Nobel in Gold — While speaking on the phone with her sister, Sarah Doudna, Jennifer Doudna ’85 holds up the gold medallion stamped with the profile of Alfred Nobel that represents the Nobel Prize. The photo was taken on Dec. 8, 2020, following a presentation ceremony in Berkeley, California, during which Doudna officially received her 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Normally, Nobel recipients receive their awards in Stockholm, from the hand of the king of Sweden, but due to the pandemic, all presentations were made locally.

— AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, Pool
COVID Clinic  — One of the many changes at Pomona during the pandemic is the creation of an on-campus clinic in Rembrandt Hall focusing on COVID-19 issues. The clinic, managed by Hamilton Health Box, is staffed by two nurses—Stephanie Garcia-Barragan (left), who oversees the new health protocols for people on campus, and her assistant, Sarai Sanchez-Salas (right).

— Photo by Jeff Hing
At the Museum — Titled “In Our Care: Institutional History in Material Form,” this exhibition is one of the first on display at the new Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College. The exhibition was curated by Sam Chan ’22, Noor Tamari ’22 and Kali Tindell-Griffin ’22 as a summer research project under the supervision and partnership of museum director Victoria Sancho Lobis and Claire Nettleton, academic curator. Though the pandemic has made in-person visits to the museum impossible, the staff has been able to offer virtual tours of the show, which will remain in place until July.

—Photo by Jeff Hing
Nice Kitty — No, that’s not someone’s pet tabby hiding in the brush near Bridges Auditorium or scampering across the campus green. It’s a bobcat, another example of the local wildlife that has found its way onto the Pomona College campus during the College’s yearlong closure. The photos were taken by a local resident, 12-year-old David Lonardi, who spotted the bobcat while trying out his new camera near campus.
Our lives are mostly continuity. Days blur into a seamless river of time, broken by a handful of true discontinuities that stand like dams against the flow of years, shunting our lives onto new and radically different courses. Some of these are matters of fate and circumstance. Winning the lottery, getting a dream job, getting fired, losing a loved one. This year we’ve all been shaken by one of the most disruptive of all—a pandemic.

Other disruptions take the form of cultural milestones—rituals of passage in the course of a modern life. Starting school, leaving home, graduating, getting a job, getting married, having a baby. These transitions seem almost sacramental. They transform our lives, but they also make us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. We look forward to them with equal parts anticipation and fear because they promise both possibility and uncertainty. They also remind us that the clock is ticking inexorably on our lives.

I’ve been thinking about this a lot lately because I now find myself on the brink of another of life’s sacramental passages—the one called retirement. By the time you read this, I will be at home, readjusting to a new life. And though I thought I’d feel some trepidation and weariness, I’m also excited about the prospect of focusing all my time and energy on my own writing and art, not to mention catching up on a lot of reading and, once this pandemic is done, having more freedom to travel.

I’ve gotten plenty of advice from friends who’ve walked this path before me, mostly about not repeating their mistakes. There are plenty of mistakes to be made, and I’m sure I’ll invent a few of my own. The best advice I’ve gotten, though, came from Professor Emeritus Richard Fass, who took my elbow one day and said with a wink: “Just remember: It’s a process.”

Which, I suppose, makes it like every other great milestone in life.

But I have to say that leaving this job is a bigger transition than most. I’m now in my 23rd year at Pomona—the longest I’ve ever worked or lived anywhere. This issue of Pomona College Magazine is the 65th I’ve had the privilege of designing and overseeing as either managing editor or executive editor. That number, I was surprised to discover, accounts for more than a third of the total since the very first PCM rolled off a press back in October 1963.

To that, I can only add: Thank you for putting up with me for so long.

When you retire, there are lots of sentimental “lasts” to get through. This is one of them—the last of these little essays I’ll ever write. Over the years, I’ve penned lots of them, usually about my take on something relevant to the magazine’s theme. In many of them, I’ve shared personal recollections and reflections from my own life—from childhood memories to the trials of parenthood to, in this case, saying goodbye to a career that I’ve mostly loved. I’ve done this, at the risk of oversharing, because I’ve always believed the universal is in the individual. I hope some of what I’ve written about my own life has resonated with you.

Twenty-three years ago, in the very first of these little missives, I promised you a lot. I’ve written about my own life has resonated with yours. Because I’ve always believed the universal is in the individual. I hope some of what I’ve written about my own life has resonated with you.

That change is one that I now leave, with a high degree of confidence, for PCM’s next editor.

—MW
A memory of Ved Mehta

One of my paying jobs during my first year, 1932–33, was serving as Ved Mehta’s reader in biology, a course in which I was also a student. Three nights a week, I was with him and read the text and tried to explain the diagrams. The diagrams were difficult for us, as Ved was not a trained artist. However, he spoke with me on any topic and let me know what he was thinking. We talked for a few minutes, and then went our ways.

At our 50th reunion in 2006, discovering that we were going to cross campus to another building, Ved suggested we walk together, and I remembered his preference for subtle guidance by a touch to his elbows. It became clear that he retained a strong mental map of the campus as it was, for he paused, concerned, before a place at which a building in our time now no longer existed (Harwood Hall, a World War II wood dungeon, a building in our time now no longer existed). We did so, and for that night biology took the place open on a Sunday night, the Sugar Bowl. Perhaps 20 years later, I was leaving a club on W. 43rd St. in New York after lunch just as Ved was leaving his club next door. To my astonishment, when I spoke to him he recognized my voice as the biology reader. We talked for a few minutes, and then went our ways.

One of my friends and I were the last to leave a club. We were allowed to stay there as Ved’s “academic kids.” When we checked in with stories from our professional endeavors, including fire rescue, the Audubon Society and animal welfare through the Marine Corps, Ved said, “I was always interested in the environment. I had sometimes felt for taking Ved away from his studies on that Sunday night. He said, with great sincerity, “Oh no, Doug. I will always remember it. It was the first time any one had suggested that they wanted to do something new.”

For the record, I must have been an excellent teacher, for Ved always scored above me on biology exams.

Susa B. ’91, vice president, AECOS Inc. Scott Ferguson ’94, public health medical officer, California Department of Public Health Julie Hagelin ’92, senior research scientist, Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Greta Harden ’94, forest lands manager. Brian Mogdridge ’92, vice president and research scientist, Institute for Wildlife Studies.

Graciela Johnson ’92, research technician, Butterfly Genes Lab, University of Cambridge.

Roger Lee ’94, senior product manager, Bell Inc.

Brad Lamphere ’93, assistant professor of biological science, University of Mary Washington.

Audrey Mayer ’94, professor of ecology and environmental policy, Michigan Technological University.

Jan Perga ’93, teacher (environmental science), Northwestern Regional High School.

Terry Sicular ’76, professor.


Colin C. Wright ’91, environmental science, Southern Oregon University.

Dilip K. Candland ’91, vice president, AECOS Inc.

Douglas K. Candland ’56, director of Breathe, United for Racial and Environmental Justice.
A new Meals on Wheels program, operating since November 2020 out of Pomona’s previously idle dining facilities, was designed with more needs than one in mind. In the midst of the pandemic, furloughed dining and catering staff prepare meals for 180 homebound seniors in the area. The result is mutually beneficial. Senior citizens receive breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week, and furloughed staff are able to use their skills on a limited basis and be paid their regular wages.

The program is a partnership among Pomona College, the Hospitality Training Academy and UNITE HERE Local 11, a labor union that represents Pomona’s dining workers.

Staff members cook and package food and prepare the meals for delivery by the Hospitality Training Academy. Jose Martinez Jimenez, general manager of dining services, says a total of 22 furloughed staff members are working the county meal program—16 dining staff and six dining managers.

To ensure their safety during the pandemic, returning dining staff work in tightly controlled “bubbles” of two teams, are regularly tested for COVID-19 and follow strict health and safety guidelines and protocols, according to Robert Robinson, assistant vice president for facilities and campus services.

“Everyone has known for months that they would have to do something to keep our community fed,” Robinson said. “Now we are actually doing it.”
Although the pandemic caused a delay of several months, construction of a new athletics, recreation and wellness center finally got under way in February, with completion expected in time for the fall 2022 semester. The rebid and expanded facility is designed to replace the Rains Center for Sport and Recreation with an upgraded, up-to-date athletic facility while boosting health and wellness for all members of the Pomona community.

“The need for a revitalized center has been clear for years,” noted President G. Gabrielle Starr in an email to the campus community.

“Last spring, however, as the pandemic forced the evacuation of students from campus, we decided to delay the start of construction in the face of the unfolding crisis. Moving forward this semester allows us to complete the most disruptive aspects of construction—demolition, grading and assembly of structural steel—at a time when few people will be on our campus. This will reduce the impact of noise, vibration, dust and truck traffic and also will reduce the costs of mitigation steps. When we return to normal operation in the fall, we can proceed with the less disruptive aspects of the work.”

By rebidding the project after the delay, the College was also able to negotiate reduced prices. At the same time, Starr said, the College has benefited from generous gifts that allowed the project to proceed without affecting Pomona’s operating budget. “We are incredibly grateful to Ranney ’60 and Priscilla Draper, Libby Gates MacPhee ’76, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the many other friends of Pomona whose early and generous partnership and support has allowed us to begin construction on this vital facility.”

In addition to supporting more than 450 varsity athletes, the new building will serve more than 900 intramural athletes, 530 club athletes and student physical education classes and accommodate fitness and recreation programming for students, faculty and staff for both colleges.

Languages, Chávez Silverman “has turned Spanglish into an astute literary tongue capable of baroque depths.” The International Latino Book Awards literally seconded—that her book recently won second place in the memoir category.

Chávez Silverman is known for seamlessly alternating languages. But that is style. Even more than that, what she does in her new book, Heartthrob (subtitled Del Balbino Café al Apartheid y Back), is storytelling. Using her letters and diary entries as a palimpsest, Chávez Silverman chronicles a love affair that is both deep and delicate, fiery and fragile, set against politics and place—and one that takes her from San Francisco to South Africa.

PCM's Sneha Abraham chatted with Chávez Silverman via Zoom. They started with the seemingly obvious. PCM: Tell me a little bit about your family and how language was used in your household.

Chávez Silverman: Well, that’s a very intriguing question because my current project is actually delving into a bit of my family history, particularly on my mom’s side. And that’s something that I haven’t written much about—my family. My mom was a Chicana. She was born in Visalia in California and grew up in San Diego. They met in summer of 1949. It was kind of like a study abroad experience. My mother got a fellowship from the Del Amo Foundation, I think. They were both on a study program in France. That’s where they met.

And each of them had apparently a fairly serious paramour. But when they met, it was like a fleshy, like a love at first sight thing. They got married in 1951, much to the disapproval of my dad’s mother in particular. I have my parents’ love letters, which were sent to me a couple of years ago by my youngest sister. She had inherited them when my mom passed. And there are quite a few.

And my mom’s parents were also in favor of the union, particularly her father. My mother was the granddaughter of two ministers. Her maternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister, and her paternal grandfather was a Methodist semi-itinerant preacher. This was an New Mexico. My mother’s parents eventually came around, to the point that my parents’ wedding was on their front lawn, performed by Samuel Van Wagner, my great-grandpa.

We grew up, mainly, English dominant-ish when I was very, very young. However, we were around relatives who spoke different languages. On my dad’s side, it was Yiddish and English. We weren’t too much in connection with my dad’s, but they were all back in New York. But on my mom’s side, we were very, very close to my mom’s parents, to my grandparents, my maternal Chavez grandparents, and they spoke Spanish and English or sometimes code-switched with all my grandmother’s siblings and relatives, etc. We were often there in San Diego with them.

And my dad played with language a lot. My mother did not encourage code-switching, but it has to do with the time that she grew up in, in the ‘40s, and the particular prejudice she experienced. It was: You speak correct English or correct Spanish—no mixing! And it was all about assimilation. And my mother retained her Spanish. Her two sisters really don’t.

But because my dad was on sabbatical, my first year of school was in Madrid, when I was 4 or 5. I was thrown into a Madrid kindergarten. That was one of my top traumas. I don’t have a lot of memories of my early childhood, but I remember that. That’s a horror because I was very shy, with minimal Spanish at first, and I was incredibly bullied at school.

PCM: How does language work in your head? Are your dreams multilingual?

Chávez Silverman: Oh, yeah, very much so. As a matter of fact, dreams form a very crucial foundational kind of intuition. I always think of the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar, who said that many of the subjects of his stories came from dreams. A little grain or a little seed or even a full note or images come from my dreams. I have a lot of access to my dreams. I’m a proselytizer for dreams. I tell my students, “How many of you remember your dreams?” And if you don’t, here’s how to remember them and keep a dream journal, etc. “Because I think it’s very important.”

But I dream in both Spanish and English, sometimes Italian, sometimes Afrikaans. And I also dream in languages that I don’t speak. Like, I wake up, and I know a sentence in German, which I don’t—I have a slight understanding, but not much. I don’t speak it.

PCM: When you write letters or crónicas, are you conscious of their potential of being published?

Chávez Silverman: Oh, yeah. Well, let’s see, initially, I wasn’t, as a matter of fact. This whole transformation or process started—I can date it very clearly to 2000, when I had won an NEH Fellowship to Argentina, and I had been living in Buenos Aires for a good part of a year. I would be there a total of 13 months.

And I was writing and emailing. I’ve always been a correspondent. Without my journals, which I recorded as letters, and letters that people returned to me and emails, my recent book, Heartthrob, could not have been written. I started sending these emails home from Argentina. I was meant to be writing a scholarly book on poetry, which I was working on.

But when I got back to the U.S., pretty soon, within a couple of weeks, I think, 9/11 hit. So this is 2001. And I had a teenage son—he was 14 and starting acting out. And I just felt very disoriented between 9/11 and reentry shock of being back after living abroad for a year. And my editor himself said, “You know what? I can’t think that a book on Argentine poetry is going to be a big hit or a best-seller.”

I mean, academic publishing was already starting to struggle. It was 20 years ago. I had begun to send these—I had deliberately called them cróni- cas—and send them along with my letters to people. “How many of those do you have?” I said, “I don’t know—20, 30.” He said, “That’s your book.” So it was really Raphael Kadushin, my former editor at University of Wisconsin Press, who identified the work I was cultivating as publishable writing, as literature.

PCM: Heartthrob is very intimate. How is it to write to the bone?

Chávez Silverman: But I don’t, my darling. I mean, I’m really very glad that it gives that impression. But I actually consider myself to be a rather close-to-the-vest person. However, I know that my writing gives people the impression that I’m spilling my guts.

In my author’s note in Heartthrob, I’m citing the writer Wyatt Mason about Linn Ullmann, who is a Norwegian writer. And he writes, “She was not looking for reportorial evidence, even if she was writing a scene based on what she could recall. She allowed herself to see with the imagination. She gave herself the freedom to imagine what had been forgotten, not in an attempt to establish fact, but to find the truth.”

I thought that was brilliant. That quote kind of gets at that tension that comes out in my epigrams between truth and reality. So I’m very aware. I’m always negotiating when I’m writing—how much to share and how much to leave out.

Publishing and truth, you spilling out your whole guts, they do
don’t always go together. It’s about a process of negotiation. And I’m very aware of that.

PCM: This book takes you across the world. Can you talk a little bit about place and love and how one impacts the other?

Chávez Silverman: I had the sense—it’s hard for me to know what kind of wisdom comes with hindsight, but it’s a lot, you know. But even at the time, as the ’80s, I ended the relationship, but not because I didn’t love him or he didn’t love me. I was finding the place, South Africa, impossible for me. I was very politicized throughout my 20s, especially. It didn’t stop but it morphed—elements of practicality and motherhood and other things came in.

I don’t want to say I had a death wish, but it was pretty ridiculous to throw oneself off that cliff and move to South Africa under apartheid, considering my political beliefs and my family that I grew up in and everything. But I hate that. The heart wants what it wants.

I mean, it was love at first—first it was a major Aries, similar to my parents, ironically. My parents, by the way, met the Roland Fraser character in San Francisco. And both of them liked him. My mother was very fond of him. I’ve just discovered both he and my mother share a friendship from the family that I grew up in and everything. I’m very aware of that.

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HOW TO BECOME A ONE-MAN BAND

Professor of Politics Pierre Englebert has never had any illusions about becoming a rock star. He’s more than content with his day job as a tenured professor at Pomona College. But his on-again, off-again love affair with writing and performing music has been on again for the past couple of years, and the evidence is mounting at a range of free, online music platforms. To understand how a noted scholar of African politics became a veritable one-man rock band, PCM invites you to step briefly into his musical shoes.

1. LEARN A FEW BASIC GUITAR CHORDS from a Scout leader as a Cub Scout in Brussels, Belgium. Get your own guitar for your birthday, and take lessons from a high school student. Ask your parents to have the family piano tuned so you can practice chords.

2. START YOUR OWN BAND—named Rhapsody for the famous song by Queen—at age 16. Play for the fun of it, but more importantly, to get the attention of girls. Sing in English despite having only an elementary grasp of the language.

3. WRITE YOUR FIRST SONG in high school. In college, form a better band—named (inaudibly) The Ice Creams. Go to lots of rock concerts by bands like The Police and UB40, and play more than 50 gigs, once as the opener for a Tom Robinson concert.

4. CUT YOUR FIRST AND ONLY RECORD at age 20 on a local label and see your music video appear—once—on Belgian TV. As your interest in African politics takes precedence, dissolve the band and drop music almost entirely for the next dozen years or so.

5. BUY AN ELECTRIC PIANO with your first paycheck from the World Bank in 1988. Use it sparingly until the mid-1990s, when you resume songwriting as a creative outlet while working on your dissertation. Get an 8-track recorder and sound-engineer your own songs, one track at a time.

6. WRITE A FEW NEW SONGS, including one for your wife titled “When You Shave Your Legs.” After getting your Ph.D., lose yourself in work. Store your instruments under the bed, where they will mostly gather dust for more than 20 years.

7. NOTICE A FLYER for guitar lessons while on sabbatical in 2018. Decide to expand your musical chops by taking guitar lessons. Then take it a step farther by auditing music classes with Pomona professors Tom Flaherty and Eric Lindholm.

8. START WRITING SONGS AGAIN, using software called Guitar Pro. Then with another program called Logic, build them out a track at a time. Send the “pre-mix” to a studio in Los Angeles to be professionally mastered.

9. UNDER THE MONIKER “Not a Moment Too Soon,” produce your first album, titled “Back to Plan A.” Post it on SoundCloud. Then sign up with a distributor to post your tracks on a range of platforms, from Apple Music to Spotify.

10. POST YOUR SECOND ALBUM—titled “Well,” including the comma—using cover art by Pomona student Sei M’phunya. Plan to keep sharing your songs as long as you find it rewarding and the songs give people joy.

Both of Englebert’s albums are available free at his website: www.not-a-moment-too-soon.com, and at such online repositories as SoundCloud, Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube.

Photo by Jeff Mag
Right from the start, Sagehens have been on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19, and they’re still battling.
The first known U.S. case of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 was identified on Jan. 20, 2020, in Washington's Snohomish County in a 35-year-old man who had recently returned from Wuhan, China. “Patient Zero” would recover.

At the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Matt Wise ’01 monitored the report. With a Ph.D. in epidemiology from UCL-A, he has worked for the CDC for more than a dozen years and has risen to chief of the Outbreak Response and Prevention Branch in the division of Foodborne, Waterborne and Environmental Diseases, typically focusing on illnesses caused by such pathogens as salmonella, E. coli and listeria.

“The reality is that almost every year, there’s some major public health disaster either at home or abroad,” he says. Most are contained. This time was different. The outbreak at the Life Care Center was identified after Dr. Francis Daoel, a former CDC Epidemiologic Intelligence Service officer and the director for infection control and prevention at the hospital where Siew worked, noted an expansion in testing eligibility beyond those who had travel history or contact with someone who was infected. The hospital selected two seriously ill patients, sent out the tests, and uncovered what would become one of the first significant COVID-19 outbreaks in the United States.

But those illnesses among vulnerable elderly patients weren’t what stopped Wise cold: At about the same time, a 17-year-old high school student from nearby Everett, Washington, tested positive with no history of travel. “The moment that came out, you knew that there was extensive unrecognized community transmission going on,” Wise says. “I think seeing that confirmed everyone’s worst fears that this was being transmitted widely within the U.S. And I think that was the moment where it was just like, ‘OK, we’re not getting out of this. This is here, and it’s happening.’”

Back in New York, the virus hit early and hard. “I got it right at the beginning, like March 16th. I tested positive,” Dzurilla says. “Thankfully it was mild, but there was so much anxiety, more than anything. Especially at that point, we didn’t really know what all the symptoms would be like. I lost my taste and smell on about Day 5 of being sick and no one had even known that was a symptom at that time. When I got it, we’d barely had any COVID patients. When I came back two weeks later after being sick, the hospital had exploded, and it was all COVID.”

In Los Angeles, Dr. Edgar Chavez ’98 had been monitoring the distant drumbeat of the deadly virus that emerged from Wuhan for months, but Los Angeles County did not record its first death until March 11, a woman who had traveled abroad.

Chavez earned a medical degree at Stanford before turning down a lucrative job offer and returning to the South L.A. neighborhood where he grew up after his family fled war-torn El Salvador. The Universal Community Health Center he opened on E. Washington Boulevard blocks from his childhood home was the first of three clinics he founded to meet the needs of the underserved, largely Spanish-speaking population.

“It was a Monday in March, as Chavez recalls, when “I had a patient that came to see me, and he was having a bad cough, just not feeling really well. He had an appointment to come back a week after so I could evaluate him again. And by Sunday I get a call from a community hospital that he had passed away from respiratory failure. This was a young 60-year-old guy. He had a little bit of diabetes, but not really to the level that I would say, oh, my God, you know, you are at such huge risk of dying from any type of disease. And so that’s when it hit me. You know what? This is going to be really bad.”

At the initial U.S. epicenter of the disease, doctors at EvergreenHealth started a website recording their own experiences and responses to the new disease to share with medical colleagues around the U.S., Siew says.

But after the earliest days, when COVID associated with people who had the means to travel—or had interacted with people who traveled—began to fade, it became clear that the battle is against the disease itself, says the CDC’s Wise.

“The virus has found the soft underbelly of everything in our society, all of our public health system, our health care system, the inequities, racism—the virus sort of sees all of that,” says Wise. He has now served three COVID deployments from his home—the first last spring focused on identifying areas where transmission was increasing rapidly, the second in the fall working on community interventions —
The disparities unfolded starkly in the South L.A. communities Chavez’s clinics serve. “A lot of our population historically has gotten poor health care, so they have lots of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease,” he says. “When they get COVID, it’s not a flu, it’s not a cold. It’s actually something that drives them to the hospital. We’re seeing a lot of deaths. In the past year, I’ve probably lost upwards of 15 to 20 patients to COVID—my own patients that I’ve seen over the past 10 years that I’ve been at the clinic. The reason that’s happening is because a lot of our community lives in multigenerational households, and so you’ll have the young that have to go out to work. They’re the people that work in restaurants and shops, where they’re the first line to deal with the public. They’re the people that work in restaurants and shops, where they’re the first line to deal with the public.

Now, he says, it’s 4,500 a month, in part because of access to testing. Along with testing, Chavez transitioned many clinic visits to tele-phne or virtual with a simplified system called Doxy.me that allows patients to simply click on a text for a video call rather than going through a portal or requiring a computer and Wi-Fi. That allowed both patients and his health care providers to limit contact. With the arrival of the vaccine, Chavez pivoted again, quickly ordering vaccines and spending close to $10,000 on a used ultra-low-temperature freezer to store them.

Beverly L.A. County, Dr. Michael Sequeira ’73 faces some of the same demographic challenges and more in his role as San Bernardino County’s new public health officer—a job he started on Nov. 23, shortly before the devastating post-holiday surge. The county is home to transportation and shipping hubs, farm workers, a large Indigenous population that includes the San Manuel and Morongo tribes and many Pacific Islanders, whose large and close-knit families have been hit hard by the virus. As hospitals began to fill, Sequeira, a former emergency room doctor, stepped back in to assist in the emergency room for a bit, “I was trying to stay ahead because if we only had 50% of the people who are eligible taking the vaccine, we’d never reach herd immunity.”

To counter uncertainty stemming from concerns about the speed of the vaccine’s approval, the mRNA technology, politicization of the pandemic or other issues, San Bernardino embarked on a campaign of education and reassurance using social media, community town halls and spokespeople including Black doctors, bilingual speaking doctors and tribal doctors. “There are also worries about variants, with the U.K. variant appearing in a small pocket of Big Bear Lake. ‘We had to jump all over that, and we’ve contained it,’” Sequeira says.

By late February, as the U.S. marked the 100,000 toll of more than 500,000 deaths, hints of hope emerged as cases declined rapidly—a suggestion, some said, that the U.S. had begun to achieve partial herd immunity. Many of those closest to the crisis are more cautious, saying it could be only a half, cautioning against overreaction. “I think everyone is eager for a return to some kind of normalcy,” says the CDC’s Wise. “I just think we have to be really careful that our eagerness to try and have some of that normalcy come back—to be able to see our grandparents and our friends and all that—doesn’t lead us to understate the virus. There are variants out there. “I would say I’m optimistic for sure, but I think that we have to temper that optimism with some realism that having a vaccine is an incredibly important tool, maybe the most important tool, but it’s not the only one. And probably not sufficient to get us over the line. We still have to do all the other stuff too.”

“I think it’s really hard to predict what society is going to look like when this all ends. And frankly, I think even the notion of this ending, it’s hard to know what that even means. You know, we will probably have some amount of COVID-19 with us always now.”

such as how to protect people at polling places, and the most recent this winter focused on providing constantly updated vaccination data on the CDC COVID Data Tracker. “When you ask that question about whether I have been touched, well, I am one of the people who have the ability to work remotely and insulate ourselves from contact.”

Working from home “is not a luxury that lots of people have. It’s not a luxury that health care providers have, and it’s not a luxury that lots of people that have to go to a physical job every day have,” Wise says.

Frustrated with waiting up to 10 days at one point for results from COVID tests sent out to labs—rendering them clinically useless, he says—Chavez made a decision to go big on testing that provides quick results. “You can tell people, ‘Hey, stay home,’ but if they don’t have access to testing, they’re the people that work in restaurants and shops, where they’re the first line to deal with the public. They’re the people that work in restaurants and shops, where they’re the first line to deal with the public. They’re the people that work in restaurants and shops, where they’re the first line to deal with the public.

Beyond L.A. County, Dr. Michael Sequeira ’73 faces some of the same demographic challenges and more in his role as San Bernardino County’s new public health officer—a job he started on Nov. 23, shortly before the devastating post-holiday surge. The county is home to transportation and shipping hubs, farm workers, a large Indigenous population that includes the San Manuel and Morongo tribes and many Pacific Islanders, whose large and close-knit families have been hit hard by the virus. As hospitals began to fill, Sequeira, a former emergency room doctor, stepped back in to assist in the emergency room for a bit, even though at 69 his age put him in a vulnerable group. “I just had a feeling that was going to be a huge problem with this vaccine,” Sequeira says, recalling how about half of his nurses in years past had resisted flu vaccines. “From the start, I was trying to stay ahead because if we only had 50% of the people who are eligible taking the vaccine, we’d never reach herd immunity.”

To counter uncertainty stemming from concerns about the speed of the vaccine’s approval, the mRNA technology, politicization of the pandemic or other issues, San Bernardino embarked on a campaign of education and reassurance using social media, community town halls and spokespeople including Black doctors, bilingual speaking doctors and tribal doctors. “There are also worries about variants, with the U.K. variant appearing in a small pocket of Big Bear Lake. ‘We had to jump all over that, and we’ve contained it’,” Sequeira says.
When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the College to evacuate its campus a year ago, the Class of 2020 was stunned—perhaps more so than their younger peers. This was their last semester on campus, a busy one but also a fun one—it was supposed to be the semester to end all semesters. But on Wednesday, March 11, an email appeared in all their inboxes, announcing the closure of campus as the COVID-19 outbreak brought Los Angeles County, along with the rest of California, into a state of emergency. Suddenly, all their expectations were turned upside down.

Their final months as Pomona College students were spent off campus, either back home with family or in new living arrangements with friends and roommates. As the pandemic worsened, economic forces began to affect the job market while tightened university budgets constrained graduate programs.

Pomona College students in general fared well, according to a Career Development Office survey released in February that showed 90% of the Class of 2020 graduates participating in career activities—such as a job, internship, service opportunity, graduate school, fellowship or other related activity.

To dive deeper, we spoke to six recent graduates from the Class of 2020, who shared how they have managed in the months since graduating from Pomona. Spanning disciplines and industries, these Sagehens have endured their fair share of experiences that are unique to the year of the pandemic. These are their stories.
**Karla Ortiz**

*I’ll Figure Something Out*

Growing up, my parents were always telling me: ‘We don’t want you to work with your hands—we want you to work with your mind.’” Karla Ortiz recalls. As immi-

grants, however, her parents knew little about college or scholarships, so Ortiz had to figure out everything on her own. “All I knew was how to get good grades and that I’ll figure something out…”

And she did. As a QuestBridge Scholar, she earned a full paid scholarship to Pomona, start-

ing out on the pre health path. After all, her passion was biology and chemistry, when she decided pre-health wasn’t for her, a methods course in Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies (CLS) soon filled the void. “I felt a very big sense of community that I hadn’t felt in any other classes. … In CLS, I felt like I was being heard and understood, and so I decided to major in that, with a focus on immigration.”

She became a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and volunteered at a non-profit, Uncommon Good, where she tutored and mentored youth. She took a leadership role with the First-

Generation and Low-Income (FLI) program.

When the pandemic hit, Ortiz—who was set to graduate with a major in CLSM and a minor in mathematics—agreed to figure things out. She was in the middle of interviews for a paralegal position when entry-level openings began to disappear. Suddenly, the replies to her cover letters read along the lines of “We are no longer hiring for this position” and “We are freezing hiring for the time being.”

With her parents’ words in her ear, Ortiz never stopped giving it her best, even as her options dwindled. Anxious about not having a job lined up, she signed up in May for an online platform for jobs in the legal and nonprofit fields.

ON MARCH 11, 2020: Karla Ortiz, a Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies major and math minor, was in the interview process for a paralegal/legal assistant position and had a few interviews outstanding for jobs in the legal and nonprofit fields.

In the fall of his senior year, Lee had applied to a number of MFA programs in acting. He spent hoursrefining his résumé and preparing monologues and getting ready for auditions, and he got final callbacks at a number of good schools. Excited about each and every one of them, he found ways to stay very good—about himself in the weeks leading up to that fall’s big turning point, when everything changed.

He stopped hearing back from the programs around the same time Pomona began evacuating campus. When the programs emailed him, it was a series of depressing messages. “Programs were e-mailing saying they had either closed or were no longer going to happen. These programs already only take about eight students, so now are some are only taking four or six. Most programs had already happened.”

The blow was a hard one. “Honestly, there were a lot of times when I was wondering why I got this degree. I felt my skills were not useful … but it’s a pandemic and I had to learn to give myself grace.”

Ongoing therapy and a close-knit group of friends going through similar struggles helped Lee get through it all.

In the weeks leading up to the announcement that all students must vacate campus, Lee didn’t believe things would be that bad. The shock of the vacuation took him aback. At first there was anger toward the College administration over the decision to evacuate. Then came fear. Lee wasn’t able to return home to New York. “I felt like I was left out in the cold. My mother is housesitting, and she was like, ‘I don’t know where you’re going to live.’”

Mixed with the fear was uncertainty. “I was on the precipice of the unknown. I hadn’t heard from my MFA programs, and I didn’t know where I was going to be. I was not sure if our [Pomona] jobs would keep us going. I was just thinking of graduation or the social aspect of things. I was just trying to figure out how to survive.”

I packed my stuff, and I just sat in the back of a car not knowing what the future held. Lee ended up in Los Angeles after calling a friend, Miles Burton ’17, who had an extra room in an apartment he was sharing with an other person. The room was spoken for, but Lee was welcome to stay there until the new room-

mate moved in. Lee was grateful for the reprieve, but the uncertainty of his life continued to bat

him in waves. Following were many weeks of despair and wondering how he would be able to pay rent and bills.

The job search in a pandemic was plainly and simply hard, says Lee. He took on various gigs to pay the rent: delivering food for Postmates, coordinating a training for a startup, becoming a freelance writer for a get-out-the-vote cam-

paign in Georgia.

Even with his precarious nature, Lee was hesitant to ask for help. But in early fall of 2020, after months of gigs and stressful thoughts, Lee reached out to his beloved Office of Admis-

sions at Pomona, where he had worked for many summers and where staff members had taken him under their wing.

“I was like, ‘OK, Kyle, this is an exercise in being vulnerable.’ It was hard to tell people I need help—that I needed help. I felt so personal. I felt so vulnerable that I was scared to do that reaching out, but I reached out to Adam [Sapp, assistant vice president and director of admissions] … He moved his schedule around immediately and had a whole team of people with admissions jobs.”

Sapp encouraged Lee to apply for a temporary position as an out-

side reader for the Admissions Office. He got the job a month later, which helped Lee feel that his life was coming together. Lee was selected for a paralegal/law clerk job and prepared for another round of MFA applications.

“[I realized that] I had to be prepared for the punches and land on my feet. I’ve learned so much about myself and my capacity and my work—things I couldn’t have learned in grad school.”

In January, Lee accepted a full-time offer in business development for BlackLine, a cloud software company. He’s also been busy re-

building his trust in himself after months of uncertainty. With a new set of tools and newfound knowledge, Lee is once again applying to MFA programs that have re-opened. He has a final call-back in April for the Tisch School of Arts at New York University. With him luck.

**Kyle Lee**

*An Exercise in Being Vulnerable*

Kyle Lee is an extrovert by nature. An actor who took to Seaver’s private high school world in the heart of Silicon Valley like a fish to water, Lee had already mastered the art of walking backwards while giving campus tours for the Admissions Office. He moved his schedule around immediately and had a whole team of people with admissions jobs.”

Lee ended up in Los Angeles after calling a friend, Miles Burton ’17, who had an extra room in an apartment he was sharing with an underrepresented first-years at Pomona.

A director of a private high school world in the heart of Silicon Valley where she now teaches. No fresh from Barstow High—a small city in the Southern California desert just outside of Los Angeles—though her best, even as her options dwindled. Anxious about not having a job lined up, she signed up in May for an online platform for jobs in the legal and nonprofit fields.

ON MARCH 11, 2020: Kyle lee, a theatre and clinical neuropsychology double major, had just received a final callback from an MFA program at UC Irvine and was excited to be in the midst of the admission process with a number of notable MFA programs.

Suddenly last March, Zachary Freiman’s parents saw their brood of three adult sons return unexpectedly to the nest at the family home in Westchester, New York. Before the arrival of COVID-19, Freiman—a double major in public policy analysis (PPE) and music—was excited to graduate from Pomona College this spring. Before the arrival of COVID-19, Freiman—a double major in public policy analysis (PPE) and music—was excited to graduate from Pomona College this spring. Before the arrival of COVID-19, Freiman—a double major in public policy analysis (PPE) and music—was excited to graduate from Pomona College this spring. Before the arrival of COVID-19, Freiman—a double major in public policy analysis (PPE) and music—was excited to graduate from Pomona College this spring.
The week before spring break, his father flew in from New York for the recital, and Freiman remembers jokingly asking him to bring cardboard boxes and packing tape in case they needed to pack up his dorm. In the end, his father did help him pack up and get home.

During the next few months, COVID-19 hit the Westchester area hard, with shelves empty of toilet paper and trips to the grocery store fraught with worry. “We were scared and at home,” Freiman recalls. “We were neurotic. We couldn’t find yeast, couldn’t find toilet paper or even cleaning supplies.”

“We were frazzled, confused and lost.”

Her mother, Erminia, worked as a caregiver at the time and had to be evacuated last March. She arrived home with a cold. Fearing she would have a severe case, Freiman took her temperature every other day while she was at home. “We were scared and at home,” Freiman recalls. “We were neurotic. We couldn’t find yeast, couldn’t find toilet paper or even cleaning supplies.”

“We were frazzled, confused and lost.”

Fortunately, professors extended a lot of deadlines. Her thesis readers continued to support her, but living through a pandemic while trying to wrap up your final semester of college was difficult. “I was nowhere near as productive as I was in school. But I thought, ‘I have to get it done. I have to graduate. I cannot end on a negative note.’” Not only did she graduate, she was awarded the John Vieg Senior Prize in International Relations for her thesis.

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An international relations major, Apolinario Chaplin had secured a job as an analyst with Accenture in San Francisco that was slated to start in January 2021. She received an email from Accenture pushing back her start date to January 2022.

“Who it was for, I wasn't sure, but I sent in an application,” she recalls. “I applied right after spring break. For some reason, they had an open position. I interviewed with a man named Miguel Delgado-Garcia, he was the hiring manager. I had a phone call with him and he wanted to meet with me in person. He took me to the offices and we met with the other people. He offered me a job on the spot and I accepted.”

The office was in San Francisco, which he was going to write in the spring. He jumped into the hiring cycle for a consulting firm in New York City, and he was able to get a job at Accenture. He was also traveling twice a week into Los Angeles for an internship, all while fulfilling his duties as president of the Associated Students of Pomona College (ASCPC).
my professor were supportive. It was definitely a difficult semester. It was a huge transition, and then one day, I submitted my thesis and graduated.

By this point, Delgado-Garcia had moved back home with his father. “Suddenly I was in my childhood room, where I had applied to Pomona. I hadn’t planned on moving back home after graduation. I thought I was going to move directly to San Francisco, and here I am.”

And then, the week before finals were due, Delgado-Garcia got an email from The Concord Group informing him that they wouldn’t be able to hire him. “At least through the remainder of the semester, I knew I had a plan because I had a job … and then my job was gone.”

The carpet was pulled out from under me. “They’re not going to continue their work on behalf of the student body, and in order to honor their current employees, they wouldn’t be able to bring us on. They had halted hiring.”

“I graduated, and suddenly I was an adult with a couple degrees and an empty head. It was a span of six weeks after graduation where I slept a lot, read a lot of books, went on a lot of hikes. There wasn’t a lot to do but being quarantined in L.A. I applied for a couple of jobs. It really knocked down my morale in general: I had been on a high, a roller coaster, I was inflated, and it suddenly dipped.”

Luckily for Delgado-Garcia, The Concord Group sent him a second email a few weeks later, re-offering him the position. At that point, he had activated his Claremont Colleges’ network and through a connection, had secured an offer with another consulting firm. Ultimately, however, he went with the original job offer.

In the end, Delgado-Garcia is grateful to have lived through those experiences to grow as a leader and as an individual: “It steeld me.” Because he’s worked remotely, Delgado-Garcia is just now starting to feel confident in his job, nearly eight months later. He’s moved out of his father’s house and in with one of his longest best friends, Nicole Talisay ’20.

From then on, it was all business for Delgado-Garcia, who helped set up a meeting between the ASPC and Pomona’s executive staff, and then joined theAside from selling coffee, Delgado-Garcia also worked alongside Nicole Talisay ’20, who was just a couple of feet away from him. Together, they helped the campus community through the pandemic and worked to bring students back to campus.

Nicole Talisay ’20, a molecular biology major, had a clear plan for her next two years. She would go get her master’s in two to three years, but she’s not ready to go back to school yet. Especially not in a pandemic. “I haven’t even thought about what I’m doing in five years is stressing me out more.”

This stress of the unknown is nothing new to Abilo, who spent her last few months as a Pomona student helping her fellow first-generation and low-income community find housing after the campus was evacuated. Abilo was able to stay with a friend in an apartment near campus but then moved back in with her mother.

Abilo and her mother, a caregiver, live in the Pacoima. They share a converted garage that they’ve had in weeks.”

Like the Class of 2020, members of the Class of 2021 have been indelibly marked by the events of the past year, but they also will be grappling toward recovery. Even as Abilo deals with the anxiety of her MCAT being endlessly postponed and her plans potentially laid waste by the pandemic, she’s also thinking sympathetically about the Class of 2021. “Class of 2020 had it rough, recrossing a lot of bridges, and they’re coming in while ill, sometimes just getting over COVID-19. Others are just plain rude.”

It’s not all negative though. Abilo is gaining precious clinical experience—and she’s learning a lot from the patients and from the pharmacists. In addition, she’s met some lovely customers. “There are good customers, older folks who don’t have anyone at home. They’re happy to see us, as we’re the only source of interaction they’ve had in weeks.”

Norani Abilo, a molecular biology major, was in the middle of her job search looking into clinical research positions at several other options for post-graduation. That’s when I started applying to as many jobs as I could, but no one was really getting back to me.”

In all, she applied for almost 200 different jobs. Some employers did get back to her and even interviewed her before they halted or let her know they were moving on to someone else. It was after some of those months of this that Abilo applied to a pharmacy technician opening at a local CVS Pharmacy in Encino, California. “I wasn’t part of my original plan,” says Abilo. “Abilo is from Los Angeles, but the pandemic has forced a many-waited trip to go away.

The positive outcome of this experience is that CVs trains you on the job, explains Abilo. Working part-time since November, Abilo has been able to study for the MCAT and focus on her medical school application materials as she works with Pomona’s Career Development Office through the process.

Back on track for her long-term plan, Abilo is now facing a new hurdle: canceled, postponed and overbooked MCAT testing dates. There are applicants from the last pre-medic cycle who weren’t able to take the MCAT because of COVID-19, and they are the ones being prioritized by MCAT testing centers, explains Abilo. “My MCAT keeps getting canceled or pushed back. Right now I have to decide how to prioritize my applications because I’ve already submitted to the Pomona Pre-Health Committee, and I have to let them know if I’m applying or not this June. I feel the uncertainty of the pandemic, and not knowing what I’m doing in five years is stressing me out more.”

2021: Another Year Without Streamers?

As we enter year two of the COVID-19 pandemic and a second academic year that may end without the festive blue-and-white streamers over Marston Quad marking Commencement, the situation will again test the mettle of young Sagehens. Like the class before them, these new Pomona graduates may be taking their graduation photos in their own driveways and front yards. And like their predecessors, they may have to make their way in an economy still struggling toward recovery.

Like the Class of 2020, members of the Class of 2021 have been indelibly marked by the events of the past year, but they also will be able to say, in their own words, that they struggled, coped and eventually found their way in the midst of a global pandemic unlike any other in at least a century. \[\text{\textcopyright 2021 Pomona College Magazine} \]
“I felt like I was almost writing the obituary of the world without actually getting out there on the front lines and doing something about it,” Halpern said. His passion motivated him and his colleague, Sam Teicher, to found Coral Vita, a company dedicated to coral farming and reef restoration. After having seen firsthand the declining health of coral reefs, he decided that “working with these ecosystems that are, really, canaries in the coal mine when it comes to climate change—the first ecosystems to collapse—is a great place to try to make a difference.”

The United Nations, government agencies and nonprofit groups like the Coral Reef Alliance and the Reef Ball Foundation have been working for years to raise attention and expand efforts to protect coral reefs. Halpern and Teicher started Coral Vita in 2015 in an attempt to act more quickly than other organizations, if possible, to secure funding, cultivate resilient corals and return them to reefs to help them recover and survive as ocean waters continue to warm and become more acidic. Halpern and his team currently work at Grand Bahama Island, just about 100 miles east of Miami, and his vision is to scale up their efforts to reefs elsewhere, too.
Corals are both tough creatures and the scaffolding for the homes of numerous other animals. Stony corals are like slowly growing trees, slowly extending their arms to provide energy to the coral. Reef corals, the animal forests of the seafloor, can stretch for hundreds of miles or more, and they surround most of the Bahamas islands where Halpern works. They teem with thousands of fish species, clams, lobsters, sea turtles and myriad other organisms—25% of all marine life—that enjoy the ample shelter and sources of food, whether they call the reefs home or are just passing by. All this makes coral reefs important thriving ecosystems during normal times.

Climate change is the new normal, though, putting these whole, interconnected marine communities at risk. Marine scientists have seen ocean waters gradually warm for decades, while subjecting reefs to particularly warm episodes more often. Like a valley widths during an extreme event, during hurricane season, coral reefs roll the dice every year. Sometimes water as much as 2 degrees Celsius above average will wash over a reef—or sometimes, linger in the area for a while, making the corals overheat. Current climate projections predict that the pace of warming will accelerate, said Stuart Sander, a marine biologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California. “What we’re seeing is that these hot water events, often associated with El Niño patterns, are more frequent and last predictably.”

Continually warming waters will stress the open ocean corals on a massive scale in the coming decades, and after that, climate change will gradually acidify the oceans as well, eventually making it harder for corals to make their durable skeletons. “We’ve already had massive coral reef loss right now, and it’s only projected to get worse,” said Andrés Grottoli, an ocean scientist at Ohio State University in Columbus. If we continue on our current trajectory, up to 90% of coral reefs could be lost by 2050, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

For the final step, Halpern and his team just have to transplant the healthy corals to the reef when they’re ready. They scuba dive down and graft the corals to the existing, degraded reef using nothing but underwater drills and glue. Once the corals are established back on the reef, the reef quickly comes back to life. “Fish immediately sense the coral there and begin to spawn,” Halpern said. “It’s pretty magical,” Halpern said. His hope is that the most resilient corals become a significant part of the reef, which then adapts naturally to climate-influenced conditions.

To realize their goals, Halpern, Teicher and their nine employees, four of whom are Bahamian, have many challenges to overcome. The first comes from events like Hurricane Dorian. While coral farms can revitalize a valuable local reef here and protect it from future storms, Halpern and his team are still rebuilding today.

Another challenge could arise if assisted evolution turns out to be more complicated than expected. There’s no guarantee that picking resilient corals for the future will work as planned. “Whatever is surviving and growing well in your nursery might not be the one growing well in the reef. There is no consistent winner among the corals, said Mikhail Matveev, a biologist at the University of Texas at Austin. One type of coral might fare well one year and then poorly the next. That’s partly because future conditions might require not only heat tolerance, but also the ability to live well with new organisms, tolerate disease and recover from storms like Dorian, he said. But Halpern isn’t putting all his eggs in one basket, as Coral Vita grows at least 20 different kinds of coral, each with a different habitat type.
IT WAS NOW SEVERAL YEARS AGO, BUT KATIE HALL REMEMBERS THE ENCHANTMENT OF HER FIRST GIRO D’ITALIA IN VIVID DETAIL AND BRIGHT COLORS.

The “Giro Rosa” as it’s usually known in cycling circles, is essentially the women’s Tour de France. Its competitors endure a brutal but beautiful 600-plus-mile, 10-day stage race through the muted browns and greens of central Italy. But mostly what Hall remembers is the pink.

The race route winds through some of Italy’s most scenic landscapes, landing in bustling plazas festooned in blush-colored garlands. “It’s beautiful,” Hall says. “You ride through these ancient town squares with pink ribbons everywhere and pink umbrellas hanging above.” (“Rosa” means pink in Italian, the race gets its name from the pink-papered newspaper that originally sponsored it.)

Although she was a self-described “pretty active kid” who played a lot of sports growing up, Hall’s childhood in Seattle was not one that necessarily foretold achievements in elite athletics like the Giro Rosa. “I was pretty bookish—one would maybe even say nerdy,” she says. And although she learned to ride a bike fairly early on, she didn’t even own one for most of her teenage years. “It wasn’t on my radar at all,” she says.

Nevertheless, Hall eventually found her way to Italy and the world of professional cycling. The competition there was fierce; women’s cycling races are often more intense than men’s because they’re shorter, she says. “There’s a lot of excitement and drama in it; it’s a really beautiful sport.”

Now, she counts her experiences there among her favorite memories in an unlikely but successful career in pro bicycling. After putting aside previous plans to study physical therapy to become a professional cyclist in 2013, Hall pivoted again in 2020 as the world changed around her. Despite being long-listed for the ill-fated Tokyo Olympics, she

Katie Hall ’09 loved her seven-year adventure in pro cycling, but she has no qualms about turning the page and moving on.
made the difficult choice to walk away from a seven-year adventure in pro sports and pursue a career she sees as more meaningful—one that has redefined her relationship with her body and her community.

Hall majored in chemistry at Pomona and for a while thought she might go into public health research. Her college years were also when bicycles reentered her life, though for the moment in a purely pragmatic role: She rented a house in Seattle with classmates one summer and bicycle-commuted to an internship in Redmond, 25 miles away. But long-distance bicycling didn’t come easily at first. “I would come from work and lie on my living room floor, and people would throw snacks at me,” she says. “I was destroyed.”

After graduation, Hall began a Ph.D. program at the University of California, Berkeley, bike racing on the side in the hope of making friends who shared her interests. After a brief and disastrous stint on a mountain bike—“It was terrifying, and I was basically last in everything I did”—she found her niche in road races. Here, finally, was something she was good at and loved. She competed in the National Championships her first year. At the same time that she was discovering cycling, Hall was also learning what she didn’t love: spending all her time in a laboratory. She found the windowless basement workplaces stifling; the slow pace made her antsy. And there were too many steps between her work and the positive impact she hoped to have on society. Searching for a better option, she started observing in physical therapy clinics, a setting where she could work with people face-to-face and see immediately how her work impacted them.

But then, after a stint on the collegiate all-stars biking team, she was offered a professional contract on a team sponsored by the health insurance company UnitedHealthcare. It was a “now or never” opportunity, she thought, an adventure that would get her out of the windowless basement. Why not try it for a year for two?

She never expected to stay for seven.

One of the best parts of being a professional bicyclist, Hall says, is the free time. A person simply cannot train for 40 hours a week without injury, a limitation that left space for a multitude of hobbies and a leisurely pace. And bicycling brought Hall not just to Italy for the Giro Rosa but all over Europe; her last two years she lived in Spain half time. When she wasn’t training, she could explore, cook, relax. When she was on the clock, she could hone her skills at something she loved, along...
with an international coterie of people who cared about the thing she cared about and who were really, really good at it.

Plus, it felt great to win, and for someone who found the sport relatively late in life, Hall won a lot. She counts her win at the Tour of California on the Women’s World Tour in 2018 as her biggest cycling achievement. She’d already lost narrowly twice in the race, the year before by only a second to the reigning Olympic champion. That made her 2018 victory all the sweeter, a culmination of four years of tough and determined work.

It was work, even if it was also fun. The constant training could be depletion, and she couldn’t let herself have an off day. Being on the road got lonely at times, especially because her husband’s job meant they were separated for long stretches. And the pressure could really get to her. In bicycling, “there are 200 starters and one winner,” Hall says. Not winning meant letting her team down, especially since she took on the role of team leader at UHC. “You have five other people putting in their whole heart and soul and faith in you,” she says. “And if you let them down, it feels bad!”

After five years on the team, the highs and lows started to wear on her. She’d won all the major races in America; she’d had her vindicating moments. But the year, unexpected as it was, had presented an opportunity for reflection, she says. Living through a global pandemic reminds her of her original goal to help people. She saw that career I was going to be able to do forever,” she says, “as good as she could at a specific movement, an endeavor that necessitated concentrating deeply on performance. When she wasn’t training, she was thinking about training, or thinking about how to this training, how to be ‘1% better at riding,’” how to organize her workouts, how to recover after difficult sessions.

“Do you walk away now? or think about training, or thinking about how to train?” Hall says. “It felt like something I could do,” she says. “As the pandemic stretched on and professional bicycling didn’t come back to life, Hall had to make a tough choice. Should she keep pushing at training, preparing for eventual races and maybe the Olympics? Or should she finally do what she had always intended and start a new life as a physical therapist? Her announcement that she would retire surprised many in the bicycling world. She’d won all the major races in America; she’d had her vindicating moments. But the year, unexpected as it was, had presented an opportunity for reflection, she says. Living through a global pandemic reminds her of her original goal to help people. She saw that career I was going to be able to do forever,” she says, “as good as she could at a specific movement, an endeavor that necessitated concentrating deeply on performance. When she wasn’t training, she was thinking about training, or thinking about how to this training, how to be ‘1% better at riding,’” how to organize her workouts, how to recover after difficult sessions.

“I had this really nice and tidy plan before pandemic,” she says. “I’d trained all year with her new teammates. On a high from her recent successes, she found herself on a long-list for the American Olympic team, slated to compete in Tokyo in August 2020. The last race of the year would be the World Championships, on September 26. Her physical therapy graduate school program at the University of Washington started on September 29. She’d use that weekend to move to Seattle and start a new life: East!”

But, as happened with so many 2020 goals, the universe had other plans. Though races started getting canceled in early spring, Hall kept training, never knowing which might go forward and which might not. Then, when she flew home to California for three weeks for a planned trip, she simply never flew back.

Suddenly back in the U.S. and unsure when things might get back to normal, she struggled to keep training at home, fitting in interval sessions and “bikepacking” trips with friends around the more standard baking projects and TV binges. That’s also how she ended up setting a brief world record “Everyest” a hill in her neighborhood—a niche bicycling sport that involves traversing a hill—enough times to equal the height of Mount Everest. In this case, that hill was Bonny Doon in Santa Cruz, California. Hall biked up and down it 28 times in just over 10 hours, as part of a fundraiser for COVID-19 relief. Though her record was quickly beaten by other cyclists, she still thinks of the experience as a highlight of 2020. “It felt like something I could do,” she says. Like many people, Hall says ruefully, “I had this really cool adventure I’m having right now, and then I’m going to go back and work a job,” she thought to herself. “So, why not ride my bike around the world!”

Hall says that physical therapy will allow her to work and think more about other people and how to help them achieve their goals. “My goal was pretty elite-level movement,” she says, “and figuring out how to do that movement with others.” She can apply that to helping even the patients who are just trying to make it through the day.

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Paragraphs)

She sees this adjustment as just another step in the flexible, elastic path that’s led her here. Olympics or no Olympics, she says, physical therapy is not a rebound but rather an organic and long-awaited step in a life that’s had its share of unexpected detours. “Cycling was not ever a career I was going to be able to do forever,” she says. “All careers, no matter how talented, need an end point, and this is hers.”

“A really cool thing to think about is where I am,” she says. “I feel like I’m in the right place.”

Takahashi Hall trains with her bike on the campus of the University of Washington — Photo courtesy of Katie Hall
Click click click.

Videotape is the focus of Will Voigt’s first job after his 1998 Pomona graduation—collecting it and editing it for the San Antonio Spurs. He is a peon in the kingdom of professional basketball coaching, his only power the dicing and splicing of game tape. Start, stop, rewind, pause, fast-forward—the VCR controls are squares, triangles and hash marks, some of the same symbols coaches use to communicate basketball plays.

That basic code of basketball is something Voigt knows well from competing for his tiny Vermont high school three hours north of the gym where James Naismith invented the sport with peach baskets as goals. In the NBA org chart, the assistant video coordinator is barely listed, but in Voigt’s case, it gives him a seat on the bench where Pomona-grown head coach Gregg Popovich and assistant Mike Budenholzer ’92 held court.

The Spurs gig didn’t turn into a trailer for his own version of Hoosiers. He didn’t move up and around the NBA. Instead, Voigt’s own education and mastery of basketball coaching would be a peculiar string he kept unspooling, to Norway, back to Vermont, California, China, Angola, and even the 2016 Rio Olympics with the Nigerian national team. He’s bounced from continent to continent, most recently landing in Germany at the height of the pandemic to coach the Telekom Baskets Bonn in the Basketball Bundesliga.

If you lose track of where in the world Will Voigt is coaching, you can usually find him on YouTube, sharing the artful ways basketball is played far from the NBA. Now he’s starring in videos instead of taping others, and friends and strangers are watching, backing up, clipping, studying. Trying to get an edge from Will Voigt.

“Will is a little wacky, and his story has played out that way,” said Budenholzer, now head coach of the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks. “In San Antonio, he was there anytime for anyone who needed anything, because everyone mattered, from the bottom of the ladder as a video guy to the top. Everyone contributes whatever is needed to the team’s growth. Young coaches can be fascinated with the NBA, but there are only so many teams and jobs, so you have to be willing to go anywhere. Will is the greatest example of taking that advice to new places that are almost unheard of in the NBA.”

Tipoff

Everyone matters in unincorporated Cabot, Vermont. When Voigt was 5, voters in the city of Burlington, 60 miles west, elected a new mayor named Bernie Sanders. The most famous export is the cows’ milk that’s used to make Cabot cheese, which comes from a local co-op. In 2019, the population was 189. “Indomitable people,” Calvin Coolidge said of Vermonters, “who almost beggared themselves to serve others.”

Voigt practiced shooting to a goal in his family’s barn, where birds would build nests between the net and backboard when Voigt went into soccer and baseball seasons. Every athlete who could play, did. Voigt, a point guard, led his team through state playoffs against Vermont’s smallest schools and graduated valedictorian in a class of 18. He also played piano because his mother, Ellen, who had served as Vermont’s state poet, and his German-born dad, Francis, who...
Basketball was calling.

David Menefee-Libey. “It makes sense that he’d become a coach.”

was a swing vote, in the middle of everything, talking to both sides playing independent-minded Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords. “Will performed in a mock Congress with Claremont McKenna students, won the 1996 Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. With less fanfare but more foretelling, Voigt performed in a mock Congress with Claremont McKenna students, playing independent-minded Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords. “Will was a swing vote, in the middle of everything, talking to both sides and paring attention to everything,” noted Professor of Politics David Menefee-Libey. “It makes sense that he’d become a coach.” Voigt didn’t see it then. When he graduated in 1998 in political science, he expected to go to law school and become a sports agent. Basketballs was calling.

First half

Earlier in the century, the sunny beaches of Los Angeles had inspired tire retreader William J. Voit to invent the modern basketball. The summer after college, Will Voigt bounced into the Long Beach State Pyramid for the NBA free agent league. He hoped to hang with agents, and one asked Voigt to coach a team led by Duke’s Ricky Price. “The players were trying to show how much they could do, and Will took it so seriously,” Price said. “He even put in a defense—for a summer league? That helped me in San Antonio, the cameras were rolling in Luanda, and God knows who was going to show up,” said John Bryant, a signee who had just flown in from China, now an assistant coach with the Chicago Bulls. “Will didn’t even look like a player much less a coach. He has that baby face. He couldn’t be the right guy, but he was.”

Voigt had ventured into college basketball coaching when a voice from his past opened an unexpected door. His high school coach Steve Pratt, in Chicago to train players for college and the NBA draft, was asked if he knew anyone who could coach a pro team in Norway immediately. Its American coach had decided not to show. “I have the guy,” Pratt said.

Half-time

To say that Voigt, then 27, brought passion to the Ulrikens Eagles is incomplete. He also loves arguing. In Oslo, the Eagles were down 26 points to the league’s best team when Voigt got ejected right before halftime. Pratt was visiting, and heard Voigt’s last words to his team: “Knew this! You have nothing to lose. Just go beat their ass!” And they did.

Second half

A vote brought Voigt back to Vermont, when he was elected coach of the Vermont Frost Heaves, a startup in the American Basketball Association. Yes, elected by Vermonters given ballots by team owner and Sports Illustrated writer Alexander Wolff: “Wouldn’t it be great to have someone who was deep into hoop and who can see the larger world and appreciate multiple perspectives.”

Voigt could nd someone who was deep into hoop and who can see the larger world and appreciation for multiple perspectives. He left campus at the end of one century to embrace a rapidly changing world while hopscotching between rectangular hardwood landing pads. He speaks six languages.

“If you look at all the places I’ve been, it’s hard to imagine any plan that would have taken me on that route,” he said. “I think everyone aspires to be and do what they can at the highest level, and for me that was to be an NBA coach one day. But when you get locked into that, as soon as you go somewhere, you are trying to get somewhere else. You can’t enjoy yourself, and you won’t give everything you have. I’ve embraced jumping on opportunities when they’ve presented themselves and doing it ‘all in’ and seeing what that leads to next.”

The Voigt video is still rolling, so stay tuned for the next episodes, wherever they’ll be filmed.

Final score

Voigt is now 44, and when he looks back on his vagabond career— the video highlights, if you will—Pomona’s liberal arts training shows in his open-minded, critical thinking, engagement in the larger world and appreciation for multiple perspectives. He left campus at the end of one century to embrace a rapidly changing world while hopscotching between rectangular hardwood landing pads. He speaks six languages.

“If you look at all the places I’ve been, it’s hard to imagine any plan that would have taken me on that route,” he said. “I think everyone aspires to be and do what they can at the highest level, and for me that was to be an NBA coach one day. But when you get locked into that, as soon as you go somewhere, you are trying to get somewhere else. You can’t enjoy yourself, and you won’t give everything you have. I’ve embraced jumping on opportunities when they’ve presented themselves and doing it ‘all in’ and seeing what that leads to next.”

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The Blaisdell Award is one of the most prestigious awards given to Pomona alumni, recognizing high achievement in their professions or their community. We are thrilled to congratulate this year’s Blaisdell Distinguished Alumni Award Winners, Cathy Corison ’75, James Strombotne ’56, Martina Vandenberg ’90 and Nathan Wang ’79.

2021 Blaisdell Distinguished Alumni Award Winners

Cathy Corison ’75 was the first woman winemaker-proprietor in the Napa Valley, where she continues to farm her vineyards sustainably and produce handcrafted wines without produce handcrafted wines without

Martina Vandenberg ’90 is the founder and president of The Human Trafficking Legal Center, which she established in 2012 with support from the Open Society Foundations Fellowship Program. For more than two decades, she has worked to fight human trafficking, forced labor and violence against women and girls across the globe. Vandenberg has trained more than 4,000 pro bono attorneys in 26 countries to handle human trafficking cases.

James Strombotne ’56 is a prolific composer whose work has been performed in more than 100 concert-hall shows, with 14 retrospectives held in major cities around the world. His work has been included in music major group shows in America and can be found in permanent collections of museums across the United States. His compositions have been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, New York City Opera and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He received a Tony Award nomination for his composition for the film Beauty and the Beast.

Nathan Wang ’79 is one of the most successful composers in Hollywood and Davis Cinema, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff. He has written music for Jackie Chan movies,Steven Spielberg’s back-up score for DreamWorks, Warner Bros. and Sony Pictures Studios films. His compositions have been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Opera and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He received a Tony nomination for the film Beauty and the Beast.

human trafficking.

NOTICE BOARD

477: An Annual Celebration of #SagehenImpact

On arrival 4.7 Day celebrates and honors Sagehen for their local and global contributions. Although we can’t celebrate together in person, all are invited to join us online for a special day of recognizing and discovering the extraordinary impact alumni make, bearing their added riches around the world.

4.7 Day also provides a unique opportunity to showcase the collective impact of the Pomona alumni community by supporting the growth and support from the Open Society Foundations Fellowship Program.

Comming Together as #OnePomona - and a Big Thank You!

There is a brighter future ahead, and the campus is happily ready and waiting for the return of students, faculty and staff to resume Pomona campus life in person. It won’t be long now!

We also want to pause and chip a big THANKS to you, our alumni and families, for your support during the last 12 months. The Sagehen community came together like never before to help students, faculty and staff navigate the uncharted course of remote learning and more during the global pandemic.

The incredible, ongoing generosity of alumni and families this past year ensured that students and faculty had the technology needed to successfully connect and engage in distance teaching and learning, helped expand urgently needed financial aid resources for students supported virtual research and experiential learning opportunities in summer 2020 through the Remote Alternative Independent Summer Experience (RAISE) program; and provided support to our local community through Pomona’s PAYS program. And there is more.

This spring, we will be sharing further details about your #SagehenImpact and the many ways your gifts have done so much to promote resilience and provide opportunity and genuine care for students and the campus community. Thank you for your dedication and support! Chirp!

Reunion Celebration 2021 is Right Around the Corner!

The Pomona College Reunion Celebration, will take place on Friday, April 30, and Saturday, May 1, on the virtual Pomona College campus. We are looking forward to bringing this year’s online reunion classes into us for two days of activities and prizes, unique presentations, Blaisdell and Distinguished Service Alumni Award winner tributes and more.

Reunion registration is free, to sign up today! For more information or to register, visit: pomona.edu/reunion-registration.

Join your classmates in supporting your Class Gift at pomona.edu/class-gift. Thank you!
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William Wirtz
Emeritus Professor of Zoology and Biology
1937–2020

William Wirtz, emeritus professor of zoology and biology, died at home on Dec. 24, 2020, after a long illness. He was 83.

Wirtz was born in New Jersey on Aug. 16, 1937. He attended Rutgers University, where he studied ecology under one of the nation’s foremost experts, graduating in 1959. At Cornell University, he did his postdoc- toral research on the biology of the Polynesian rat in the leeward Hawaiian Islands. He received his Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology in 1968. He joined Pomona College the same year in September, teaching until his retirement in 2003.

As a child, Wirtz enjoyed wandering the woods and taking a boat to the nearby salt marshes. “I was the kid who brought home mice and snakes. And I never stopped,” he told the Pomona College Magazine in 2003 interview.

At Pomona, Wirtz was responsible for establishing, maintaining and upgrading Pomona’s animal care facility and program. He was also known for his two-foot-long snakes, a reticulated python and a boa, which on at least two occasions over the years escaped. Such events did not halt Wirtz’s work. When snakes were found shortly after their escape, and eventually were both rehomed to wildlife centers.

Professor of Biology and Neuroscience Rachid Levin remembers Wirtz as an inspiration within his department. “He was totally at home in the wilderness and he was a skilled and passionate naturalist,” she said. “He showed the way of engaging students and turning them on to natural history. He took many generations of Pomona students on unforgettable adventures to Pitt Ranch and the Granite Mountains.”

One of those students, Audrey Mayer ’94, now a professor of ecology and environ- mental policy at Michigan Technological University, credits Wirtz for launching her career. “I knew I liked biology, but I had no idea what to do after in terms of a career. He’s one of the only people who encouraged me to get a Ph.D., which was not on my radar at all. I have a book coming out in March on the gnatcatcher—that was a book that started with him.”

Julie Hagelin ’92, now a senior research scientist for the Institute of Aztec Biology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, says Wirtz was the first person who made her realize she could do field biology. She learned the step-by-step process of handling small mammals on her first day working as his stu- dent assistant—a skill she took with her to graduate school. “It was like he opened a door to a secret world of biology: in the bushes and brush, with these little animals, that are only active at night.”

Retired doctor Sharon Booth ’78 shares the same feeling. “Wirtz’s ecology 101 course awakened my eyes to the natural world and the joy of learning about its complexities.” Booth went on to work for Wirtz, spending at least one summer in the chapar- ral trapping rodents for population surveys.

Joel Brown ’80, now an emeritus profes- sor of biology and sociology at the University of Illinois Chicago, was also one of Wirtz’s early protégés. “I’d always loved nature, had always loved nature, but had no idea that extending one’s love for nature could be a career.”

“Bill was a nonstop document- ary and encyclopedia who taught us all these techniques, and can you believe it, we were being paid!” Brown became a student worker for Wirtz and learned how to trap small animals, put radio collars on rac- coons and coyotes, band red-tailed hawks and nourse lizards. “It was completely transformative. I went home, and told my folks I knew what I wanted to do. I want to be an ecologist. And so, from that day forward, Bill led me amazing opportunities.”

“He was an outdoors guy, a classic mud-and-boots ecologist,” says Brown. “Bill Wirtz was one of the foundational mentors in my life, without whom, all the other sequences of my life would not have happened.”

Wirtz was a longtime member of the Raleigh Volunteer Fire Department and lived in the mountains with his wife, Helen, for many years. In the 1980s, he studied habits of coyotes that scavenged in the foothills of Claremont and Glendora, even adopting a rescuing coyote. He did exten- sive work on the distribution of rodent populations in San Diego’s Experimental Forest and studied the nest habits of the endangered California gnatcatcher that lives in endemic serpentine waste areas. Wirtz was just one of many field research interests over the decades.

Although Wirtz and his wife became involved in equine rescue, including rescuing horses for the Inland Valley Humane Society for the Blind, in Little Rock. After studying at Pomona College and Oxford University, he began to focus on careers working in nature. As a writer, he asked David Autor, the Editor of the Observer, about writing a 14,000-word piece about the philosophy of fighting with Mehta’s sight, could write such descriptions as this one, from the first installment of Continents of Exile, his 12-volume series. “The fields become bright, first with the yellow of mus- tard flowers outlined by the feathery green of sugarcane, and later with maturing stands of wheat, barley and tobacco.”

The New York Times ...

“Mehta was widely considered the 20th- century writer most responsible for intro- ducing American readers to India...”

Mehta and his mother met Shawn for the first time, and then backtracks to the 1970s when his father had an affair with a married woman.

“Periodically, Mehta—who never had a guide dog or used a stick—would ask him, ‘How can anyone expect to read so much about one life?’ His answer was that ‘Continents of Exile’ is not the story of one life but of hundreds of lives, with char- acters coming and going in the manner of a roman fleur. Thus the past is regained.”

Ved Mehta ’52
Author
1934–2021

Ved Mehta has established himself as one of the magazine’s most imposing figures,” The New Yorker’s noted editor William Shawn, who hired him as a staff writer in 1961, told The New York Times in 1982. “He writes about im- portant matters without solemnity, about scholarly matters without pretension, about abstruse matters without obscurity.”

“The recipient of a MacArthur Foundation ‘genius grant’ in 1984, Mr. Mehta was long praised by crit- ics for his forthright, luminous prose—with its ‘informal elegance, diamond clarity and hypnotic power,’ as The Sunday Herald of Glasgow put it in a 2005 profile.”

The Sunday Herald of Glasgow “His most enduring work is surely the ‘Con- tinents of Exile’ series, which was written be- tween 1971 and 2005. It began with stories his father used to tell Mehta and his siblings when they were small. Later, the narrative began to gain its own momentum and eventu- ally a distinct design and architecture emerged. Though he took his lead from his father’s stories, he also became involved in chain-reaction stories, about writing a 14,000-word piece about the philosophy of fighting with power, ‘as The New York Times put it in a 2005 profile.”

Ved Parkash Mehta ’52, noted au- thor, died Jan. 9, 2021, at age 86 from complications of Parkinson’s Disease. Blind from an early age, Mehta is best known for his autobi- ographical publications, including his first book from 1972 to 2014. Born in India, he became one of the country’s most influential writers in the United States, writing for The New Yorker magazine for many years. Here are a few excerpts from the obituaries published around the world following his death:

The New Yorker “This book The Bridge Between the Streams describes his life as a blind child in the India of the 1940s, as he learned to read Braille and to ride a bicycle and a home. Throughout his youth and his matu- rity as a writer, Mehta was determined to ap- prehend the world around him with maximal accuracy and to describe it as best he could. ‘I felt that blindness was a terrible imped- iment, and that if only I exerted myself, and put it in a 2005 profile.”

Mr. Mehta was long praised by crit- ics for his forthright, luminous prose—with its ‘informal elegance, diamond clarity and hypnotic power,’ as The Sunday Herald of Glasgow put it in a 2005 profile.”

The New York Times ...

“Mehta was widely considered the 20th- century writer most responsible for intro- ducing American readers to India...”

Besides his multivolume memoir, pub- lished in book form between 1972 and 2004, his more than two dozen books in- cluding a 12-volume series of autobi- ographical works, known collectively as...
**“Bike Parts”**

By Joel Fagliano ’14

For those who have joined the adult coloring craze—or who want to give it a try—here’s another familiar image from the Pomona College campus. Send us a scan of your work (pcm@pomona.edu) to show off in a future issue.

**CROSSWORD CHALLENGE**

This crossword puzzle was designed by Joel Fagliano ’14, the digital puzzle editor of The New York Times and assistant to the print crossword editor, Will Shortz. The solution is available on page 53.

**COLOR ME CREATIVE**

For those who have joined the adult coloring craze—or who want to give it a try—here’s another familiar image from the Pomona College campus. Send us a scan of your work (pcm@pomona.edu) to show off in a future issue.

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and the Pomona Plan can accompany you, providing stable and predictable lifetime income.

SAMPLE ANNUITY RATES FOR INDIVIDUALS

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