READING GABI STARR (Pomona’s 10th president is an open book; in fact, you might say she’s an entire library) p. 28

STORY FOLDED UP LIKE A FIST (“Word-collector” Ray Young Bear ’73 writes poetry and novels in a language he mistrusts) p. 40

REBUILDING LIVES (Emily Arnold-Fernández ’99 establishes a new paradigm for helping refugees) p. 46

SAYING NO TO THE OLYMPICS (Chris Dempsey ’05 and the undoing of the 2024 Boston Olympics) p. 12

Summer 2017
We Sagehens are a proudly bookish bunch, so what better way to get to know our next president than through the authors and books that have influenced her most? Starting on page 28, you’ll learn more about G. Gabrielle Starr’s life story, and along the way you’ll discover key authors—from Jean Toomer to J.R.R. Tolkien—who have shaped it.

We’ll start with the oldest, a poetic voice from ancient Rome. Starr writes: “Ovid makes the beautiful, the just, the joyous, the unexpected and even the mistaken, painful or frightening open to human creativity. It’s not that we understand everything, but that we see the possibility for something new. For more than 2,000 years, his work has inspired artists to believe in the power of the human mind to transform the world.”
STRAIGHT THOUGHTS

Carla Guerrero ’06

“DO BELONG HERE”

Fifteen years ago this summer, I was nervously anticipating my big move to Pomona College. Even though I traveled less than three miles from my home in the city of Pomona to my dorm on Bonita Avenue, I had no idea what to expect. I was the first in my family to go to college, and my proud immigrant parents, who encouraged me along the way, could not guide me further. I was on my own, or so I thought.

My four years at Pomona were bumpy, at times rough. As an introverted, socially awkward, “first gen” and low-income brown girl, I felt out of place and had a hard time adjusting. But my Pomona experience smoothed out, thanks to the amazing people I met—the faculty mentors, staff and friends who kindly, and at times more forcefully, asked me to stop leaving campus and stick around for the weekends. The message they kept repeating was that I belonged here—but it took me a while to believe it.

Today, a lot has changed. I now work for the College as an associate director in the Office of Communications (I am on campus more now than when I was a student); I’m a proud member of the President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity (PACD); and I’m a very proud alumna. (If you read this magazine regularly, you know there’s a lot to be proud of in recent years.)

So this past year, when I was able to join my colleagues, the faculty and students in the hiring process for a new president, I did it with a sense of pride and commitment to the College.

When three candidates were brought to campus, there was one woman, our new president, G. Gabrielle Starr, who elicited such a strong and immediate reaction in the staff forum that one colleague—a young woman of color—stood up during the Q&A portion and said, “I love you.” Gentle laughter followed that comment, but I knew what she meant, and I appreciated the excitement that followed in the room, others were feeling it too.

Later that day, PACD had the opportunity to meet with Starr and we heard about her background and work in the community, including the NYU’s Prison Education Project, which she helped launch. It was obvious in her trembling voice and the tears that filled her eyes how much the project, and the lives it touched, meant to her. In that short hour we had with her, I saw in her a champion and role model to other students of color (and to me) nervously anticipates the big move to campus in late August, they not only can feel comfortable, but also that they belong here. —Carla Guerrero ’06 Guest Columnist
Hidden Pomona

I was disappointed to see one glaring omission in the item about the 1969 bombing in Carnegie in the spring 2017 issue of PCM. The story of the Men’s Glee Club’s contest with Yale was heavily covered in Southern California newspapers at the time. The contest was held on the same night that the bombing occurred in the building across the street. It was a tragic event that forever changed Pomona, and I believe it is important to recognize its impact and the sacrifices made by those who were affected.

My grandmother, Katherine B. Hume, was 1904 class secretary. I have read about her in the spring 2017 issue of PCM. She was in charge of the “Fact or Myth” section, and I have always been interested in learning about the Pomona history and traditions that were recorded in those columns. I have a particular interest in the Glee Club, as it is such an integral part of Pomona’s culture and legacy. I would like to contribute to the Glee Club story. I hope that additional people who were involved in the Glee Club at the time will be included in the “Final Three” choruses in the spring 2017 issue of PCM, as it represents the Pomona history and traditions that should be preserved for future generations.

Of course, the bombing was a terrible event, and it is important to remember the sacrifices made by those who were affected. However, it is also important to recognize the positive contributions that Pomona has made to the world, and the Glee Club is a great example of this.

I would be honored to contribute to the Glee Club story. I have some ideas about the Glee Club’s history and traditions, and I believe that they would make a great addition to the spring 2017 issue of PCM. I would be happy to provide any information or stories that I have about the Glee Club, and I would be willing to help in any way that I can.

Please let me know if there is anything else that I can do to help with the Glee Club story. I would be grateful for any assistance that you can provide.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
It was with "Wrong Side of History," and you are taking my school down with you. Why am I dumfounded, after our reunion two years ago featured confusing signs regarding what Pomona College has become, but it is certainly no longer a community that includes me anymore? Political correctness over "liberal arts" is turning Pomona College into a museum of historical radiation. I have difficulty understanding exactly how Anti-intellectual nonsense! Has Pomona College allowed any other like-minded alums who care about what it was to be on, this would surely be it. The more important issue, however, is the fact that "climate change" is likely to top the list of "issues" that "will seem so ethically obvious that people will wonder how on earth anyone could have gotten them wrong." First, let me state my belief—and words (not theirs). The only people allowed to be offended are constitutionalists, who don’t carry billy clubs and fire sticks. They no longer allowed to be sung, nor a beautiful song trampled on the scientific process in the institution’s lack of response. I was unable to find any reference to the impact on its “research” of adherence to the scientific process. The facts are far from conclusive, and the purported remedies have been a wonderful means of learning and staying connected. I always feel grateful for being part of the Pomona community after reading an issue: “Pomona College.” Our culture is declining so fast, this kind of "legitimate discrepancies in data and in medicine adherence to the scientific process. The facts are far from conclusive, and the purported remedies even less so.

The more important issue, however, is the event that occurred on the CMC campus on the evening of Thursday, April 6—the intimidation of, and attack on, organizer Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute. Is it not part of the mission statement of Pomona College that, “through close ties among a diverse group of faculty, staff and classmates, Pomona students are inspired to engage in the probing inquiry and creative learning that enable them to identify and address their intellectual passions”? That hardly seems to be the case any more, given the events of April 6 and the administration’s lack of response. I was unable to find any mention of the Mac Donald event on the College’s website, much less a forceful statement from President Ortubay supporting Ms. Mac Donald’s rights, the students’ obligations to respect those rights and the College’s intention to punish the aggressors. So if ever there was a moment for the Pomona community to determine which side of history it wanted to be on, this would surely be it.

—Mark Shipley ’66
Los Vegas, Nev.

I was opened an Internet site that reprints news articles from around the country this morning. First on today’s list: “Oecologist professing students into her course based on race and in- come.” Thinking as I called it, “What dumb liberal college is getting its five minutes of fame while destroying our educational system?” I saw these words: “Pomona College.” My school. My beloved Pomona College. Why am I dumbfounded, after our reunion two years ago featured confusing signs regarding who could or couldn’t use every public bathroom on campus, and where the abuser is no longer allowed to be sung, nor a beautiful song trampled on the scientific process in the institution’s lack of response. I was unable to find any reference to the impact on its “research” of adherence to the scientific process. The facts are far from conclusive, and the purported remedies have been a wonderful means of learning and staying connected. I always feel grateful for being part of the Pomona community after reading an issue: “Pomona College.” Our culture is declining so fast, this kind of "legitimate discrepancies in data and in medicine adherence to the scientific process. The facts are far from conclusive, and the purported remedies even less so.

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Deep in the bowels of the Geology Department in Edmunds Hall is a room full of storage cabinets with wide, shallow drawers filled with mineral specimens collected by Pomona geologists over the years. Many of them, according to Associate Professor of Geology Jade Star Lackey, go all the way back to the department’s founder, Alfred O. “Woody” Woodford 1913, who joined the chemistry faculty in 1915, launched the geology program in 1922 and served as its head for many years before retiring some 40 years later. Many of Woodford’s carefully labeled specimens came from the Crestmore cement quarries near Riverside, Calif. “Woody even had a mineral named after him for a while,” Lackey says, but the mineral was later found to have already been discovered and named. “More than 100 different minerals were discovered at Crestmore, including some striking blue-colored calcites—chooses of Pomona.” Ultimately, Lackey adds, Crestmore was quarried to make the cement to construct the roads and buildings of Los Angeles, but in the meantime, “Woodford trained many a student there, and the mineral legacy of Crestmore is widely known.”
In the basement of Bridges Auditorium is a long, meandering hallway lined with photos and posters, offering a history lesson about the amazing parade of celebrities who have passed through here since the facility was completed 87 years ago. Among them are international figures, from Winston Churchill and Eleanor Roosevelt to the Dalai Lama and Coretta Scott King; explorers like Admiral Richard Byrd and Amelia Earhart; authors like Sinclair Lewis and Thornton Wilder; poets such as Edna St. Vincent Millay, Carl Sandburg and Maya Angelou; comedians ranging from Bob Hope to Lewis Black; performers like Marcel Marceau and Edgar Bergen; such actors as Basil Rathbone and James Earl Jones; and great musicians from every era and musical style, including Vladimir Horowitz, Ray Charles, Andrés Segovia, Marian Anderson, Duke Ellington, Yehudi Menuhin, Dionne Warwick, Fiona Apple and Taylor Swift. The list, like the hallway, goes on and on.
Saying No to the Olympic Games: How and Why Smart Cities Are Passing on the Torch


What's the myth, and if you can call it that, the movement? And it's asking cities, in the case of the Summer Olympics, to spend somewhere between $10 billion and $20 billion in costs for a three-week event. And that event brings in revenues that are typically around $4 billion or $5 billion. The host city and the taxpayers have to make up the difference. And, at the same time, economists have not found any evidence that the Olympics boost your city's economy in the long term. That means it's a bad idea for our city's future. We don't want to see this region become focused on a three-week event at the expense of some of our long-term goals as an economy and as a society. And so we should form a group to start to raise some of those concerns and some of those questions about the bid.

PCM: When did the momentum start taking off for you in terms of garnering support?

Dempsey: We came together in the fall of 2011, six months or so after there were initial reports in the media in Boston that a powerful group of people was coming together and trying to boost the games. What you saw in Boston, similar to the bidding groups in many cities, is that the people that formed that group were people who stood to benefit personally in some way from hosting the games. So the best example in Boston is that the chairman of the bidding group for Boston 2024 was also the CEO of the largest construction company in Massachusetts. Obviously, the Olympics would have been great for the construction industry in Boston because of all of the venues and stadiums that needed to be built for the games. But there was a very powerful group of people that included the co-owner of the New England Patriots, the owner of the New England Patriots, Matt Romney (the former presidential candidate and former governor of Massachusetts). It eventually included the mayor of Boston himself. So it was a very powerful group of people, and a lot of people that the institutions in Greater Boston and Massachusetts that would typically ask some tough questions of the bid and be skeptical of a really expensive proposal in a pretty much stayed silent. And we saw that was going to be the case because it turned out that many of the people that were pushing the bid were also people that were on the boards of directors or donors to a lot of these institutions that would typically be the financial watchdogs.

So we saw that this was a real juggernaut, and we also saw that opposition was going to have to come from the grass roots. There was this institutional opposition. Seeing that, we said, “We think there's a very good case to make that this is a bad idea for our city's future.” We don't want to see this region become focused on a three-week event at the expense of some of our long-term goals as an economy and as a society. And so we should form a group to start to raise some of those concerns and some of those arguments against the bid. And so out of that group...and we never talked about this...we never talked about this...and we never talked about this.

PCM: When did the momentum start taking off for you in terms of garnering support?

Dempsey: The high-water mark for the boosters was in January of 2015, when they were victorious in a process that the United States Olympic Committee had to determine which city would be the U.S. bid. Boston 2024 outbid Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. There was a lot of excitement in Boston about the fact that the United States Olympic Committee chose our city. In fact, the polling in January of 2015 showed that support was around 35 percent, and opposition was only around 35 percent. So we had some pretty daunting odds at that point. I'll always remember that day of the announcement, President Barack Obama tweeting his congratulations to Boston on winning the USOC bid. That was the kind of influence we were going up against.

Up to that point, the boosters behind Boston 2024 had shared very little information about what the bid entailed and about what the contracts and the budget looked like. The cover of the book became kind of the iconic image of Boston's Olympic opposition—regular people expressing their concerns. Our brand became that of representing regular people, whereas Boston 2024 was seen as a group of very wealthy, successful and powerful people who lacked public support.
Jonathan Lethem

Dettmar

The Sensational Past
Revolution Against Empire

Justin du Rivage

Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence

Jean Wyatt

Form in Toni Morrison's Later Novels

Christopher C. Rand

Military Thought

My Dark Horses

In her first full-length poetry collection, Jodie Hollander '68 offers highly personal poems about family, inter-
spersed with meditations on the works of Edmund

The Pomona College Book Club
Interested in connecting with fellow Sagehen readers? Join the
Pomona College Book Club at pomona.edu/bookclub.

Shake It Up

Great American Writing on Rock and Pop

Professors Jonathan Lathem and Kevin Dettmar, both longtime devotees and scholars of modern music, join forces as authors of a comprehensive overview of American music's role in shaping our culture.

Revolution Against Empire

Pomona's Santa Barbara Magazine

Justin du Rivage '05: says that the Boston 2024 boosters were making a very different outcome if it weren't for the powerful forces. The IOC is composed of 108 people, and their main role is to choose which city will host the Olympics. They do this by evaluating the bids submitted by different cities, and considering factors such as the infrastructure, the financial stability, and the support from the local government. The bidding process can take years, and it's not uncommon for cities to spend millions on their bid. But ultimately, the decision is made by the IOC, and it can be influenced by political factors. This is why it's important for cities to be transparent and fair in their bidding process, and to make sure that they are able to compete on a level playing field.

Jonathan Lethem

Jonathan Lethem is a writer, editor, and critic. He is the author of several novels, including "Motherless Brooklyn" and "Electra Girl," and has written for publications such as "The New Yorker" and "The New York Times." He is known for his unique blend of science fiction and crime fiction, and his work often explores themes of identity, power, and control. Lethem is a professor at Brooklyn College and has received several awards for his writing, including the National Book Award for Fiction. He is a native of the New York City area and still resides there with his family. He is the perfect choice to discuss the history of the Olympic Games, as he brings a fresh perspective to the subject and is able to connect it to contemporary issues.
and the second was Tehran, Iran. And cities that bid. The first was Los Angeles, Angelenos and Southern Californians are support for LA’s bid for the 2024 Games. Dempsey:

People in Southern California
spent on education, transportation or health those public dollars would be much better
Many cities decide to give public subsidies to
MADE A SMART DECISION HERE.’”

SINCE BOSTON DROPPED OUT, HAMBURG, GERMANY; ROME, ITALY; AND BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, HAVE ALL
“IT HELPED, IN A SENSE, TO BRING
together the different parts of a shattered body, of a shattered mind, of a shattered family, and bring hope, when there was really no hope, that my children and I could survive and not only survive, but thrive here on this campus.”

US. SEN. BRIAN SCHATZ ’94 ON OPPORTUNITIES TO DO GOOD:
“EVERY DAY WILL GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.
But it’s not always super clear when your moment arrives. I mean, life isn’t a Marvel movie, when your opportunity for courage and leadership presents itself in an obvious way, when the bad guys show up with ominous music. What do you do when human rights and civil rights are undermined during your comfortable life, sliver by sliver, minute by minute? What do you do when the sea levels rise millimeter by millimeter? What do you do when you see injustice, but your life is becoming more successful by the day? Do you just give up, or do you step forward and say, ‘No, you can’t have that. You can’t have control over what’s happening in this world.’ And if you do, you’ll have responsibility as of today, as of your graduation from Pomona College. You have done very well. Now you have to do good.”

(Maryl Lewis published the two poems, "A High-Consequence, Low-Probability Event" and "In the Pool, You’ll Pass That Barrier," in The Pomona College Magazine.)
U.S. Senator Brian Schatz ’94 of Hawaii delivered the principal address at Pomona’s 124th Commencement exercises on May 14, 2017, as a total of 372 graduates stepped forward to receive their undergraduate degrees. Other speakers and honorary degree recipients were researcher and educator Sarah C. R. Elgin ’67, P’85, human rights lawyer and activist Gay McDougall, and philanthropists Frederick “Rick” P’95 and Susan Sontag ’64, P’95.

The graduation ceremony was the 14th for outgoing President David Oxtoby, who gave his final charge to a Pomona graduating class, telling the Class of 2017, “I call on you to engage politically, and to use your Pomona education for that purpose. It is not enough simply to complain privately about some action being taken. Organize, protest, vote, run for office, and engage in the political world. While some might think ‘politics’ a dirty word, we have heard from Senator Schatz today that it can also be a high calling and an opportunity to help craft solutions to some of the world’s most pressing problems. It can be difficult, but sometimes you must compromise, and you must work with people with whom you disagree. In doing so, you may not always accomplish exactly what you want, but you just might move forward the causes you care deeply about.”

Class speaker Dominique Curtis ’17 brings her capped-and-gowned daughter with her to the stage to accept her diploma from President David Oxtoby.

Announced during the ceremony were 2017 Wig Award winners (from left) Philip Choi, Tzu-Yi Chen, Vin de Silva, Donna Di Grazia, Michael R. Kaufland, Pardis Mahdavi, John Aldridge Clethero ’05 and David R. Kaufeld.

Estela Sanchez ’17 sports a unique lei of folded dollar bills.

President Oxtoby delivers his last charge to a graduating class.

Rodrigo De Leon ’17 awaits his turn to pick up his diploma.

During the processional, faculty line the walkway to applaud Eric Montgomery ’17 and the other new Pomona graduates.

—PHOTOS BY CARLOS PUMA
For the public, the term “psychopath” is almost interchangeable with “serial killer,” but Kailey Lawson ’17 believes most people with the personality disorder get a bad rap, and she wants to devote much of her future work in the field of cognitive science to understanding why they think and act the way they do.

“When I tell people that I study psychopaths, they say, ‘Oh my god! Why?’ Those are terrible people,” she says. “But I think as we understand personality more, we understand that there’s a continuum. You’re not a good person or a bad person—there are all of these things that play together. And psychopathic traits are the same way—there’s a continuum and, you know, everyone falls somewhere on the spectrum.”

In fact, she notes, the traits that mark psychopathy are often present in prominent members of society. “There’s lots of research that high-powered individuals, like CEOs or surgeons, have many psychopathic personality traits. Do you want your surgeon to feel bad when they’re cutting into you? No, you don’t. You want them to be somewhat detached and have a steady hand and not be thinking ‘Oh no, I’m going to hurt him.’”

High-functioning individuals with psychopathic traits haven’t been studied very much, Lawson says, because of the stigma attached to the term. So, in her senior thesis in cognitive science, she tested people from across the spectrum. “I was looking at inhibition, because a core facet of psychopathic traits is disinhibition, a lack of stopping yourself or controlling yourself, even when you might know you should act otherwise.”

What she found was that people who scored higher on the index of psychopathic traits also demonstrated a real deficit in inhibition. “And so I think that illustrates that people with higher levels of psychopathic tendencies don’t have the same abilities that people with lower levels of them do, and they should be treated differently in the legal system, the same way that we would treat people with other cognitive deficits differently.”

And that starts, she believes, with trying to understand them instead of demonizing them.
During the spring semester, as Pomona seniors made their way through their final classes and prepared to slip into their graduation gowns, most still had one big item left on their to-do lists: their senior thesis. The senior thesis is a capstone project that may well be the longest paper students have ever written. Intimidating as the project may sound—it typically takes a full year to complete—the consensus among students is that it lies at the heart of Pomona’s liberal arts education, giving them an opportunity to connect knowledge from across disciplines and to delve into a specific topic in depth.

As a rising senior soon to embark on a similar journey and eager to know more, I interviewed seniors from a variety of majors to learn about their experiences and seek their advice. The 10 projects featured here—ranging from a novel about the politics of fairy tales to an ambitious endeavor to teach arts education, giving them an opportunity complete—the consensus among students is that it lies at the heart of Pomona’s liberal arts education, giving them an opportunity to connect knowledge from across disciplines and to delve into a specific topic in depth.

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An Environmental Perspective on Local Issues in Claremont

Frank Connor ‘17, environmental analysis (EA) major

Frank Connor, inspired by the thesis of a 2015 EA alumna, focused on local climate change, groundwater and water-rights issues by reviewing planning documents in Claremont. Lyles saw the thesis, accompanied by “lots of caffeine” and many a fun conversa-

tion, as an awesome educational opportunity and took an interdisciplinary approach, applying the skills he learned from his history, geography and statistics classes to complement his work in EA. He says he thoroughly en-
joyed working with Professor Char Miller, who provides feedback on all EA majors’ pa-

pers, as well as with Professor W. Bowman Guttery from the Economics Department.

During his final semester at Pomona he took an economics class and decided to use it while learning there to expand his thesis. Part of the challenge was tracking down relevant people and generating interest among stakeholders.

As a Pomona College Orientation Adven-
ture (OA) leader, Lyles likes to think about how EA changes the way he views things. He stops looking at mountains as just mountains and now understands them as dy-

namically changing and constantly changing.

Exploring the History of Labor and War

Jonathan van Harmelen ‘17, history and French major

Jonathan van Harmelen’s yearlong thesis on Japanese-American history during World War II focuses on the relationship between labor and the war effort. His research began while he was interning at the Smithsonian’s Na-
tional Museum of American History, where he worked under Noeloro Sanchez, who had just publi-

ished titled “Raising a Wrong.” He has also worked with Professor Samuel Yamashita through a number of history seminars.

The project involved working with public historians, collecting oral histories of sur-
vivors, reviewing newspaper articles and sta-
tistics and making site visits. Though numerous historians have examined this sub-
ject, van Harmelen believes further under-
standing such forgotten narratives is now needed more than ever. He notes that the subject of Japanese-American incarceration during World War II is one of the darkest chapters in United States history. When he came to Pomona he found and purchased this beautiful reproduc-
tion of the book, since it is complex, mysterious and has some archaic passages that may date from the second millennium BCE.

He found and purchased this beautiful reproduc-
tion in the bazaar in Tursaf, an old Silk Road town in western China. Probably written by sev-
eral different individuals between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, the text also contains some oracle passages that may date from the second millennium BCE.

In particular, Lieberfeld says he enjoyed the interdisciplinary nature of this project and is grateful for The Claremont Colleges, since the politics and philosophy depart-
ments at each school have different special-

ities. He says he also appreciates the fact that Pomona does not have too many core re-

quires. He says he also appreciates the fact that the interdisciplinary nature of this project bridge this gap.

One of the challenges with this thesis project, says Lieberfeld, was that “there is a gap between studies that focus on law and public policy and those focused on technol-

ogy; many are experts in one of these fields, but not both.” Lieberfeld’s thesis attempts to bridge this gap.

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Samuel Yamashita, the Henry E. Shelden Professor of History, reaches into the bottom drawer of his desk, which harbors intriguing artifacts of every shape, and pulls out a bound volume of bamboo strips, each bearing a vertical row of tiny Chinese charac-
ters. It is, he explains, the famous Daoist classic called the Daodejing, which translates to “The Classic of the Way and Virtue.”

After reading other environmental analysis theses, Rajani said that “juggling two theses at once was definitely hard, but I really enjoyed it because I was al-

ways working on something that I was genu-

inely passionate about and felt that I learned from start to finish. I also couldn’t have asked for better advisors—they’ve been very supportive of my plans to continue develop-

ing my work beyond Pomona, so I definitely see my projects as much more than just graduation requirements.”

Brenda Rushforth, assistant vice president for human resources, says she has been a Star Wars fanatic ever since 1977, when she begged her mom to take her to the first movie for her birthday. She then passed the obsession along to her son, buying him his first light saber at Star Wars Celebration IV in 2007. All told, the family has attended six Star Wars conventions—one in Los Angeles, one in Anaheim, three in Chicago, Florida, one in London. Along the way, she has come in contact with people who are from various Star Wars pro-

usions, including original di-

rector George Lucas and actor Mark Hamill. The commemora-
tive drawer is a memento of a spe-

cial event that by name held at Disney Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida, in honor of one of the ceremenal closings of the Star Tours ride. The attendees had an opportunity to enjoy the ride one last time before the original version was shut down for refurbishment.

Reflecting on the process, Rajani said that “juggling two theses at once was definitely hard, but I really enjoyed it because I was al-

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The Screen, the Stage and Beyond

Jesse Lieberfeld ‘17, media studies and environmental analysis major

Napier Award winner Jivika Rajani spent her senior year working on two non-tradi-
tional theses, each with a uniquely creative focus.

For her media studies thesis, she curated a multimedia experience dubbed MixBox, transforming a section of the Kalkh Gallery at Pitzer College into a multimedia installa-
tion that guided participants through an in-

teractive conversation with the idea of race.

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Students in Assistant Professor of Theatre and Dance Giovanni Ortega’s Music Theatre class launch into the choreography for the song, “Money” from Cabaret.

—PHOTO BY MARK WOOD
READING

POMONA’S 10TH PRESIDENT IS AN OPEN BOOK.

GABI STARR

IN FACT, YOU MIGHT SAY SHE’S AN ENTIRE LIBRARY.

STORY BY MARK KENDALL | PHOTOS BY DREW REYNOLDS
In her NYU office overlooking Washington Square Park, G. Gabrielle Starr keeps a collection of vintage tomes given to her by a colleague, and a shelf filled with her own books from college.

The weeks before she is to leave New York City and move across the country, scholar and future college president G. Gabriele Starr really should be shedding books and clearing shelves. Instead, a steady flow of new material keeps arriving, at her request and much to her delight.

Starr is reading ahead, poring over Pomona’s history, taking in all she can about the College’s past and present. This makes sense: Gabi was the kind of kid who made up homework for herself if she didn’t have any, just to have the chance to use her encyclopedia. By the age of 3, she was reading the newspaper headlines aloud from her father’s lap, and her mom recalls that “she always had a book—everywhere she went.”

From those early days, she never let go of the tomes. Louisa May Alcott gave way to Immanuel Kant; Pride and Prejudice and Cane replaced Little House on the Prairie. As a professor of 18th-century English literature whose interests widened to incorporate neuroscience, Starr was soon writing the books, and her reading extended to fMRI brain scans as she found new methods to pursue her work in aesthetics. She also knew how to read people and the complex situations that come with leadership: Still pursuing intensive research, Starr became a savvy and much-loved administrator at New York University, rising to become dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, with some 7,000 students in her division.

Today, The History of Pomona College, 1887–1969 is at the top of her reading list as she prepares to take office as the College’s 10th president in July, with her formal inauguration in the fall. “I’m not a fan of pomp and circumstance,” says Starr. “I want to start off my time at Pomona with immersion. What brings people to Claremont is that magic of a place” where the life of the mind thrives.

And yet there is an unmistakable sense of excitement at Pomona about her arrival. In her campus meetings, Starr clearly connected with her audiences, both intellectually and in a personal sense. Just as telling is the reaction at NYU, where colleagues seem to be undergoing the five stages of grief.

“She is ferociously brilliant. Absolutely brilliant,” says Professor Ernest Gilman, an English Department colleague and friend who has known her since she arrived at NYU in 2000. “There are a lot of smart people around here, and she stands out as an intellectual force.”

“There’s nobody who doesn’t like Gabi,” adds Gilman, noting that Starr “knows how to get things done without rattling anyone’s cage.”

Pamela Newkirk, NYU’s director of undergraduate journalism, puts it this way: “I mean, no one’s smarter than Gabi. You can be as smart, maybe,” she says, laughing. “But beyond that, she’s also warm, just on top of everything. I imagine she doesn’t sleep much because she seems to be everywhere. … And she’s also someone who I knew would be president of a college.”
Starr had already skipped kindergarten and the eighth grade and was still third grade of adulthood when she got her hands on a copy of the Emory University course catalog, poring over the lists of classes. She remembers the cover was a watercolor scene of autumn trees on the campus and the theme was “A Community of Scholars.”

“it just seemed magical,” she recalls. “And it was.”

Yes, Starr would set off for college at the age of 15, after some negotiations with her folks, who certainly knew the value of an education. Her mother, Barbara Starr, taught English and American history at Lincoln High in Tallahassee, Fla., the school Gabi attended. A sharp card player to this day, she negotiated for the teacher’s union. Gabi’s father, G. Daviss Starr, would earn his college degree at the age of 40 and eventually go on to become a professor at Florida A&M. An eloquent speaker with a penchant for Southern witticisms, he had a particular interest in the psychology of literacy. Her older brother, George, had already blazed the trail when, as a math whiz, he took off for college at 15, too.

She would come back and teach her grandmother the Sunday school lessons.”

“She was a born teacher,” says her mom. “When she would go to Sunday school, she would get lost in the process. Even the woman reading the biggest book, and smiled!”

Unlike Gabi, John is not a scholar of the 18th century (or to be more precise, the period from 1660 to 1830 that historians term the “long 18th century”). That said, he remains grateful for the compelling life story of Behn.

When it comes to books, though, John and Gabi aren’t always on the same page. While she often leans toward fantasy, knowledge didn’t mean much to him. It was at Emory, Starr plunged right into campus life. She started off studying chemistry, with plans to become a doctor and also to

Eventually, a harried and apologetic John showed up a solid 45 minutes late. How did he know how to find Gabi in a crowded Village hot spot? In John’s telling: “Scan the room for women approximating your friend’s vague description; then approach the woman reading the biggest book, and told!”

For me, it opened a new world of rigorous, analytical inquiry for the world around us, about politics and policy, about justice and also about beauty and friendship.”

The couple has two school-age children—their daughter, Georgianna, and son, Elijah.

A native of Wisconsin, John C. Harpole graduated from Dartmouth College, where he majored in government and undertook additional coursework in moral philosophy. Speaking of his ongoing interests in ethics, foreign policy and history, John notes, “Devising policy from morality and ethics is a very dangerous game.”

After college, John simultaneously passed the Foreign Service exams and secured a position as a security analyst at the State of Wisconsin Investment Board. When his clearances came through, John joined the U.S. State Department. He served in D.C. and later abroad as a vice consul and as a staff aide to the U.S. ambassador to Bogotá. Returning from service abroad, John entered the M.B.A. program at the Tuck School of Business. For John, Tuck was transformative: “The school took a liberal arts approach to quantitative disciplines. For me, it opened a new world of rigorous, analytical inquiry for which I am deeply grateful.”

Upon graduation, John moved to New York and re-engaged his occupational advisor at J.P. Morgan. Later he opened his own alternative asset advisory firm, which he ran for nearly a decade. Today John applies his skills and experiences in the leadership advisory and financial services practices at a global talent consultancy. When asked if he reflects upon his career arc, John recalls his liberal arts experience and training: “In life as in careers, there is no straight line from A to B; success can be found by applied curiosity and the willingness to engage change.”

This commitment to curiosity and inquiry is something he and Gabi share: “For me,” says John, “I think of it as intellectual recursion—a constant, never-ending reassessment of assumptions and biases in the search for better answers. When we’re fearful, unquestioning or just plain complacent, that’s when we make bad decisions.”

John adds, “I am sure that Pomona, as well as the 5Cs and the wider Claremont community, will find in Gabi a leader who finds in each person a reason to engage. To her, the fact that someone has point of view X or ideology Y is not a barrier to engagement but an opportunity, ultimately, to facilitate understanding.”

―iii―
childhood growing up in Tallahassee, Florida. At her home in Manhattan, Starr recounts her IN HER ELONGATED NYU office overlooking Washington Square Park, Starr pulls one of her most beloved volumes from the shelf filled with books she has saved from her college days. It’s a copy of Kant’s Critique of Judgement, stuffed with more notes than a street preacher’s Bible. She kept it from a course on the book taught by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard during her senior year at Emory.

That class opened her to the world of aesthetics and beauty and the sublime, a realm she has never really left. “I had never even heard of the sublime. I had no idea what it was. It was a fascinating course that really sparked an interest for me in how art, imagination, and how human beings engage with all of the things that we create, and those ideas so big that we could never hope to make them real,” Starr says.

Exploiting aesthetics was a natural path. Gabi’s father, who died in 2014, had always had a taste for collecting fine things: decorative arts and porcelain from China, as well as family documents and expansive British life,” she notes, “that it’s before the emergence of the modern disciplines, so if you were writing about what we think of as aesthetics, you’d be writing about it from the perspective of psychology, culture, economics, philosophy, physiology, literary history, any of those perspectives—and they all were combined into new forms of writing.

“So my intellectual history from that perspective has really been that the disciplines provide particular tools, but they don’t necessarily exist in isolation from one another.”

Starr soon made her own leap across the traditional disciplines. With her Ph.D. in English and American literature from Harvard, Starr went on to a postdoctoral fellowship at Caltech and the nearby Huntington Library at a time when cognitive neuroscience was beginning to take off. She joined a reading group on the topic and took a course on fMRI. Delving into that new science, she began to look at imagination and the effects of the arts from the perspective of that field. Not long after she arrived at NYU, a New Directions fellowship from the Mellon Foundation allowed her to study neuroscience in greater depth.

While people typically agree on what qualities as a beautiful face or natural landscape, Starr notes, they typically disagree on the beauty of ideas of the imagination. “Part of the great thing about this period in British life,” she notes, “is that it’s before the emergence of the modern disciplines, so if you were writing about what we think of as aesthetics, you’d be writing about it from the perspective of psychology, culture, economics, philosophy, physiology, literary history, any of those perspectives—and they all were combined into new forms of writing.

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Starr and her co-researchers have found that when people respond in the most positive way to a work of art, it activates what is known as the default mode network. Those are the regions of the brain that work together when we are in a resting state—self-reflection, mind-wandering, remembering, imagination—and then they decrease in activity, for the most part, when we perform external tasks.
STARR: “Beauty” is probably the oldest and most inclusive term for the vast set of responses we have both to works of art and to powerfully compelling parts of the natural world; “beauty” is also an important term in that, unlike many other words we use to describe aesthetic experience (like “thrilling,” “sublime,” “awesome,” “delightful,” “awful,” or even “nice”), it has a primarily aesthetic and broadly employed range of reference. “Feeling beauty,” however, emphasizes not just the value of terms like “beauty” and its kin, but “feeling”—the principle that all aesthetic responses call on feeling, and that link feeling to knowledge in surprising, dynamic ways. Aesthetic responses in this sense that matters in my book are not any responses to a work of art, but a subset of such responses—the felt engagement with art and with other objects we might approach because they move us.

How does understanding the neural underpinnings of aesthetic experience reshape our conceptions of aesthetics and the arts?

STARR: Aesthetic experience restructures our ways of knowing the world by changing the ways that we assign value to the world. By exploring the neural underpinnings of aesthetics, we can begin to see how this happens and to understand why aesthetic experiences may call on our most powerful kinds of mental representation, as well as how they become foci for linking the internal and external worlds.

How do works that address different senses using different means approach because they move us.

STARR: Perception is not even the beginning when it comes to aesthetic experience—not only is what we perceive conditioned by our past experience and the limits of our bodies, but aesthetic experience brings a range of internal perceptions and processes into close relation with external sensory experience. So the perceptual differences that shape works of art are not the most central key. Powerful aesthetic experience means in part that we are accessing the systems we use for understanding internal life, as well as those for engaging the outer world. Thus, the arts may affect us not primarily by the senses, but by speaking to a core set of human neural systems, chief among them our systems for emotion, memory, semantic processing, imagery and inwardly directed thought.

What does the phrase “feeling beauty” mean?

STARR: Some theorists of the aesthetic would like our response to art to be purely immaterial, or if they grant that there is a material underpinning to our experience, they do so only to dismiss the possibility of learning anything about the aesthetic by studying this material foundation, or they claim that this foundation is no more than trivially important.

On some level I find this puzzling. Human beings have a material existence that shapes and enables every breath we take, every thought we entertain, every moment of bliss or disbelief.

Aesthetic experience is in fact embodied. Seeking to understand the aesthetic, then, means that we have to seek to understand how that experience is shaped by the bodies in which we live. Learning about the human body is a worthy undertaking in itself. The brain is only one part of this equation, but it is a crucial part. The question then is whether we learn anything about aesthetics when we use the tools of neuroscience to do so.

One major critique of neuroaesthetics relies on the idea that what we want to know about art primarily is how to interpret it. But the study of art and how it affects us is not only a hermeneutic problem, it is an epistemological problem, an affective problem, a moral problem, an historical, economic, social and even an evolutionary one. No single discipline carries all the answers that we might want to pose about art and aesthetic experience.

Cognitive and behavioral neuroscience contributes something particular to the study, in my view, not so much of art objects as of our responses to them, and our responses to the broader world that calls to us in terms of beauty and its kin. Neuroscience can help us understand part of the story of emotions, of memory, and even of how we relate domains of experience together.

Neuroscience doesn’t have all the answers, but it has given us many new things to ponder about how we live in the bodies that help make us human. The road is long, but we can have a lot of fun on the way.

Repainted with permission from MIT Press

The fact that this network connected to our inner lives lights up when we have a deep response to art reveals an unexpected pathway between our interior and exterior worlds. Are there more such moments to be discovered? In one co-authored paper, Starr and her colleagues raise the possibility of “significant moments when our brains detect a certain ‘harmony’ between the external world and our internal representation of the self—allowing the two systems to co-activate, interact, influence and reshape each other.”

“Doubly directed” is the term Starr uses for it, and this could also be used to describe Starr: “I still like good, old-fashioned reading—novels and close reading of literature,” she says.

“But this is a different kind of knowledge that’s also useful. I would never say that one would replace the other.”

Becognition and grant support have followed the research. Her most recent book, Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience, was a finalist for the Phi Beta Kappa Society’s Christian Gauss Award. Starr was named a Guggenheim Fellow in 2015, and her work also has been supported by a National Science Foundation grant. Her novel research also draws speaking invitations, and she once deftly debated noted UC Berkeley philosopher Alva Noe on whether neuroscience can help us understand art. (You can find the video on YouTube.)

Starr’s approach is “something that very few of us can imagine or even fewer of us do, to make that kind of connection between the humanities and the cognitive sciences,” says Gilman, her NYU English colleague.

“Most of us are comfortably in our little groove; if your subject happens to be, you know, Spenser, you spend a lifetime studying Spenser, you don’t know much about anything else. She’s quite eclectic and broad in her passions.”

IT TAKES ONLY a quick scan of Starr’s NYU office to see the evidence of her other interests. Her collection of books on Parental Incarceration and the Family to A Million Years of Music, and from The Works: Anatomy of a City to The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Books not only fill the shelves, they are also neatly stacked, five or six high, in a row down the middle of her conference table.
Her desk is covered in papers. “What’s active is what’s closest to the top,” she explains of her archaeological system, and there’s barely room for her side-by-side computer screens. Of course, her office is simply a reflection of her whirlwind academic life. Out of all these different things, what energizes her?

“All of it. All of it. I finally got two computer screens last year, and if I had three, I’d feel like it was just about enough information.” Starr’s mind is running plenty of RAM as well. As dean, her days are full of meetings, events, decisions—but she still pursues her research and writes a steady flow of papers, turning in four this past school year alone. “The funny thing about the past six years is that since I became dean, I’ve become much more productive as a scholar... because the amount of time was so radically constricted,” she says. “It was: ‘do it in four hours every Friday afternoon or it’s never going to get done.’”

“I have come to really enjoy not stopping,” she says, laughing. “It catches up with you every now and then, but there’s a lot of fun to be had in helping students and figuring out big problems. And then going back and doing writing is relaxing. So I feel like there’s a balance. Also, I like to go and do things where they’re needed be-cause that always feels good.”

“That’s right: happy.” Starr not only has a penchant for telling jokes, she can also slip quickly into pop-culture talk, discussing anything from The Simpsons to Ghostbusters to the old-school hip-hop of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. “Her sense of joy is, to be honest, unusual in a college administrator, notes her NYU colleague Newkirk. “She’s a real person. She’s someone you would want to hang out with and have a drink and laugh with.”

Still, Starr says she is only a “sometimes” extrovert, and she never completely let go of the solitary girl who spent a lot of time out in the yard in a tree reading a book. (Once a year, she decompresses by rereading J.R.R. Tolkien’s entire Lord of the Rings trilogy.) “Because I liked imaginary worlds... I loved being inside them. And being an English professor is a great extension of that because then you get to bring other people inside of an imaginary world with you.”

Starr now awaits her move to the cloistered world of Pomona, with its own sort of magic. At NYU, embedded in the bustling of Manhattan, so much could pass by unnoticed. In Claremont, she sees herself popping into the dining halls, stopping by the gym to watch basketball games and, eventually, teaching a first-year seminar and carrying on research with faculty at Pomona and perhaps elsewhere in SoCal. “Pomona,” she says, “isn’t a world to itself or for itself. It is a place where we convene to imagine, argue, engage and build, together, many possible worlds. We can only do this as who we are—a community of the curious—and I’m eager to be a part!”

But first come the good-byes and thank-yous, and the matter of packing her books, shelf after shelf. Could there be any doubt? She is known her began to take her more seriously.”

As dean, she partnered with New York City’s largest community college to create a pipeline in STEM education and helped launch a faculty partnership focused on the global humanities. She is particularly proud of her role in co-founding a cross-university prison educa-tion program offering A.A. degrees in the liberal arts to students in a medium security prison in New York State. “It’s been a lot of fun to get to do things you can’t do when focusing primarily on scholarship and teaching,” she says, noting the opportunity to work with other institutions and even other parts of NYU. “It’s very satisfying when good things happen, when students who never would have come here come here graduate and are successful. That makes me happy.”

STARR’S MOVE INTO leadership roles began after she earned tenure at NYU and was being recruited by another school: As a con-dition of staying, she asked to become director of undergraduate studies. “I wanted to be at a place where I could do things for my students and do things for my department because I’d been given this great gift of pretty much a job for life.”

Then colleagues asked her to run for chair of the English Depart-ment, which she accepted. Only a year later, when NYU Dean Matthew Santirocco announced his assumption of a new leadership role in 2013, leading a division with a $130 million budget, a significant fundraising need and a high profile in the heart of Manhattan, Starr agreed, her work was well-received, and she wound up landing the permanent position in 2013, leading a division with a $130 million budget, a significant fundraising need and a high profile in the heart of Manhattan.

NYU colleagues point to her oratorical skills as helping fuel her rise in the ranks there, with Professor Galim using a famous year ago at freshman orientation: “She just gave this amazing, passionate, bril-liant speech,” he recalls. “I think some of the people who hadn’t known her began to take her more seriously.”
In the Meskwaki language, there is no word for poem. So poet and novelist Ray Young Bear ’73 made up his own: pekwmomoni, a word that translates roughly as “story folded up like a fist.”

It’s a word that seems perfectly suited to the interwoven cultural imagery that fills his work. “My poems are therefore origami,” he explains, “large stories that have been compressed with multiple layers of images and messages. They can be complicated or simple, but they’re replete, once the key is turned, with Algonquian-based history.”
Algonquin is the group of Native American languages—and cultures—to which Meskwaki belongs. The Meskwaki, or “People of the Red Earth,” originated in the Great Lakes region of what is now New York and have a long, tragic history of being driven westward, all the way to Kansas. Finally, in the 1800s, they doubled back to central Iowa, bought a chunk of prairie beside the Iowa River and took root there in what is now the Meskwaki Settlement.

The Meskwaki language is spoken today by only a few hundred people, and Young Bear is grateful to be among them. Since his formal education took place entirely in English, however, he didn’t learn to read and write Meskwaki until much later, in adulthood. Today he takes pride in being one of the few Native American authors with literary mastery of their native tongue. “I’ve got contemporaries who are very famous who may not be well versed in their language, but I happen to be halfway proficient. That’s a rarity, in my opinion.”

In his early days of writing poetry, he recalls, he usually thought in English, as well as a series of old Meskwaki peyote and social songs. “I used English with poetic skill and depended upon it to bring his work to a wide range of readers, he still regards it as an alien tongue, a part of a culture that subjugated, displaced and nearly wiped out his own.” Sometimes I wonder how much I should accept the English language, because it is, after all, a vehicle of assimilation in progress,” he muses. “Maybe I don’t want to accept the English language because it would mean that we’re defeated. You know, you don’t want to succumb to the civilization that almost killed you.”

Grandmother

if I were to see
her shape from a mile away
I’d know so quickly
that it would be her
the purple scarf
and the plastic shopping bag
if I felt her hands
on my head
I’d know that those
were her hands
worn and damp
with the smell
of roots
if I heard
a voice
coming from a room
I’d know
and her words
would flow inside me
like the light
of someone
stirring ashes
from a sleeping fire
at night

Old Bear, Young Bear

The slightly worn La-Z-Boy recliner in Young Bear’s living room appears in some of his poems as a place of visions. It’s where he sits when he’s seeking spiritual guidance, and a number of his poems originated in scenes dreamt there.

Today, however, he has ceded that place of honor to his guest and retreated to a desk chair against the wall, where he sits gazing out at the round of springtime greenery as he talks about his work, the culture and religion that inspire much of his poetry. On the wall behind him are framed photos of his six adopted children, along with concert posters, Meskwaki artifacts and memorabilia from pop-culture readings across the country. To his left is a big ceremonial drum, on which he occasionally taps out a rhythm to illustrate a story. “Most of what I know with regard to language, religion and culture comes from my grandmother and my father,” he says. “Both of them were quite religious, other than the fact that they had different, you know, political beliefs.”

By “different” he means bitterly opposed. His parents were members of powerful clans that represented opposite poles of tribal politics—the traditional and the progressive. “My parents were star-crossed lovers like the Capulets and the Montagues,” he says. “My mother is an Old Bear from the conservative, traditional chief-in-absentia line of beliefs. My father came from the progressive Young Bear faction that believed in working with outside society and getting along. And so the Old Bears and the Young Bears were against each other, and then my parents fell in love and had me.”

With his parents separated by political feuding, Young Bear lived until the age of 10 with his grandmother. Adah, an Old K. Old Bear, a seminal figure in his life and work. Indeed, the very first poem in his first published collection, Winter of the Salamander, is titled “Grandmother” and begins with the words “if I were to see / her shape from a mile away / I’d know so quickly / that it would be her.” “My grandmother didn’t speak any English,” he says, “so I’d converse with her in Meskwaki. She was the one who basically began outlining the world order for me to understand just exactly why we are here.”

This House

i begin with the hills
lying outside the walls
of this house
the snow and the houses
in the snow begin somewhere
the dogs curled against each other
must feel that they own
the houses, the people
each house must feel they
own the dogs but the snow
piling itself over everything
i keep thinking of comfort
such as a badger stretched over
a house with its guts pulled out.
its legs over each corner.
this is truly a dream to tie down
a skinny badger like a tent over
a house, watching it shift
as the wind changes direction
like the cylinders of pistols,
the holes of magnums turning people inside out.

My wife has turned the yellow blanket in her sleep.
she wishes to be left alone,
closes herself within the dark
of her stomach, cups her hands
and sees what is ahead of us.
she senses I will die long before
the two of them, leaving her
without a house, without warmth.

the yellow blanket, the house
and its people cover her.
the clothes she wears cover her
the skin her body covers her.
the bones cover her womb.
the badger feels it through the womb,
protects the unborn child.
encircles itself to a star
and dies in our place.

Those traditional beliefs still profoundly color his view of the world. “Animos is probably the best word I can describe my beliefs.” When I go into an elementary school, or even graduate school level, the analogy I give them is: If you see a tree outside, for you and me, we can look at it scientifically and also for aesthetic reasons. But for Meskwakis, they look upon the tree as a protector, as a remnant of the gods that were left here after the first time the world was obliterated.”

The Accidental Poet

Staring in the seventh grade, Young Bear entered the public schools of Tama, Iowa. “That was the first time I had Caucasians for classmates,” he recalls, “and that was when I realized that I was behind in my academics.”

He recalls an essay assignment in particular—one he thought he’d aced. “The teacher came up to me and said, ‘Ray.’ She kind of whispered it and said, ‘Do you know what you did?’ And I said, ‘What?’ And I thought, ‘Uh-oh.’ She said, ‘You’ve written a poem, not an essay.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ And she walked away. But I didn’t know what that meant. What’s a poem?’

The answer would come to him through popular songs sung by the Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel. He recalls becoming so fascinated by the lyrics of “The Sound of Silence” that he wrote them down on a piece of paper and carried them around in his billfold. Soon Young Bear would begin to write more intentionally, and poetry would shape his life in surprising ways.

For example, it was a poem that brought him halfway across the continent to Pomona College in California. The poem, he says, “was basically a proclamation of my native identity or something like that, a very awkward, very raw poem that I had written in the ninth or 10th grade.” But when he was a high school senior, he was printed in a magazine published by the Upward Bound program, and soon thereafter, he received a surprising letter. “It said, ‘I read your poem, and I was wondering if you’d like to come to school at Pomona College in California. We can offer you a $30-a-month stipend and travel to and from home whenever necessary,’ and no forth.”

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It sounded too good to pass up, so he took the ticket the College sent him, and with $25 in his pocket and a paper bag full of snacks, he boarded the train for a two-day trip out West.

At Pomona, he soon found himself in over his head academically—some classes he thrived in, others he found utterly incomprehensible. Today he suspects that he undersized his own academic abilities and sabotaged his own college career. In any case, after two years of focusing on the classes he loved and ignoring the others, he dropped out and returned home. But he still remembers those two years as some of the most influential on his poetry, mainly because of the poets he encountered on the Pomona campus.

“I attended every poetry reading that I could,” he says. “And they had lots of great poets—non-traditional poets like Charles Bukowski. He was the one that really got me interested in bluntness and being, you know, rude.” He also remembers meeting classmates and fellow budding poets Brenda Hillman ’73 and Garrett Hony ’73 and spending an increasing amount of time alone, writing poetry. In Manifestation Webster, the last 60 or 70 pages are all from Pomona, he says. “So that was really a prolific time.”

After Pomona, he became a college hopper, spending time at the University of Iowa, Grinnell College, Northern Iowa University and Iowa State University, taking whatever he wanted from each while missing the others. “It was a great way to just see what and where,” he says. “And then from the Red Earth came the rest of us.” He moved in with his grandmother, “to simply be ignorant, or to simply be ignorant, to see how I can implement them within my work.”

“Vision Quests Epiphany”

Even today, despite his success as a writer, with four books of poetry and two novels under his belt, Young Bear shies away from referring to himself as a poet. He prefers to call himself “a word collector.”

“A word collector is primarily someone like myself who is bilingual,” he explains. “Someone who is interested in the artistic communication process with the English language but doesn’t use it on an everyday basis. So it’s necessary for me to investigate these words and to see how I can implement them within my work.”

Much like a scrap metal artist, he says, he collects verbal scraps and reassembles them into art.

In fact, the University of Dakota Press, which had printed a couple of his poems, offered to publish his chapbook, “that scared me silly,” he recalls. “I only had 40 or 48 poems, and I thought, ‘I’m just a young man trying to write poetry, and it’s important. It’s not real.‘”

Ironically, it was his traditional grand- mother who encouraged him to continue to develop his burgeoning talent with the English language.

“By the time I got to 30 years of age, she began to say, ‘You should use your abilities to write about the history of your uncles and your grandmother, and how he purchased this land in 1856. And the only way you can communicate that is to write in English.’”

Which floored me because, at first, she was the one saying, ‘Don’t learn anything, grandson, from the school,’ when she sent me to school, ‘because the whites are always trying to steal our language.’”

“Culturally, with tribal languages predicted to die, poetry might be the vehicle against linguistic atrophy,” he muses. Still, the poet who refuses to think of himself as a poet continues to caution himself against taking his own literary ambitions too seriously.

“I wish I had met and been influenced by a person like myself, that fall in 1969,” he says. “But I realized, you can’t do it well. However, English isn’t my God-given language. Learn from it as much as you can, but always keep in mind that the first language that gave you anumic instincts can’t be found in English. Poemost, English is a language that was to convert us. In time, those colonial-based persuasions will re- verse. Many will realize, even the best writers, that our first languages are key to survival and identity. As your grandmother probably told me, you, the Meskwaki creator doesn’t speak English. When he asks you what you have done, I can assure you, son, he won’t care about your books in English nor whether your life’s goal was to write a best-seller.”

The vision quests and the “word collect- ing” poetry are all part of what Young Bear terms his experimental approach to life and to literature. “There’s no mold, there’s no pattern that I have,” he says. “It’s just an ex- periment. Everything that I do, almost, is an experiment. I like the idea of poetry, because you know, you can go back to something and rewrite it and change it over and over again. I’ve been working on some of my poems for 10 years.”

First Language

Maybe it was inevitable that Young Bear, caught from an early age in the tug of war between the traditional and the progressive, would be conflicted about the role of the two languages that have shaped his life as a Meskwaki and a poet. Though he continues to work on his poetry in English, as well as the third language, Dakota, he says, “I am hard at work on a volume of non-fiction—a combination memoir and Meskwaki history. More and more, he is convinced that the true value of his work will be in whatever portion it has to help preserve Meskwaki culture, religion and language.”

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EFORE THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS MADE HEADLINES, Emily Arnold-Fernández ’99 would ask people, “What do you think is the average time spent in a refugee camp?” Six months, they’d guess. A year, two years. In reality, the average time is 17 years. “We had to do a lot of education so people could understand why we are doing what we are doing,” said Arnold-Fernández, founder of Asylum Access, which empowers and advocates for refugees worldwide. “Now people understand that we’re talking about decades of upheaval.”

She was just back from Thailand, visiting Asylum Access offices and meeting with partners and potential donors. Art from her travels adorned her sunny office in downtown Oakland: a vibrant painting of a woman in a headscarf, painted by a Cairo refugee, and a black-and-white photo of a refugee boy joyously leaping into a river delta in Ecuador.

“Because we’re seeing the greatest number of people displaced since World War II, it feels more urgent,” she said. Refugees living in camps are all but locked up, rarely allowed to leave, while those outside the camps rarely have the right to work, rent an apartment or send their children to school and must do so in the shadows, lacking legal protections.

**REBUILDING LIVES**

STORY BY VANESSA HUA | PHOTOS BY THOMAS DE CIAN

EMILY ARNOLD-FERNÁNDEZ ’99 AND ASYLUM ACCESS ARE CREATING A NEW PARADIGM IN HELPING REFUGEES REBUILD THEIR LIVES.
Assistance to refugees has often come in the form of humanitarian aid—beds and blankets, food and shelter—that address their immediate needs but not long-term goals. Asylum Access is changing that paradigm, helping refugees rebuild their lives by challenging legal barriers.

With 16 offices in the United States, Tanzania, Ecuador, Thailand, Malaysia and Mexico, she’s now expanding her reach by working with organizations in the Middle East and elsewhere to create programs modeled after Asylum Access.

“She’s one of those rare people who can talk to a refugee and sit in a UN council giving testimony,” according to one of her mentors, Kim Nyegaard Meredith, executive director of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. “Most people can’t navigate both ends of the continuum.”

The eldest of four children, Arnold-Fernández recalls lively dinner-time conversations with her family about the news. Her parents took her ideas seriously, discussing and debating even her most outlandish childhood proposals. During the California drought in the 1980s, she proposed filling in swimming pools, making them shallow to save water.

At Pomona, she majored in philosophy and music. Her sophomore year, she spent her spring semester in Zimbabwe. Aside from a family car trip to Tijuana and a choir tour to Italy in high school, she’d never traveled abroad. After their orientation, a few weeks spent in a rural village and a crash course in the Shona language, she was told by organizers to navigate her way to the township where she’d live next. Figuring out how left her confident she could go anywhere in the world. Yet her time in Zimbabwe was also humbling.

According to 2015 data from the United Nations Refugee Agency

65.3 MILLION
Number of forcibly displaced people around the globe

21.3 MILLION
Total number of refugees worldwide

26 YEARS
Average time a refugee spends in exile, based on the average duration of the 32 protracted refugee situations

0.5%
Percentage of refugees accepted each year into resettlement programs

24
Number of people displaced from their homes every minute of every day

According to 2015 data from the United Nations Refugee Agency
"I’d always understood myself as someone intelligent and capable, a leader, and all of a sudden I was in a situation where every 5-year-old knew how to hand-wash socks in the river and I was the idiot who had to be taught everything from scratch," she said. She learned firsthand the importance of not making assumptions. "If someone doesn’t speak the language, it doesn’t mean they’re not intelligent." After graduating, doing a stint at a domestic violence nonprofit in Los Angeles and teaching English in Spain, she enrolled in law school at Georgetown University. She had a passion for social justice issues, and on a summer internship in Cairo, she worked with refugees. Her very first client, a Liberian teenager, fled his homeland to avoid being forcibly recruited as a child soldier.

She interviewed him several times to put together his appeal. Leaking down at the floor, he sloshed, mumbled, hand to his mouth, and spoke in a Liberian-inflected English, which was his native language. Knowing that the United Nations officials interviewing him would be speaking English as a second language too, she advised him to request an interpreter to overcome potential communication barriers.

Six months after her internship, she learned that he’d been accorded legal status as a refugee, and he eventually resettled in the Northeast of the United States. That put him among the less than 1 percent of refugees who are resettled each year in the Global North—countries such as the U.S. and Canada. Most remain in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, often living only a border away from conflict.

"The catalyst for Asylum Access was meeting refugees with tremendous skills and potential who, while they had refugee status, still couldn’t work or go to school," she said. She also realized that U.S. staff weren’t always equipped, motivated, or sufficiently resourced to adequately advocate for the human rights of refugees. "Most of the world had no idea that we were condemning people who fled war or targeted violence to years, decades or generations of marginalized existence."

Yet refugees can be a potent force for development, experts say, contributing to the economies of host countries not only by buying and selling but by creating employment. In Kampala, 40 percent of those employed by refugees are Ugandan nationals, according to a report by the University of Oxford’s Refugees Studies Center. In 2005, she and others working in the refugee field started organizing, and by September, she had volunteered to become the executive director of Asylum Access while working as a civil rights attorney part time.

"Like being in charge, and starting things is a good way to get there," she said with a grin.

A year later, while traveling to Ecuador, she came down with food poisoning the night before a long day of meetings with government officials and potential donors. Amalia Greenberg Delgado, who was traveling with her, nursed her throughout the night. Neither woman slept well.

Though Arnold-Fernández was ailing and speaking in Spanish, her second language, she made a case for the Asylum Access model of empowerment, pushing the government to allow refugees to bring lawyers to interviews to advocate on their behalf.

"I was impressed by her strength and energy. She bounced back," marveled Greenberg-Delgado, the organization’s director of global operations. "The next morning, she went for a run."

In the early years, Arnold-Fernández housed Asylum Access in her tiny apartment in San Francisco. In the summer of 2007, she had 10 interns who worked off her couch on TV trays and at the kitchen table—everywhere, she joked, but the bathroom. After she’d spent a week orienting and training them, she handed them keys and flew to Thailand, where she was conducting due diligence to open an office.

"My poor husband had to put up with in teresting arriving at our doorstep at 9 a.m.," she said. She’d spend her days in meetings and doing field research, writing up her notes in the evening, and around midnight would respond to emails and chats from her interns, before she went to bed at 4 a.m., getting up three hours later. "A crazy time."

Her husband, David Arnold-Fernández ’94, whom she met at Pomona, used to stage-manage the Asylum Access summer fundraiser, a skill he’d gained when they were both in a musical theater group at Georgetown. "She’s so into it that it’s going to work, cold, or hot water. She’s always handled it. That’s the thing I’m most proud of her for."

With that determination, Arnold-Fernández changed the international conversation around refugees. In 2013, Asylum Access won a landmark victory against a restrictive law in Ecuador, which has the largest refugee population in Latin America. The president had decreed that people had to file a petition for legal status within 15 days of arrival—even though many new refugees were in rural areas on the border, far from where they could file. Since the lawsuit, applicants now have three months to file for legal status and 15 days to appeal.

"In three years, Asylum Access started building a coalition to advance refugees’ right to safe and lawful employment globally, followed by a groundbreaking report examining those struggles. The deputy high commissioner of the UN’s refugee agency began citing that report, and it also inspired the World Bank to draw up an expanded report, with the assistance of Asylum Access.

Arnold-Fernández pushed for those nights at a time “when no one else was talking about refugees working, and now that’s a part of the common discourse," said Greenberg-Delgado, who has been with Asylum Access since its inception, first as a board member and now member of the staff.

After more than a decade at the helm of Asylum Access, Arnold-Fernández has been training the next generation of leaders. Last fall, she worked on the business plan, and over the holidays, while visiting her parents, she dug up old telephone directories for her high school, choir and cross-country teams and put out an appeal that the United Nations officials at Asylum Access in her tiny apartment in 2010.

"I recommend this organization very highly for anyone who is interested in social justice and working for social change," she said. She was impressed by her strength and energy. She bounced back, marveled Greenberg-Delgado, the organization’s director of global operations. "The next morning, she went for a run."

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Sreng Suon, born in Cambodia, moved to the United States in 2007. She and her husband, David Arnold-Fernández, founded Asylum Access in 2010.

"I'm not trying to have a product, an output, because I'm so results-focused in my professional life,” she said. "I want to tap into my creativity again, and doing something that’s creative in a different way will make me more creative as a leader.”

"Most of the world had no idea that we were condemning people who fled war or targeted violence to years, decades or generations of marginalized existence.”

—Emily Arnold-Fernández
INTRODUCING REGIONAL BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS

This year, Pomona added regional, in-person gatherings to our growing suite of Book Club offerings. Since January, Sagehen readers have gathered in Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C. Learn about upcoming regional discussions by clicking on “Events” at pomona.edu/bookclub.

June/July Book Club Selection:

The Handmaid’s Tale

Join nearly 500 Sagehen readers in the Pomona College Book Club as we revisit Margaret Atwood’s dystopian classic, The Handmaid’s Tale, now also a hit television series. To join the book club, learn about in-person discussions in your area, and access exclusive discussion questions, faculty notes and video content, visit pomona.edu/bookclub.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Be sure to mark your calendars and update your contact information at pomona.edu/alumniupdate to hear about other upcoming opportunities to catch up with fellow Sagehens, including:

- The Claremont Colleges Worldwide Socials—September 2017 and March 2018
- Pomona’s 10th Presidential Inauguration—October 14, 2017
- Pomona-Pitzer Football Rivalry Weekend—November 2017
- Winter Break Parties—January 2018
- Alumni Weekend—April 26-29, 2018

SAGEHEN CONNECT MOBILE DIRECTORY NOW AVAILABLE FOR ANDROID

Since fall 2013, Sagehen Connect has offered iPhone users mobile access to Pomona’s full alumni directory and mapped results of Sagehens who live and work near you—and now this free app is available for Android users as well! Visit pomona.edu/sagehenconnect to find out how to download the app to your iOS or Android device.
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California sunshine and the energy of nearly 1,600 excited Sagehen alumni and family members fueled a bright and festive Alumni Weekend on April 27–30, 2017.

In addition to the popular Parade of Classes and Wash Party, events included concerts, exhibitions, special dinners and networking receptions, a series of “Ideas@Pomona” lectures and panel discussions, a golf tournament, a Sagehen Triathlon, tastings of local craft beers and alumni-produced wines and opportunities to attend classes, as well as the chance to reconnect with old classmates in a wide variety of settings and activities.

Be sure to mark your calendars for next year’s Alumni Weekend, scheduled for April 26–29, 2018.
Save the Date

FOR THE INAUGURATION OF

G. GABRIELLE STARR

THE 10TH PRESIDENT OF
POMONA COLLEGE

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2017