

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

COLLEGE MAGAZINE

Pomona



Summer 2017

READING
GABI
STARR

INTRODUCING THE 10TH PRESIDENT OF POMONA COLLEGE: **G. GABRIELLE STARR**

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."



"I 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 judging from the excited chatter in the room, others were feeling it too.

Later that day, PACD had the opportunity to meet with Starr and we heard about 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 for our students and a leader for our campus.

It was no surprise then when Board Chair Sam Glick '04 sent us an email in December announcing Pomona's 10th president as G. Gabrielle Starr, that a palpable sense of excitement—perhaps even jubilation—was felt across campus. At least, that is how I felt.

This summer, as a new class of Sagehens (of which more than 50 percent are domestic students of color) nervously anticipates the big move to campus in late August, they not only enter a much more diverse campus than the one I knew in 2002, but they also enter at an exciting moment in Pomona's history: our first woman and first African American president will lead the College.

Although the journey will have its bumps and twists, I know the amazing people who teach here, work here and study here will continue to help the College progress, grow and thrive under Starr's new leadership. More importantly (and a bit selfishly), I believe having Starr lead my alma mater will give other young women of color that confidence to say loudly and boldly, "I do belong here."

—Carla Guerrero '06
Guest Columnist

Pomona

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Pomona College
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DEPARTMENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Home Page Pomona's 10th President | 1 |
| Stray Thoughts "I Do Belong Here" | 2 |
| Letter Box Hidden Pomona | 4 |
| From the Archives Old News | 7 |
| Pomoniana Who Needs a Horse? | 8 |
| Inner Space Big Bridges Hall of Fame | 10 |
| Book Talk Saying No to the Olympics | 12 |
| Heard on Campus Sen. Brian Schatz '94 | 17 |
| Milestones Commencement 2017 | 18 |
| How To Understand the Mind of a Psychopath | 20 |
| New Knowledge Thesis Season | 22 |
| Object Lessons What's in Your Desk Drawer? | 25 |
| Picture This "Money!" | 26 |
| Bulletin Board | 52 |
| Class Notes | 54 |
| Births & Adoptions | 58 |
| Obituaries | 58 |
| Last Look Alumni Weekend 2017 | 62 |

ON THE COVER

G. Gabrielle Starr, Pomona's 10th president —PHOTO BY DREW REYNOLDS



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FEATURES

28 Reading Gabi Starr

Pomona's 10th president is an open book; you might even say she's an entire library. | BY MARK KENDALL

32 A Couple on the Same Page

An engrossing book, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, helped bring Gabi Starr and John C. Harpole together.

32 The Neuroscience of Beauty

G. Gabrielle Starr discusses her book *Feeling Beauty* and the neural footprint of aesthetics.

40 Story Folded Up Like a Fist

"Word-collector" Ray Young Bear '73 writes poetry and novels in a language he mistrusts in order to preserve a culture that he loves. | BY MARK WOOD

46 Rebuilding Lives

Emily Arnold-Fernández '99 and Asylum Access are creating a new paradigm in helping refugees rebuild their lives. | BY VANESSA HUA

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*. While there were no injuries from the bomb at Scripps, that was, sadly, not true at Pomona. That bomb did not simply explode in the mailbox—it was picked up by a young secretary in the Government Department, and it exploded in her hand. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, she was Mary Ann Keatley, 20, wife of a CMC student. She had her “left eye ripped open and her right one penetrated by a fragment.” She also lost two fingers on her right hand. While the crime was never solved, there was considerable speculation at the time that the Vietnam War may not have been the motivation. Interested alums can use the research skills learned at Pomona to delve into newspaper archives for more information about the bombing and the turmoil on campus at the time. Both were heavily covered in Southern California, and the bombing made national news.

—Diane Pyke '69
Port Charlotte, Fla.

Editor's Note: Please keep in mind that the sidebar about the Carnegie bombing was a short excerpt from a much longer “Hidden Pomona” podcast. The full podcast covers these tragic facts in detail, and I highly recommend it for anyone interested in knowing more about that sad piece of Pomona history.

My grandmother, Katharine B. Hume, was 1904 class secretary. I have letters and class (1904) snapshots of Winston Dickson, Pomona College's first Black student, who was mentioned in “Hidden Pomona” in the spring 2017 issue of *PCM*. He founded a law firm in Houston, Texas, that still exists. He never got back to a class reunion—it was too far.

—Katharine Holtom Jones '61
Alpine, Calif.

Fact or Myth

In the spring 2017 issue of *PCM*, in the section titled “Fact or Myth,” I saw the picture of the Pomona College Glee Club and read the story about them winning the National Championship in St. Louis. This was a long-standing story in my family about my father's participation in the Glee Club. (I believe he is the third person from the left in the front row of the picture.) His name was Richard G. Henderson, and he was in the Class of 1934. I never knew my father because he died when I was 1 year old. After graduating from

Pomona in 1934, he went on to St. Louis University Medical School and graduated from there in 1938. During World War II, he was at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md, and was working on a vaccine for scrub typhus, a disease that the American troops were contracting in the Pacific theater. He, unfortunately, contracted the disease while working on the vaccine and died from the disease at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda in 1944.

I have read *PCM* for many years and really appreciate the excellent quality and informative nature of the magazine.

—William G. Henderson '65
Denver, Colo.



The Men's Glee Club of 1932

I enjoyed reading about “Hidden Pomona” in the spring issue of *PCM*. The story of the Men's Glee Club of 1932 in “Fact or Myth” brought back memories to share. Several Glee Club members sent children to Pomona, including John Shelton '35, Louis Ronfeldt '34, Leonard “Agee” Shelton '32 and Juan Matute '34. The tributes include John's daughters Heidi '61 and Lucy '65 (a soprano), David Ronfeldt '63, Agee's children John '63 and Jane '65, and Juan's children Juan Jr. '63 and Gini '66.

Agee was a bass and later a trustee. His son, John, was my close friend from grade school on. Agee told us of the story of the National Championship competition in St. Louis. The Glee Club sang Pomona's original song “Torchbearers” to win the title, so “Torchbearers” is still the reigning national champion song. Moreover, the judges were impressed that the Pomona Glee Club did not have a director present and yet sang extremely well.

Agee's daughter, Jane Shelton Livingston, notes that while they were on the train to St. Louis, they sang and sang and sang to perfect their *a cappella* chops. She added that often-reigning Yale was the school to beat. Also, the Glee Club's director, “Prof” Lyman, was the guid-

ing force and beloved by all. It's true he didn't conduct the singers, but he certainly prepared them and inspired them.

Two more things: First, the 1932 championship was the 17th annual event, not the first. It was the first time in St. Louis, and the prior 16 events were held in New York. Second, the runners-up were (not necessarily in order) Penn State and New York University. Yale is not included in the “Final Three” choruses in the excerpt. It does not tell us who was second and who was third.

There is probably much more to the 1932 Glee Club story. I hope that additional people will write in.

—Robert Benson '63
Davis, Calif.

Our father, Juan Matute '34, arrived at Pomona College a few years after he had come to Claremont from his birthplace in Guadalajara, Mexico. He had yet to master academic English. Imagine how thrilling it was for him to travel across the country with the Glee Club. It was an experience of his lifetime and one that he treasured throughout his life. We still have his scrapbook and the memorabilia he collected from the tour, including matchbooks, napkins and pictures.

He was the first musical director for the Mexican Players of Padua Hills. He also played piano, guitarron and bass. He not only was the musical director but, as well, acted and produced many of the plays and musical concerts there. He met his wife, Manuela '35, at Padua Hills, where she was a singer, dancer, actress and waitress. Manuela sang in the Women's Glee Club at Pomona.

When our father died in 1992, we played “Torchbearers” in honor of what Pomona College meant to him.

—Gini Matute-Bianchi '66
Aptos, Calif.
and Juan Matute Jr. '63
Claremont, Calif.

In “Fact or Myth” from the spring 2017 issue, the writer has added a new myth, that of the flightless sage grouse. While it has a chunky body and does not migrate, it is decidedly not flightless. It can fly up to 50 m.p.h on short local flights of up to five or six miles. As a bird photographer, I have watched their leks during mating displays many times, and I can personally debunk this one before it goes any further.

—Mary Jane Gibson '68
Edmonds, Wash.



Cecil 1.0

There's an article in the spring *PCM* about Cecil 3.0, where the writer mentions not knowing the origin of the first Cecil costume. I can help with that. The costume was made in the summer of 1980. Laura Stiteler '82 was working in the athletics department and was assigned to (or maybe volunteered to) get a mascot costume for the fall.

I'm sure the budget was generous: The head was very sturdy and professional-looking, and the rest of the costume was far superior to Cecil 2.0. It was a high-end costume, made at the time that the San Diego Chicken was a celebrity. Laura and I had gone to the same San Diego high school, where I'd been the mascot. So toward the end of my freshman year, she asked if I'd be Cecil. I said yes, and I was Cecil for the next three school years, until I graduated.

Laura had ordered such a high-end costume that one part couldn't take the kind of abuse I gave it. (I got beat up in it twice: once at a football game at Occidental, and once at a football game at CMC. Both times it was my fault; I provoked the other team's fans.) The orange leather duck feet that it came with started falling apart, so Bob, the equipment manager in the gym, dyed some sweat socks orange and had somebody whip up some more resilient orange feet. I still have the original leather feet in a box somewhere.

The photo (above) is from an ad for the old Coop Store, and the other people in it are Aditya Eachempati '83 and Liora Szold Houtzager '83. When I graduated, Dave Peattie '84 took over being Cecil, and when he graduated, it passed to Allison Sekuler '86.

For the first year or two that I was Cecil, the dean of freshmen, Elizabeth Chadwick, called

herself Cecily. She put out a newsletter authored by Cecily and had a pair of feathers, one blue and one white, that she kept in her office. When she left Pomona for her next job, she gave me the feathers and said now I'd be both Cecil and Cecily. So Cecil was both genders, or no gender, or something along those lines, way back in the 1980s.

Chirp.

—Dennis Rodkin '83
Highland Park, Ill.

Marine Zoology

In response to the short article in the spring *PCM* on the end of the marine zoology program 50 years ago, I took Marine Zoology and Ecology with Professor Willis Pequegnat the summer of '51. (There was also an advanced course for pre-meds.) The boys slept on the roof under a big blue tent, but girls had to find accommodations in town, so not many girls took Marine Lab. I was lucky that my family home was in Corona del Mar, two blocks from the Marine Lab, and I even kept my summer job (cutting back on hours). Our textbooks were *Animals Without Backbones* and *Between Pacific Tides*. We had occasional field trips to local tidepools and a little outboard motorboat to travel in. It was a great experience! Why did it stop in '67?

—Perdita Myers '54
Idyllwild, Calif.

Wrenching News

PCM has always been a good read—a welcoming and dreamy trip to my Pomona past—but also a reminder of Pomona's vibrancy long after I scooted through the halls of Harwood. But it is wrenching trying to process the devastating news that one of my dear Pomona friends, Marylou Correia Sarkissian, was taken away from her children, family and friends in December.

Any of us who crossed paths with Marylou knew we were spending time with a capital “E” extrovert. Back in 1985, I was a sophomore transfer and had a lot of introvert in my DNA. It was probably a good thing that Marylou was my Harwood neighbor. She drew me out and introduced me to her friends. In a matter of weeks, I already felt like I had a home in the Sagehen roost. Marylou simply had that quality of making most anyone comfortable in her presence.

She'd often come by my room to announce we were going “somewhere” in her white Chevette. A fast-food joint. The gym. Just a cruise down Foothill Boulevard. It didn't really matter where. We had a great time hanging out and just chatting about life.

Our last semester, Marylou and I both attended a job fair at a hotel near the Ontario airport. I wasn't entirely sure of my next step post-Pomona, but Marylou was determined, focused and chock-full of résumés for the HR recruiters. I can't be 100 percent sure—let's call it 99 percent—but she left that job fair with more interviews lined up than any other attendee. Prestigious hospital and pharmaceutical firms. I can sadly admit, I was a touch jealous on our drive back to campus.

It's kind of crazy how certain people leave such an impression on your life. Friendships from those formative years bake into your memory. Then one evening, an awful piece of news, and all those memories come flooding back. We are reminded of the special people we knew, and how much pain their families are going through with their loved ones taken away.

I wish Marylou's children and family all of the possible strength they can muster. Words may not provide tremendous relief at this point in their lives. But they should know she touched a lot of lives in so many positive ways.

Until we may meet again, dear friend.

—Matt Gersuk '88
Fair Oaks, Calif.

Which Side of History?

I have long feared that the path of political correctness that Pomona College has chosen over these last several years would lead to a deterioration of my alma mater and the values it used to represent. The editorial titled “The Right Side of History” in the spring edition of *PCM*, which actually celebrates this decline, has confirmed my fear and provoked me to take pen in hand.

In March of 2004, a CMC professor named Kerri Dunn told Claremont police that her car had been vandalized and spray-painted with racist and anti-Semitic slurs. The Claremont Colleges immediately erupted in self-righteous indignation and a frenzy of predictable PC actions, including canceling classes; organizing rallies, demonstrations and sit-ins; wearing black shirts; and chanting slogans of “pro-diversity, anti-hate.” When the facts came out, the Claremont Police Department and the FBI determined that Dunn had vandalized her own car and spray-painted the epithets herself, thereby creating a campus-wide hoax.

A student reportedly said of the Dunn affair: “I'm not concerned whether it's a hoax or not.” Really? Do facts and the historical record not matter anymore? Any historian who was trained, as I was, by mentors such as Vincent Learnihan, John Gleason, Jack Kemble and Margaret Gay Davies, would be horrified by such ▸

anti-intellectual nonsense. Has Pomona College learned nothing since 2004?

I believe that the proper definition of a college is “a community of scholars in search of the truth.” I have difficulty understanding exactly what Pomona College has become, but it is certainly no longer a community that includes me or any other like-minded alums who care about history.

Editor Wood: You, sir, are actually on “The Wrong Side of History,” and you are taking my college down with you.

—Mark Shipley '66
Las Vegas, Nev.

It was with interest and dismay that I read your column, “The Right Side of History,” in the spring 2017 issue of *PCM*. You note 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 the belief of many others—that climate change is not settled science. The climate-change lobby has trampled on the scientific process in the myopic pursuit of its political and economic objectives and has shown little interest in contemplating the impact on its “research” of legitimate discrepancies in data and its mediocre 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, scholar 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 Oxtoby 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.

—S. Matthew Katz '98
Bronxville, NY

I opened an Internet site that reprints news articles from around the country this morning. First

on today’s list: “Geology professor accepting students into her course based on race and income.” Thinking as I called it up, “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 dumfounded, after our reunion two years ago featured confusing signs regarding who could or couldn’t use every public bathroom on campus, and where the alma mater is no longer allowed to be sung, nor a beautiful song that won our Glee Club a national championship long ago? Political correctness over “liberal arts” education (in the outdated definition of those words). Professor McIntyre, what has happened to your department and your school since you retired?

Our culture is declining so fast, this kind of abuse of authority on campus is honored by school administrators almost everywhere, as is violent agitation against free speech by anyone not parroting liberal tenets. The only people allowed to be offended without reprisal are constitutionalists, who don’t carry billy clubs and fire sticks. I no longer contribute to the decline. Nor will I, while the mind-twisting continues.

—Patricia Yingling White, '66
Colorado Springs, Colo.



Ocelots Where?

Hmmm. Might be a gratuitous detail in the intro, p. 37, of the spring *PCM* that just arrived: ocelots in Uruguay? Hmmm. No more mention of this in the body of the fine article. But I live in Uruguay several months a year. Ocelots? Never heard of them there. Maybe my ignorance. I do vaguely remember an ocelot (I think) as the subject of a fascinating Kafka-like story by one of (neighboring) Argentina’s greatest 20th-century writers: Julio Cortázar. But in Uruguay? Hmmm.

—Bill Katra '68
La Crosse, Wis.

Wonderful Alchemy

I was recently back at Pomona for my 25th reunion. It is hard to say why Pomona friendships remain resilient after so many years—because this was a formative time in our lives? Because of the particular people Pomona attracts? Was it the institution itself that molded relationships in a certain way? Or was it simply a surfeit of sun? It’s a strange and wonderful alchemy.

I am grateful for all of your efforts with *PCM*. Whether I was in Myanmar or Laos (or Vietnam or India or Hong Kong before that), *PCM* has been a wonderful means of learning and staying connected. I always feel grateful for being part of the Pomona community after reading an issue.

—Chris Herink '92
Clifton, Va.

Number 47

Here’s another story about the number 47. I will be going with my classmates to see the sun eclipse in August, and they have been kicking around the number 47 with a couple of professors from Pomona. What they have been talking about is far beyond me since my field was theology.

For five and a half years, I did business for the United Methodist Church in 47 languages. I would leave Los Angeles on the first of November, flying west, and hopefully arrive back in Nashville, Tenn., for Christmas. It included large groups like Cantonese and Mandarin and small groups like the Kuki and Meitei tribes in Burma. Some interesting travels and stories.

—Bob Wood '65
Franklin, Ind.

Kudos

Keep up the good work with *PCM*. You and your staff are doing an excellent job in my opinion. You have had a number of very good articles in recent issues.

—John H. Davis '51
Carmel, Calif.

CORRECTION

In the story “The Magical Bridge” in the spring 2017 *PCM*, the name of Olenka Villarreal’s husband should have been listed as “Robert” instead of “Richard.” Our apologies to the Villarreal family for this uncorrected error.

Alumni, parents and friends are invited to email letters to pcm@pomona.edu or “snail-mail” them to *Pomona College Magazine*, 550 North College Ave., Claremont, CA 91711. Letters may be edited for length, style and clarity.

OLD NEWS

Pomona’s student newspaper, the oldest in Southern California, was first published by the College’s two literary societies in 1889 as *The Pomona Student*. In its first year, it was a four-page monthly, financed by student subscriptions that sold for 75 cents per year. The name of the publication changed to *The Student Life* in 1893. Today it is published weekly by the Associated Students of Pomona College and covers life across the five undergraduate institutions of The Claremont Colleges.



ITEM: Three copies of the student newspaper of Pomona College

DATE: 1891, 1898 and 1924

COLLECTION: *The Student Life*

If you have an item from Pomona’s history that you would like to see preserved in the Pomona College Archives, please call 909-621-8138.

BLUE ROCKS, BICYCLE POLO, A ROLLING HOUSE AND MORE...

[POMONIANA]



Pomona Blue Calcites

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—echoes 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."

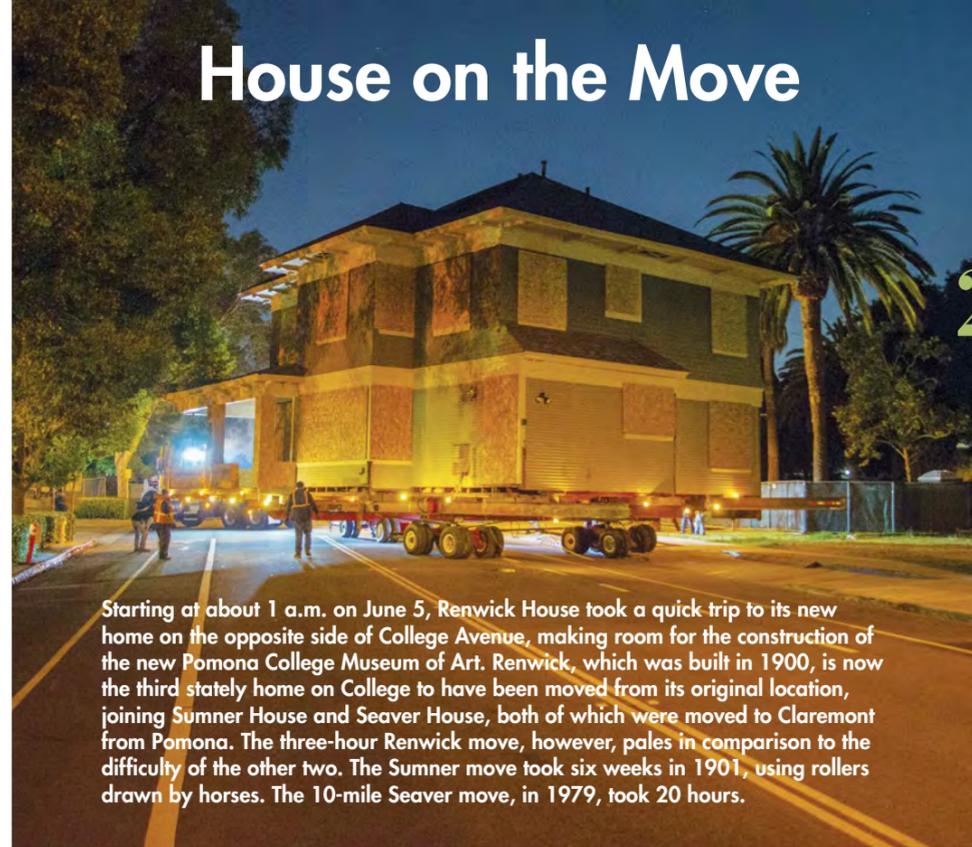
WHO NEEDS A HORSE?

Some creative Pomona students made good use of the open spaces of Bixby Plaza in April for a game of bike polo, similar to the traditional game of polo, but with bicycles in place of horses.

According to Jeremy Snyder '19 (who took the photo below), "the object is to hit the ball into a goal, which we usually just mark as a section of wall, using a mallet. You're not allowed to set your feet down, or else you have to go over and tap the fountain. We usually play three-on-three every Friday afternoon at the plaza outside Frary, and we bring bikes up from the Green Bikes shop so that anyone who passes by and wants to join can. We made the mallets for it out of sawed-off ski poles from Craigslist and plastic pipe sections that we bolted onto the ends."



House on the Move



Starting at about 1 a.m. on June 5, Renwick House took a quick trip to its new home on the opposite side of College Avenue, making room for the construction of the new Pomona College Museum of Art. Renwick, which was built in 1900, is now the third stately home on College to have been moved from its original location, joining Sumner House and Seaver House, both of which were moved to Claremont from Pomona. The three-hour Renwick move, however, pales in comparison to the difficulty of the other two. The Sumner move took six weeks in 1901, using rollers drawn by horses. The 10-mile Seaver move, in 1979, took 20 hours.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 25% of the Class of 2017 applied for a competitive award during their time at Pomona College. Of those...
- 42 members of the class won a total of...
- 47 fellowships and awards, including...
- 13 Fulbright awards to do research or teach in another country...
- 6 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowships...
- 5 TAPIF (Teaching Assistant Program in France) awards...
- 3 Goldwater Scholarships, awarded to juniors for continuing study...
- 2 Udall Scholarships, awarded to sophomores or juniors for continuing study...
- 2 NSF Graduate Research Fellowships to support postgraduate study...
- 2 Downing Scholarships to pursue postgraduate studies at Cambridge...
- 2 NYU Shanghai Writing and Speaking Fellowships...
- 1 Venture for America Fellowship...
- 1 New York City Teaching Fellowship and...
- 1 Princeton in Asia Fellowship. In addition, the 2017 class boasts...
- 3 Rhodes Scholarship finalists...
- 3 Marshall Scholarship finalists and...
- 1 Mitchell Scholarship finalist.

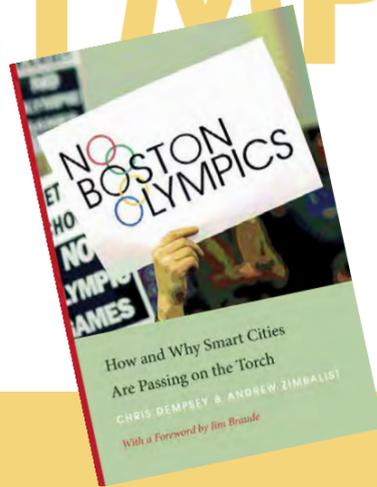


Big Bridges Hall of Fame

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.

CHRIS DEMPSEY '92 DISCUSSES HIS BOOK ABOUT THE GRASS-ROOTS EFFORT HE HELPED LAUNCH THAT CHALLENGED AND SHUT DOWN BOSTON'S PROBLEMATIC BID FOR THE 2024 OLYMPICS.

SAYING NO TO THE OLYMPICS



No Boston Olympics
 How and Why Smart Cities
 Are Passing on the Torch
 By Chris Dempsey '05
 ForeEdge 2017 | 232 pages | \$27.95

You could say David slew Goliath in Boston—in an Olympian-scale triumph. Christopher Dempsey '05 was one of the leaders of the No Boston Olympics campaign that successfully shut down the Boston 2024 Olympics bid. It is a story of how a scrappy grassroots movement beat a strapping, well-armed initiative. In the book he coauthored, *No Boston Olympics: How and Why Smart Cities Are Passing on the Torch*, Dempsey tells the tale and offers a blueprint that shows how ordinary people can topple extraordinary giants. *Pomona College Magazine's* Sneha Abraham interviewed Dempsey. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

PCM: Can you unpack the conventional argument that the Olympics are good for a city? What is hosting supposed to do for a city? What's the myth, and if you can call it that, the romance behind it?

Dempsey: The International Olympic Committee has often had some success telling cities that hosting the Olympics is an opportunity for them to be seen on the world stage, and to enter an exclusive club of world-class cities that have hosted the Olympics, and to leave a legacy from the investments that are made by Olympic hosts to support the Olympic Games. The reality is that the International Olympic Committee is 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 boosts your city's economy in the long term, that it makes you a more attractive trading partner, or a place for a future business investment, or that you're really benefiting your city in any sort of long-term way. So the actual reality of the Olympics is that they're a very expensive and risky proposition with very little benefit. But, traditionally, the IOC has

had some success getting Olympic boosters focused on some of those more ephemeral benefits to get them to ignore some of those costs.

PCM: When did it crystallize for you that you were going to co-helm this grassroots movement?

Dempsey: We came together in the fall of 2013, six months or so after there were initial reports in the media in Boston that a powerful group of people was coming together and forming to try 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 Boston Celtics, the owner of the New England Patriots, Mitt 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

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 like this 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.

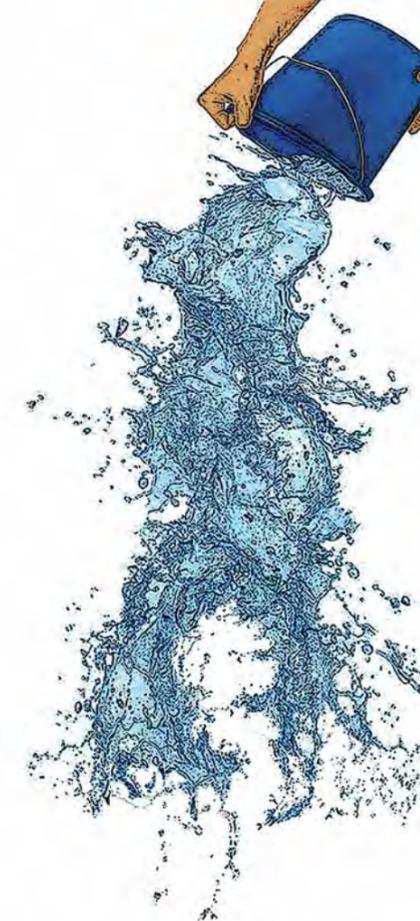
So we saw that this was a real juggernaut, and we also saw that opposition was going to have to come from the grass roots because there was not going to be much institutional opposition. Seeing that, we said, "We think there's a very good case to make that this is a bad idea for our city's future. We 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 questions and some of those arguments against the bid."

PCM: When did the momentum start taking off for you in terms of gathering 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 run to determine which city would be the U.S. bid. Boston 2024 beat out 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 55 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 contract with the International Olympic Committee would require. Residents were just hearing the basic talking points that Boston 2024 put out, things like promises about no taxpayer money and



glossy photos and images of what the bid would look like.

And that's very typical for Olympic bids: boosters focus on these happy, positive moments. But over time the boosters were forced, by us and by others, to start sharing more information about the budget and the costs, and the contract with the IOC. And it was a death by a thousand cuts for the boosters—as more and more information came out, Bostonians liked the bid less and less.

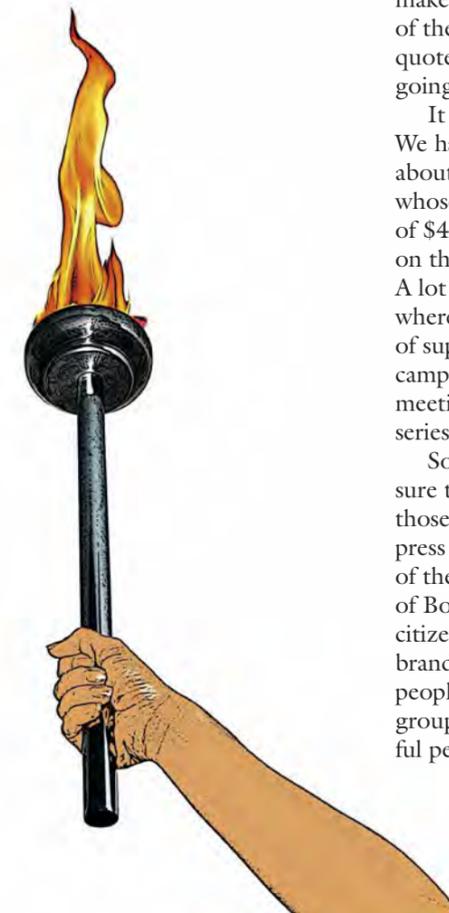
As residents got more educated on the pros and cons, they determined that this was not a good idea for our city's future. And so by February, the polling was pretty much split, where support and opposition were both around 45 percent. And then by March we had successfully flipped the numbers from those January numbers. From there on out, support for the bid hovered between 35 and 40 percent for the remaining life of the bid.

PCM: How were you mobilizing support?

Dempsey: Probably what we did best as an organization was work with the media to make sure that they were telling both sides of the story, arming them with facts and quotes and numbers about what was really going on with this bid.

It was very much a grassroots movement. We had an average contribution size of about \$100, compared to Boston 2024, whose average contribution size was north of \$40,000. They spent about \$15 million on the bid. We spent less than \$10,000. A lot of our organizing was social media, where we were able to build communities of supporters. But it was also old-school campaign tactics, such as holding organizing meetings and rallying people to attend a series of public meetings on the bid.

Sometimes it was as simple as making sure that we passed out signs to people at those public meetings so that they could express their opposition to the bid. The cover of the book became kind of the iconic image of Boston's Olympic opposition—regular citizens 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. ▶



PCM: Did you find that there's something unique about Boston citizens?

Dempsey: I don't know if we're unique, but I do think we have a proud history of being engaged in these types of civic debates. It is a part of the DNA of the city and the people who live here. The very first public meeting, that became the cover of our book, was held in a building that's across the street from where some of the patriots of the American Revolution are buried. It's part of who we are; we have that proud tradition of standing up for ourselves and not being afraid to take on some powerful forces.

So this is just one story in a long line of stories in Boston's history where people have done that.

PCM: Was there a turning point in the campaign? There were 200 days from when the governor was inaugurated to when the bid was canceled, is that right?

Dempsey: Exactly 200 days. Which was fast, but it wasn't sudden. Probably our most important talking point centered on the taxpayer guarantee. The International Olympic Committee requires the city that is bidding on the games to sign a contract that says that the city taxpayers are the ones who are responsible for any cost overruns.

And that fact contradicted the promises that the Boston 2024 boosters were making—that there were no taxpayer dollars needed for the games. So we kept hammering that point. It was a constant drumbeat and no single day or event. Just an educational process over many months.

PCM: You dedicate the book in part to Boston's journalists. Why, and what was their role in this process?

Dempsey: They really are heroes in this story. This is particularly true of some young reporters who were ambitious and hardworking and willing to dig in on the details of the bid and make sure that the other side of the story was being told. Boston 2024 was spending tens of thousands of dollars a month on media and PR consultants to get their story out there. If journalists listened only to the powerful and connected, then our side never would have been able to get its message out. But

because we were taken seriously, because journalists were doing independent research that uncovered some of the drawbacks and errors of the bid, the public could make an informed choice.

Here's a specific example of the press's impact. WBUR, which is one of the two NPR public radio stations in Boston, commissioned and published a monthly poll surveying residents about their opinions of the bid. That meant that we—and the USOC and IOC—could see support declining. We didn't have to wait a year for a referendum or another opportunity for the public to be heard. It wasn't cheap for WBUR to commission those polls, but it had a tangible impact on the debate—that's great journalism.

We really feel fortunate that the media was so robust here. I think we would have had a very different outcome if it weren't for those newsrooms.

PCM: Is there a way the Olympics can be made more egalitarian and more affordable?

Dempsey: If you think about the International Olympic Committee's business model, it essentially started in 1896 with the first modern games in Athens. It probably made some sense in the 19th century to move the games around to different cities because that was the only way that people could experience the Olympics. It was based on the model of the World's Fair, which was quite successful in the 19th century. But since 1896, humanity has invented the radio, television, the Internet, *Pomona College Magazine*, air travel. There are all these different ways to communicate and interact now that didn't exist in 1896.

Today you beam the activities to billions of television sets. And people who want to see the Olympics in person could get on a plane and have not more than one or two airline connections to get to wherever it is, whether it would be Los Angeles or Athens or London or somewhere else. There's a strong case to make for a permanent location or a small number of semipermanent locations that would host the games.

Unfortunately, I'm very pessimistic about the International Olympic Committee's willingness to change. The IOC is composed of roughly 90 people who are self-appointed. Many of their positions are hereditary, so it includes people like the princess of Lichten-

stein and the prince of Monaco and the prince of Malaysia. These are fabulously wealthy people who are not used to hearing "no"—they're used to getting their way. And as long as they still have one or two cities bidding every cycle, they'll perpetuate this model no matter how inefficient and wasteful it is for the host cities.

I wish that I were more optimistic about the IOC changing, but as long as they stay undemocratic and unregulated, it's hard to see them really having the right incentives to change.

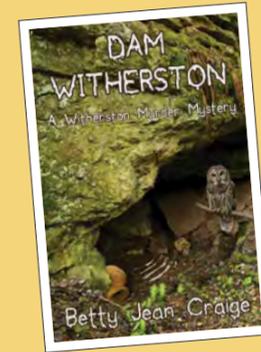
PCM: Did you get a lot of push-back personally? Did anyone accuse you of poor sportsmanship for spearheading this campaign?

Dempsey: Early on, we were called cynics and naysayers—if not much worse. It was important for us to be clear that we loved Boston and that we thought Boston *could* host the Olympics, but that we *shouldn't* because it put our city's future at risk. And by reframing the question away from it being a kind of competition about who has the best city and instead turning it into a much more sober public-policy choice about whether this is a good proposal for us to embrace, we got people to move beyond the question of pride in your city and instead into the question of priorities. Did people want our elected leaders focused on the Olympics or on more-important challenges in transportation, education, health care, etc.?

Eventually we became seen as the scrappy underdogs—and thankfully, a lot of people root for underdogs.

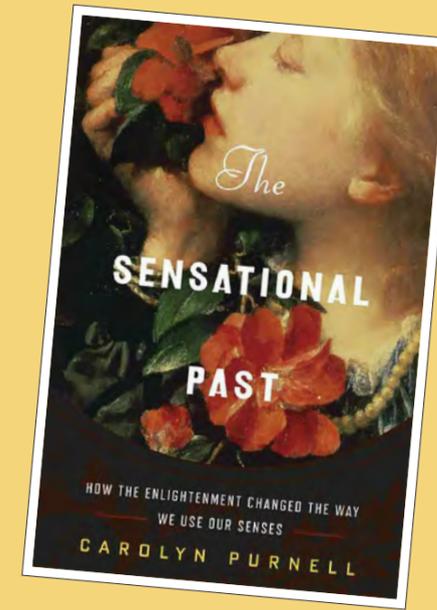
PCM: What are a few things in your blueprint for citizens who want to challenge Olympic bids in their own cities? What is the advice you'd give to the powerless who are seeking to advocate for their greater, best interest?

Dempsey: First, when it comes to Olympic opposition, the facts are on your side. The boosters of an Olympics do not have a very good track record to run on, and they don't have a lot of good data and information on their side. So you're starting from a good place there, even though you'll never have the power and resources that Olympic proponents will have. Second, the International Olympic Committee is truly out of touch with what regular people ▷



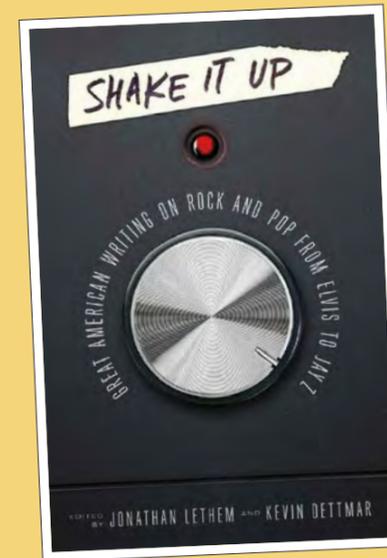
Dam Witherston
A Witherston Murder Mystery

Betty Jean Craig '68 returns to her fictional Georgia town of Witherston with a story of blackmail, sacred burial grounds and murder.



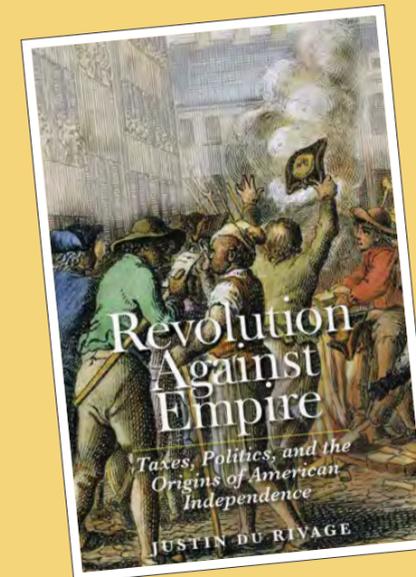
The Sensational Past
How the Enlightenment Changed the Way We Use Our Senses

Carolyn Purnell '06 offers an insightful survey of the ways Enlightenment thinkers made sense of their world.



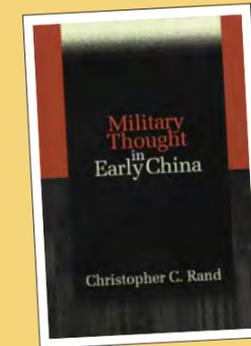
Shake It Up
Great American Writing on Rock and Pop from Elvis to Jay Z

Professors **Jonathan Lethem** and **Kevin Dettmar**, both longtime devotees and scholars of modern music, join forces as editors of a compendium of some of the nation's all-time best writing from the world of rock and pop.



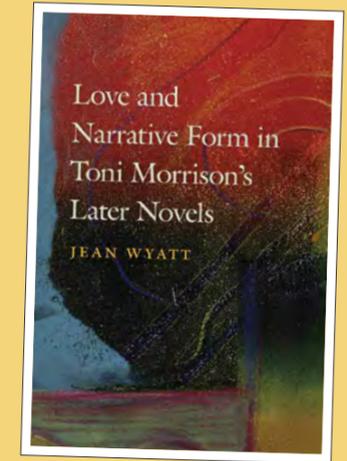
Revolution Against Empire
Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence

Justin du Rivage '05 resets the story of American independence within the long, fierce clash over the political and economic future of the British Empire.



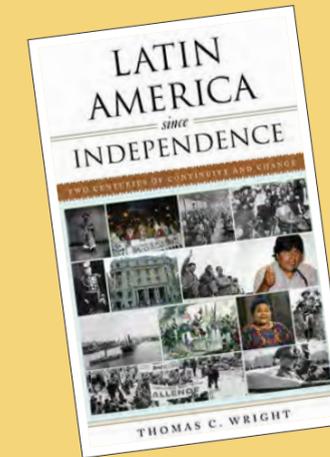
Military Thought in Early China

Christopher C. Rand '70 provides a well-argued framework for understanding early China's military philosophy.



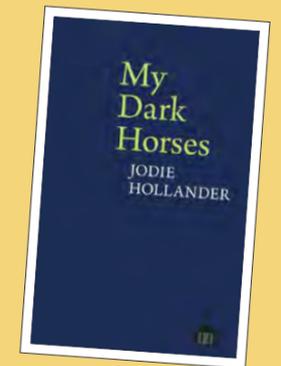
Love and Narrative Form in Toni Morrison's Later Novels

Jean Wyatt '61 explores the interaction among ideas of love, narrative innovation and reader response in Morrison's seven later novels.



Latin America Since Independence
Two Centuries of Continuity and Change

Thomas C. Wright '63 critically examines the complex colonial legacies of Latin America through 200 years of postcolonial history.



My Dark Horses

In her first full-length poetry collection, **Jodie Hollander** '68 offers highly personal poems about family, interspersed with meditations on the works of Rimbaud.

The Pomona College
BOOK CLUB



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

want and need, and the more that you can expose the IOC as a selfish, short-sighted, opaque institution, the more you'll help your cause, and you'll expose that what's best for the IOC is often the opposite of what's best for host cities, and vice versa.

The cost and complexity of organizing citizens has come down. Underdogs and outsiders can really still make an impact on the debate—and that impact can be amplified on Twitter and Facebook. We often bemoan the negative impacts of those platforms, but they can also be powerful tools.

PCM: What is the broader significance of the story you tell for citizens who will never have an Olympics bid in their cities?

Dempsey: Olympic bids raise a lot of questions around how public resources are used to advance common goals. We should always be challenging and questioning public expenditures to make sure we're getting the

“SINCE BOSTON DROPPED OUT, HAMBURG, GERMANY; ROME, ITALY; AND BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, HAVE ALL DROPPED THEIR BIDS FOR THE 2024 OLYMPICS. AND THEY'VE ALL POINTED TO BOSTON AND SAID, ‘BOSTON MADE A SMART DECISION HERE.’” —Chris Dempsey '92

impacts and results we need as a society. Many cities decide to give public subsidies to stadiums, arenas or convention centers when those public dollars would be much better spent on education, transportation or health care.

PCM: Do you have any thoughts on the LA bid decision that's coming down in September?

Dempsey: People in Southern California have very warm memories from the 1984 Olympics, and that is driving a lot of the support for LA's bid for the 2024 Games, which replaced Boston's bid in 2015. I think Angelenos and Southern Californians are forgetting that 1984 was a unique situation. For the 1984 games, there were only two cities that bid. The first was Los Angeles, and the second was Tehran, Iran. And Tehran actually had to drop out of the

running on the eve of the Iranian Revolution. So that left Los Angeles as the only bidder in the IOC's auction.

As anyone knows, when you show up to an auction and you're the only bidder, you get a really good price. And so Los Angeles in 1984 was able to say to the IOC, "We're not going to build new venues. We're not going to sign the taxpayer guarantee. We're going to negotiate the television contracts, and we're going to get the profits from those." Los Angeles today is not in the same position, because Paris is also bidding. In fact, Mayor Garcetti had said that he will be signing the contract that puts Los Angeles taxpayers on the hook. That's a fundamental difference from 1984.

That's something that Garcetti doesn't want to talk about and the boosters behind LA 2024 don't want to talk about, but it is a reality of what they have agreed to with the IOC.

I give LA 2024 credit because they are creating a plan that uses a lot of existing and

temporary facilities, but they are still fundamentally proposing a risky deal. Imagine a corporation that wanted to locate in Southern California and said, "We want to move here and we promise to add some jobs, but if we're not profitable as a company, we want LA taxpayers to make up the difference."

That would be an outrageous demand for a private business to make. But that's essentially what LA 2024 is doing, and the mayor is going along with it. I think the LA region deserves more of a discussion around what the pros and cons are here and whether this is truly a good deal for the city or whether they're sort of coasting off of the warm feelings and warm memories that people have from 1984.

PCM: So some city somewhere needs to host the Olympics, right? Is there a place you think would be a good fit?

Dempsey: For me it's more about the model. If you were going to choose a permanent location, I think you could make a case that Los Angeles would be a good one. LA is good at putting on TV shows, which is what the Olympics is more than anything else. Obviously Athens, because of the history with Greece, would be another interesting location to consider. Or maybe London. I don't know what the answer is there, but I think the most important thing is that we try to make cities aware that, around the world, there are a lot of drawbacks.

Since Boston dropped out, Hamburg, Germany; Rome, Italy; and Budapest, Hungary, have all dropped their bids for the 2024 Olympics. And they've all pointed to Boston and said, "Boston made a smart decision here, and we're going to make the same decision to drop out. We have other things that we want to spend our time and limited taxpayer dollars on."

So you are seeing fewer cities bid. LA and Paris are going ahead for 2024, and we'll see kind of what the bidding landscape looks like in years ahead.

PCM: So the romance is fading, right?

Dempsey: I think that's true. The IOC has been greedy in a sense. They've extracted all of these concessions out of prior hosts, and potential host cities are realizing that the contract that they are being asked to sign is just not a reasonable one for most democracies. You're seeing a narrowing to a couple of cities that have hosted before and feel like they have the venues in place, and then you're seeing dictatorships—places like Russia and China that don't care about popular opinion and are doing it for the spectacle or to glorify their autocratic leaders.

PCM: Do you have a favorite Olympics event?

Dempsey: I was about 10 years old when the Dream Team played in Barcelona, so I'd go with that. It's also fun to watch the quirky and obscure events that you see only every four years. At No Boston Olympics, we always said the three weeks of the Olympics would be fun. But you have to look at the long-term costs, not just the party. **PCM**

MYRLIE EVERS-WILLIAMS '68
ON COMING TO POMONA COLLEGE:

“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.”

(The civil rights leader spoke at Alumni Weekend 2017.)

JUDGE RICHARD TARANTO '77
ON WORK THAT MATTERS:

“THERE IS NOT MUCH THAT'S MORE satisfying than being able to exercise a craft well, which takes a lot of work, and if you can be excellent at work that you have come to believe, at some moral or philosophical level, is worth doing, the combination can be wonderful.”

(The U.S. appeals court judge spoke at Alumni Weekend 2017.)

U.S. 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? You do whatever you can with whatever you have. That is your responsibility as of today, as of your graduation from Pomona College. You have done very well. Now you have to do good.” (The U.S. senator from Hawaii spoke at Commencement 2017.)

BRIAN TUCKER '67
ON MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO PREPARE FOR DISASTERS:

“A HIGH-CONSEQUENCE, LOW-PROBABILITY event is pretty unmotivating. But we have found, in all the cities we've worked in around the world, if you talk about the safety of the parents' children, that motivates them. As some of us say, this is the 'gateway drug' to disaster reduction—to talk about schools.”

(The founder of GeoHazards International spoke at Alumni Weekend 2017.)

PENNY DEAN '77
ON TRAINING DISTANCE SWIMMERS:

“IN THE POOL, YOU'LL PASS THAT barrier, that pain threshold, and you'll feel it in your side, and if you just say, 'Oh great—here's the pain. Now go faster. Go harder. Go harder now.' And you'll get through it. You're on top of the world.”

(The record-breaking swimmer and former Pomona College swim coach spoke at Alumni Weekend 2017.)

COMMENCEMENT 2017

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'05; 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."



1 Class speaker Dominique Curtis '17 brings her capped-and-gowned daughter with her to the stage to accept her diploma from President David Oxtoby. 2 Announced during the ceremony were 2017 Wig Award winners (from left) Philip Choi, Tzu-Yi Chen, Vin de Silva, Donna Di Grazia, Michael K. Kuehlwein, Pardis Mahdavi, John Alldredge Clithero '05 and David R. Kauchak. 3 Estela Sanchez '17 sports a unique lei of folded dollar bills. 4 President Oxtoby delivers his last charge to a graduating class. 5 Rodrigo De Leon '17 awaits his turn to pick up his diploma. 6 During the processional, faculty line the walkway to applaud Eric Montgomery '17 and the other new Pomona graduates. —PHOTOS BY CARLOS PUMA

Kailey Lawson '17

Double Major: Philosophy and Cognitive Science



HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF A PSYCHOPATH

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 gosh! 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.

1 From an early age, spurn fiction for nonfiction. Fall in love with true-crime books because of your interest in human motives. Aspire to be a criminal profiler until you learn that your image of a profiler is a TV fiction, not a real job.

2 In high school, follow your mother’s example and get involved in community service, volunteering at a food bank and local homeless shelter. Fall in love with the work partially because you find it fulfilling and have a deep interest in understanding the problems of the people you’re helping.

3 Know that you don’t want to follow in your brother Nick’s footsteps at Pomona College, but end up deciding it’s the best place for you anyway. And though you’ve always thought philosophy was abstract and boring, take a first-year seminar with Professor Julie Tannenbaum in medical ethics and discover that the field deals with intriguing real-world challenges.

4 Love your class in forensic psychology with Claremont McKenna College Professor Daniel Krauss so much that you end up as his research assistant. Major in both philosophy and cognitive science because you see them as two ways of understanding human behavior; then spend a summer with Harvard’s Mind/Brain/Behavior program in Trento, Italy.

5 Inspired by a lecture by author/activist Bryan Stevenson on mass incarceration, follow his advice about getting “proximate” to the problem. Spend a summer working behind barbed wire at Patton State Hospital, a psychiatric facility in the California correctional system. While there, take an interest in psychopathy, which you come to believe is misunderstood.

6 As a senior, write two theses on the subject of psychopathy—an examination of the ethical theory of the blameworthiness of psychopaths for your philosophy major, and a study of inhibition deficits in high-functioning psychopaths for your “cog-sci” major.

7 Conclude that psychopathic traits should be treated as a mitigating factor in both moral and legal domains, and decide you want to study the subject further to be able to influence public policy. Gain admission to a top Ph.D. psychology program at UC Davis with a professor whose research offers opportunities to pursue your chosen work into the future.

APRIL THESES BRING MAY DIPLOMAS

THESIS SEASON

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 normally takes a full semester or, in some cases, an entire 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 computers how to dance—offer just a taste of the diversity of inventive work students are producing in their final year at Pomona.

Cinderella and Its Politics

Bianca Kendall Cockrell '17, politics major
After an angry fairy sends everyone in her castle into an enchanted sleep, Princess Alexis must go to America to retrieve the one item that will break the curse: an apple. She befriends Rumpelstiltskin and a vegetarian dragon and ends up in New York City, a place where democracy reigns supreme...

This may not sound much like a politics thesis, and indeed, Bianca Cockrell’s thesis is anything but conventional. Instead of writing a traditional academic paper, Cockrell wrote a novel about the politics of fairy tales, an idea that she got excited about when she took Professor Susan McWilliams’ Politics



and Literature seminar in the spring of her junior year. Over the following summer, she continued her quest with a Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) project titled “Once Upon a Regime,” for which she traveled around several European countries and visited fairy tale centers, museums and universities, where she sought insights from fairy tale scholars.

As part of her overall project, Cockrell also submitted two other papers—a political theory piece about revolutions and nation building in fairy tales, and a case-study analysis of modernism and the idea of America presented in early Disney princess films.

She proudly calls her thesis “a three-pronged political-theory, creative-writing and historical-case study.”

Cockrell’s reasoning for using this unique format stemmed from a “practice what you preach” idea: “I wanted to see how using classic fairy tale characteristics like ambiguous characters and clichéd storylines contributes to the success of the story and the successful transmission of the ideas and values in the story.” Through this process, Cockrell was able to explore fascinating questions, such as whether Cinderella is a revolutionary, whether too much freedom is good or bad and the role of fairy tale as a democratic vehicle.

Uber, Lyft and the Environment

David Ari Wagner '17, environmental analysis (EA) major

Uber and Lyft, the “unregulated taxis” that are putting traditional taxi companies out of business, are expanding quickly and changing the landscape of urban transportation. David Wagner’s thesis analyzes the environmental impacts of such companies, particularly in California, with respect to travel behavior, congestion and fuel efficiency. The literature on these topics is new, which Wagner says was one of the most challenging and exciting aspects of this project. His analysis suggests that in several major urban areas, fuel-efficient taxis are being replaced by less fuel-efficient Uber and Lyft vehicles.

Wagner selected the topic while interning at UC Davis’s Sustainable Transportation Energy Pathways program, which focuses on three revolutionary developments in transportation: shared, automated and electrified vehicles.” Like the EA major, Wagner’s project is interdisciplinary, utilizing economic, statistical and political analyses, all of which he believes are essential to an understanding of environmental issues. EA can be an emotional topic, he notes—which is why it is both hard and necessary to approach it rationally.

Wagner considers it a good idea to write a thesis as an extension of another project. He also suggests that students who are about to embark on this journey treat it as seriously as they would treat a job, eventually aiming to send the completed product to employers in hopes of making a real contribution.

Estimating the Unknown

Benjamin Yenji (Benji) Lu '17, mathematics and philosophy major

Benji Lu is a math and philosophy double-major interested in going into law or doing data science and statistical research. For his thesis in mathematics, he developed a method of enhancing the predictive power of a commonly used machine-learning algorithm known as “random forests.” His research seeks to quantify the degree of confidence associated with random-forest predictions in order to make them more meaningful and actionable. To do so, he has been working to increase understanding of the statistical theory behind the algorithm itself.

Lu’s interest in integrating statistics with machine learning began his junior year, when he took a course on computational sta-

tistics with Professor Jo Hardin. His thesis grew out of a subsequent SURP project with Hardin, during which he also worked with an applied-mathematics research group at UCLA. Over the course of his SURP project, Lu met daily with Hardin, who encouraged him to write daily reports on what he had learned, what he had done and what he still did not understand. Once the academic year began, they met weekly to continue the project as his senior thesis.

Lu says he has enjoyed working with an expert in such a close setting and applying knowledge from his classes to research. For him, mathematical reasoning can be fun, creative and exciting, and it connects well with philosophy, the other half of his double major. Both subjects, he explains, involve rigorous, purely logical argumentation that can yield both elegant theory and practical results.



So You Think You Can Dance?

Huangjian (Sean) Zhu '17, computer science (CS) major

Sean Zhu got the idea for his unique thesis a couple of years back while playing Dance Central, a game that scores the player’s dance moves using motion capture. A computer science major and a member of the Claremont Colleges Ballroom Dance Company, Zhu thought it would be cool to combine the two interests by teaching computers how to dance.

But how does a machine learn dance steps?

“The computer learns from past data,” Zhu explains. “In this case, the data would come from past dance movements.” Using Kinect, the same device that Dance Central employs, Zhu was able to generate and input dance-movement data to his program.

“Computer creativity is a rising field of research,” says Zhu. “We may tend to think that computers cannot be creative, as creativity is a capability that is typically thought to be exclusive to humans. This project challenged me to think about what creativity is and ways to approach this question.”

The Philosophy of Political Control

Matthew Daniel Dahl '17, politics major

While studying in China during his junior year, Matt Dahl took a Classical Chinese class that exposed him to many original texts in the literary language of ancient China. That’s when the politics major, specializing in political theory, began to question the usual interpretation of the writings of China’s most famous philosopher.

While contemporary scholars assume that Confucius was most concerned with the cultivation of benevolence, Dahl challenges that conclusion through a close reading of the *Analects*. His thesis argues that the true message of the text concerns methods of political control and the maintenance of power. His contention is that Confucius supports rule by the so-called “gentlemen” not because they are benevolent but rather because they know how to be crafty in their speech. In fact, Dahl claims, “gentlemanliness” is not at all coincident with any of the traditional tenets of Confucian ethics.

Such a reading has been neglected, he suggests, because scholars have overlooked the possibility that Confucius wrote the *Analects* in the same esoteric manner that Plato wrote the *Republic*. By applying new interpretive procedures, Dahl believes he has revealed some of the original, radical political teachings that Confucius subtly sought to impart.

Exploring the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Ana Celia Núñez '17, late antique medieval studies (LAMS) major

Ana Núñez’s yearlong thesis examines six early Latin Christian pilgrim *itineraria*—the ancient equivalent of road maps. Using sources in both English and Latin, Núñez >

sought to understand the ways pilgrims experienced the Holy Land as a landscape of blurred temporal boundaries between the biblical past and the pilgrim's own present.

She recalls that she first came across LAMS in her sophomore year of high school, when she was a prospective Pomona student and happened to attend Professor Ken Wolf's Medieval Mediterranean class. Now, with her thesis completed and her Pomona diploma in hand, she is heading to the University of Cambridge for a master's of philosophy in medieval history, after which she aims to return to the U.S. for a Ph.D. and a career in academia.

Núñez says she found the thesis experience memorable and rewarding, and she has one bit of advice for students yet to embark on the journey: "Trust yourself, and it will get done."

The Screen, the Stage and Beyond

Jaya Jivika Rajani '17, media studies and environmental analysis major
Napier Award recipient Jivika Rajani spent her senior year working on two nontraditional theses, each with a uniquely creative focus.

For her media studies thesis, she curated a multimedia experience dubbed MixBox, transforming a section of the Kallick Gallery at Pitzer College into a multimedia installation that guided participants through an interactive conversation with a stranger. The catch was that they were separated by an opaque curtain and would never see the person they had just gotten to know. Rajani then filmed debrief interviews in which her participants reflected upon the experience of making connections with strangers when they couldn't rely on snap judgments based on appearance.

For her environmental analysis thesis, Rajani drew on her background in theatre to write a play rooted in identity politics and environmentalism. After reading other environmental plays and researching works written about the Indian diaspora, she developed her three main characters to represent different schools of environmental thought, from deep ecology to ecofeminism. As one of five winners of Pomona's 10-Minute Play Festival, Rajani had an opportunity to direct and act in an extract of the play with some friends. She is also working on adapting her work for the screen.

Reflecting on the process, Rajani said that "juggling two theses at once was definitely hard, but I really enjoyed it because I was always working on something that I was genuinely passionate about and felt that I owned from start to finish. I also couldn't have asked for better advisors—they've been very supportive of my plans to continue developing my work beyond Pomona, so I definitely see my projects as much more than just graduation requirements."

Exploring the History of Labor and War

Jonathan Richard 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 National Museum of American History, where he worked under Noriko Sanefuji on an exhibit titled "Righting 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 survivors, reviewing newspaper articles and statistics and making site visits. Though numerous historians have examined this subject, van Harmelen believes further understanding 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. While I am not Japanese-American, understanding this crucial subject is a step that all Americans should take, and is now very timely given our unstable political climate."

For his semester-long French thesis, Van Harmelen focused on the Algerian War and memory as represented through Alain Resnais' 1963 film *Muriel*.

An Environmental Perspective on Local Issues in Claremont

Frank Connor Lyles '17, environmental analysis (EA) major

Frank Lyles, inspired by the thesis of a 2015 EA alumnus, 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, geology and statistics classes to complement his work in EA. He says he thoroughly enjoyed working with Professor Char Miller, who provides feedback on all EA majors' papers, as well as with Professor W. Bowman Cutter from the Economics Department.

During his final semester at Pomona he took an econometrics class and decided to use what he was 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 Adventure (OA) leader, Lyles likes to think about how EA changes the way he views everything: He stops looking at mountains as just mountains and now understands them as dynamic things that are constantly changing.

Law, Public Policy and Technology

Jesse Solomon Lieberfeld '17, philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) major

Jesse Lieberfeld's yearlong, in-depth investigation focuses on the relationship between the Fourth Amendment and modern communications, especially how laws that were developed long before the emergence of modern technology should be interpreted today and in the future. As a PPE major, Lieberfeld approached his research question from both legal and philosophical perspectives, poring over a range of U.S. Supreme Court opinions, articles on privacy, law review papers and interviews.

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 technology; many are experts in one of these fields, but not all." Lieberfeld's thesis attempts to bridge this gap.

In particular, Lieberfeld says he enjoyed the interdisciplinary nature of this project and is grateful for The Claremont Colleges, since the politics and philosophy departments at each school have different specialties. He says he also appreciates the fact that Pomona does not have too many core requirements, allowing him to take a lot of niche classes.

April Xiaoyi Xu '18 is a junior majoring in politics and minoring in Spanish.

WHAT'S IN YOUR DESK DRAWER?

We asked three members of the Pomona College campus community to show us the strangest or most interesting object in one of their desk drawers and to tell us the story behind it. Here's what we found.



1 Samuel Yamashita

the Henry E. Sheffield 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 characters. It is, he explains, the famous Daoist classic called the *Daodejing*, which translates to "The Classic of the Way and Virtue."

He found and purchased this beautiful reproduction in the bazaar in Turfan, an old Silk Road town in western China. Probably written by several different individuals between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, he explains, the text also contains some archaic passages that may date from the second millennium BCE.

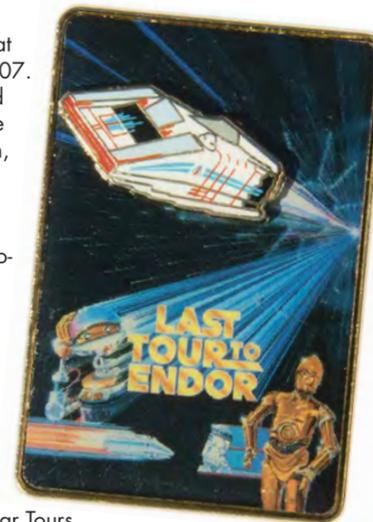
"I started reading it in the original Classical

Chinese when I got to Pomona in 1983 and spent one to two years going through the 81-chapter text, passage by passage, word by word," he says. "I still can recite passages from memory. I tell my students it is the perfect desert-island book, since it is complex, mysterious and allusive, and its meanings are inexhaustible—or perhaps infinite."

2 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 Orlando, Florida, and one in London. Along the way, she has met a veritable who's who from various *Star Wars* productions, including original director George Lucas and actor Mark Hamill. The commemorative "Last Tour to Endor" pin that she keeps in her desk drawer is a memento of a special event by that name held at Disney Hollywood Studios in Orlando in 2010 in honor of the ceremonial closing 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.



3 Eleanor Brown

'75, the James Irvine Professor of Economics, paws through a couple of desk drawers, pulling out occasional odds and ends: a couple of bills in Kenyan currency ("Students

returning from study abroad often bring samples of currencies along with their many stories") and a CD titled "The Slippery Noodle," ("Indiana's oldest bar and a great place to listen to the blues"). Finally she settles on a small rubber stamp. "In my early 40s, I did a three-year tour of duty as an associate dean," she explains. "One of the great pleasures of the job was working with the office staff. Jane Arnal and I had offices at one end of the suite, and one of her many artistic outlets was making ink stamps. This one was a gift to me during the time I was the sexual harassment officer of the College."



No clatching or groping!

"MONEY!"

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

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

STARR

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.

IN THE WEEKS

BEFORE SHE IS TO LEAVE NEW YORK CITY AND MOVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY, SCHOLAR AND FUTURE COLLEGE PRESIDENT G. GABRIELLE 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:

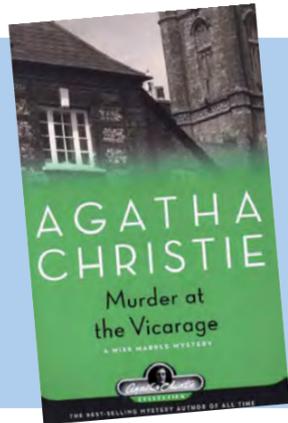
"I mean, no one's smarter than Gabi. You can be as smart, *maybe*," she says, laughing. "But beyond that, she's also very warm, just on top of everything. I imagine she doesn't sleep much because she seems to be everywhere. ..."

"I don't know anyone who doesn't adore Gabi. I just don't. There probably is somewhere. I've never met that person. And that is not an easy thing at a place like this. This is a huge university. ... 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 three years shy 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 really 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.



Murder at the Vicarage

by Agatha Christie

“A childhood collection of Miss Marple novels was my first glimpse into reading as searching for signs—those hidden traces of human feeling, motive and mind.”

Learning was at the core of life in their home just outside Tallahassee. Her grandmother (on her father’s side) also lived with them for much of Gabi’s childhood, telling family stories that reached back to the Jim Crow South, Reconstruction and the years before emancipation. The tales ranged from the humorous to the poignant and painful, but they were linked by an enduring faith, a shared commitment to human dignity and a belief in education through the generations. Always precocious, Starr not only took in the history but was eager to share what she learned. Knowledge didn’t mean much outside of a human web that would shape and refine it. “She was a born teacher,” says her mom. “When she would go to Sunday school, she would come back and teach her grandmother the Sunday school lessons.”

Still, as she reached her teens, her dad did worry about Gabi heading off to college so young, and wanted her to consider a women’s college. A deal was struck: She could go as far away as Atlanta’s Emory University, a roughly five-hour drive from their home.

“She was always adventurous,” says her mom. “She didn’t stop until she tried it. And you couldn’t stop her.”

At Emory, Starr plunged right into campus life. She started off studying chemistry, with plans to become a doctor and also to ▶

AN ENGRASSING BOOK, *THE SECRET LIFE OF APHRA BEHN*, HELPED BRING GABI STARR AND JOHN C. HARPOLE TOGETHER.

A COUPLE ON THE SAME PAGE

Married now for more than a decade, John and Gabi might never have met if it hadn’t been for *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, the story of the 1600s English playwright, poet and sometime spy.

A colleague of Gabi’s who knew John from high school set them up on a blind date. John found a well-reviewed Brazilian restaurant in Greenwich Village, set the date and time, and then promptly forgot the restaurant’s location, getting lost in the process. Ever the scholar and never without a book, Gabi opened Behn’s biography and lost track of time. 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 *voilà!*”

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 ever 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, he is drawn toward nonfiction on the heavier side.

A few years back, John was up late at night reading *Master of the Senate*, one of historian Robert Caro’s acclaimed Lyndon Johnson biographies, when he reached the section detailing how U.S. Senator Richard B. Russell Jr. of Georgia, leader of the Southern Caucus, led a cabal that had successfully blocked civil rights legislation for years.

Infuriated, John hurled the hardcover book (all 1,200-plus pages) into a wall with enough force to startle Starr, who was contentedly reading in the next room. In her *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience*, Gabi obliquely cites this incident as an example of sometimes intense aesthetic responses.

John and Gabi both add a post-script to this story. This past spring they met Robert Caro and his wife at a dinner in New York. Recounting the flung tome story, Caro assured them that this reaction may have been the “best compliment he has ever received,” since writing about the anti-civil rights cabal was so troubling: “How can you do anything *but* throw the book?”

For Gabi and John, their varied reading lists only add to the conversation. “John is one of the smartest—and wittiest—people I know,” says Gabi. “He won me over completely with a passionate argument about the Mining Act of 1872. I’ve never



Gabi Starr and John C. Harpole start the day in their Manhattan home a couple of months before leaving for Claremont.

looked back. He cares very deeply about 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 civics, foreign policy and history, John notes, “Divorcing 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 securities 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 Colombia in 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 investment career 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 to reflect 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 recursiveness—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.” 



At her home in Manhattan, Starr recounts her childhood growing up in Tallahassee, Florida.

study music. There was so much to explore at the university: She even did a stint on the women’s club rugby team.

“I kind of felt like I was really thirsty and I got a drink,” she recalls. “Or maybe it really was like being in a candy shop—going to college—so many different possibilities to study things and learn about things that I never even conceived of.”

Soon enough the then-emerging field of women’s studies drew her in, as she became fascinated with who holds power in society and who doesn’t, and that discipline would be the source of her B.A. and M.A. at Emory. She also spent a year at St. Andrew’s University in Scotland, studying philosophy of language, Arabic and French while becoming enamored with French classicism. “I’m a bit of an intellectual magpie,” she says.

Starr, though, would soon find an enduring intellectual focus, one that would guide the rest of her career.



Pride and Prejudice

by Jane Austen

“Jane Austen was a friend who got me through the awkwardness of being a smart child.”

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 imagination works, 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.

Exploring 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 books. Gabi herself had tapped into the arts at a young age, taking up piano at the age of 2, and she has always loved music. These things planted the seeds for her intellectual curiosity.

“We spend so much of our time adjusting the world to make it pleasurable and comfortable, but also challenging—in a positive way—interesting, engaging; and that’s everything from how we design the spaces we live in to how we groom the natural world. ... It really speaks, I think, to a deep need that the world fit us in some

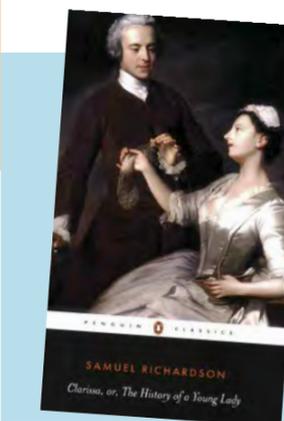
way, as well as that we fit into the world—and I want to understand more about that.”

Off to Harvard for her Ph.D., she started to explore 18th-century 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.

“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.



Clarissa

by Samuel Richardson

“Clarissa is not just about obsession, but it produces obsessive reading. It drew me into the 18th century with its psychological complexity and depth.”

IN NYU’S BRAIN imaging lab, Starr and her colleagues, it could be said, are getting inside the mind, to get a different read on the sublime. Their work involves looking closely at brain scans taken as subjects view art or listen to music from within an fMRI tube.

While people typically agree on what qualifies as a beautiful face or natural landscape, Starr notes, they typically disagree on the beauty of paintings, music, poetry—art. And when we are deeply moved by art, what goes on in our brains is quite a surprise. As she noted in one of her talks a few years back: “The pleasure that we get from the arts is about being able to take pleasure in unexpected places.”

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. These 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. ▷

G. GABRIELLE STARR DISCUSSES HER BOOK *FEELING BEAUTY* AND HER SEARCH FOR THE NEURAL FOOTPRINT OF AESTHETICS.

EXPLORING THE NEUROSCIENCE OF BEAUTY

What does the phrase “feeling beauty” mean?

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 “divine,” “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 they 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 seem to produce the same set of feelings?

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 lessons can we draw about the embodied nature of aesthetic experience and the hidden unity of seemingly disparate arts?

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 ought 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 epistemic 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.

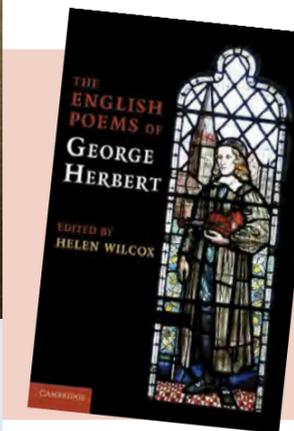
Neuroscience doesn't have all the answers, but it has given us many new things to ponder about how we live in the bodies that help make us human. The road is long, but we can have a lot of fun on the way. [PCM](#)

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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 poetry 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.”

Recognition 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.)



The English Poems of George Herbert

by George Herbert

“Herbert’s poetry has been part of my life—I fell in love with it in my second year of grad school, and I read his poems to my father as I sat beside him in his last hours.”

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 breadth of her interests. Her tomes range from *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. ▷

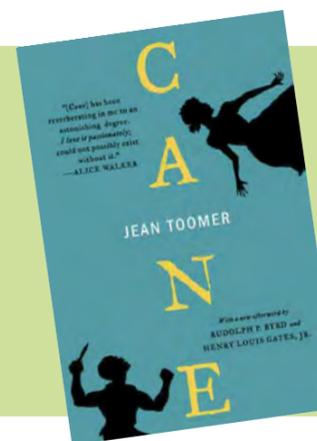


Her desk is covered in papers: “What’s active is what’s closest to the top,” she explains of her archaeological system, and there’s barely room for her side-by-side computer screens. Of course, her office is simply a reflection of her whirlwind academic life. Out of all these different things, what energizes 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 because that always feels good.”



Cane

by Jean Toomer

“Cane is sheer beauty to me. The pages are heavy with it.”

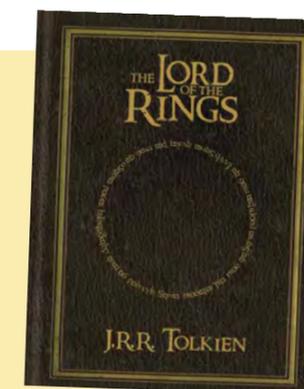
STARR’S MOVE INTO leadership roles began after she earned tenure at NYU and was being recruited by another school: As a condition of staying, she asked to become director of undergraduate studies. “I wanted to be at a place where I could do things for my students and do things for my department because 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 Department, which she accepted. Only a year later, when NYU Dean Matthew Santirocco announced his assumption of a new leadership role in 2011, he approached her to ask if she would serve as acting dean. 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 Gilman noting a talk years ago at freshman orientation: “She just gave this amazing, passionate, brilliant speech,” he recalls. “I think some of the people who hadn’t

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 education 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.”



The Lord of the Rings

by J.R.R. Tolkien

“I took *The Lord of the Rings* when I was having both children. It’s on every device I own, even though I don’t know by heart half of it half as well as I would like.”

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 bustle 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 bringing all those beloved tomes, all those worlds, with her. **PCM**



"WORD COLLECTOR" RAY YOUNG BEAR '73 WRITES POETRY AND NOVELS
IN A LANGUAGE HE MISTRUSTS IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE CULTURE THAT HE LOVES.

STORY FOLDED UP LIKE A FIST

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK WOOD

In the Meskwaki language,

there is no word for *poem*. So poet and novelist Ray Young Bear '73 made up his own: *pekwimoni*, 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." ▶

Algonquian 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 his verses out first in Meskwaki and then rewrote them in English. “But as I started growing up, getting mature, I realized that often-

times it was just the opposite. It eventually got to the point where, you know, I was writing far too much English; then I sometimes had to go back and start redoing stuff in Meskwaki again.”

Indeed, the two languages flow together in many of his recent poems. Lines of Meskwaki appear here and there among his verses, and his newest volume—*Manifestation Wolverine: The Collected Poetry of Ray Young Bear*, a compilation of his earlier collections plus a slate of new poems—includes works like “Three Translated Poems for October,” originally composed in Meskwaki and then translated into English, as well as a series of old Meskwaki peyote and social songs.

But though he uses English with poetic skill and depends upon it to bring his work to a wide range of readers, he still regards it as an alien tongue, 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, colonialism 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
hands on my head
i'd know that those
were her hands
warm and damp
with the smell
of roots.
if i heard
a voice
coming from
a rock
i'd know
and her words
would flow inside me
like the light
of someone
stirring ashes
from a sleeping fire
at night.

Summer 2017

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 riot of springtime greenery as he talks about his life and 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 poetry 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 ahead. 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, Ada 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.”

Pomona College Magazine

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
in each house must feel
they own the dogs
but the snow is by itself
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.
it is truly a dream to tie down
a skinned 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 young wife turns under
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 roomlight.

the yellow blanket, the house
and its people cover her.
the clothes she wears cover her.
the skin of her body covers her.
the bones cover her womb.
the badger feels it owns 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. “Animism is probably the best way I can describe my beliefs,” he says. “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

Starting 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.

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, it 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 so forth.” ▷

43

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 underestimated 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—nontypical 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 Hongo ’73 and spending an increasing amount of time alone, writing poetry. “In *Manifestation Wolverine*, the first 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 what he wanted from each while resisting requirements that would have led to a degree.

Through it all, he continued to write, though he still refused to think of himself as a poet. In fact, when 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 30 or 40 poems, and I thought, ‘I’m just a young man trying to write poetry, and it’s imitation. It’s not real.’”

Ironically, it was his traditional grandmother 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 grandfather, 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 SIGNIFICANCE OF A WATER ANIMAL

Since then I was
the North.
Since then I was
the Northwind.
Since then I was nobody.
Since then I was alone.

The color of my black eyes
inside the color of King-
fisher’s hunting eye
weakens me, but sunlight
glancing off the rocks
and vegetation strengthens me.
As my hands and fingertips
extend and meet,
they frame the serene
beauty of bubbles and grain—
once a summer rainpool.

A certain voice of *Reassurance*
tells me a story of a water animal
diving to make land available.
Next, from the Creator’s
own heart and flesh
O ki ma was made:
the progeny of divine
leaders. And then
from the Red Earth
came the rest of us.

“To believe otherwise,”
as my grandmother tells me,
“or to simply be ignorant,
Belief and what we were given
to take care of,
is on the verge
of ending...”



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.’”

Vision Quests

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, “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.

Even beneath the words, he refuses to take full credit for the images and ideas that make up his poetry. Many of them, he explains, come to him in dreams. “I tend to view myself a lot more these days as somebody who is basically channeling information,” he says. “My grandmother would always say, ‘You and I are protected by spirits invisible to us. They are always around us.’ And so I believe that part of the reason I am able to write these

things without any academic foundation is the fact that I’m simply channeling those energies that have been here before.”

To some, that may sound metaphorical, but Young Bear couldn’t be more literal. Indeed, in recent years, he has become more and more involved in trying to use his ability to channel those spiritual connections for more mundane purposes, like solving crimes.

It began with the murder of his brother in 1992, an unsolved crime he would fictionalize in his first novel, *Black Eagle Child*. “We contacted a psychic then in Dallas, Texas, who had some insights into Meskwaki clan names and some teenage suspects,” he recalls. “Over the years, my parents always believed these suspects would slowly kill themselves with drugs and alcohol. They got away, but perhaps not really.”

A few years later, after watching the news about three missing campers in Yosemite Park, he fell asleep in his La-Z-Boy and dreamt that he was one of the women, talking to a mysterious character through a car window. He took note of the license plate on a nearby car, but forgot it upon waking. The next day, he returned to his La-Z-Boy for a vision quest. “I was able to pin the license down and forward the info to the Sacramento FBI,” he recalls, though he has no idea if anyone ever took him seriously.

But the experience also served his poetry, inspiring a poem called “Three Brothers.”

THREE TRANSLATED POEMS FOR OCTOBER

Old woman, I hope that at least
you will watch me in the future
when I am an elderly man—
so my baggy clothes
do not catch fire
when I socialize
with the young people
as they stand around
the campfire intoxicated.
Of course, I will tell them
worldly things.

/ / /

Now that the autumn season
has started, one suddenly
realizes the act of living
goes fast.
Sometimes the spring
is that way too:
the green so quick.
Thirty-two years of age I am.
Box elder leaves are being shaken
by the cold rain and wind.
In the tree’s nakedness
there stands a man,
visible.

/ / /

Although there is yet
a lot of things to do,
surprisingly, I have this urge
to go fishing.
They say the whites
in town will pay
one hundred dollars
to whoever catches
the largest channel catfish
or flathead.
You know I like to fish.
We could invite and feed
lots of friends.
Plus, purchase
a cast iron woodstove
since the business committee
has ignored our weatherization
application, but Bingo
is on the agenda.

The vision quests and the “word-collecting” 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 experiment. Everything that I do, almost, is an experiment. That’s what I like about 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 volume of his *Black Eagle Child* trilogy, he is also hard at work on a volume of nonfiction—a combination memoir and Meskwaki history. More and more, he is convinced that the true value of his work will be in whatever power it has to help preserve Meskwaki culture, religion and 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, “who would’ve told me: ‘Hey, young Indian man, you can write and compose poems in English, yes, and you may eventually do it well. However, English isn’t your God-given language. Learn from it as much as you can, but always keep in mind that the first language that gave you animistic insights can’t be found in English. Foremost, English is a language that was used to convert us. In time, those colonial-based persuasions will reverse. Many will realize, even the best writers, that our first languages are key to survival and identity. As your grandmother probably told 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.’” [PCJ](#)

Emily Arnold-Fernández listens to a client's story at the Asylum Access office in Bangkok, Thailand.



EMILY ARNOLD-FERNÁNDEZ '99 AND ASYLUM ACCESS ARE CREATING A NEW PARADIGM IN HELPING REFUGEES REBUILD THEIR LIVES.

REBUILDING LIVES

STORY BY VANESSA HUA | PHOTOS BY THOMAS DE CIAN

BEFORE 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. ▸

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

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 sopho-

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

Arnold-Fernández discusses a family’s case at their home in Bangkok.



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.”

more 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. ▷



“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. Looking down at the floor, he slouched, mumbling, hand to his mouth, and spoke in a Liberian-inflected English; Mandingo was his native language. Knowing that the United Nations officers 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.N. staff weren’t always equipped, motivated or sufficiently well-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.

“I like being in charge, and starting things is a good way to get there,” she said with a grin.



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 raised a total of \$5,000. (These days, funders include individual donors, grant-making foundations and government donors. Asylum Access raised \$2.6 million in fiscal year 2016 and served more than 22,000 refugees in five countries.)

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 programs. “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

“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

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 interns 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 ’98, whom she met at Pomona, used to stage-manage the Asylum Access summer fundraisers, a skill he’d gained when they were both in a musical theatre group at Georgetown. “She was on stage, and I was behind the scenes,” he said. That same dynamic has reflected how he’s supported her work at Asylum Access, too. “I get out of her way and let her do her thing. She has this attitude that it’s going to work, come hell or high 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.

Also around 2013, 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 these rights 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 as 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,

Saengduan Irving joined as Thailand’s country director. Though Irving felt nervous meeting her boss in person, Arnold-Fernández immediately set her at ease with encouraging feedback.

“We talked about what we are going to do to move forward and didn’t worry about the past,” Irving said. “She’s not 50 or 60 years old, like leaders from other organizations. But she’s very mature, very smart. She knows the situation well.”

To remain inspired for decades more, in June Arnold-Fernández began a three-month “CEO Sabbatical” sponsored by O2 Initiatives, designed to revitalize executive directors at nonprofits. It’s the latest in a slew of accolades, including the Dalai Lama’s Unsung Heroes of Compassion Award, the Waldzell Leadership Institute’s Architects of the Future Award, the Grinnell College Young Innovator for Social Justice Prize, and Pomona’s Inspirational Young Alumna Award.

During her sabbatical, she’s devoting herself to playing the violin and singing. In years past, she sang in a local a capella group and performed in the pit orchestra of musicals, but more recently, her travel schedule made it impossible for her to participate.

“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.” 

4/7 A CELEBRATION OF COMMUNITY & IMPACT

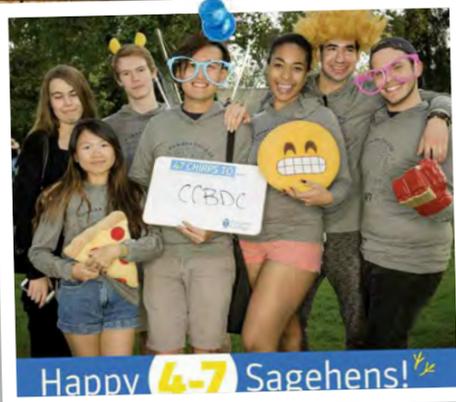
We give 47 resounding chirps for the hundreds of Sagehens around the world who came together in April to celebrate Cecil's favorite day of the year: 4/7. On campus, students, faculty and staff flooded Marston Quad for a campus celebration featuring free T-shirts, food and festivities.

Across the U.S., six dozen alumni gathered for group service projects organized by **Don Swan '15** in Los Angeles, **Ingrid Vidal Cullen '10** and **Erin Phelps '12** in New York City, **Jordan Pedraza '09** in San Francisco, **Lisa Prestwich Phelps '79 P'16** in Seattle, **Guy Lohman '71** in Silicon Valley, and **Frank Albinder '80** and **Mercedes Fitchett '91** in Washington, D.C.

On Facebook and Instagram, the third annual Celebration of Sagehen Impact drew 2,000 posts, comments and likes from alumni around the globe. (See photos at right.)

And, in a community-wide effort of spirit and impact, 134 Sagehens participated in a special one-day gift-matching opportunity to support the College's Student Emergency Grant Fund, raising more than \$60,000 for students with urgent and immediate financial needs.

Thank you, Sagehens, for an incredible celebration of community and #SagehenImpact.



Members of the Ballroom Dance Company celebrate 4/7 Day on campus.



Bay Area alumni make an impact together at Second Harvest Food Bank.



Seattle Sagehens gather for a group service project at Northwest Harvest.



Alumni with careers helping others celebrate their impact online on 4/7

The Pomona College BOOK CLUB



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.



District of Columbia Book Club discussion group



Los Angeles Book Club discussion group

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

THANK YOU, JORDAN!

47 hearty chirps to **Jordan Pedraza '09** for a year of vision and dedication as the 2016–17 president of the Pomona College Alumni Association. Jordan began her term last summer with a goal to "foster the 'three Cs': communication, connection and collaboration" among the alumni community. Under Jordan's leadership, the Alumni Board deepened its connection with College leadership, including the Board of Trustees; strengthened connections with students through meetings with ASPC and participation in the Senior Class Mixer and Sophomore Re-orientation; and introduced new opportunities for communication and collaboration with the greater alumni community, including organizing and facilitating the "Sharing Our Sagehen Stories" session at Alumni Weekend and establishing a recurring presence for the Alumni Association Board in the Alumni Chirps email newsletter. This spring, Jordan served as a spokesperson for the College's effort to raise funds for the Student Emergency Grant Fund and rallied fellow alumni in the Bay Area to take part in the 4/7 group service event she organized.



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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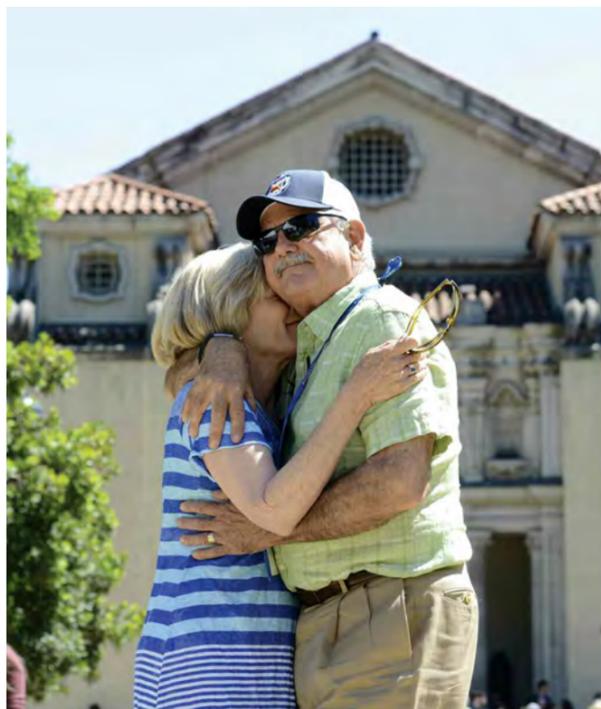
ALUMNI WEEKEND 2017

PHOTOS BY CARRIE ROSEMA

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.







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