PCM: Are there many places in the world that are left unexplored?

Preston: There really aren’t. But even today there are some areas in the mountains of Honduras that remain unexplored. The thickest jungle in the world covers incredibly rugged mountains. When you’ve actually been in that jungle, you realize the steepness of the landscape and the thickness of the jungle make it almost impossible to move forward anywhere, except by traveling in a river or stream. You can’t get over the mountains. You just can’t get over them. You can fight with machetes for 10 hours and be lucky to go two or three miles.

And then, of course, there are all the snakes. The number of poisonous snakes in that area is staggering—and you can’t see them.

PCM: Are you in grasslands? What is the terrain like?

Preston: Well, it’s interesting that you mention that. Most of it is really thick jungle, but where there isn’t jungle, there’s high grass. It’s nine or 10 feet tall and it’s very thick-stemmed. It’s almost like wood. It’s the worst stuff to travel through. You back away at it with a machete and you can barely make any forward movement. There are snakes hiding in the grass. They climb up into it so there’s always the chance of their falling down on you. Wherever you are, when you move forward after cutting through with machetes, you’re stepping through leaves and debris that are lying on the ground. It’s two feet deep. You have no idea where you’re putting your feet.

So it’s a really frightening thing when you see just how common the snakes are in there.
camera traps out, and they saw the most camera traps. They recently brought those gists down into this valley, and they set presence are extremely rare on the surface human beings to be humbled by nature once that is not only indifferent but is actively:

What is it about these unexplored places for you as a group? And broadly speaking

PCM: Would you talk about places that are

level, and it was extremely impressive to

by what we saw. They had the scientific response to that experience?

PCM: Did you feel that others in the expedi-

by 10 Ph.D. scien-

and coming up with the most reasonable

and knowing how many were there before. And,

sition group were sharing the same sort of

And do you still think those objections are

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Preston: Yes, 1 did. We had 10 Ph.D. scien-

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American doctors and in equilibrium. It's a beautiful thing to see that

It's very vital for us to protect them.

Conservation International sent 14 biolo-
gists down into this valley, and they set

camera traps. They recently brought those camera traps out, and they saw the most amazing animals—animals thought to be ex-
tinct, species that were unknown to science, and unambiguously dense numbers of big cats.

This is truly a rain-forest environment that is what it was like before the arrival of human beings and in equilibrium. It's a beautiful thing to see that

Preston: Yes, I did. We had 10 Ph.D. scien-
tists with us on this expedition. We had eth-

obshobatians, three anthropologists, an

anthropologist, engineers and others. And all of them were deeply affected and impressed by what we saw. They had the scientific background to appreciate it on a deep level. While I was appreciating it on more of a lay-
man's level, they understood it on a scientific level, and it was extremely impressive to them.

Preston: Everyone agrees that there is a
tremendous die-off among the indigenous people of the New World from Old World pathogens. The controversy is what percent-
age of people died. There are those who say;

“Well, we don't have solid evidence that 90 percent to 95 percent died. All these num-

bbers that the early Spanish give us, they're very unreliable.” But the doubters have not

come forward with their own numbers. They just say it's all very unreliable.

However, with no event in history are

we given reliable numbers, especially that far back. It's really a question of looking at all the evidence, the confluence of evidence, and coming up with the most reasonable

interpretation. And the most reasonable in-

terpretation, which is, in fact, the consen-

sus, is that there was a 90 percent mortality rate from European diseases. That's just

staggering.

Of course, the big question is, “How

many people were in the New World before the Europeans arrived? What was the popu-

lation? We have very good numbers on what the populations were after, but we don't

know how many were there before. And,

again, I think the consensus view is that the aboriginal populations in the New World were quite high.

Preston: There are mountain lions, jaguars, margays, ocelots, Apex predators.

And they're everywhere in that valley. They've never been hunted by people. And what they prey on are animals like peccaries and
tapirs, which are also heavily hunted by humans. There are so many peccaries and
tapirs in this environment that they support a very large number of these apex predators.

Preston: When you open the book, it begins as an adventure story, but it turns into a his-
tory lesson and a biology lesson. Obviously, it's still a treasure book, but pretty soon layers to it. You talk about the historic
decimation of the population in the New World versus the lack of decimation in the Old World. Is what you put forth something that's accepted by the mainstream? Obvi-
ously, the numbers seem to bear that out, but are other people talking about it in these terms?

Preston: Yes, I would say that the view I pre-

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Preston: In my book I try to balance some of the legitimate objections with some of the ones that were not legitimate. To put it in perspective, it was a very small group of archaeologists objecting very vociferously.

The Honduran archaeologists who dismissed our findings were individuals who had been removed from their positions following the military coup in Honduras in 2009. The military removed the leftist president and then turned the government back over to the civilian sector, and they had new elections. A lot of people think that’s a big fix.

The fact is the importance of this discovery is just archaelogical. It has stimulated the Honduran government into rolling back the illegal deforestation of this area and enacting a two-thirds of the expedition came not by archaeologists but by engineers using lidar, which is an extremely expensive technology affordable to most archaeologists but by engineers using lidar, which is an extremely expensive technology.

Some of the dismissed archaeologists did not look with approval on our cooperating discovery, they initially didn’t know anything about it. There were no scientific publications yet. They heard that a “lost city” had been found, and some reacted with understandable skepticism. But when the scientific publications started appearing, the criticism ceased. As of now, almost a dozen archaeologists have worked at the site, all from top institutions—Harvard, Caltech—as well as archaeologists from Honduras, Mexico, and Costa Rica. When the doubters examine those scientific publications and saw the lidar images of the city, they realized, “Oh, wow, this really is a big fix.”

The Honduran government is going to be effective? Deforestation is going to be a hot zone of disease. When I got leishmaniasis, of course, I became very interested in leish because obviously, it’s a very incurable disease. You find it’s suddenly a rather intense focal interest of your interest. Epidemiologists have figured out that leishmaniasis across the United States. There was a paper that looked at best-case and worst-case global climate models for the spread of leishmaniasis into the United States. Even in the most optimistic, best-case scenario, leishmaniasis will spread across the United States and the burning of the forests in the area.

After Copán collapsed, a lot of Maya influence floured into the Mosquitia region. The ancient people of Mosquitia then started building ball courts. They started selling ball court rings and playing the Mesoamerican ball game. And they started laying out their cities in a kind of vaguely Maya fashion. But they weren’t Maya. They probably did not speak a Mayan language. They probably spoke some variant of Chiché, which is a language group connected to South America.

There are so many mysteries as to who these people were, where they came from, what their relationship was to the Maya, and what happened to them. Now, the excavation of the cache hidden at what might have happened to these people, what caused the collapse not only of T1 but of all the cities in Mosquitia. But we still don’t know anything about their origin, where they came from, who they were. And we have only a vague idea of how they lived in this seemingly hostile jungle environment, how they thrived in that environment.

Preston: Two thirds of the expedition came not by archaeologists but by engineers using lidar, which is an extremely expensive technology affordable to most archaeologists but by engineers using lidar, which is an extremely expensive technology.

So much of it remains untouched still, but do you feel that the experts are gaining more knowledge about this culture that disappeared?

Preston: Yes, this culture is so little known and so little studied that it doesn’t even have a name. They’re just the ancient people of Mosquitia. But they had a relationship with the Maya. It’s a very interesting question as to what the relationship was. The city of Copán is 200 miles west of the site of T1.

Preston: Yeah, I would’ve. Honestly, as a journalist, I’ve put myself into some dangerous situations, and if this is the worst that’s going to happen to me, I’m probably ahead of the game. I’m lucky. I would do it again. Look, leishmaniasis is not the worst thing that can happen to you. A lot of people are dealing with a lot worse, like cancer and things like that. So I’m doing just fine.

Preston: It unfortunately does seem to be coming back. This is not unusual for the strain of leish that we all got. I finally photographed the lesion that is red-welting. But I haven’t sent it to my doctor yet. I just don’t have the guts to do it.

Preston: That is a very important question as to what the relationship was. The city of Copán is 200 miles west of the site of T1.

Preston: It unfortunately does seem to be coming back. This is not unusual for the strain of leish that we all got. I finally photographed the lesion that is red-welting. But I haven’t sent it to my doctor yet. I just don’t have the guts to do it.

Preston: What price are you willing to pay for a story? If you had known beforehand what would happen, would you have still gone?

Preston: Yes, I would’ve.

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Preston: Talk a little bit about that preservation scenario, leishmaniasis will spread across the United States and the burning of the forests in the area. Epidemiologists have predicted the spread of leishmaniasis into the United States.

Well, it’s hard to say. Deforestation is going to be a hot zone of disease. When I got leishmaniasis, of course, I became very interested in leish because obviously, it’s a very incurable disease. You find it’s suddenly a rather intense focal interest of your interest. Epidemiologists have figured out that leishmaniasis across the United States. There was a paper that looked at best-case and worst-case global climate models for the spread of leishmaniasis into the United States. Even in the most optimistic, best-case scenario, leishmaniasis will spread across the United States and the burning of the forests in the area. Epidemiologists have predicted the spread of leishmaniasis into the United States.

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Sea Chanties

To help his students get on board with one of his chief research interests, Music Professor Gibb Schreffler got them out of the classroom and out to sea. On a breezy spring afternoon, aboard the two-masted sailing vessel Eny Johnson in Los Angeles’ San Pedro Bay, Rancho—Schreffler’s ch quaintman alter ego—led a group of Pomona and Claremont Colleges students in singing “Goodbye, My Riley” and “Even’s Gone a Hilo,” traditional work songs known as “sea chanties.” Adding the physical labor of pulling halyard lines gave the students a sense of how chancy singing once fit into the work of the crew on a traditional sailing vessel. As the boats grew more difficult toward the end of the lines, the chantey leader shifted to a “short drag” chanty such as “Haul Away, Joe” and “Head the Bowline” to reflect the cadence of a more demanding physical task.

The half-day sailing field trip was part of Schreffler’s special topics course, American Maritime Musical Worlds, where his class explored America’s musical development from the perspective of those who have lived or worked near the water. The goal was to better understand the context and function of the shipboard work songs prevalent in the 19th century.

According to Schreffler, the topic of American maritime music is not well-documented or researched. His scholarship focuses on the musical experiences of African Americans, and his findings place the tradition of sea chanties within the larger umbrella of African American work songs. The epicenter of the chanty genre, he explains, was not Great Britain but America—or, more precisely, the western side of the “Black Atlantic,” defined by Southern U.S. ports and the Caribbean.

Schreffler’s research also found that chantey singing by sailors at sea represented just one branch of a larger network of work-singing practices, most of which were performed by extra-firm laborers. In fact, far more chanties were sung by stevedores—the work- ers loading ships—than were ever sung by sailors. Sailors’ labor was tended to be associated with white workers, and stevedores’ labor was associated with Black workers—which partly explains the neglect of the latter’s story in ethnocentric narratives told by English and Anglo-American authors of the last century.

Schreffler’s research has been challenging, in part, because much of what has been presented in the last century has created a strong bias against recognizing African Americans as the creators of the sea chanty genre. His published work on the subject includes the article “Twentieth Century Editors and the Re-envisioning of Chanties,” in the maritime studies journal The Nautilus. His research takes him to archives and ports in cities around the country that were centers of maritime commerce, such as Mobile, Alabama, and Galveston, Texas. He also has traveled internationally in a traditional sailing ship from the Azores, in the middle of the Atlantic, to the coast of France, to study applied shipwarming in order to better understand the historical texts he studies.

Since the maritime work songs Schreffler studies are not used in today’s sailing, recreating their performance helps him imagine them and find answers, despite the lack of detailed information available. Since 2008 he has been working on posting online his renditions of every documented chantey song he has encountered. His purpose for the recordings is to simulate psychologically the process of acquiring a repertoire and learning the genre’s method and style.

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AS AN ATHLETE, Aseal Birir ’18 has made his mark as the leading running back in Pomona-Pitzer history. At the same time, as a senior chemistry major working on his last research project, he is also leaving his mark in the laboratory.

On the athletic side, Birir was named Rookie of the Year in the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC) during his first year of college. Since then, he has validated that award by going on to claim team records both for career rushing and for single-game rushing.

Birir’s scientific journey started early at Pomona after his senior year at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, Calif. As an incoming first-year student, he participated in the summer High Achieving Program (HAP) for minority students interested in pursuing a career in the STEM fields. The HAP experience in Professor EJ Crane’s biochemistry lab provided him with an eye-opening introduction to scientific research. It also laid the foundation for the academic support that would be key to balance his rigorous curriculum and a full football schedule.

The HAP program also introduced Birir to Professor Chuck Taylor, who has worked with several Sagehens on medical research projects. It was Professor Taylor who recruited Birir into the lab and to consider pursuing a career in medicine.

Birir works with the biochemistry lab on a medical research project with Professor Charles Taylor.

During his junior year, Birir was honored by the conference, which named him SCIAC’s Athlete of the Week.

“The single-game record is somewhat bittersweet for me,” says Birir. “I am very proud of my individual effort, but it stings to know that I broke the record in a game that we lost in the last minute. However, it will probably be the game that I remember for the next 10 years from now when I reflect back on my football career at Pomona.”

Birir also serves as captain during his senior season.

“Birir’s athletic abilities and his leadership on and off the field have been instrumental in the improvement of our entire football program,” says Sagehen Head Football Coach John Walsh, who recruited him in 2012.

On the academic side, under the guidance of Chemistry Professor Chuck Taylor, Birir, who hopes to become a doctor in the future, is focusing his research on reducing the risk of bacterial infections in hospitalized patients for infectious disease.

“I’ve always been interested in science and medicine, especially after joining the biochemistry lab,” Birir says. “I think it’s really important to prevent infections and involve myself in that field. It also helps that I enjoy the lab. I love working with people on projects and helping them achieve their goals.”

“The lab work is very rewarding,” says Birir, who has been working with Professor Taylor since he entered Pomona. “Some students would throw up their hands and say ‘I’m done,’ but Aseal would come back and we’d work through the problem together.”

“You can’t teach a person to have this kind of drive, but by getting to know them, you may be able to learn what they excelled at and tap into that,” adds Taylor. “Ultimately, the drive comes from within and is a combination of intellectual curiosity and willingness to learn from one’s mistakes. This is probably the trait that makes Aseal a great football player and what will make him an excellent physician.”

On top of his athletic and academic commitments, the Novato, Calif., native finds time to mentor young men at a local high school. On Fridays, he volunteers for the program Young Men’s Circle at Pomona High School through the Pomona College student group BLOC (Building Leaders On Campus). The program involves college volunteers meeting with high school students and encouraging them to pursue their goals through either work shops or conversation.

“We try to use what we have learned about our own paths to college to help these students pursue whatever goals they have—may that be college or something else,” says Birir.

Birir’s “Young Men’s Circle works to bridge that opportunity gap by providing the kids access to volunteers who were in similar situations to theirs to not also think they can’t do it.”

Another factor in Birir’s success is the ability to forge relationships with his men. Two high school coaches greatly influenced him to pursue a college football career and to follow his dream of becoming a doctor. Coach Mark Ridley put him in contact with college coaches, while Mick O’Mara was his coach and his AP chemistry teacher—and one of the reasons why Birir is a chemistry major today.

“Without him [Ridley], I probably would have not even realized that I could play football in college or even go to about pursuing it,” says Birir. “He still keeps in contact with me and is planning on coming to Claremont this year to see me play.”

“What does Birir want to accomplish in his final year as a Sagehen?”

“I guarantee if you ask Aseal what is more important—his personal record or the team to win games—he will always want team success,” says Walsh.

“Win SCIAC and best CMS [Claremont-Mudd-Scripps],” Birir responds. —Patrick Zurita West

Two for MLB

TWO MEMBERS OF last year’s Pomona-Pitzer football team are now making their way in the world of professional baseball. Starting center fielder and second baseman Tanner Nishioka ’17 was picked by the Boston Red Sox in the ninth round of the Major League Baseball draft—the highest draft pick in Sagehen history—while pitcher David García ’17, though undrafted, signed a contract with the Milwaukee Brewers.

“It’s a huge honor to have two Sagehen baseball players signed by MLB teams in the same year,” says Sagehen Head Baseball Coach Frank Pericoli.

Nishioka is the first Sagehen drafted to the MLB since David Cohen was selected by the Mariners in the 27th round of the 2011 draft. During Nishioka’s senior season, the neuroscience major from Honolulu led the nation for Division III with 18 home runs and a .888 slugging percentage, and he racked up a slew of honors, including selection for First Team All-American, Academic All-American, West Region Player of the Year and SCIAC Player of the Year.

“I just wanted to play baseball for as long as I could,” Nishioka told the Los Angeles Times. “I wouldn’t say I thought I would be drafted in the top 10 rounds at all. I still can’t believe it.”

Nishioka completed his college career in the top six in Sagehen history in his .321 batting average (.392, .389, and .310), and RBIs (98, 90, and 66). Nishioka also ranks seventh in single-season batting average (.441) and is tied for third in home runs in a single season (18).

García ended his senior year with a co- record of 7–0. The right-hander also earned All-West Region honors during his junior season after he finished the year with a perfect 7–0 record and a 2.31 ERA with only 16 earned runs surrendered in 62 2/3 innings pitched.

After graduating in May with a B.A. in economics, García tried out with the Mets, the Angels and the Twins. He was on his way to Garry, Ind., with plans to play baseball for a non-MIIB affiliate, the Gary Southshore Railcats, when the Twins gave him a call.

“Two hours before I arrived, I got the call from the Twins,” said García. “I was kind of just having dreams of becoming a reality,” says Garcia. “I couldn’t believe it; and I still can’t believe it. It was pure elation.”
A LOOK BACK AT OCTOBER 14, 2017, THE DAY G. GABRIELLE STARR WAS INAUGURATED AS POMONA’S 10TH PRESIDENT.


PHOTOS BY CARLOS PUMA AND WILLIAM VASTA

1) During the morning Inauguration Symposium, Dominic Mensah discusses a student empowerment program he helped found in Ghana. 2) Starr poses with four current and past chairs of Pomona’s Board of Trustees — from left: Stewart Smith ’66, current Chair James D. Glick ’04; Jeanne M. Buckley ’65 and Dr. Richard E. Greusard ’51. 3) Starr delivers her inaugural speech. 4) Starr is hooded during the installation ceremony. 5) Glick applauds after the completion of Starr’s official installation as Pomona’s 10th president.

“We discover. We create.
And every discovery begins with a question, an observation, something that piques the human imagination. As a community we test our knowledge, engaging deeply with our fields, our peers and the world beyond us. We don’t close our eyes to critique, to alternate possibilities, to the reality that we may be wrong. And the ultimate result is something new in the world: a new idea, a new solution, a new molecule, a new policy, a new work of art, a stronger community.”

—PRESIDENT G. GABRIELLE STARR
“We have a voice—indeed, many voices—what will we say, and how will we say it to the world? When this College was launched ‘the world’ meant something different. Our place, now, is different. We must decide together what that place will be. We have stood for access. We must stand for equity and inclusion. We have stood for principle. We must stand for nuance. We are smarter than slogans, smarter than simple binaries, smarter than the world always knows. We can be humble. We can open our voices to the world. We can shape discourse now. Listen to each other. Hear each other. And, please, mark these words: As one Pomona, we realize the future of our own making. Thank you, let’s celebrate each other, let’s party, and then—let’s get to work.”

—PRESIDENT G. GABRIELLE STARR
“Pomona College offered me unparalleled opportunities as a first-generation, low-income, undocumented student. I was able to attend Pomona College cost-free, study abroad and visit 11 different countries, engage and partner with the surrounding communities to bridge socioeconomic barriers, think critically about what I was learning in the classroom and how to best apply such knowledge to better my home community.”

—Sergio Rodriguez Camarena ’16

“I hope I can meet you next year at our 60th, for you also exude that openness that meant so much to me then and has allowed me to persevere in my efforts to guide a broken world toward a saner future.”

—Carolyn Nesper ’58

“When I think about what Pomona means to me, I think about one particular conversation I had with my son, Franklin, early on during his time at Pomona. We were talking just before he was scheduled to go meet with a family friend who was visiting Pomona as a prospective student. I asked him, ‘If he asked you what the best thing about Pomona is, what would you say?’ Without hesitating, he answered, ‘I am surrounded by people who care about me.’”

—James Blancarte ’75

“Pomona College wasn’t just a great educational experience. It was a new perspective on a bigger, more diverse world of different cultures, national and global politics and society, in general—a total game changer.”

—Sarah Manik P’17

“Pomona College and her people quickly became my adopted family. The people I met, experiences I had, and opportunities I realized served me well as a student and have continued to be a source of support and inspiration during my 37 years (ack!) as an alumnus. I look forward to a new chapter in Pomona’s storied history under your leadership, and I can’t wait to meet you in person. Remind me to show you my Cecil Sagehen tattoo.”

—Frank Albinder ’80

INAGURAL MESSAGES

Leading up to her inauguration, President G. Gabrielle Starr went online to ask alumni and parents to share stories, memories and thoughts about their own Pomona experience. Here are a few excerpts. To read others, go to www.pomona.edu/sharewithpresidentstarr.
LIFE AND DEATH IN THE D-POD

EMERGENCY ROOMS ARE AMONG THE MOST STRESSFUL WORKPLACES IMAGINABLE, BUT FOR ATTENDING PHYSICIAN KARA TOLES '07, STRESS IS JUST PART OF THE BALANCING ACT THAT MAKES LIFE WORTHWHILE.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK WOOD
A.M. At this hour, as at every hour, the D-Pod bustles beneath the round-the-clock glow of the hallways strip-lights. Attending physician Kara Toles ’07 has just begun her shift in the Emergency Department of the UC Davis Medical Center (UCDMC), and for the moment, both the outgoing and incoming teams are jambled together inside the tiny, walk-through office known as the “Doc Box,” a space about the size of a janitor’s closet. As they work their way through the customary hand-off, their terse exchanges are studded with terms like “angioedema” and “metabolic encephalopathy.” Toles quickly takes charge, questioning the three young residents and one visiting medical student who will make up her team for the day.

Once the hand-off is complete, Toles has no time to sit out for her first tour of the surrounding hallways. As she speed-walks, print-out in hand, she pokes her head through each set of curtains to introduce herself, greeting each patient by name. The important thing, she explains, is to get a firsthand sense of which patients can wait and which need immediate care. “The first thing we’re trained to do with a patient is say, ‘What do I see, hear and smell?’ In medicine, and especially in emergency medicine, we have to use all of our senses, picking up cues. Just standing outside of a room, you can tell a lot about a person’s airway, breathing and circulation—the ABCs—just from looking at them.”

Today, most of the cases seem to be fairly routine, but one catches her eye—a man suffering from a severely swollen lip and chin. She speaks with him for a few minutes before moving on. “That can go downhill really fast,” she remarks as the burrers back to the Doc Box. “We need to take it very seriously.”

Welcome to the D-Pod. That’s D as in disease, disaster and death. It’s what we call the section of the ER that handles the patients Toles describes as “really sick”—that is, dealing with potentially life-threatening conditions. Today, their immediate welfare and, possibly, their ultimate survival will depend on how well Toles and her team do their jobs.

THERE’S A CERTAIN IRONY in Toles’s decision to specialize in emergency medicine. Back in 2005, as a junior at Pomona, struggling with the academic workload of a premed student and trying to decide what major to pursue as she followed her childhood dream of becoming a doctor, she was featured in an article in this magazine titled “Stressed,” in which she opened up about the difficulty of dealing with the unrelenting demands of college life. Her first year was so stressful, she said at the time, “I’m sure I would have transferred if it were not for the support that I got through my sponsors and other peers in my sponsor group.”

Fast-forward—past graduation, past a year off to regroup, past four years of medical school at UC Davis and various rotations as a resident—to her choice of arguably the most stressful of all medical specialties.

“I know,” Toles says with a laugh when reminded of that history. “What does that tell me about myself? I guess I thrive in stressful environments! I feel alive in stressful environments! It’s that degree of stress that makes you get up and do, and not feel paralyzed. And I think that I need some degree of that to feel alive. But then, my baseline is to back off and say, ‘Holy, all right. I’m going to chill now.’

But every once in a while, I need to remind myself that I’m alive.”

That balancing act seems to be a lifelong pattern. At Pomona, for instance, she solved her early battle with stress, in part, by choosing a less traditional path into medical school, switching her major for instance, she solved her early battle with stress, in part, by choosing a less traditional path into medical school, switching her major from neuroscience to Black Studies because it allowed her to break away from the sciences and spend more time exploring her identity as a Black, queer woman and how to incorporate social justice into her practice as a physician.

“I was able to tap into those other sorts of courses—psychology and art history and music and dance, West African dance, and history of jazz with Bobby Bradford and all these super-cool classes that I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to take if I was doing neuroscience. It was really fun to learn about that stuff, and it kind of helped me have a better understanding of who I was as an African American woman, so it was a pretty awesome experience.”

Today, the pattern continues with Toles’s decision to work part time instead of committing to a full-time position in a hospital ER. “Residency was a lot of people telling me where to go, what to do, and when to do it,” she says. “I’m a very headstrong, independent individual, and so I needed that part of my life back after training. I’m taking a little bit of a pay cut because I’m not signing on somewhere and getting, you know, that salary and benefits package. But I only work around eight to 10 shifts a month, so I have a lot of free time to decompress and tap into things that give me life and make me happy and make me feel fulfilled.”

9 A.M. Toles checks in again on the patient with the swollen lip and is delighted to learn that the swelling is going down. After counseling him on his daily medications, she returns to the Doc Box and wolfs down a beef stick, a few walnuts and some trail mix to keep her energy level up. “You never know when something’s going to go down, so I just snuck and then have a full meal after I get off,” she says.

With her whole team momentarily present, Toles offers to demonstrate a new technique for resolving a dislocated jaw without having to put pins inside the patient’s mouth, but as if on cue, events begin to speed up, postponing the demonstration and sending residents scrambling.

First, there’s a new analysis of imaging for a patient suffering...
required to do this practice," she says. "I love the fact that I get to see such a breadth of pathology. I think it's incredibly engaging in one way. I get to see people in their most vulnerable state, and that's really rewarding."

She went on to explain that the doctors at UC Davis work in a variety of settings, from the emergency department to the pediatric intensive care unit. "I love the fact that I get to see a wide range of patients and conditions," she said. "It's a challenge, but it's also very rewarding."
Imagine for a moment that this is your life. Interviewing the likes of Fidel Castro, Gabriel García Márquez, Lee Kuan Yew, Jimmy Carter and Shimon Peres. Getting shot at, shelled, detained or banned in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Cuba. Bearing witness to global events such as the rise and fall of the Medellín and Cali cocaine cartels, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, upheavals in Venezuela and Indonesia, a coup in Fiji and the defeat of the Taliban.

And now imagine that, as a reward for your efforts, you are “promoted” to a management position, where conference calls, performance reviews and bureaucratic jockeying have taken the place of covering palaces, presidents and the outbreak of war and peace.

What do you do then? Why, you quit your job and move to India with your wife and two sons to start your own weekly newspaper, of course. At least that’s what you do if you’re former Associated Press (AP) bureau chief Steven Gutkin ’86.

Whether fleeing Colombia because of death threats from the Cali cartel, or ducking and covering during a Taliban shell attack on a battlefield north of Kabul, or witnessing the independence celebrations of the long-suffering people of East Timor, Gutkin has always equated work with adventure and the pursuit of truth. And when he talks about his long career as a foreign correspondent, his war stories unfurl like a tightly wrapped, multicolored Sikh turban.

For instance, early in his career, he and another journalist were left stranded in the Amazon jungle with Yanomami tribespeople by a pilot who took off from a grassy field promising to return in a few hours but came back instead 10 days later. Gutkin and the other reporter were forced to trade their clothes with the tribesmen in exchange for plantains to eat, and he recalls watching dozens of Yanomami click their tongues—their word for “wow”—upon seeing their first magazine.

At the time he was angry about the pilot’s antics, but looking back, he says, “I was afforded a great privilege to spend time deep in the Amazon jungle with an intact hunter-gatherer society completely untouched by Western influence. I don’t think it would be possible to find such people today.”

And then there’s the story he tells about the day Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar was killed. Gutkin had submitted questions to the drug lord’s son, Juan Pablo Escobar, and asked him to get answers from his dad over the phone. While the two lingered on the phone, the police traced their call. Gutkin says, “Father and son spoke about a number of things that day, …

PHOTO BY SEPHI BERGERSON
but among them was going through the answers to a journalist’s questions—that would be me.

Gutkin soon arrived at the Medellin home where Escobar had been gunned down with a pistol in each hand. He saw blood, shattered glass and Escobar’s half-eaten hot dog. He recalls, “I used the same phone that Escobar had used when his call was traced, partly because he was answering my questions, to call in my reports to the AP.”

In some ways, I have always considered being banned from Cuba as something of a badge of honor, but the truth is I love the country and very much would like to return there. I hope enough time has passed now that I will be able to do so.

So, after decades of pursuing big stories and dodging bullets, he accepted a job as deputy regional editor for the U.S. South—“a good gig,” he says, but still “a far cry from the life I had come to love.”

Looking back, Gutkin says the price for achieving profitability at Goa Street was too high, however. He gives the example of Goa casinos, whose advertising was essential for financial survival but who would not countenance negative coverage despite a scandalous presence in the state. “I do not want to choose between my principles and my pocketbook,” he says of his eye-opening introduction to media entrepreneurship in India.

About a year ago, the couple decided to quit printing their weekly and publish online only. Currently, they are in the process of turning Goa Street into a probono publication that promotes art, culture, and responsible citizenship in the state and beyond—with any hopes for further monetization postponed to a later date.

The couple had been traveling to Dutt’s native country of India every year since their marriage in 2002, and in 2008, they had purchased a house in the tiny western state of Goa. “If the idea was to start something on our own,” he says, “Goa seemed the place to do it.”

The first edition of their new weekly newspaper, called Streets, was published on Nov. 8, 2012. “We started out with a bang, to say the least,” Gutkin says. “Our Goa Street Flash Mobs, days before our launch, attracted about 160,000 views on YouTube, and we arranged hop-on, hop-off party buses around the state, with traditional Goan brass bands aboard, to ferry people to hot spots around Goa.”

As a chief in Venezuela from 2004 to 2010, he led one of the AP’s largest international operations and directed coverage of wars in Lebanon and Gaza and the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Then a big story broke on the other side of the world that would change his life forever.

In the spring of 2010, a bloom at the Deepwater Horizon platform sent some 210 million gallons of oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico over a period of five months, making it the largest spill in the history of the petroleum industry.

At the time, Gutkin had been hoping to take up a new position in Mexico City, but the AP convinced him to move to Atlantic to lead the AP’s multimedia coverage of the spill, involving scores of reporters, photographers, videographers, graphic artists and others. Eventually, however, the story died down, and Gutkin found himself living in Atlanta with no permanent assignment. “The kids were settled in school,” he says, “and we were hoping to buy a home and stay there for a while.”

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For the next four years, Gutkin and his wife, along with a devoted staff, published a weekly newspaper, informing readers about things to see, do and eat in Goa while providing cutting-edge articles on a wide range of topics, including politics, art, literature, music, environment and finance.

“One idea was to bring the idea of an ‘alt-weekly’ to India,” Gutkin says. “We worked very hard and had a wonderful time.”

When Alan came to check out the property and saw the towering coconut trees, the first thing he said was, “We’re keeping them,” Gutkin remembers. “So instead of cutting the trees to build the house, we built the house around the trees. We’re calling it Villa in the Palms, kind of like the sequel to Villa in the Sky.”

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For Ramona Bridges ’77, the plunge into homelessness was like falling off a cliff. One day, she was a grounded single woman with a solid career, working a stable job. The next, she was an aimless, disoriented street person, pushing her sad belongings in a shopping cart, repeatedly arrested as a trespasser, in and out of jails and mental wards, and even banished from her own church, her only solace in her life’s most desperate moment.

Suddenly, Bridges had lost her job, her home, her car. And she had lost her way in life.

Once the bright star of her Catholic high school in South Los Angeles, one of the few African American students attending Pomona College in the mid-’70s, Bridges had met a dead end in mid-life.

How could it have come to this? How did a young woman with so much promise wind up with nothing to her name except a misdemeanor criminal record, multiple restraining orders and a tarnished résumé?

“I guess I haven’t thought about it because my faith helped me so much when I was homeless,” says Bridges. “If I hadn’t had the religious background that I had, something bad probably would have happened to me out on the streets. I felt like it was a spiritual experience. So no, it didn’t scare me.”
was born in Austin and still has a taste of a Texas drawl. Her father was an accountant, her mother a teacher. She had three siblings, but she always thought of herself as “a mommym’s girl, her favorite child, probably.” She was a tomboy when it came to sports, but she treasured the dresses her mother would sew for her at Easter.

Her parents divorced when Bridges was 13, and the teenager moved with her mother to Los Angeles. She remembers it as “a happy move,” hitching a U-Haul and heading west with her uncle and cousin. The year was 1969, the start of a new life.

The newcomers moved into an apartment in the Fairfax district. They were one of the few African-American families in the neighborhood, she recalls. But Bridges didn’t attend Fairfax High, the public school across the street. Instead, she enrolled in an all-girls Catholic school, the now-defunct Regina Caeli, 25 miles away in the heart of Compton. Her mother made the daily drive to drop her off and pick her up.

The extra effort paid off. The school’s 1973 yearbook documents the graduate’s stellar record: student body president, National Honor Society, glee club, French club, and varsity basketball. Her fellow students also voted her “Most Typical,” an ambiguous title that, as she explains it now, may as well have been “Miss Goody Two-Shoes.”

“I was always doing what I was told to do,” said Bridges, who speaks with a slight lisp that she attributes to sucking her thumb as a child. “A lot of times I got criticized for not doing the popular things, because you know how girls are. They want you to chase the boys and all that. And I just wasn’t going to necessarily do all that. You know, I was going to do the right thing. So I didn’t win any popularity contests. But the nuns loved me.”

Back then, Bridges didn’t dwell on what the future might hold. “You know, you’re young and you don’t really have anything in mind,” she says. “I knew I was going to college. That was a given, because my mother made a house rule that everybody was going to college. No exceptions.”

Pomona College recruiters came on campus and “made a good pitch,” she recalls. They were looking for “somebody from the inner city that had scholarship credentials,” and she fit the bill. Bridges enrolled with vague ambitions to be a doctor, though she quickly decided “that I couldn’t cut the mustard” in premed. So she switched majors to psychology, “which was more my forte.”

Bridges also came out in college as a lesbian, though it wasn’t a crisis for her. “No, it might have been a crisis for my mom,” she says, with a smile. “It blew her mind. But it wasn’t for me, no.”

At the time, she thought her psychology degree would lead to “some kind of job” in counseling or social services. But after graduation, the only job she could find was in the insurance business. For the next 15 years, Bridges toiled anonymously in unglamorous insurance work, first as a claims adjustor with State Farm in Oregon, then back in L.A. with the California Department of Insurance, this time handling consumer complaints.

It was steady work for more than a decade, but not exactly fulfilling. So Bridges started working for nonprofits, sometimes as second jobs. She was a youth advocate, children’s social worker and caregiver. Then in 2001, she was hired by the California State Employment Development Department (EDD), helping people file unemployment claims. She held that job for almost 12 years, until a crisis within the agency led to a personal crisis for Bridges. Stress at work, she says, triggered the mental illness that had haunted her since her 30s. Suddenly, she found herself on the downward spiral into homelessness.

Bridges remembers finding comfort on a bench outside her church the Agape International Spiritual Center, where she could listen to the wind chimes.
BRIDGES WAS DIAGNOSED WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER in the 1990s. She had gone through a bitter breakup with her long-term partner and the loss of their Lancaster home through foreclosure. At the same time, she discovered that her younger brother, now deceased, was HIV positive.

“Then, I thought: ‘Is this all I get?’” she says. “And I got thrown under the bus as a result of speaking out.”

Looking back, Bridges says police and prison guards treated her “like a second-class citizen.” She doesn’t remember ever being aggressive, police and church officials tell a different story. They say a barefoot Bridges was often angry and delusional, lashing out at strangers. In one report, officers describe her as “yelling incoherently and (being) verbally aggressive.”

At one point, Bridges sought counseling from a church minister, the Rev. Greta Soseth. Bridges brought an expensive bottle of wine and asked the minister to give it to Oprah Winfrey, who she said was her friend and an inspiration. The pastor could see that Bridges was in a lot of pain. What she needed was just someone to talk to, to listen and to offer encouragement.

“I admired her in a way,” says Soseth, “because she was having such difficulties, yet she always had a higher vision for her life. She always had these great ideas for businesses that she could start. The spirit within her was strong.”

Bridges was soon allowed back in the church, and the minister has been impressed with her recovery.

“Now she seems completely self-sufficient,” Soseth says. “It’s almost like talking to a completely different person.”

EVENTUALLY, BRIDGES HAD A LIFE-SAVING PAYDAY.

Her disability came through, and so did a settlement for a separate lawsuit, which she says she had to sue to win. The money helped her get off the streets, and her restored health insurance helped her gain stability, because she was able to start taking her meds regularly again.

Bridges also credits the help of loyal friends like Audrey James, who visited her in jail and bought her clothes. Then there were her best friends—books. They were like medicine without a prescription. The “healing messages” contained in them, she says, helped “me find my way back to myself.”

Still, it wasn’t easy getting an apartment with an eviction on her record. So in 2014 Bridges rented a room that she found advertised on a bulletin board at a Starbucks on La Brea in Inglewood. She lived there for the next two years, until a family crisis called her back to Texas.

When Bridges was homeless she had had a falling-out with her mother, who at one point refused to bail her out of jail. “My mother was really disappointed that I had gotten arrested and was homeless,” she says, “so she lost a lot of respect for me.” Now, the oldest daughter was attending college.

Back among family and friends, Bridges applied for her cousin and fellow church member, Mitchell Leigh, and Thelma Charles’ homeless advocacy to work on the county agency’s emergency response team.

Yes, the search has been frustrating. But through it all, there’s one thing she hasn’t lost—her faith. And that gives her hope that she’ll finally find work again.

“I pray on it,” she says softly. “I pray on it.”

Fall 2017

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HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION

As summer came to a close, many Pomona students returned to campus with new career experiences, thanks to internships across the country and around the globe. Through the Pomona College Internship Program (PCIP), 68 students received funding to participate in work opportunities that would otherwise be unpaid, while others found paid internships that also allowed them to live in new cities and gain new experiences. Here are six of their stories...

Marisol Diaz ’18
Major: American Studies
Internship: Legislative intern with California Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia ’99
Location: Sacramento, California

“Interacting with staffers in Assemblymember Cristina Garcia’s office has been great. She has such a wonderful team of people, specifically, in her office, there are a lot of women and women of color. It’s very encouraging to me, and it’s very important in shaping my experience to be surrounded by women.”

Jacob Feord ’18
Double Major: Economics and Japanese Language and Literature
Internship: Intern with the United States Department of State at U.S. Embassy Tokyo-Akasaka
Location: Tokyo, Japan

“A U.S. government institution managed by Americans, located in Tokyo and staffed largely by Japanese local staff makes for a very unique workplace culture. The mixture of languages and business ideologies is a concoction absolutely unique to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. At first it seemed difficult to navigate, but I ended up having a lot of fun getting to know the quirks of the embassy system.”
Pablo Ordoñez ’18

Major: Public Policy Analysis

Internship: Policy intern with the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau

Location: Washington, D.C.

“Everyone has this big misconception about the government: It’s a very slow, monotonous, perfunctory place. But like any company, it has a CEO and high-level executives, meetings, people very connected to the mission of the bureau—and that’s helpful to me for any industry I’ll go into. Government could be slow and inefficient, but there are people there who are very connected to the work they are doing who have extremely innovative ideas.”

Carly Grimes ’18

Double Major: Cognitive Science and Politics

Internship: Intern with the Yale University Canine Cognition Center

Location: New Haven, Conn.

“My favorite part of this internship was interacting with the dog’s owners, since I love communicating science research to the general public. The owners were always very interested and would ask great questions that sharpened my ability to make complex scientific theories more easily digestible for people with vastly varying scientific backgrounds.”
Sylvia Gitonga ’20
Major: Economics
Internship: Investment analyst intern with the East African Reinsurance Company
Location: Nairobi, Kenya
“I learned how to establish and maintain relationships not only with clients but also with the company’s employees. I also became more vocal and confident in terms of presenting ideas to people. Although I secured this internship by myself, the one-on-one meetings with Wanda Gibson in the Career Development Office, with regard to my career path, really played a huge role in acquiring the internship. The PCP funding, however, is what really enabled me to carry out this internship. If not for that, my career growth would be stagnant.”

Samuel Kelly ’18
Major: Media Studies
Internship: Intern with The Daily Show with Trevor Noah
Location: New York City
“I’d say one of the biggest things I’ve learned at this internship is the level of professionalism necessary to make a massive production like The Daily Show operate smoothly and at a high level. It takes a lot of people to get The Daily Show on the air every night, and I’m always impressed at how everyone in the office knows exactly what they need to do to make it successful.”
BRYAN KEVAN ’14 SOUGHT A POSTGRADUATION ADVENTURE AND FOUND A CYCLING LIFESTYLE.

ROADS LESS TRAVELED

BY BRYAN KEVAN ’14

IF A ROAD can be a political statement, then the Carretera Austral—stretching 1,200 kilometers, the majority of the length of Chilean Patagonia—is just that. Started under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s, it checked all the boxes for a military dictator seeking to exert political and economic control over the country’s most remote and inaccessible territory.

Many of the towns along the road had previously been connected to the outside world only through towns across the border in Argentina, a dependency that Pinochet sought to eliminate. Snaking around narrow fjords, over high passes, and through dense, seemingly impenetrable forests, the road was a symbolic statement in a time of war. Pinochet controlled Chile from policing its borders. The road unofficially carried Pinochet’s name for years, an indication of the spirit of the Carretera Austral remaining in the historically poor relationship between Chile and its neighbor to the east.

The construction of the Carretera Austral was a political and economic statement of the Chilean government. The road was a symbolic statement of the country’s sovereignty in the face of decades of antagonistic relations and political control over the area. The road was a tool for the Chilean government to exert control over the area and to symbolize its sovereignty over the territory.

In 2000, workers finally completed the road connecting Chilean Patagonia to the rest of the country. In 2000, workers finally reached their limit, a dead end at the town of Villa O’Higgins. The terrain was just too rough after that point, and the territory too remote. With no more towns, the Carretera Austral had reached its terminus. Two small border crossings into Argentina, complete with posts and military barracks, were constructed at the end of the road, neither passable by car.

When I graduated from Pomona in 2014, my mom told me to go out and take a new risk. Convinced to the Pomona bubble for four years, and to the bubble of small Eugene, Oregon, for my life before that, I was hungry for something different. Something new, challenging and, most importantly, adventurous.

I eventually found a road that led to the Argentine border post. As I stumbled out of the wilderness, a policeman came out to meet me, clearly concerned for my safety. I was quickly stamped into the country and shown where to set up camp.

So I packed up the things I thought I would need for a few weeks on the road, never having camped for more than a handful of nights in a row, and set off to Patagonia. Everyone on the Internet’s various bike-touring forums raved about this gravel road in Chile, and I felt like I just had to do it. I didn’t expect to make it far. Maybe go out for a week or two, have a fun experience and then come back. I quickly realized upon my arrival that I had timed it all wrong. It was September, very early spring in Patagonia, and most towns, campsites, hostels and even some border crossings into Argentina were still closed. It rained pretty much constantly for the first two weeks of my trip, and the state of the road left my body broken and bruised every night from hour upon hour of riding on rocky, muddy gravel.

I cursed and yelled my way through dense forests, over swinging sheep bridges, through bogs and through glacial streams, all on the very imprecise directions received from a very inebriated gaucho living on the border.

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I eventually found a road that led to the Argentine border post. As I stumbled out of the wilderness, a policeman came out to meet me, clearly concerned for my safety. I was quickly stamped into the country and shown where to set up camp.

In a poetic turn, I experienced the same thing at the Argentine border as I had at the Chilean one, but in reverse—just three policemen stamping passports and making snide remarks about Chileans. After the decades of antagonistic relations and political symbolism that surrounded the road’s construction, all that remained at road’s end was a remote border crossing, a few rotted military barracks and a handful of policemen taking half-hearted verbal shots at one another across the border.

I was sold. These were the genuine travel experiences I wanted in my life. I continued my trip, eventually ending up in Tierra del Fuego, at the tip of South America. More trips soon followed—Southeast Asia, the Pacific Northwest, Iceland, and Morocco, all since graduation.

I am now in the planning stages for a trip spanning the entirety of the Silk Road across Central Asia, starting in 2018. I encourage interested readers to follow along at my blog starting next March at venturaadventures.wordpress.com. “

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Welcome, 2017-18 Alumni Board

The Alumni Board welcomed President Starr to its first meeting of the year with a basket of gifts sent by alumni authors, filmmakers, guest musicians and writers. President Starr and members discussed priorities for the year and topics important to the Pomona-Pitzer community, including free speech and alumni-student mentorship. During lunch, the board heard from Evi Tsekahro ’20, who was featured in the recent New York Times article “Whose, Affirmative Action Isn’t Enough.” The discussion also included alumni engagement, chaired by Dan Swain ’15, which focuses on learning and career programs for alumni, Athletic Affinity, chaired by Marcella Fitts ’91, which supports events such as Rivalry Weekend and promotes the Champions of Sagehen Athletics fundraising initiative; Current Matters, chaired by Racie Garner ’97, which respond to time-sensitive issues within the Pomona alumni community as they arise; and 4/7, chaired by president-elect Diane Ung ’95, which organizes community service events around Pomona’s “special day” in April. The Alumni Association president for 2017-18 is Matt Thompson ’96. A complete list of members and a nomination form can be found at pomona.edu/alumni/alumni-association-board.

Fall/Winter Book Club Selection: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Grab a blanket (or, if you’re in Claremont, maybe a far) and cozy up with The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot, the Pomona College Book Club selection for Fall. This New York Times bestseller was adapted into a film by Oprah Winfrey and directed by Joe Wright starring Tusshar Kapoor, with Rebecca Skloot as a concerned mother whose words are used without her consent. The book is about the discovery of the first immortal human cell line, which has made significant contributions to medical research. In the case of “immortal” Henrietta Lacks, the cells are from her own cancerous tissue and have been used to develop treatments for various diseases.

Sagehens Bid a Fond Farewell to Prof. Lorn Foster

Lorn Foster, Pomona’s Charles and Henrietta Johnson Dreyfus Pro- fessor of American Government and Professor of Politics, has announced his retirement at the end of this academic year—his 40th—at the College. A special fund supporting student internships and Pomona’s gavel program has been established in his honor. Foster fans who wish to honor his legacy with a gift should visit pomona.edu/give and select the “Lorn S. and Gloria F. Foster Fund” from the gift designation menu. To learn more, or make a gift, contact the Development Office. If you have any questions, contact the Development Office at (909) 621-8200.

Pomona-Pitzer Athletics

Show Your Sagehen Pride with New Pomona-Pitzer Athletics Gear

Big news for Sagehen fans: Accessing the launch of a new online Nike store for Pomona-Pitzer Athletics! Get in the game with your favorite gear at sag- hens.com—just click the “Nike Store” tab on the navigation bar. Your order will be shipped directly to your door. And don’t forget to support your favorite team with a gift to Champions of Sagehen Athletics at pomona.edu/champions!

New Pomona-Pitzer Athletics Filter in the Mobile Alumni Directory

Sagehens Connect—a free app featuring an alumni directory and streaming resource to connect you with Sagehens in your area—has been bringing alumni together since 2013. Now, a new filter allows users to search by athletic participation. For complete information on how to download the app to your iOS or Android device, visit pomona.edu/sagehensconnect.

Alumni Travel/Study

April 4-11, 2018
Explore Cuba with the Claremont Colleges
Join CGMC and Pitzer alumni on this cross-cultural tour as we cross a cultural divide, exploring the art, history and culture of the Cuban people.

May 25-June 4, 2018
The Camino de Santiago: A Pilgrimage into the Past
Join John Sutter Miller Professor of History and Professor of Classics, Ron Wolf on one of the great journeys of the world, the Camino de Santiago, done in the way it was meant to be traveled: on foot.

For complete tour information, please visit pomona.edu/alumni/travel/ or email alumni@pomona.edu.
Class Notes
only available in
print edition
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Send your class note to pcmnotes@pomona.edu.
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I HAVE A PICTURE of myself as a child, sitting on the very porch where, 30 years later, I am writing these words. Quarry Farm hasn’t changed much since my last visit, although most of my life has.

As a kid, I spent a couple of summers at Mark Twain’s Quarry Farm—the house in Elmira, New York, where Twain lived and wrote books like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court,* *Life on the Mississippi,* and *Tom Sawyer.* My father, Wilson Carey McWilliams, was a great teacher of Twain’s work and a scholar-in-residence here. During the days, my sister and I romped around the grounds while Dad held seminars.

McWilliams, was a great teacher of Twain’s work and a scholar-in-residence here. During the days, my sister and I romped around the grounds while Dad held seminars.

By Susan McWilliams

I got my dream job, teaching at Pomona College, a few months later. I tell my students, sometimes, that grown-ups are not lying to you when they talk about how fast life goes. You wake up and really do wonder where it all went—which is why one of the great luxuries afforded Pomona students is the freedom to sit down on Marston Quad or in a dorm room and to talk with friends, or to think for yourself, about where you want to be and, more importantly, with whom you want to be there. Your job isn’t just to learn a subject. It’s to learn to live a good life.

And so it is years later, and I have my own children now, and they are almost the age that I was when we spent that first summer at Quarry Farm. And they love stories that are based on the pictures on the fireplace tiles in the parlor. And he read us Twain, of course: the stories and the novels and the bull’s-eye critique of James Fenimore Cooper that always made me laugh, even though I’d never read anything by James Fenimore Cooper.

My father dropped dead 12 years ago, on a sunny Tuesday morning, leaving behind notes on the manuscript about Mark Twain that he’d been working on for decades. His friends and colleagues mourned the lost genius, of course: the stories and the novels and the tricks, grownups who do stupid things, those rare acts of true bravery and courage that make you believe human beings might be worth something, after all. Perhaps all that storytelling has something to do with why I finally picked up those old manuscript notes—and why this summer, I’m the professor working at Mark Twain’s house, as a fellow of the Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies, trying to finish a book that my father was writing before I was born.

One of Twain’s great themes was that the staff of Twain: kids getting in trouble, kids being sneaky, kids in danger, knights, grownups who do stupid things, those rare acts of true bravery and courage that make you believe human beings might be worth something, after all. Perhaps all that storytelling has something to do with why I finally picked up those old manuscript notes—and why this summer, I’m the professor working at Mark Twain’s house, as a fellow of the Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies, trying to finish a book that my father was writing before I was born.

I tell my students, sometimes, that grown-ups are not lying to you when they talk about how fast life goes. You wake up and really do wonder where it all went—which is why one of the great luxuries afforded Pomona students is the freedom to sit down on Marston Quad or in a dorm room and to talk with friends, or to think for yourself, about where you want to be and, more importantly, with whom you want to be there. Your job isn’t just to learn a subject. It’s to learn to live a good life.

And so it is years later, and I have my own children now, and they are almost the age that I was when we spent that first summer at Quarry Farm. And they love stories that are based on the pictures on the fireplace tiles in the parlor. And he read us Twain, of course: the stories and the novels and the bull’s-eye critique of James Fenimore Cooper that always made me laugh, even though I’d never read anything by James Fenimore Cooper.

My father dropped dead 12 years ago, on a sunny Tuesday morning, leaving behind notes on the manuscript about Mark Twain that he’d been working on for decades. His friends and colleagues mourned the lost genius, of course: the stories and the novels and the tricks, grownups who do stupid things, those rare acts of true bravery and courage that make you believe human beings might be worth something, after all. Perhaps all that storytelling has something to do with why I finally picked up those old manuscript notes—and why this summer, I’m the professor working at Mark Twain’s house, as a fellow of the Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies, trying to finish a book that my father was writing before I was born.

One of Twain’s great themes was that the American myth of individual autonomy and self creation is a lie—a lie that enabled the great moral evil of slavery, for one thing, but that also impoverishes our lives in subtler ways. Huck Finn has a lot of adventures, but other Americans are always trying to get one over on him, and Huck feels “awful lonesome” most of the time.

The truth about us humans, Twain taught, was that we are social and political creatures who are inextricably bound to other people. Love calls us and can ennoble us, and Twain was “confident,” my father wrote, “that the comradeship of honorable love is the closest human instance of what is divinely right.” Twain knew that we have to admit our connection and indebtedness to others if we are ever to know ourselves. And we have to be willing to dedicate ourselves to others, and to do so out of love, if we are ever to be truly free, to smile in the face of our certain death.

My father wrote this “Love, particularly when it is linked to the rearing of children, can nurture and sustain the spirit, even in a gilded age, just as a great storyteller can help us to hear the music in our souls.” And so it is that here I am, on this front porch looking out at the hills of upstate New York, at home again with my father, and at home again with Mark Twain, with the abiding refrain in my ears.

Susan McWilliams is associate professor of politics and chair of the Politics Program at Pomona College. The author of *Traveling Back: Toward a Global Political Theory,* she has two books in the publishing pipeline ahead of the Twain book.
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