

THE GEORGE  
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MAGAZINE  
FALL 2022

GWM

Gift



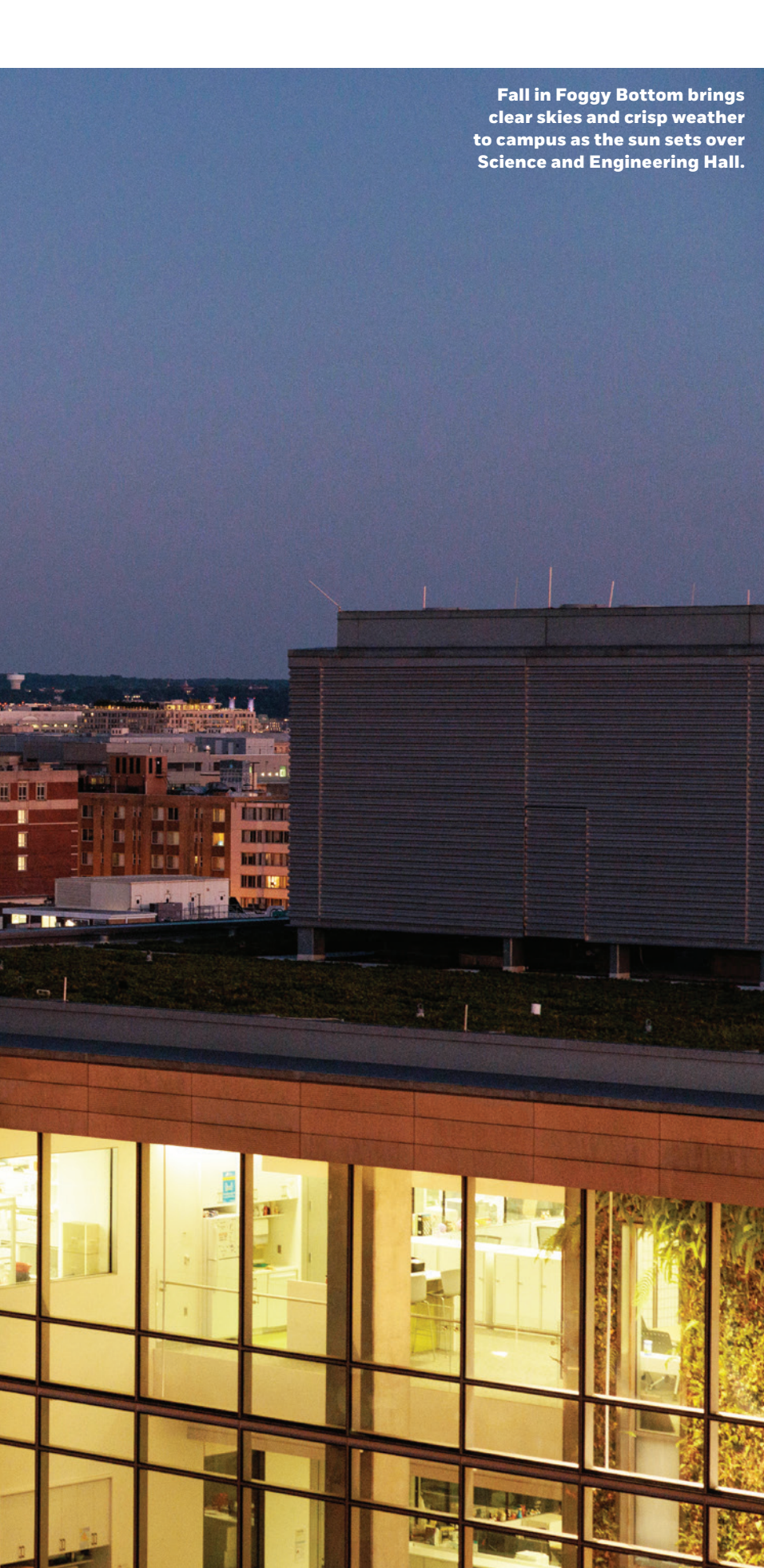
Guide

2022









Fall in Foggy Bottom brings clear skies and crisp weather to campus as the sun sets over Science and Engineering Hall.

# GW MAGAZINE FALL 2022

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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**Photo illustration**  
by Alex Rhodes

PHOTO: WILLIAM ATKINS





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# Give the Gift of Opportunity

**Scholarships open doors to a world  
of possibilities for GW students.**

**This holiday season, let's help the next  
generation of leaders realize their dreams.**

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**GIVE TO OPEN DOORS**  
**[go.gwu.edu/opendoors](https://go.gwu.edu/opendoors)**



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# GW MAGAZINE

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# Prelude

NEWS AND INSIGHTS FROM CAMPUS AND BEYOND







ALUMNI & FAMILIES WEEKEND

# A Place That Just Feels Like Home

**The GW community gathered to celebrate and reconnect during Alumni & Families Weekend 2022.**

**BY NICK ERICKSON**

**Twin siblings Adrienne and Nathan Williams never would have guessed a pit stop on the way to their home in Syracuse, N.Y., from a family wedding in North Carolina would be so consequential, but they are forever grateful for the detour in the route. —▶**

ABBY GREENWALT





“We didn’t really know it at the time, but this university has meant the world to us.”

**Nathan Williams, B.S. '10**

The two were high school students at the time when their family veered off the Beltway to Washington, D.C., where they toured the George Washington University together. Adrienne and Nathan shared everything in life up to that point, and they knew early on during their tour that they’d also be sharing the same university as they fell in love with the campus.

Nearly a decade and a half later, it remains an all-time great pit stop, as the two class of 2010 graduates return whenever they can to relive some of the best, most formative years of their lives while sharing their GW pride with fellow alumni and current students.

They came together with the GW community over Alumni & Families Weekend, Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, to celebrate what makes the university special by reconnecting, checking out new and improved upgrades to the university, and participating in campus events and activities.

“We didn’t really know it at the time, but this university has meant the world to us,” said Nathan Williams, B.S. '10, an economics graduate from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences who now works as a financial specialist at TIAA in D.C. He and Adrienne, B.A. '10, attended the All-Alumni Party Friday night at Potomac Square.

Despite the rainy conditions, events were well-attended throughout the weekend. Potomac Square and the Grand Ballroom of the University Student Center, which housed the Weekend Welcome Gathering for parents and students, were some of the liveliest venues in the early parts of Friday. Both events had deejays, flashing lights and laughter echoing off the walls.



**GW alumni, families and friends gathered for reunions and fun-filled festivities as the annual Alumni & Families Weekend returned to campus for the first time since 2019.**

Speaking of laughter, Saturday Night Live alumna, unofficial Olympic commentator and three-time Emmy nominee Leslie Jones performed the annual Fall Comedy Show Friday night at the Charles E. Smith Center. Earlier in the evening, a Multicultural Alumni Reception honored the legacy of Michael Tapscott, the recently retired director of the Multicultural Student Services Center, a post he had held since 2003.

Those who preferred a more laid-back setting had plenty of options too. The Vern Harvest at the Mount Vernon Campus on Saturday offered a variety of fall activities, including pumpkin paintings, caricature drawings, and apple cider and doughnut samples. The newly renovated Thurston Hall was bustling with people exploring its modernized community spaces and amenities during open houses. Weekend attendees could also see the GW Documentary Film Series, which included the premieres of four short films: "Gelman Library and Favorite Study Spots," "GW's Global Women's Institute," "D.C. as a Classroom" and "Commencement on the National Mall." Two additional films, "To Bigotry, No Sanction" and "GW Open Doors," were also shown. Five-, 10-, and 20-year reunions were held on Saturday night for the classes of 2017, 2012 and 2002.

On Saturday evening, the university honored alumni and supporters of the university at the Spirit of GW Awards for their accomplishments and

contributions that have elevated the standards of excellence and generosity for the GW community.

Aicha Evans, B.S. '96, received the Distinguished Alumni Award. Evans is currently the CEO of Zoox, a subsidiary of Amazon that develops autonomous vehicles, and has been recognized in Forbes' 50 over 50 and Fortune's Nine Powerful Women to Watch lists.

John G. Samuel, M.B.A. '14, received the Recent Alumni Achievement Award. Samuel is the co-founder and CEO of Ablr, a company that helps organizations be more inclusive by removing barriers that hinder people with disabilities.

Aaron R. Kwittken, B.A. '92, was recognized with the Outstanding Service Award. Kwittken is the founder and CEO of PRophet, an artificial-intelligence-driven-data-as-a-service platform. He has made numerous contributions to the School of Media and Public Affairs, including stipends to offset unpaid or underpaid internships for students.

The GW Philanthropy Award went to the A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation for its extraordinary and enduring support. GW is among 11 university partners in the United States with a Clark Scholarship program. At GW, this scholarship has supported more than 100 students. A. James Clark was a trustee emeritus, honorary degree recipient and longtime supporter of GW.

On Sunday, a Buff and Blue Brunch and a timely panel discussion on the Supreme Court nomination process featuring prominent GW alumni in law, media and government relations wrapped up the weekend. The panel, called Political Discourse and hosted by GW Law and the Graduate School of Political Management, featured GW Law Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew, former Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.),

alumna Ariane de Vogue, B.A. '89, GSPM Fellow Dana Gresham and GW Law alumnus Jonathan Bond, J.D. '08.

President Mark Wrighton, who was present at many events, said at the All-Alumni Party on Friday night that the weekend offered a glimpse of all the things happening on campus while simultaneously celebrating the legacy of GW alumni.

"This is a great institution with wonderful, creative, dedicated people who are making a difference in the world," Wrighton said.

Wrighton also shared the university's commitment to enhancing the student experience, pointing to the momentum of the Open Doors: *The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships* and the continuation of Only at GW experiences.

Alumni visiting for the weekend looked back at their own only-at-GW opportunities, many of which were centered around civic engagement and public service, while living at the epicenter of democracy.

Former roommates Lynette le Mat, B.A. '72, and Peggy Sulvetta, B.A. '72, who were celebrating their 50-year reunion, remembered how their time at GW coincided with the Vietnam War. Thurston Hall, which is where they lived, is now a state-of-the-art residence facility. But when they were undergraduates, it housed anti-war demonstrators who descended upon D.C. to express their opposition to military actions in Southeast Asia.

A half century earlier, they were two first-year students from Connecticut randomly paired together, and on Saturday, toured their old stomping grounds, reminiscing in Thurston Hall's courtyard terrace.

"We haven't seen each other in a long time, but through the years we've kept it in touch," said le Mat. "The friendship started

at GW."

The Williams twins were also enamored by the city while at GW, and one of their favorite memories was visiting the lit-up Lincoln Memorial with friends the night before Commencement on the National Mall.

"That resonated with me, and it still resonates with me," Nathan said. "You're in the capital city of the United States of America, whether it's going to inauguration or this week watching Lizzo play James Madison's flute."

"Or protesting in the street," Adrienne, an international affairs graduate who now works at the nonprofit Student Achievement Partner, interjected.


"Exactly!" Nathan, a men's basketball season ticket holder, responded. "No matter what it is, this is where things are happening, and I just feel so proud to be here."

While some gathered to celebrate the culmination of their GW journeys, others are just beginning theirs and showed off their new experiences and D.C. settings to their families visiting over the weekend.

Even though Albert Schenn and Nancy Shiue moved their daughter, first-year student Rachel Moon, to campus from the Dallas area just over a month ago, a lot has already changed as Moon just recently joined the GW Hatchet student newspaper.

"The best part of being a parent is just watching her integrate into the local community," Schenn said while attending the Vern Harvest with his wife and daughter.

While everyone comes from a different starting point, GW is the destination that binds together more than 200 years of life experiences and professional development and achievement, all of which were celebrated over Alumni & Families Weekend.

As Adrienne Williams said: "It is a place that just feels like home." 



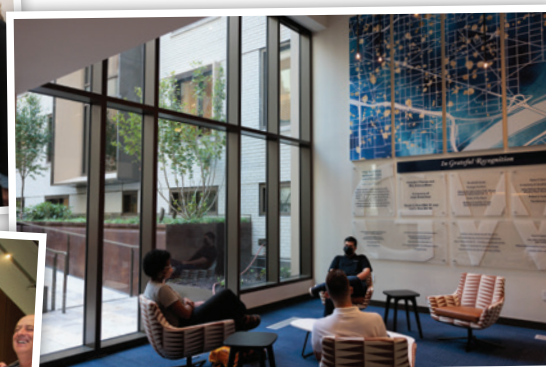


# A REIMAGINED THURSTON

**The completely renovated residence hall is focused  
on building community and student well-being.**

**// By Nick Erickson**





**Inside the new Thurston Hall:**  
The residence hall welcomed new students and returning alumni this fall with features that include modern community spaces and amenities such as a brand new dining hall, student lounges and a mosaic donor wall.

**T**hirty years earlier, Elizabeth (Berberian) Oliveri, B.A. '96, was a George Washington University first-year student roaming the halls of Thurston Hall, an unfamiliar place that would soon be the setting of one of her most unforgettable life chapters.

And in August, life came full circle as she moved her daughter, GW School of Business first-year student Marielle, into that same building.

Although the building's interior is dramatically different now after a total transformation that took more than two years to complete, her memories all came bursting back. She's thrilled Marielle now has that same opportunity to be part of the Thurston tradition as an inaugural resident of the modernized residence hall.

"I think there's a real special feeling for anyone who has walked through the doors," said Oliveri, who is now a teacher living in Manhasset, N.Y. "Whether we had community space like this or not, you feel like you're part of the community."

The renovation project, which began in 2019, entailed a complete interior overhaul of the nine-story residence hall that has long been a staple on GW's Foggy Bottom campus. GW partnered with architectural firm VMDO and Clark Construction to design and realize the renovation.

"Our desire to build pride in place starts with the sense of community that we build in residence. The new Thurston provides students with spaces to gather and connect with each other," said Colette Coleman, vice provost for student affairs and dean of students. "Students now have access to

**"Whether we had community space like this or not, you feel like you're part of the community, and that's what makes it so special."**

**Elizabeth (Berberian) Oliveri, B.A. '96**

the collective community through spaces where they can share ideas, worldviews and a commitment to solving the issues of our world today."

There are 16 lounges throughout the building, including an enclosed rooftop commons that offers a sweeping, only-at-GW view of the city so students can see the Washington Monument, Eisenhower Executive Office Building and National Cathedral with one spin. Natural light runs all the way down to the first level. At the center of it all is a wide-open courtyard filled with chairs, benches and other areas for students to congregate.

"The idea behind the placement of many of those lounges and the inner atrium spaces is that when you are in those spaces, you're going to be able to be seen and see other

students," Associate Vice President for Business Services Seth Weinschel said. "So you're going to always feel like you're part of a larger community."

A dining hall, which opened in October, is another highlight of the Thurston Hall update, offering a wide variety of healthy food choices. Other amenities include a laundry room on every floor, wider hallways and staircases and gender-neutral restrooms that are fully private, including toilets, sinks and showers.

The renovation served as an opportunity to improve sustainability efforts in the building such as improved heating and cooling systems while ensuring high air quality. It earned a LEED Gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Hundreds of alumni from various decades took trips down memory lane in the hallways at Alumni & Families Weekend during two events to showcase the project. The building includes a dedicated mosaic donor wall to highlight the support from the community. Over 300 donors who contributed to the revitalization were honored with private tours and a reception with university leadership that included a toast to the late Leon Rosenman, B.B.A. '81. Rosenman's friends and family named the seventh-floor courtyard in honor of the enduring friendships sparked there in the late '70s. The building also was opened to the entire university community later that day, attracting a cross-section crowd of families of current and past students. **GW**



### Alumnus Isaac Fitzgerald Writes About His Many Lives—From Altar Boy to Bartender and Author—in ‘Dirtbag, Massachusetts: A Confessional’

This “confessional” opens with a sentence Isaac Fitzgerald, B.A. ’05, has trotted out “almost like a joke throwaway line” at parties for years: “My parents were married when they had me, just to different people.”

Fitzgerald has lived many lives, some of his choosing. He was homeless and grew up around violence and alcohol and drug abuse. He was an altar boy, who left the church. Later, he rode a motorcycle, tended bar and worked for a time in pornography. “At a very young age, I knew that I wanted to say yes to things more than I wanted to say no to them. I just knew that would lead me to live an interesting life,” he told me in an interview. “That became a core tenet of my life.”

The memoir, in which Fitzgerald strives to tell the truth, paints a picture that is simultaneously beautiful, deftly observed and sad, and its closest relative—at least to me—is Frank McCourt’s “Angela’s Ashes.”

This is not the book that Fitzgerald thought he was going to write. It began as an essay collection about popular culture, told through the lens of his life. But after struggling for 18 months, he realized his life was the lead, not the supporting actor.

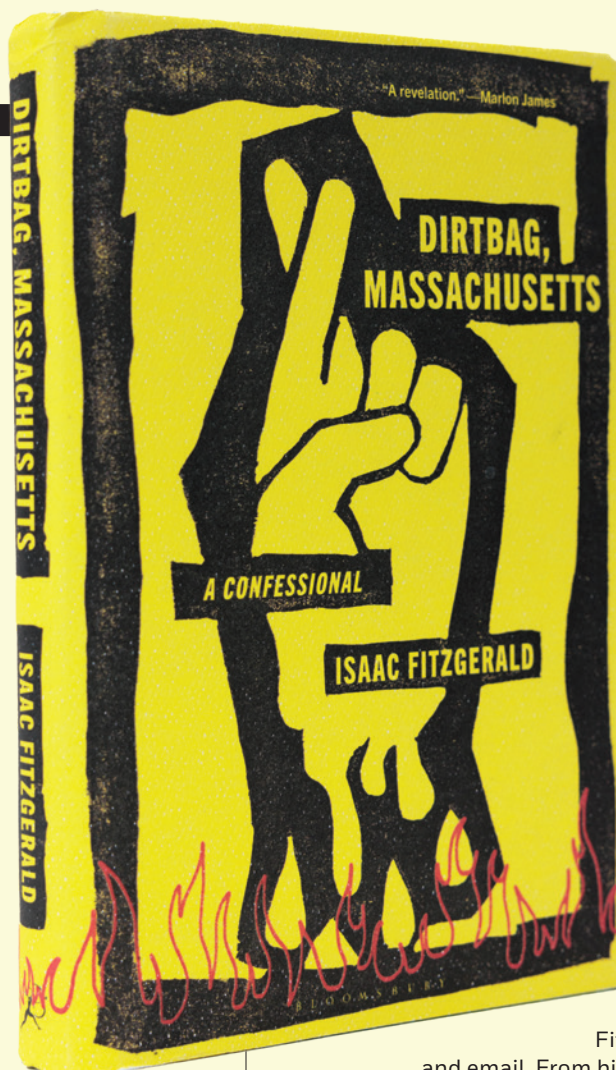
“I called my editor and said, ‘I think this might actually be a book about my childhood.’ A book that I had promised myself for many years I was not going to write,” he says. “She said, ‘Yeah. I’ve been waiting for you to understand that.’”

Many memoirists succumb to the temptation to always and only put their best feet forward but not so Fitzgerald, who goes hard on himself when he thinks he deserves it.

“You’re going to lose the reader’s trust, or even worse, the reader is going to get bored,” he says. “I really didn’t want any of the pieces in it to feel like they were these nice little presents wrapped up with a bow.”

When the author’s mother—who figures prominently in the beginning of the book—read the manuscript and asked him why he left out all of the happy times, like the family camping and canoeing trips, Fitzgerald turned to a metaphor of the truth as a log.

“It’s a hunk of wood. I, of course, understand that you would carve a much different piece of art—a much different sculpture out



of that hunk of wood than I would carve,” he told his mom. “This was my art. These are the moments I’m going to choose to highlight.” He was grateful that she understood immediately, Fitzgerald says.

For his father’s part, Fitzgerald writes in the book, “‘Are we going to be arrested for child abuse?’ my father asks me at one point, when we’re talking about my writing. He isn’t joking, but he isn’t not joking either. It’s his Irish way of asking, ‘How bad is this book going to be?’”

In writing the book, Fitzgerald drew upon his old journals

and email. From his time in boarding school, he had an email account, and when Google launched Gmail in 2004, Fitzgerald got an early account. This meant he had a trove of easily searchable prior correspondence, with which he could cross-reference his memories.

He also asked permission to name people, and when he couldn’t secure it, changed names. He is very glad he could use the name of his first roommate in boarding school: Jon Ritzman. “What a great name for a kid from Cape Cod. It might as well be Jon Rich Man,” he says. When he couldn’t use a name, he struggled to make up ones that approximated the real ones.

“I have no imagination for that. Jon Ritzman was just the tip of the iceberg. I lost some beautiful names that I swear matched the personalities so, so well, and then I had to put in things like ‘Colin Smith,’” he says. He likes writing nonfiction—in which “I get to just see what happens and put it down on paper”—but he admires deeply “people who have the imagination to write fiction.”

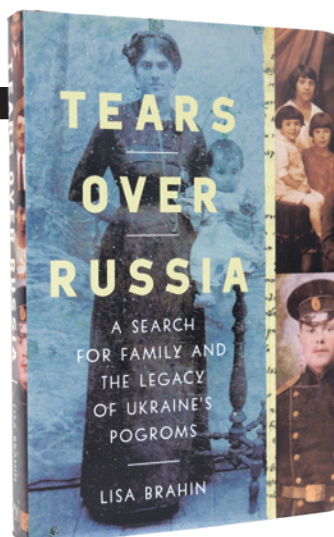
For other writers, Fitzgerald cautions about the way a blank page can blind, and if one writes on the computer, all those red and green squiggly lines or auto-filling words can get in the way. “The machine is so ready to do the thinking,” he says, which is why he writes on paper, where he says his handwriting is so bad that he cannot get caught up in his mistakes. Like a gesture drawing, “I can just go, go, go,” he says. Later he transcribes his notes on the computer and corrects mistakes.

All the while, he wrote this book for himself at 14, or someone like he was then.

“In a way, I’m talking to a younger self. Because if there is one message in this book, I think it’s ‘Don’t deny the pain you’ve been in,’” he says. “I was trying to yell back through time at a younger self.”

— Menachem Wecker, M.A. ’09





🔔 **'Tears Over Russia: A Search For Family and the Legacy of Ukraine's Pogroms'** (Pegasus Books, 2022)

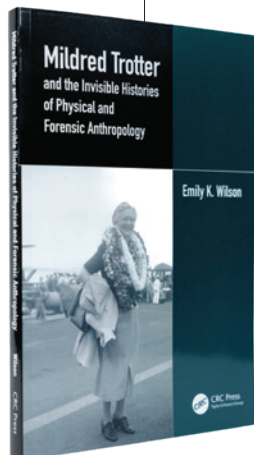
By Lisa Brahin, B.A. '84

This book, which covers the years 1917 to 1921, explores a very different era in what was then Russia and is today Ukraine (now, of course, in the spotlight as Russia tries to take it back). The author's grandmother, who told her stories at night as a means to get her to sleep, suffered from claustrophobia (elevators were traumatic) due to hiding in crawl spaces in the late 1910s. "The chaos that she survived shaped fears that haunted her for nearly 90 years," writes the author, a Jewish genealogist. She notes that the time period she covers was a "prelude" to the Holocaust, and her grandmother "lived in a world that did not want Jews at all." (Estimates range from 100,000 to 250,000 Jews killed in riots in what was then Russia.) "My curiosity only heightened when I discovered that there was almost nothing published about this time period," the author writes. And so, "Tears Over Russia" was conceived. This is the kind of book one won't want to put down, even as it could be written in blood as well as tears.

🔔 **'Mildred Trotter and the Invisible Histories of Physical and Forensic Anthropology'** (CRC Press, 2022)

By Emily K. Wilson, M.A. '08

The author, a forensic anthropologist, wrote this book partially as a biography of a trailblazing scientist—known for identifying remains of U.S. soldiers killed in World War II and for an infamous mistake measuring tibias—but also as a way to take stock of the scientific field at the time. Thus Mildred Trotter

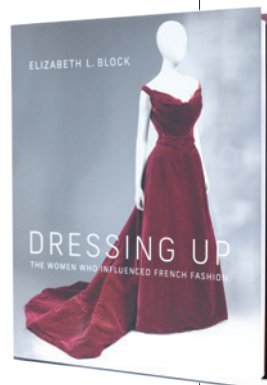


(1899-1991), who was the first woman to become a full Washington University School of Medicine professor and president of what is now the American Association of Biological Anthropologists, also becomes a lens through which to look at often ignored themes in science history, "such as scientific error, the historical experiences of women and marginalized people within the discipline, sexism, and scientific and social racism." The book, which is rigorous and footnoted but also a very comfortable read, provides all sorts of fascinating tidbits along the way. For example, the subject and a colleague were the ones, in 1951, to first learn that people shrunk in size after reaching their maximum height. Of the tibia error, the author observes "a cautionary tale and a useful reminder that we are all fallible. Scientific research comes with a profound obligation to conduct careful, honest work."

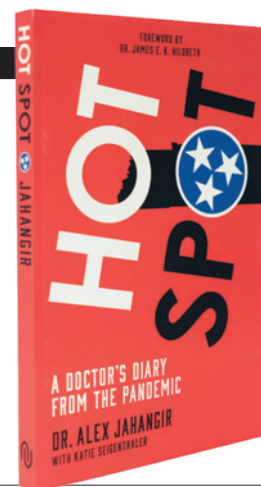
🔔 **'Dressing Up' (MIT Press, 2021)**

By Elizabeth L. Block, B.A. '94

In this book, the author, who works in the publications department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, addresses the ways wealthy Americans in the 19th century participated in and influenced Parisian clothing design. At times, the relationship makes one's head spin. "Curiously, many of the costumes were inspired by French royal figures who were ultimately ousted or killed," the author writes, "an ironic association with the monarchy for wealthy U.S. citizens whose families became rich off of capitalistic ventures." So did these



American taste-makers know they were committing such a faux pas? That's an open question, the author writes, "but we can access the paradoxes of some of their choices to give us a sense of the complexities surrounding them." This book sorts through a great deal of complexity and enlists a host of relevant photographs and artwork along the way.



🔔 **'Hot Spot: A Doctor's Diary from the Pandemic'** (Vanderbilt University Press, 2022)

By Alex Jahangir, B.S. '99

The author, an orthopedic trauma surgeon who headed Nashville's COVID-19 task force, has a tough job in normal times. "Show me somebody whose life is draining away, and I will remain calm," he writes. And then COVID struck, and Jahangir—who arrived in Nashville from Iran at age 6—was at the forefront of the city's response to a novel virus. "In the early days of the pandemic, we were all stunned and scared by what we didn't know," he writes. "We needed to move mountains, and some days we did. ... On other days we failed to move anything in the right direction, much less mountains. On these days I cursed my feet of clay and my limits." The doctor—perceived as a hero some days and a villain others—kept notes along the way to ground him. He fleshed out those "op notes" and discovered it was

also a tale of leadership and self-discovery. (Extra haunting: Each section starts with the date, the number of COVID cases and the number of deaths.)

— Menachem Wecker, M.A. '09



# THE GIFT OF JOURNALISM



# 100 of CHANGE



# THANKS TO CAREER PIVOTS, THESE ALUMNI ARE CREATING A FEW PERFECT PRESENTS.

BY CAITE HAMILTON

The paths we set out for ourselves don't always end up where we imagined. Sometimes they lead to ice cream. Or jewelry. Or even plants. Each of the seven alumni in this year's gift guide pivoted from their area of study to a passion project that became their career, and in the process delivered something good enough for gifting, from an obscure bottle of Burgundy to a luxurious moisturizer. Thank goodness for second chances.



# ALL THE PRETTY THINGS

It was during her senior year at the Elliott School of International Affairs, while interning for CNN between classes, that **Ana Mari Ortega Schwarzberg, B.A. '08**, decided she needed to find a way to unwind. A lifelong crafter, she reached for a knitting kit when her then boyfriend (now her husband) suggested she try learning to make jewelry instead. He bought her a few tools, and she found a metalsmithing studio in Bethesda where she could learn some of the basics. "The rest, as they say, is history," she says.

She launched her eponymous jewelry line in 2008 after enrolling at Miami International University of Art & Design. She doesn't remember what kicked off the first collection—she assumes it was a gemstone necklace, given that's what she remembers feeling inspired by at the time—but one thing she knows for sure is that it was in her signature style: a mix of color, texture and form, but always classic.

"I gravitate a lot toward pearls, but I try to create styles that are a bit more modern and inventive," Ortega says. "I also love color and love mixing different colors, materials and textures. You can really see this in my orchid earring collection."

The orchid earrings—dimensional polymer clay petals in the shape of a black, turquoise, green or pink orchid atop a coordinating bead drop—are a personal favorite of the designer, the most unique item in her collection and one she always keeps in stock. But Ortega is constantly designing ("I love going to gem shows and buying different stones and beads and just playing until I come up with combinations that I love," she says), and over the fall and holiday seasons will release about 60 new items, with multiple launches each month.

"I try to keep adding new and fresh designs while keeping a core collection of my classic and bestselling pieces," Ortega says. In short, she just tries to design pieces that she would like to wear but can't find in the market, like her three-pearl drops (three freshwater pearls strung on delicate gold-plated silver chains) or her double flowers (a small mother of pearl flower attached by post to a larger one), both bestselling earrings.

The switch from international affairs to jewelry design was unexpected, but she says it was the right decision for her. And, it turns out, the two vocations did eventually overlap.

In 2022, along with her collaborator and friend, Vanessa Fernandez, Ortega received a commission from the White House to design a custom piece for the Spouse Program of the 2022 Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. It was an unexpected intersection of her area of study at GW and her creative career—but one that was entirely welcome.

Says Ortega, "It brought my design experience full circle with my education from the Elliott School, as I was creating diplomatic gifts for foreign leaders who attended the event."

**Ana Mari Ortega**

[anamariortega.com](http://anamariortega.com)

Use code **GW** for 15 percent off your next order.



# I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM



Cajou Creamery co-founder **Nicole Foster, B.A. '93, M.P.H. '98**, was in law school studying to become a criminal defense attorney when she decided to become a raw vegan. She noticed how, compared to consuming a standard American diet, eating cleaner helped her body—and her mind—perform better. Cut to her and her husband starting a family and learning that their two sons were lactose-intolerant.

"We couldn't imagine telling our kids, 'You can't eat ice cream for the rest of your life,'" Foster says. So they decided to make their own.

Foster earned a raw food chef certification and, in the process, learned to make nut milks and developed a very rough recipe for a dairy-free ice cream—one they've adapted but still use in their Baltimore café today.

Of course, making ice cream for friends and family (and one client, D.C.-based Glen's Garden Market) on a machine that only churns three pints at a time—the only piece of equipment they had when they launched in 2016—wasn't sustainable. They joined a commercial kitchen in D.C. and eventually relocated the entire operation to Baltimore, where in 2021 they opened a brick-and-mortar store after winning a retail storefront competition.

It's there that they serve a selection of their signature flavors inspired by their travels, like baklava and blueberry cheesecake (two fan favorites), as well as new launches.

To celebrate the shop's one-year anniversary, for instance, Cajou introduced its Blame it on the Boogie collection, an homage to Michael Jackson's 1970s hit. Sunshine (a creamsicle flavor), Moonlight (milk and cookies), Good Times (tiramisu) and Boogie (a CBD-infused raspberry bellini) all top Foster's current list of personal favorites (with perhaps a slight bias for Good Times: "I ate so much of it yesterday," she admits), and each of them features the creamery's signature cashew milk-based recipe.

Why cashews? For a few reasons, says Foster. First, cashew milk is creamier than other alternatives and doesn't impart a distinct flavor. Plus, cashews have a lot of health benefits. Known as nature's vitamin pill, they're packed with fiber, carbs, proteins, unsaturated fats, minerals and then some. What's more, making cashew milk is zero waste. Unlike almonds or coconuts—where there's a husk left over after milking the nut—the entire cashew (cajou in French) can be used in the process.

Foster serves as Cajou's CEO while continuing to practice law, and the creamery benefits from her decades in the legal industry. Recognizing that those with prior arrests often have a difficult time thriving after they return to society, Foster built Cajou Creamery as a worker-owned co-op that hires folks returning to the workforce.

"We want to provide not only a job but an opportunity at ownership," Foster says. "That's where the real opportunity to transform your life comes from."

Foster just wants to better lives through ice cream, whether that's improving one's circumstances or curbing a craving.

"The other day, somebody came into the store and cried," Foster says. "She's like, 'I feel seen because normally you go to ice cream shops and there's one vegan option, right? But this is entirely dedicated to me.' I was like, 'Oh my God, that's amazing.'"

**Cajou Creamery**  
[cajoucreamery.com](http://cajoucreamery.com)

*(Whole Foods or, for locals, the Howard Street café)*

Use code **GW2010** for 10 percent off your in-store purchase through Jan. 1.



From Meghan Trainor's "My Kind of Present" music video and Kasey Musgraves' original film, "Star-Crossed," to a live Coachella performance with Princess Nokia, **Victoria Walls, B.B.A. '16**, has plenty of professional dance credits to her name. She often finds herself in long rehearsals, in front of a camera or even on a stage (in other words, sweating in a full face of makeup), so she knows what it feels like to be tough on your skin. Which is why, during the pandemic, she started experimenting with something she'd long been interested in: skincare.

"I began to research and understand what types of products I enjoy using and what type of products are beneficial for your skin," she says.

It was a bit of a switch for the dancer, but she was used to sharp turns. After graduating from GW with a degree in event management, Walls wondered if her 9-to-5 was keeping her from her true passion—dance. She'd been on GW's first ladies' dance team and was a member of D.C.-based dance team Capital Funk. Walls decided she wasn't ready to give it up, and in June 2018 moved to Los Angeles.

"By January 2020, I was on stage dancing at the Grammy Awards," she says.

That was the same year she launched The Skin You're In, a line of products designed for all skin types to feel hydrated and glowing. She teamed up with a manufacturer ("so that my products are protected by the FDA and always safe," she says) to create vegan, paraben-free formulas for four core products—an oil cleanser, moisturizer, charcoal

mask and tea face mist—then spent a few months testing the products on friends and family of differing ages and skin types.

The charcoal mask—her bestseller—feels like "a spa day in a jar," she says, but her personal favorite is the moisturizer. "I love that I can feel hydrated without a heavy moisturizer," says Walls. "It doesn't leave a greasy finish."

She uses each of her products daily, starting with the oil cleanser to remove makeup, then following it up with the daily cleanser, a foaming face wash that she introduced in January 2021.

Since her nearly sold-out launch in June 2020, she's added even more products to the company's recommended beauty routine, including limited-edition serums and, a current favorite, a lavender sleep mask ("It smells amazing and deeply hydrates the skin while you're sleeping," she notes).

Walls says The Skin You're In differs from other skincare brands because it extends beyond skin into the realm of self-care. "Whether you wear the face mask while enjoying a glass of wine or come home from a long day and use the lavender sleep mask before bed," she says, she just wants The Skin You're In to leave a lasting impression.

**The Skin You're In By Victoria Walls**  
[theskinyoureinvw.com](http://theskinyoureinvw.com)

Use code **GW2022** for 20 percent off your order.

# SKIN SUPPORT SYSTEM





# NOT YOUR AVERAGE CUPPA



**Nick Krupa, B.A. '00**, remembers the first cup of coffee he had that truly blew his mind: It was in 2005 at San Francisco's Ferry Building Farmers Market. Long a destination for chefs, foodies and farmers alike—Chez Panisse's Alice Waters says she shops there weekly—the market had drawn Krupa and his business partner, Andy Wigginton, while on a tasting mission. They noticed a huge line (“always a good sign,” Krupa says) stretching to the Blue Bottle Coffee kiosk.

“We ended up trying a latte, and it was unlike anything we had ever tasted,” he says. “Espresso and milk together, without being burnt or over-extracted, was a revelation.”

The Oakland-born coffee company was among the earliest “third wave” outlets—that is, coffee for consumers who understand their morning cup of joe is the result of a long supply chain that includes a producer, importer and roaster, not just a barista—and Krupa says they were determined to bring some of that magic back to Austin. They just weren't quite sure how yet.

At the time, Krupa and Wigginton were both a couple of decades into their careers and starting to feel a pull toward something new. Namely, coffee. So in 2010, finding themselves between tech gigs (Krupa was a software developer, which he jokes was a “natural parlay” from his degree in international affairs), they opened Patika, a pint-sized coffee truck in Austin's Warehouse District that eventually earned its own long lines and a cult following after its specialty brew. Four years later, they decided to take the leap to a brick-and-mortar location, closing the cart but still emphasizing the coffee. It was there that Patika's two managers, Kyle Smith and Tony Smith, started getting super into roasting. So they approached Krupa and Wigginton with an idea: Why not start a roastery?

In 2019, the four launched Superthing Coffee Roasters, a small operation based just outside of Austin in Dripping Springs.

“We tell people, ‘Just drive out west until you start seeing horses and then take a left and follow the giant pink eyeball. We'll be there,’” Krupa says.

If it sounds a little fanciful, that's because it is. Superthing's whole aesthetic is a vibe—from the typeface to the tasting notes. Because the roastery chafes against the experience of coffee as “serious business” (even though it obviously takes coffee seriously), the packaging features surrealist graphics from Mexico City-based designer Futura, a universe of cycloptic creatures and portals set against colorful backdrops. The flavor descriptions (like this one for their Ethiopian-Columbian Tractor Beam Blend: “Wah Wah Wah Wah Wah...that's supposed to be a tractor beam sound. We wanted to design a blend that is well-rounded for espresso and filter coffee that brought a little bit for everyone. Also, we couldn't resist any excuse to call the espresso shots ‘tractor pulls’”) are fun, irreverent paragraphs that make you feel cool just for wanting to drink the coffee, even if you haven't yet.

“We were trying to do something where every aspect of the design and packaging—flavor descriptions, coffee names, all of it—is ‘turned up’ all the way,” Krupa says. “Coffee branding can be so stark and serious, and we wanted a completely different direction.”

As for the coffee itself, it's super. Customers dig the roaster's original Power Blend (“pretty spectacular on espresso,” Krupa says), but the co-owner himself prefers a Costa Rican from Tarrazu that Superthing calls San Diego. It's not always in season, but when it is, it blends a traditional Central American coffee taste with undertones of blueberry, raspberry and dark chocolate. Krupa calls it “exceptional.” In other words, it might just be the cup that blows your mind.

**Superthing Coffee**  
[superthingcoffee.com](https://superthingcoffee.com)

Use code **SUPERGW** for a one-time discount of 25 percent off (subscriptions not included!) through the end of 2022.



Any chef worth her salt knows: You have to taste as you go. And although she's self-taught, **Mei-i Zien, B.A. '99**, heeds the advice. The twist? She makes dog treats.

"I have tried everything that has come out of the oven at least once, even the dog biscuits," says the maison de pawZ owner. "All the treats smell delicious and look tasty."

Zien was working 9-to-5 behind a desk in a D.C. think tank when she decided that wasn't what she saw for her future. She pivoted to fashion and spent the next 18 years heading up sales divisions and leading global brand launches. It was around that time that her sister's American Eskimo puppy, Tyler, decided he belonged to Zien, not her sister. But when he was 7 years old, he started developing skin allergies, which led to a year of constant vet visits.

"That was when I decided to take full control by completely rehauling his diet," she says. She started making his treats at home, and for Tyler's 8th birthday, baked him a special cake and birthday biscuits. When a guest jokingly suggested she was running "maison de pawZ," the name stuck.

For several years, Zien ran the "pawtisserie" as a side hustle, squeezing in baking on the weekends and in her free time. But when CB2 placed an order large enough that she had to gather a group of girlfriends to help with packaging, she knew she had to pivot once again.

She committed to maison de pawZ full time and, just before the pandemic, moved her operation from the city to a commercial kitchen in New Jersey. Zien set to work fine-tuning recipes and expanding her product line from the three original biscuit flavors—Croque Monsieur (ham and cheese), Spiced Apple Tart (apples and honey), and Je T'Aime Veggies (beets, carrots and kale)—to include a few other flavors, each 100% human-grade, with zero preservatives, and utilizing local ingredients. She sources organic flour from New York-based Farmers

Ground, sugar-free peanut butter from Big Spoon Roasters in North Carolina, beef marrow bones from local craft butchers for steak frites broth, to name a few.

"We use only the very best ingredients for our dogs because we want to know they are eating the best," Zien says. "So even if the treats sound decadent and look over-the-top, our most sensitive stomachs and allergic dogs are able to enjoy them safely with zero rumbling tummies."

What sets maison de pawZ apart from other, similar companies? Zien says she doesn't take shortcuts. When she makes blueberry filling for the pup-tarts, for instance, she uses just blueberries, honey and beef-bone-broth gelatin (never store-bought).

"Every item is completely all-natural and preservative-free," Zien says. "I use a slow-and-low bake process to remove the moisture from the dog biscuits so that it is shelf-stable for up to a year. The low bake also helps preserve vitamins and minerals in the ingredients."

The "barkery" also offers special treats for local clients, taking custom orders for cakes and partnering with a New York City-based bakery to stock pawtisserie items with a shorter lifespan, like dog donuts and cookies.

Zien says the cakes are her favorite item on offer—she's collaborated on custom projects and events for numerous global Fortune 500 brands—while her canine clients prefer the steak frites biscuits.

But none of the products get past her bosses, Tyler and her long-haired chihuahua, Marcel, without their lick of approval.

"They have very discerning palates," she says.

maison de pawZ  
[maisondepawz.com](http://maisondepawz.com)

Use code **RAISEHIGH** for 20 percent off your next order.

# FOR THE GOODDEST DOGS





# HIDDEN GEMS IN A GLASS

As a restaurant sommelier in New York and D.C., **Mike Zima, B.A. '10**, sometimes had to serve wines that he wasn't 100 percent excited about—that's just the nature of the game. But the other side of the coin (or the cork, if you will), is that there were also wines he couldn't wait for guests to try—wines that felt exciting and special and, in some cases, rare. It's those wines, says his wife and business partner, **Azziza BenSaid, B.A. '10, J.D. '13**, that inspired him to start SommPicks.

"The jumping-off point was a guy that came into Del Posto [where Zima was working as a sommelier] and ordered a three-liter of 2001 Sassicaia [a Bordeaux-style red]," Zima says. "He loved it and asked if I could find him more. I did, and he bought it all, so I thought, 'Wow, this could be a business.'"

Zima launched SommPicks in 2012, hoping to bring high-value wine to the masses—both serious oenophiles and those just starting their wine journey who want to taste something exciting.

That means that the couple (BenSaid joined as the company's COO in 2015, looking for a change after a career in law) sells, quite simply, wine that Zima likes.

"What he has tried to do is only present wine that he feels like he can stand behind," says BenSaid. To do that, pre-pandemic, the couple would travel to Europe once a quarter to taste and select the wines they'd offer through SommPicks, often trying to pay special attention to smaller-production wines and winemakers. They hope to start traveling again soon, sourcing their signature Old World offerings from France, Italy and Spain (and then some).

"A lot of what we're selling is kind of more fine and rare esoteric wines," BenSaid says. "For example, older vintages and wines that are made in minuscule quantities tend to be harder to find locally. That's really why we're bringing them in from Europe."

The website [sommypicks.com](https://sommypicks.com) works like any direct-to-consumer site. You log in, select the wine you want—prices range from \$21 all the way to more than \$10K for "super old/rare/unique formats"—and checkout. Depending on where the wine is (SommPicks lists wines for sale even if they're in pre-arrival, a.k.a. purchased but not yet on a boat headed for the company's San Francisco warehouse), and where you are, you could have your order later that day (in the Bay Area) or, in the case of pre-arrivals, in up to 14 weeks. If that seems like a long wait, that's because it's one way the company continues to offer reasonable prices: Consolidating shipments means lower freight costs. When most of your product travels across the pond, that's an important consideration.

The inventory grows each month when the company launches a new "collection." The late summer list added more than 750 new wines to the lineup, for instance, including new offerings of their bestselling varietals, burgundy and champagne.

Take, for example, Clement Perseval and Jacques Selosse, two complementary producers in SommPicks' inventory. On the one hand, Selosse is well-known in the wine world and has somewhat of a cult following, while Perseval (who worked with Selosse for years) produces a champagne that, to many, is every bit as good but available for a fraction of the cost.

"This is a great example of what we try to do at SommPicks," BenSaid says. "We love working with well-known names like Selosse, but we also love to be able to say, 'Hey, if you like Selosse, you should really check out Clement as well.'"

A true wine nerd, Zima is happy to direct a customer to their next favorite bottle—and he'll even help customers track down a wine that's been stuck in their memory for years.

"That's also a service that we provide," BenSaid says. "It's something my husband loves to do because it's kind of a challenge, and people looking for random bottles like that tend to be really interested in wine and passionate about what they're looking for."

Passion is the purpose of SommPicks, when it comes down to it. As BenSaid says, they just sell wines they're excited to sell.

**SommPicks**  
[sommypicks.com](https://sommypicks.com)

Use code **FOGGYBOTTOM** for 5 percent off your order until the end of the year.





# BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED



Shortly after grad school, **Anna Johnston, M.P.H. '14**, realized something: She'd spent a lot of time in school, but she had never picked up any hobbies. Unnerved by the realization, she started buying plants.

"My grandmother used to have houseplants when I was little and she showed me how to take care of them," Johnston says. "I felt like I knew the basics." Her next steps grew (no pun intended) from there.

She launched Jungle & Loom—so named for the items she was selling at the time, plants and fiber art—on the side while pursuing a career in public health until, two years later, in 2020, she transitioned it to a full-time business. These days, Jungle & Loom has blossomed into two locations—one at D.C.'s Union Market and another, the flagship, in the Brookland Arts Walk.

"That is a really special location because I have the privilege to be neighbors with some of the best creative folks in the D.C. area," Johnston says. "We are all open on Saturdays to sell our goods."

For Jungle & Loom, that means everything from playful plant stickers and macrame wall hangings to vintage glass and, of course, live plants. Johnston says her bestsellers are the staples—pothos, ficus, sansevieria—especially for folks just getting into plant parenthood, as so many did during the pandemic. But she notes that planters are just as important as what goes in them, so she makes sure to stock a range of types and sizes to satisfy both form and function.

"It is absolutely my mission to help people find the plant that works best for their home situation, lifestyle and plant-parent style," Johnston says, "but I also want you to feel good about it. I want it to be a beautiful addition to your home."

The shop offers services that go beyond plants and home accessories—repotting services, virtual consultations, group and private workshops, as well as greenery rentals and installations at events. Basically, if a customer dreams it up, Johnston is usually amenable to making it happen.

"The evolution over time was partially directed by my interest and partially directed (probably more so) by customer requests," she says. "If a customer asked, 'Can I...' or 'Can you get...,' I have always done my best to say yes if it made sense for me as a business decision."

Her willingness to adapt means she often has a lot going on, and the list is ever growing. But the proof is in the pudding (potting?). With so much in the works—new locations and products, a slight rebranding, updating the website—it seems her instincts are paying off.

**Jungle & Loom**  
[jungleandloom.com](https://jungleandloom.com)

Use code **GWLOVESPLANTS10** for 10 percent off your online purchase.



# ALUMNI'S RECENTLY WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKS MAY BE THE PERFECT STOCKING STUFFER, MANY FOR THE YOUNG AND YOUNG AT HEART.

BY CAITE HAMILTON

Like the alumni featured in this year's gift guide, these five authors also took a few left turns, be it returning to a forgotten story from their past or switching media altogether.

## TINY TRAVELERS

**Debra Ann DeVoe, M.A. '82**, loves to dance. She took her first class at 3 years old, began helping her teacher lead other dancers at 13, and by her senior year of high school was teaching her own class of preballet students. In her spare time, she devoured books about ballerinas, dance history and ballet stories. When she went off to college, she continued the obsession.

"Working with Maida Withers and Nancy Johnson during the early '80s at GW, I expanded my knowledge of dance beyond technique," says DeVoe, currently a dance teacher based in Maryland. "I delved into dance philosophy, criticism, dance history and research."

It was only natural then that in 2018 she penned her own children's book, "Ballet Busters Leap Into the First Nutcracker."

The story follows Marti, Julie, Zack, Luis and their dance teacher, Miss Sophia, as they travel to St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1892, to witness the first staging of "The Nutcracker." DeVoe says she noticed a lot of dance picture books on the shelves, but not many chapter books for grade school students. So she wrote her own, creating fictional characters but taking some inspiration from her own life.



**Ballet Busters  
Leap into the  
First Nutcracker**  
by Debra DeVoe

**\$10.99**  
[dancing-doorways.com](http://dancing-doorways.com)

During an improv dance course with Withers, for instance, her class was walking past the Kennedy Center and saw famed choreographer George Balanchine standing outside.

"[Withers] went up to him, shook his hand and introduced all of us, thanked him for his work, and he signed the sole of her dance shoe," she says. "Balanchine had performed as a child in one of the early Nutcracker performances in Russia. In my books, the children leap back in time and work with famous dancers from long ago. Maida taught me you can meet and learn from great people in the world of dance."

## WISER WORDS

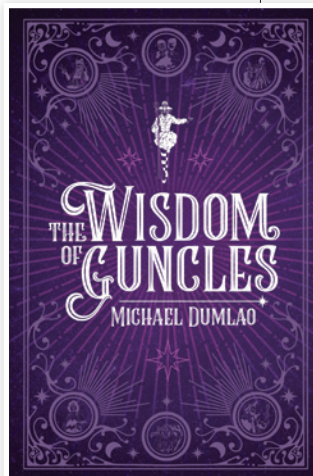
It was while singing together in the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C., that author Michael Dumlao and artist **Kyle Marcus Bryant, B.F.A. '18**, struck up a friendship—both personal and professional. Dumlao, who had just penned a book of queer insights, was searching for an illustrator and had seen Bryant posting his work on social media. Though Bryant had never illustrated a published book before, his style was exactly what Dumlao was looking for.

"I think it was also important to him to work with a queer artist of color," Bryant says, "as the book tells the true stories of a diverse group of LGBTQ+ people."

"The Wisdom of Guncles" shares 10 journeys from a collection of gay uncles ("guncles") and other queer guides, told through varying archetypes—the Nerd, the Skeptic, the Elder, among others. With input from Dumlao, Bryant illustrated each of the narrators at the start of the chapter. The Alchemist, for instance, tells the story of a queer, non-binary drag artist from Paraguay struggling with their immigrant parents' expectations. Eventually, they create the safe space they never had and give their niece the confidence to come out. Bryant illustrates them sitting assuredly in a salon chair, robe overflowing, with a fading transmutation circle in the background.

Bryant says that, while he doesn't have a guncle nor is he a guncle himself, the stories in the book were so universal—"triumph after tragedy, risk and reward, selflessness and sacrifice and duty to your family"—that he was able to relate to something in each chapter.

"I actually cried like a baby while I read it," he says.



**The Wisdom of Guncles**  
by Michael Dumlao,  
illustrated by Kyle Marcus Bryant

**\$14.99**  
[thewisdomofguncles.com](http://thewisdomofguncles.com)



## DO HARD THINGS

There's no pressure like the pressure we put on ourselves, and **Kerry Molina, M.A. '96**, knows that all too well. As a teenager, Molina (née Christiano) had prepared all summer for her upcoming live dance performance during the Miss New York State pageant. She was the youngest contestant, from a very small town, but she'd secured a spot in the top 10.

Once she was on stage, though, as she began to make her way through the routine, the lights and the eyes of the audience began to throw her off her game. Suddenly, she forgot the steps. But Molina persevered, making her way through the performance despite the falter, and eventually was named fourth runner-up.

Years later, she retold the story in a personal essay class in college and knew she wanted to turn it into a children's book. In 2018, she penned "Kaci Keeps Going," about a young dancer named Kaci (K.C., for Kerry Christiano) who works hard not to let her nerves get the better of her during a solo dance performance.

Molina, whose Yellow Brick Road Studio in Gainesville, Virginia, offers art classes for adults and children, says the book champions the power of positive thinking.

"The messages of perseverance, hard work and a growth mindset are so important to impart to kids," she says.



### **Kaci Keeps Going**

by Kerry Molina

**\$12.95**

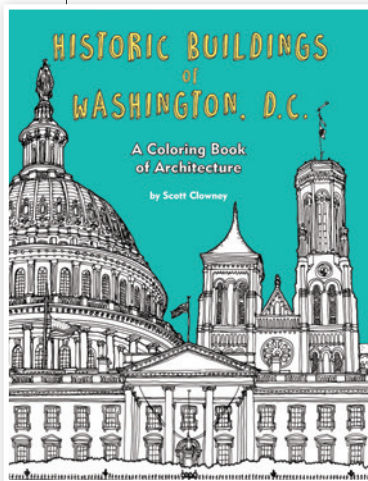
[kerrymolina.com/my-book](http://kerrymolina.com/my-book)

### **Historic Buildings of Washington, D.C.: A Coloring Book of Architecture**

by Scott Clowney

**\$8.50-14.95**

[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)



## FILL IN THE BLANKS

Browse the website of artist **Scott Clowney, M.A. '11**, and you'll see a somewhat disparate collection of his work: illustrations titled "Skulls" and "Death in the Evening" mix with line drawings of beautiful buildings, from Hampshire House in Boston to Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C. But a person contains multitudes, and, as an artist, he goes where the inspiration—or the lack of it—leads him.

"After the coloring book series, I struggled to draw—even doodle," Clowney says. "This 'artist's block' had a negative impact on my mental health and well-being, and I slipped into a period of sustained, self-sabotaging doubt. One day I just decided to tap into all that uneasiness. I

sifted through my archives and began creating new work around themes of light and dark, but mostly darkness." Clowney says he's more productive these days than he ever has been, but architecture is his true love. Currently the director of exhibitions and public programs at the District Architecture Center, Clowney says

he's long had a passion for striking spaces that shape a city skyline. In 2017, he teamed up with the National Building Museum to create "Historic Buildings of Washington, D.C.: A Coloring Book of Architecture," celebrating the form of the White House, Union Station and other architectural landmarks.

"My hope was [those who buy the coloring books] would be enticed by the challenge or proposition to stay within the lines or break free from the extreme constraints, whatever their fancy," Clowney says.

He's added three more books to the collection in the years since (including one set to release in 2023, featuring San Francisco), each hand-drawn building accompanied by a paragraph on the history of the structure, inviting the viewer to add her stamp with colored pencils, markers or pens—and, of course, her own unique viewpoint.

## CARBO-LOADING

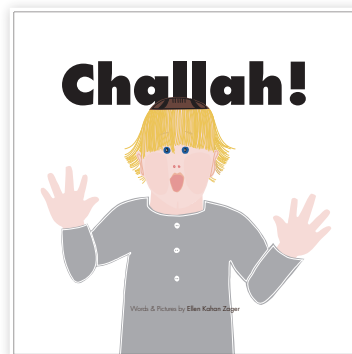
Kids say the darndest things. For Ellen Kahan Zager's grandson, the word was "challah." It was his first word, and until he knew what other carbohydrates were called, he described each of them

indiscriminately as challah, the traditional Jewish braided bread.

The hilarious mix up prompted **Zager, B.A. '77**, an art director by trade, to write "Challah!," about a little boy named Elior who counts the days to Shabbat, when he can indulge in challah once again. Along the way, he encounters things that are not, in fact, challah—pancakes, a chocolate cake, a croissant—until finally his beloved challah appears.

This wasn't Zager's first book—she co-wrote and illustrated "And There Was Evening, And There Was Morning," which tells the story of how God created the world—but it was the first she wrote for her grandson.

"[Challah is] still his favorite food," she told the "Baltimore Jewish Times" last year.



### **Challah!**

by Ellen Kahan Zager

**\$16.99**

[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)



# CLOSING AMERICA'S HOMEOWNERSHIP GAP







STORY // SARAH C.P. WILLIAMS

## BOOSTING HOMEOWNERSHIP AMONG BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA BEGINS WITH OWNING UP TO A HISTORY OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE REAL ESTATE AND MORTGAGE INDUSTRIES, SAY GW RESEARCHERS STUDYING THE HOMEOWNERSHIP GAP.

### IT HAS FUELED THE AMERICAN DREAM,

inspired settlers to conquer new lands and motivated generations of young people to save a bit of each paycheck: the desire to own one's own home. In recent years, homeownership rates have increased by record amounts, even as home prices surge faster than inflation. But not everyone is riding this wave.

The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that for nearly three-quarters of non-Hispanic white households in this country, homeownership is a reality. For Black Americans, however, it remains a dream for the majority; only 43 percent of Black households live in a home they own. This homeownership gap—a 30 percentage point difference between non-Hispanic white and Black homeownership rates—is as large as it has been in 120 years. It is also intrinsically linked to the growing wealth gap between Black and white Americans, says Vanessa Perry, a professor at the GW School of Business. White households have a median net worth at least 10 times that of Black households, according to a report she co-authored in 2020 for the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB).

“The wealth gap is really the homeownership gap,” she says. “We’re seeing young Black people who graduate from college and are able to get good jobs but are still falling behind their similarly situated white counterparts because their parents and grandparents weren’t homeowners and didn’t accumulate the same kind of

**75%**  
of non-  
Hispanic white  
households that  
are homeowners

**43%**  
of Black  
households that  
are homeowners

wealth.”

It’s a Catch-22, of course. Those with the benefits of intergenerational wealth have the easiest path to becoming homeowners, which leads to more wealth. Perry wants to break that cycle—or at least give Black people a chance at joining it.

For decades, policymakers blamed the homeownership gap on other disparities—from education to employment. But improvements in these areas over the course of the 20th century barely moved the needle. Now, says Perry, it’s time for the country to face up to the much deeper roots of the gap: years of discrimination and exclusionary policies in the mortgage, housing finance, insurance and real estate industries that are still reverberating today.

“The solutions to the homeownership gap that have been tried so far haven’t worked because they haven’t addressed the underlying problems; they’ve skirted around them,” says Perry. “I hate to talk about reparations because people think it’s such a dirty word and shut down when they hear it, but at this point we need approaches that are directly enabling first-generation Black homeowners.”

Perry, who previously worked for the mortgage giant Freddie Mac, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, now studies the homeownership



gap. She and other researchers at GW use economic modeling, consumer research and public policy collaborations to probe the underlying causes of the gap, devise potential solutions to narrow it and ask why—or whether—homeownership matters in the first place.

“I think academics have the freedom to ask bigger, bolder questions about the homeownership gap than a lot of economists working for agencies and banks,” says Janneke Ratcliffe, vice present of the Housing Finance Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where Perry is a visiting fellow. “Engaged scholars like [Perry] are in a position to really push the envelope for all of us on how we tackle these issues.”

### CUMULATIVE DISADVANTAGE

President Franklin Roosevelt called real estate “about the safest investment in the world” and, in the midst of the Great Depression, established the Federal Housing Administration to revive mortgage lending—at least for white Americans. Mortgages remained still largely unobtainable for Black Americans, in part due to how lenders and agencies interpreted a set of maps that “redlined” Black neighborhoods across the country, categorizing them as risky investments.

Since then, numerous policies and initiatives have aimed to boost Black homeownership rates; most notably, the Fair Housing Act, signed into law in 1968, prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of housing.

Yet, in the NAREB-commissioned 2020 State of Housing in Black America report, Perry and her co-authors documented just how far the United States still is from meeting the goals of equity outlined in the Fair Housing Act. Black homeowners pay higher interest rates and higher insurance rates than white homeowners; their houses have lower values and appreciate more slowly. In an Urban Institute article published earlier this year, Perry and her colleagues calculated that Black mortgage applicants are more likely to be denied than white applicants—even Black applicants with incomes more than 150 percent of the area median income (AMI) have a higher denial rate than white applicants with incomes less than 80 percent of the AMI.

The denials aren’t generally fueled by overt discrimination but rather by engrained practices in the mortgage industry that make it hard for Black Americans—with less intergenerational wealth, poorer credit scores and a lower debt-to-income ratio—to qualify. While only 18 percent of

non-Hispanic white households have more than \$40,000 in student loans, for instance, a third of Black households carry that much student loan debt.

“The way we measure risk does nothing but pass on historical discrimination and racism,” says Perry. “And so, to the extent we keep measuring risk in the same way, we’ll always be in a situation where Black and Hispanic home buyers have to pay more for mortgage loans.”

Even when humans are removed from the process—as mortgage companies increasingly turn to artificial intelligence-based tools to gauge credit risk—this kind of engrained historical discrimination cannot be easily removed from the equation, Perry says. New models of credit risk proposed by some researchers to take the weight off traditional measures of wealth have included a wide variety of data, from utility and rent payments to social media activity, GPS data, club membership and even school grades.

“But even these factors can be unknowingly correlated with race or with neighborhood,” says Perry. “So these new tools have to be really deeply looked at from a fairness perspective.”

### A LARGER SET OF PROBLEMS

When Black Americans do buy a home, they still face other barriers that can prevent them from accumulating wealth over time. For one, homeowners’ insurance tends to be harder to obtain and more expensive. In a *Journal of Urban Affairs* article, Gregory Squires, a GW professor of sociology and public policy and public administration who has long studied fair housing policies, concluded that racial profiling by the property insurance industry contributes to diminished opportunities for racial minorities. Even after controlling for other demographic factors, race is significantly associated with the availability and cost of insurance policies, he says.

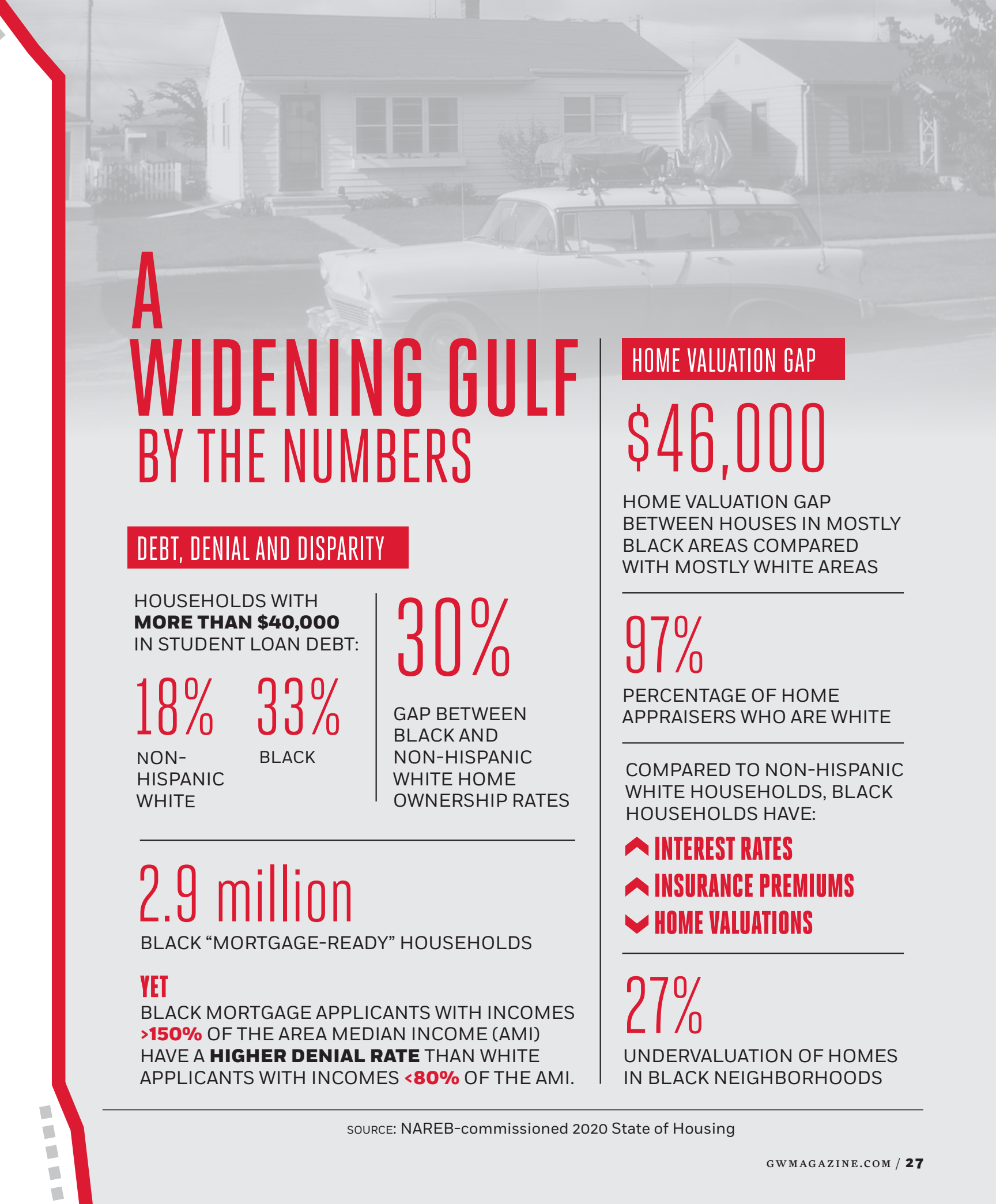
Another problem revolves around appraisals. Home values in predominantly Black neighborhoods have historically been—and remain today—lower than those in predominantly white neighborhoods. It’s a cycle that is hard to break out of, since home appraisers rely on “comps,” or recently sold comparable properties, to set values. When one home receives a low appraisal, it then becomes a benchmark for the appraisal of nearby houses.

“When a property comes back with a very low appraisal, it suppresses the property value not just for the individual family but for the entire neighborhood,” says Squires, who has worked with HUD’s Office for

**“I HATE TO TALK ABOUT REPARATIONS BECAUSE PEOPLE THINK IT’S SUCH A DIRTY WORD AND SHUT DOWN WHEN THEY HEAR IT, BUT AT THIS POINT WE NEED APPROACHES THAT ARE DIRECTLY ENABLING FIRST-GENERATION BLACK HOMEOWNERS.”**

**VANESSA PERRY**





# A WIDENING GULF BY THE NUMBERS

## DEBT, DENIAL AND DISPARITY

HOUSEHOLDS WITH  
**MORE THAN \$40,000**  
IN STUDENT LOAN DEBT:

18%

NON-  
HISPANIC  
WHITE

33%

BLACK

30%

GAP BETWEEN  
BLACK AND  
NON-HISPANIC  
WHITE HOME  
OWNERSHIP RATES

2.9 million

BLACK "MORTGAGE-READY" HOUSEHOLDS

**YET**

BLACK MORTGAGE APPLICANTS WITH INCOMES  
**>150%** OF THE AREA MEDIAN INCOME (AMI)  
HAVE A **HIGHER DENIAL RATE** THAN WHITE  
APPLICANTS WITH INCOMES **<80%** OF THE AMI.

## HOME VALUATION GAP

\$46,000

HOME VALUATION GAP  
BETWEEN HOUSES IN MOSTLY  
BLACK AREAS COMPARED  
WITH MOSTLY WHITE AREAS

97%

PERCENTAGE OF HOME  
APPRAISERS WHO ARE WHITE

COMPARED TO NON-HISPANIC  
WHITE HOUSEHOLDS, BLACK  
HOUSEHOLDS HAVE:

- ▲ **INTEREST RATES**
- ▲ **INSURANCE PREMIUMS**
- ▼ **HOME VALUATIONS**

27%

UNDERVALUATION OF HOMES  
IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS

SOURCE: NAREB-commissioned 2020 State of Housing





**VANESSA PERRY**

Professor of marketing,  
strategic management and  
public policy

**“Homeownership is connected to the ability for people to build equity, but there are also all these other benefits that can accrue almost immediately with increased homeownership rates. You see improved public education and other public services. There’s more political participation.”**

**“Our research would indicate that without a concerted effort, the homeownership gap is going to grow. If we want to turn things around, we really have to stay deeply engaged.”**



**JANNEKE RATCLIFFE**

Vice President, Housing  
Finance Policy Center at  
the Urban Institute

**“Stable, affordable housing in healthy communities can reduce stress and increase access to fresh produce, parks, jobs, safe streets and other amenities that help people stay healthy.”**



**GREGORY SQUIRES**

Professor of sociology and  
public policy and public  
administration

Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “It means the effects of yesterday’s and today’s discrimination keep persisting into the future.”

Appraisal bias—the undervaluation of homes owned by Black families or situated in predominantly Black neighborhoods—has received national attention in recent months. In March, the White House announced a plan to address home appraisal inequities. Squires is currently collaborating with the city of Philadelphia on a report about what local municipalities can do to solve appraisal bias.

Last year, the real estate brokerage Redfin crunched the numbers on 7.3 million home sales to conclude that homes in mostly Black areas are valued at about \$46,000 less than comparable homes in mostly white areas. In Philadelphia, there is a 27 percent undervaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods, according to a paper Squires published last summer in the journal *Poverty & Race*. One driving factor? The vast majority of all home appraisers—97 percent, according to one White House report—are white. Increasing diversity in the appraisal, real estate and mortgage industries, Squires says, could help lessen appraisal bias.

## **NO SILVER BULLET**

Diversity in the housing industry, though, is just a piece of the puzzle. “Wall Street investors, huge lending institutions, regulators, economists, public policy experts and countless housing advocacy groups have been working on this problem for many years,” says Perry. “No one has found a silver bullet.”

Researchers like Perry and Squires work collaboratively with all those other players to help come up with feasible solutions that might close the housing gap. Both local and federal programs and laws, they say, can make a difference. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled on the legality of disparate impact claims under the Fair Housing Act, determining discrimination doesn’t have to be intentional to be illegal.

“Sometimes there can be violation of civil rights laws even when there’s not a proven intent to discriminate,” says Squires. “So if a housing provider, for example, refuses to make loans on homes that are valued below a certain amount, that might be a violation of the law because it disproportionately impacts people of color.”

In 2021, the White House issued a series of memorandums and executive orders around the concept of affirmatively furthering fair housing—underscoring the role of the Fair Housing Act in not only refraining from discrimination but



also taking actions that “undo historic patterns of segregation and other types of discrimination and that afford access to long-denied opportunities.”

Those legal actions, Squires says, were a turning point for pushing the housing industry to root out even unintentional discrimination. “It means it is a lot easier for lawyers and advocacy groups to file complaints against housing providers that are discriminating either in overt or very subtle ways,” he says.


And with those legal frameworks in place, Perry believes that now is the time to turn to special purpose credit programs, established under the Fair Housing Act, which aim to explicitly help groups of disadvantaged people obtain mortgages through financial assistance. Perry and her collaborators at the Urban Institute have argued that lenders can use these programs to help reduce the racial homeownership gap. They could, for instance, offer favorable mortgage terms, down payment assistance, streamlined refinances, flexible underwriting or income restriction exemptions to Black home loan applicants or applicants who want to buy in predominantly Black neighborhoods—two ways of defining the disadvantaged group.

In 2019, for instance, Vice President Kamala Harris—then a senator and presidential candidate—proposed a grant program, to be administered under HUD, which would provide money toward a down payment or closing costs for low-income homebuyers who live in historically redlined neighborhoods. More recently, Chase Bank announced \$5,000 loans for qualified homebuyers in Black neighborhoods.

Perry is also a fan of average-risk pricing instead of risk-based pricing—the idea that every person who qualifies for a mortgage receives the same terms. This could help lower mortgage payments for Black families overburdened with student loans, for instance.

Critics of these kinds of approaches, Perry says, worry that easing the barriers to homeownership could lead to a dramatic rise in foreclosures and a housing crash. She argues, however, that there are millions of Black households that are low risk for defaulting on a mortgage yet don’t meet today’s standards. In the 2020 “State of Housing in Black America” report, she and her colleagues cited a Freddie Mac study that estimated there are currently 2.9 million Black “mortgage-ready” households in the country—with heads of household under 45 years of age who have the income and credit history to qualify for a mortgage.

“A lot of experts believe that the credit standards that have been in place have been far stricter than they need to be,” she says.



**"NOBODY WANTS  
TO RECREATE A  
SUBPRIME CRISIS,  
BUT THE MARKET  
HAS MANY MORE  
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HAPPENING."**

**VANESSA PERRY**

“Nobody wants to recreate a subprime crisis, but the market has many more checks and balances now to keep that from happening.”

## **BENEFITS FOR ALL**


Other economists argue that boosting minority homeownership alone cannot close the wealth gap; there are too many other factors correlated with long-term savings. Perry, however, notes there are research-backed benefits to homeownership—even aside from its potential for financial gain. Homeownership, she points out, affects the whole economy and benefits entire communities.

“Homeownership is connected to the ability for people to build equity, but there are also all these other benefits that can accrue almost immediately with increased homeownership rates,” says Perry. “You see improved public education and other public services. There’s more political participation.”

Stable housing can also bring health benefits. In 2021, Squires and Antwan Jones, an associate professor of sociology at GW, reported in the medical journal *Circulation* that cities with inclusionary zoning policies—which incentivize developers to set aside a share of new housing units for low- to moderate-income families—have lower rates of heart disease and other cardiovascular illness. “Stable, affordable housing in healthy communities can reduce stress and increase access to fresh produce, parks, jobs, safe streets and other amenities that help people stay healthy,” said Squires when the paper was published.

Today, housing prices continue to boom, rising nearly 20 percent between February 2021 and February 2022. Those rising prices help line the pockets of homeowners with additional equity while pricing non-homeowners out of the home-buying market—again, a phenomenon that only exacerbates the racial homeownership gap.

“Our research would indicate that without a concerted effort, the homeownership gap is going to grow,” says Ratcliffe, speaking about data analyzed by the Urban Institute. “If we want to turn things around, we really have to stay deeply engaged.”

Perry is as engaged as ever, advocating for the lending and real estate industries to address the issues head on. “For a long time, people would just not address that historical discrimination and redlining were still underlying causes of the homeownership gap,” she says. Now, Perry says, lenders and policymakers are more aware of the continued and compounded role of this history, and the time is ripe for solutions. 



# Alumni Profiles

WHETHER THEY ARE  
ON THE FOREFRONT OF  
CANCER RESEARCH,  
ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S  
RIGHTS OR MAKING SOCCER  
ACCESSIBLE TO CHILDREN,  
OUR ALUMNI ARE  
CHANGING THE WORLD.

HERE ARE SOME  
OF THEIR STORIES.





# ON THE FRONTLINES: ALUMNA WAGES WAR AGAINST CANCER

*AS CEO OF THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY, [KAREN E. KNUDSEN, B.A. '90](#) HAS CROSSED THE COUNTRY TO JOIN SCIENTISTS, LAWMAKERS AND CAREGIVERS IN A FIGHT AGAINST AMERICA'S SECOND-LEADING KILLER.*

by JOHN DICONSIGLIO



Since becoming chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society (ACS) just over a year ago, Karen E. Knudsen, B.S. '90, has spent more time on the road than in her Philadelphia home. Her color-coded calendar is marked for each stop on her itinerary as she races to stay one step ahead of the nation's second-leading killer.

One of the most influential voices in cancer care, ACS is a nonprofit research, advocacy and patient support organization with a presence in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

In her first year as CEO, Knudsen has traveled to cancer centers across the country. At the ACS science offices in Atlanta, she monitors a nationwide

network of federally funded labs. Through its lobbying arm in Washington, D.C., she advises lawmakers on the Hill and in the White House.

It's a wearying schedule, one that often keeps her away from her husband and her two college-aged sons. But each day, Knudsen finds inspiration by speaking with people whose lives have been touched by cancer—from survivors who share recovery tales to patients nearing the end of their fight.

"Some have stories of real hope and others of tragedy," Knudsen says. "Our goal is turn the tide of cancer so we are writing more of the hope stories than the tragic ones."

Knudsen came to ACS at a crossroads in the cancer landscape. One in two men and one in three women in the United States will have a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime—with 2 million new diagnoses and 600,000 deaths each year.

In some ways, however, the battle has been characterized by a string of victories. Mortality rates have declined by more than 30 percent since the 1990s, led by research breakthroughs, enhanced screening and detection, and rising commitments to funding and patient support services.

But Knudsen took office in the midst of



enormous challenges, including a COVID-19 pandemic that caused more than 9 million Americans to delay cancer screening. Each new breakthrough has also made the science of cancer care more complex, she says, and sporadic access has limited the reach of lifesaving technology.

“Ultimately, the way we will solve cancer is through research and advocacy; research gives us the breakthroughs, and advocacy gives us the access,” she says. “The two always go hand-in-hand. Discovery alone is not enough.”

Within the cancer community, Knudsen may be the perfect person on center stage at the perfect time.

She is the first woman CEO in ACS’s 109-year-old history, and the first basic scientist and director of a cancer center to lead the organization. Before coming to ACS, Knudsen was the executive vice president of oncology services and enterprise director for the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson Health in Philadelphia—one of 71 National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated centers recognized for their impact on cancer outcomes. As a scientist, her work on advanced prostate cancer has resulted in new treatments for one of the deadliest forms of the disease.

“I think it helps me as a leader in this organization that I have had an entire career focused around understanding the link between research and human health,” she says. “I can translate knowledge from the laboratory into the clinic.”

Knudsen credits GW with nurturing her passion for research. As a biology major, she planned to attend medical school until professors and advisers suggested she apply for a position at NCI, part of the National Institutes of Health. Knudsen instantly fell in love with the lab. “It made me think differently about where I saw my life in science,” she says.

GW was also instrumental in developing the leadership skills she has employed throughout her career. As an officer with her sorority, she frequently organized alumni events that brought successful professional women to campus. And going to school in the heart of the nation’s capital introduced her to the political world.

“In so many ways, being at GW was a prelude to everything I do now,” she says. “I loved the biology program and the opportunity it gave me to work closely with researchers. I met alumni who were highly skilled in the business world. And living in the city prepared me for what it’s like to lead a nonprofit that has political advocacy as one of its mission pillars.”

In her numerous roles with ACS—she is CEO of its advocacy affiliate, the American

Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, and sits on the boards of NCI and 12 of its designated centers—Knudsen finds herself telling two different stories about the future of cancer.

She prefers to emphasize the positive developments. Earlier this year, for example, she attended a White House ceremony in which President Biden announced a renewed commitment to the Cancer Moonshot, a marshaling of federal government resources to speed research progress and reduce death rates by 50 percent over the next 25 years. ACS, the largest funder of cancer research outside the U.S. government, has contributed \$3.1 billion since 1991.

But Knudsen is quick to note that each cancer discovery has also led to new questions and challenges. Researchers have now identified 200 different kinds of cancers—including five forms of breast cancers—all biologically and clinically distinct and requiring their own unique therapies.

“Ironically, the smarter we get, the more cancers we have,” she says. “We’re making strong progress against many of those 200—and there are others that are just not well understood right now.”

Meanwhile, Knudsen says there’s evidence that the delayed screenings linked to COVID-19 are already resulting in increased late-stage diagnoses. “That’s frightening because certainly the best chance of survival is with early detection,” she says. She has also targeted access barriers from addressing racial and economic disparities to overcoming logistical hurdles. ACS offers day-to-day patient support services such as rides to treatment and lodging near cancer centers.

And she has campaigned to improve health literacy so patients can better understand their treatment and more proactively coordinate their care regimen. “We are actively leaning into strategies to empower patients and families to be their own best health advocate,” she says.

Throughout her whirlwind first year at ACS—and the miles she’s logged visiting scientists, politicians and patients—Knudsen maintains she has seen more reasons for hope than despair. “With every lab I walk into, every cancer center I visit, every person I meet with, I can firmly say I see us improving lives every day,” she says.

Much of her optimism, she said, comes from watching the next generation of young cancer professionals—many of whom remind her of her research days at GW. “They’re dedicated to using their knowledge, their creativity, their innovative strategies to get to the point where we need to be,” she said, “where we end cancer as we know it.”

GO, '09  
B.A.  
SIMON LANDAU



LANDAU: WILLIAM ATKINS / OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF SIMON LANDAU





# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

*ALUMNUS **SIMON LANDAU'S** OPEN GOAL PROJECT AIMS TO GIVE EVERYONE AN EQUAL SHOT AT THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SPORT—AND BEYOND.*

by CAITE HAMILTON

With an estimated 250 million players across 200 countries, soccer is the most-played sport in the world. And it's the world's most accessible, able to be played at all ages and skill levels and in all kinds of environments, from a dusty field to a parking lot. All you need is a ball. But when it comes to travel soccer—a specific segment of the sport aimed at school-age kids seeking a higher-level experience—Simon Landau, B.A. '09, says the reality is far less democratic. Through his nonprofit, Open Goal Project, he's opening up the world of travel soccer to everyone.

Landau grew up in Princeton, New Jersey,

an affluent town known for its Ivy League university and not much else. His dad ran Landau, a century-old family business that specialized in Icelandic wool garments, while his mom, a university professor, traveled to teach at various schools across the country. With dual incomes and steady jobs, Landau's parents could afford babysitters and family vacations and to enroll both of their boys in travel soccer. The older (and, by Landau's admission, more talented) of the two, Matt, went first, and four years later, when Landau was old enough, he tried out too.

"Soccer was always a kind of integral piece of my life, not just from a sports aspect

but much more from a connecting-with-people aspect," Landau says. "It opened the door to a bunch of different friendships and people who I don't think I would've interacted with otherwise." Even though Princeton is a small town, there was a sizable Guatemalan population. Many of Landau's close childhood friends were children of immigrants or immigrants themselves.

"I think those relationships made it clear to me that being a white kid with two parents who had the means to access a college education meant I didn't face barriers like those friends of mine faced—language-wise, culture-wise and income-wise," he says.

Landau played with Princeton Soccer Association for seven years, training with coaches who worked at the nearby university and with motivation from teammates he encountered along the way, like Eddie Gaven and Michael Bradley, who, years later, would go pro.

For the uninitiated, travel soccer (traditionally) works like this: Recognizing that your child has talent and interest beyond their rec league or school team, you have them try out (you can't just sign up) for the local travel soccer team. Once they're on the team, they travel regionally to compete against other players and, possibly, turn the heads of college recruiters.

Travel soccer offers what rec league and school teams often cannot: experienced coaches with specialized licenses; teammates with equitable levels of talent and ambition; opportunities to be scouted by D1 schools and earn scholarships; the chance to travel and meet fellow competitive players. But all of those perks come at a cost—one that prices many families out.

The greatest barrier to entry is fees. Landau notes that there are monetary demands at every level, from tryouts to uniforms to travel expenses. But for low-income, first-generation or immigrant families, there are even more considerations, like language and technological barriers, which hinder filling out registration forms, as well as difficulty accessing reliable transportation.

"Far too often in soccer, like anything else in life," Landau says, "society is structured so that the outcomes are going to be dictated by the resources that are at the disposal of those young people." Young people, he notes, like Ariana Reyes.

Landau met Reyes after he'd graduated from GW. He was volunteer coaching and playing pickup games at a field near his house in D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood when he noticed a few kids juggling in the corner. The children of his fellow players, the kids were no more than 10 or 11 years old but were "far more talented than I was



when I was their age.” Reyes in particular, he noticed, was “juggling in the corner of the field, doing all of this stuff with the ball that just was not normal for a 9-year-old.”

“But [these kids] clearly didn’t have the structure and outlet—like travel soccer—that I knew they were talented enough for,” Landau says. “These were kids who certainly deserved that opportunity, but for a variety of reasons, didn’t have the accessibility.”

Reyes remembers spending weekends at the field while her dad played soccer with Landau. “We would always either watch them play or if there were other kids around—it didn’t matter the age—we would hop in and create our own little scrimmages with goals that were either shoes or gates or literally anything,” Reyes says.

She loved the game of soccer (in that pure shoes-as-goals kind of way), having played it practically since she could stand, and she was obviously talented, but when Landau started asking around to see where Reyes played, he came up short. She was participating in an after-school soccer program called DC Scores, for which Landau was volunteering at a different location, but she’d never tried out for travel soccer. She didn’t even know what it was.

“I started searching for tryout opportunities for her and started to see the different barriers that young kids or families like hers faced—kids who had all the talent

in the world but obstacles that were standing between her and accessing this travel soccer experience that I had—and the way the overall system of youth soccer had been set up that inherently excludes kids like her—kids from immigrant families, Black and brown kids who don’t have the resources,” Landau says. The seeds of the Open Goal Project had been planted.

At first Landau was fundraising simply for Reyes’ try-out fees, but soon he was introduced to former Major League Soccer player and D.C. native Amir Lowery, who had been doing similar work in the area, and together, they scaled their efforts to support a dozen more low-income student athletes on travel teams.

“Over time, we saw how expensive and how inaccessible the system is to kids from this population,” Landau says. Instead of trying to place the kids on other travel soccer teams and sponsor them—trying to fit them into a system that was continually shutting them out—they rebuilt the system.

Launched in 2015, Open Goal Project provides the umbrella for a multi-tentacled organization. The core program, District of Columbia Football Club (DCFC), comprises four free-to-play travel soccer teams (three boys’ teams and one girls’ team) for kids ages 7 to 17, each with three practices a week and games on the weekends, with bilingual coaches and sessions held within walking

distance of public transportation. This fall, DCFC has added a fifth group for girls under the age of 10. The nonprofit also offers a free summer camp and a fitness and nutrition program.

“When we started doing this, Amir and I used the term ‘peeling back the onion,’ because until we were really into it, we were like, ‘Oh, this is an issue. This is an issue,’” Landau says. They’ve adjusted (and re-adjusted) their program based on the needs of the kids they serve—with plenty of input from the players themselves, including Reyes.

“It was really more like trial and error,” Reyes says. “They were always so upfront with me and asked me what I thought worked or what didn’t work and how I felt about things.” The founders’ willingness to listen to the players has not only helped expand the program but also make it more successful. In addition to its founders and a support staff, Open Goal employs what Landau calls several “youth staffers”—college-age kids who look and sound like a lot of the younger program participants—who he says the kids wouldn’t have access to on a larger scale in a traditional travel soccer setting but are crucial for feeling inspired and connected.

Daniel Callejas, whose two boys, Ramsés, 15, and Mateo, 13, have participated in both traditional travel teams and DCFC’s program, says Open Goal has been invaluable. For Ramsés, who wanted to explore which position best suited him, DCFC provided the space to explore and eventually turned him into a strong left back.

Mateo is “100 percent devoted to soccer,” his dad says. The teen plays for a traditional D.C. travel team but wanted extra time on the field and more training, which his dad can’t afford. He tried out for DCFC, made the cut and utilized its regular practice sessions and summer camps. He participates in Open Goal Project’s enrichment programs, summer camps, and open sessions for extra practice.

“In travel you have to have some degree of talent prior to being accepted to the club,” Callejas says. “Having money isn’t always enough, although it becomes a major factor later. Club fees, uniforms, trips, private sessions, summer sessions, sporting gear/equipment are all yearly expenses that most cannot afford. These are all things that families in DCFC do not have to worry or stress about.”

It’s all part of Open Goal’s “holistic approach.” Unlike traditional travel soccer teams, where families can (and will) pay for extra training and nutrition consults or where the teams may lead a one-off workshop and bring in a guest speaker, DCFC and Open Goal regularly provides those services in-house—and then some—as part of its off-



the-field programming.

While peeling back the onion, Landau and Lowery realized there were other ways the kids they served needed to play catchup beyond entry fees and transportation. There were real-life skills that, without learning, would set them back even further.

They launched a fitness program, for example, that focuses on exercise that doesn't require traditional gym equipment. They brought in a partner organization to host sessions on goal setting, making budgets and time management. With 80 percent of their participants coming from families where they would be the first generation to attend college, the founders created a program focused on financial aid and college access. And they regularly invite program graduates who are now attending college (like Reyes) to hold sessions for the kids too.

"We have a number of families where the parents ... maybe they had an eighth-grade education or high school education, and the kids have not had that perspective brought to them," Landau says. "We try to weave in elements that help them understand the value of accessing higher education."

Of course, it isn't just the programming that helps accomplish these goals. It's the connection Landau and Lowery—and the 10-plus-person team at Open Goal—establishes with its players.

"It was always Simon with me, working on SATs and working on sending and responding to college coaches' emails," Reyes says. "Simon and the organization were also the only ones to help me apply to colleges."

In 2020, Reyes was accepted to James Madison University, where she's studying hospitality. She starts at left forward on the D1 school's soccer team, an accomplishment for which she credits Open Goal.

"If I were to think back on when we first started, I remember being really shy and quiet at my first ever tryout with a travel team," Reyes says. "[Simon] was always comforting me and helping me understand that what I was doing then was all going to pay off in the future. It would allow me to connect with a certain class of people who I never connected with back at school or in my area as a low-income Hispanic girl."

Landau sees Reyes' admission into JMU as proof that the travel soccer program he and Lowery (and Reyes herself) have built can be successful, but he maintains that he's never seen the work he's doing as strictly a "soccer issue."

"This is a social and racial equity issue that is manifested in the form of youth soccer in this country," he says. "It's something we're trying to address at every point." In other words, Open Goal just wants to even the playing field.

# DESIGNED FOR IMPACT

## ALUMNA LIZZIE GROVER RAD HAS LAUNCHED A FASHION LINE THAT AIMS TO START CONVERSATIONS.



LIZZIE GROVER RAD, B.F.A. '14

BEATRICE FISCHEL-BOCK, B.F.A. '14

Lizzie Grover Rad, B.F.A. '14, isn't afraid of challenges or controversy. After co-founding two highly successful interior design companies, ZOOM (started as a GW student) and Hutch (featured on Shark Tank and estimated value of \$50 million), Grover Rad pivoted to fashion during the pandemic.

Her eponymous first collection, launched to fanfare earlier this year, focused on reproductive rights, incorporating a striking range of designs from cartoons to images that draw on the Salem Witch Trials and the Scarlet Letter. A wearable history of women's struggles to gain control of their own bodies.

Grover Rad's new venture includes her longtime friend and business partner, Beatrice Fischel-Bock, B.F.A. '13. The two met at GW and started ZOOM and Hutch together.

GW Magazine talks to them about how they got their start, what inspires them and what's next.

### How did you two meet?

We met in our very first interior design class. We are both very shy but were attracted by each other's outfits and struck up a conversation. It's strange how in life you just gravitate and connect with some people and from the get-go we were like soul sisters. Lizzie had transferred to GW, and Bea had last minute decided to try the interior architecture program. It felt very kismet that we met.

### You started ZOOM while undergrads at GW. How did that come together?

The three of us [with Madeline Fraser, B.F.A. '14] started ZOOM our junior year when we realized how many of our peers couldn't figure out how to furnish their dorms and apartments. It came easily to us without spending a big budget. We all had full course loads, part-time jobs and did ZOOM on the side. It was a lot of work, but we were having so much fun doing it. We would virtually design for our clients and have all the inventory shipped to our dorm rooms. Then on the weekends we would rent a van and install the design. We were painting furniture, building Ikea furniture, drilling in curtains. We got very good at DIY! By the time we graduated we had brought in a million dollars in gross revenue and knew we were on to something.

### Why did you turn from interior design to fashion? Is there more freedom than there is with interior design?

ZOOM, then Hutch, was almost a decade-long journey. So much of the digital design landscape changed during that time.



When we started people weren't even sure about ordering furniture online. Now it's a no brainer. Our company became a lot more about the tech we were building than creativity. We were no longer doing what lit us up and what started it all in the first place. Fashion is a lot freer. It's more like art. Interior design is about the inhabitant's needs and wants. There's a lot of constrictions.

**Grover Rad's first collection couldn't be more timely with a range of designs that focus on reproductive rights. When did you decide to do that, and why is it important to you?**

Lizzie came up with her fashion brand during the pandemic. Slowing down finally gave her the space to be much more creative. From the get-go she knew social issues would be at the heart of her brand. It's almost impossible to not have what's going on around us influence you. We of course didn't know that Roe v. Wade would be overturned right after we launched, but it was unfortunately not a huge surprise. Contemporary issues that we grapple with are rooted in history and unfolding that on a topic like reproductive rights surfaced a lot of inspiration.

**Why is it important to you to have clothes that are conversation starters?**

Clothes are a form of communication. There's a famous monologue from the Devil Wears Prada in which Meryl Streep talks about Anne Hathaway's sweater and what it says about her. You gather information from what a person is wearing. Art is another way people communicate without speaking. Marrying the two is at the heart of Grover Rad.

**What's next? Will all the collections be thematic?**

Our second collection came out in October and is about Billionaires in Space. Lizzie explores the fact that white rich men are exploring space travel and leaving Earth behind rather than dealing with the dire circumstances at home. Along with historical astronomical drawing and apocalyptic paintings, we imagine a different post-apocalyptic future of a planet ruled by women.

**Also, have to ask, any favorite GW memories?**

We went on some pretty amazing field trips! D.C. has such a wealth of architecture both historic and new. It was really fun to go out and explore the city with our sketchbooks. We also loved our interior architecture professors. They made such an impact and are near and dear to our hearts.

# RAMA CHAKAKI, '99



# FUNDING THE UNDERDOG

## ENGINEER TURNED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR RAMA CHAKAKI IS INVESTING IN COMPANIES THAT MIND THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE OF PROFIT, PEOPLE AND PLANET.

by STEVE NEUMANN

Rama Chakaki, B.S. '90, M.S. '96, has always been a supporter of the underdog. As a young child in Saudi Arabia, she would watch "Telematch," a West German television series that consisted of silly games in which participants in elaborate costumes jumped across water or climbed rocks, either against the clock or as a race.

"I remember always rooting for the team that wasn't winning, and that kind of became a theme in my life," Chakaki says.

Today, Chakaki is COO of aixplain, a company that is "on a mission to make sure AI is accessible to all." She is also a partner in Transform VC—a Silicon Valley venture capital firm investing in companies like aixplain that have a social impact—and co-founder of the VIP.fund, a nonprofit empowering marginalized and conflict-impacted youth.

"You can do great and make money, but you have to always think about who you're leaving behind and how you can integrate them into your business model," Chakaki says.

Chakaki, who was born in Syria but grew up in Saudi Arabia, attended a private girls' school there from 2nd through 12th grade. After she graduated, her father moved the family to the United States, where Chakaki received both her bachelor's degree in computer engineering and her master's in

engineering management from the GW School of Engineering and Applied Science in 1996.

Chakaki's experience at GW helped lay the foundation for her vision of being successful and doing good. Of particular importance to her was research professor Rachelle Heller, who became Chakaki's adviser for graduate school and then a lifelong mentor.

"She always encouraged me to look at the connections between computer science and everything else in the world," Chakaki says. "And she had me work with her on projects that were quite impactful in showing me how technology can really support social good."

After graduation, Chakaki rose through the ranks at several software development and telecommunications companies before becoming COO at Eastnets, a global provider of compliance and payment solutions for the financial industry.

But after two years of working at Eastnets in Dubai—a locale known for its glamorous, luxurious lifestyle—Chakaki realized that most companies were either looking after their bottom line or involved in social impact but not both.

"I walked into the office one day and wanted something different," Chakaki says, "and that's when I started on this journey of finding out what that might look like."

In 2005, Chakaki left the corporate world behind and set up the first social impact incubator in the Middle East, called Baraka Ventures. One of the projects in the portfolio that she's particularly proud of is BarakaBits, a publishing platform telling positive stories from the Middle East.

Bolstered by BarakaBits' success, Chakaki moved to Los Angeles, where she could learn how to continue her success on a larger scale. As she continued to work on BarakaBits, she invested in two other social impact companies—AYA Animations and Mint + Laurel—and founded edSeed, an education crowdfunding platform that supports the higher education of youth impacted by conflict in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

But it was during the COVID-19 pandemic that a former colleague of hers, Hassan Sawaf, started aixplain, one of the companies funded by Transform VC, co-founded by Raed Masri. Chakaki reached out to see if aixplain was the type of venture that could connect her twin passions of technology and social impact.

"Raed was very open to looking at how the two can intersect," Chakaki says, "and how we can not only nurture billionaires that can be mindful about the concerns of others but incorporate environmental and social concerns into their business plan and bottom line."

To Chakaki's delight, this has been a milestone year for Transform VC. In addition to her own company, aixplain, Transform VC has six companies in its portfolio that have now hit the unicorn mark—a startup with a valuation that exceeds \$1 billion—three of which are Middle Eastern. Additionally, two companies—though not unicorns yet—founded by women were part of Transform VC's most recent cohort of funded companies in 2022.

"Transform VC is obviously part of the DNA of Silicon Valley," Chakaki said, "but we feel that we are in a very privileged place—so let's extend that privilege to people that are underdogs or dismissed by others."

Chakaki is thrilled that she has found a way to help companies mind the triple bottom line of profit, people and planet at this stage in her career. At the same time, she is able to nourish her own triple bottom line of social impact, tech investing and—perhaps most important to her—education, through her nonprofit edSeed.

"With an education, these refugees gain financial independence and support themselves and their communities," she says.

When civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, over 9 million Syrians were displaced, among them many university students who had access to free education in Syria but who now found themselves unable to continue in host countries where education is either too expensive or, in some cases, unavailable to Syrians.

One such student featured on edSeed is Walaa Al-Ten from Syria, who arrived at a refugee camp in Jordan in 2014. She is currently enrolled at Lebanese International University (LIU) for an undergraduate degree in biomedical sciences.

Her residency status prevents her from enrolling in public universities there, so the only way for her to get her degree currently is through LIU.

Through aixplain, Chakaki has been able to have a direct involvement in education by bringing in interns from refugee camps who are interested in learning AI. While there, the interns get to work on what is called "human in the loop" projects, where they're actually creating the data that trains the AI algorithms.

"By helping them get a practical application of AI, they have a leg up getting jobs in AI in the future," Chakaki says.

"But then they can also use that knowledge to create AI that serves their community locally, and that helps them navigate the unstructured slums that are refugee camps.

"It would truly be a glory moment for me if one of the refugees I work with today actually becomes one of our mindful billionaires," Chakaki says. ■



**ALUMNI**

# Get to Know GWAA President Will Alexander (if You Don't Already)

**Double alumnus Will Alexander assumed the presidency of the GW Alumni Association last summer.**

The D.C. native who graduated from the School Without Walls made the most of his six years at GW. During his time on campus, Alexander, B.S. '04, M.B.A. '06, was a brother of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., a member of the cheerleading team, a cabinet member of what was then Colonial Inauguration and a Presidential Administrative Fellow.

He hasn't slowed down much. In addition to leading the GWAA, Alexander is an expert on construction, real estate and sustainability, and he is currently the owner of SUSTAINABUILT.

GW Magazine caught up with Alexander to learn about how he envisions his role as GWAA president, his favorite on-campus moments and—in a bonus lightning round—his celebrity crush, dream vacation and more.

## **Why is staying connected to the university important to you?**

I was a Stephen Joel Trachtenberg Scholar, so much of what I enjoyed from my time as a student was made possible by someone investing in the success of young people like me. I had a ball at GW, and I want to ensure that subsequent generations of students have an opportunity to experience all that I did and more. Recognizing those who invested in you can sometimes be taken for granted as a student while you're in the midst of studying for exams, participating in athletics and navigating relationships. But as an alumnus, I am able to reflect on how invaluable that opportunity was for me. I work hard to be that "someone" for today's young people.

## **What do you hope to accomplish as GWAA president?**

I didn't enter this role with any preset agenda. I really want to spend the time talking to fellow alumni, understanding where they are, their needs and concerns, and helping make connections that help build a strong alumni community. I am working with GW's Office of Alumni Relations to create opportunities that bring more alumni into the fold and contribute to the university's mission of educating future generations of scholars.

An example of this is the Judge Leah Brock McCartney mural project. It arose from two students' experience in a



course taught by GW Professor Jordan S. West exploring Black feminist theory. They were struck by the legacy of GW's first Black woman graduate and sought to share their understanding of her life and impact with the broader university community by creating a mural on campus. As alumni, we have an opportunity to support these efforts through volunteerism and fundraising to bring this initiative into fruition. To me, this is what the role is all about. What are the things that our students, faculty and staff are engaged in? What ways can we, as alumni, contribute to the furtherance of such enriching experiences for generations to come?

### What is your favorite only-at-GW moment?

There are so many. The easiest is my Commencement on the Ellipse. Graduating in the heart of the nation's capital is a moment that so few in this world get to experience. There is truly nothing that is comparable. Separately, on a more personal note, I don't think I would have ever embarked on my college cheerleading

career if it were not for GW. That experience opened up my world, traveling around the country and as far away as Germany, teaching and participating in the sport. It gave me a more global perspective.

### What do you like to do when you return to campus?

I make a point to stop in at GW Deli. I've been going there since I was a freshman in high school in '96. I also like to grab a pint at Tonic. Some of my old haunts are gone. Lindy's was a favorite.

### What would someone be surprised to learn about you?

I don't think many who knew me as an undergrad would have predicted that I'd become as much of a homebody as I am these days. When I'm not out for professional or volunteer purposes, I am typically spending time with my two sons, Jameson and Jackson, and my wife, Jennifer, who also graduated from GW. I also like to tinker with old Nissans and enjoy a good bourbon at home. [GW](#)

### LIGHTNING ROUND:

#### Cats or dogs?

Dogs. I don't like a pet to be indifferent toward me.

#### Sweet or salty?

Both. Breakfast sandwich on a French toast bagel is near perfection.

#### Dream vacation

Returning to Germany for an extended stay (one month plus).

#### Morning or night?

Night, the kids are asleep

#### Favorite day of the week.

Saturdays are for trucks!

#### Celebrity crush

Tracee Ellis Ross

#### Favorite band/musician

Wu Tang is forever

#### Coffee or tea?

Tea

#### TV or movies?

Movies

THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC



Alessandro 'Alec' Chierici is supporting scholarships at the GW School of Engineering and Applied Science with a planned gift through his IRA.

A gift in a will, trust, or retirement account can close the financial gap for undergraduate students, reduce student loan debt for young alumni, and help graduate students reach their goals.

**Like Alec, you can open doors to a GW education for the next generation of students.**

To learn more about how you can support scholarships and fellowships in your estate plans, please contact GW's Office of Planned Giving.

(877) 498-7590  
[pgiving1@gwu.edu](mailto:pgiving1@gwu.edu)



*"I left Italy in 1960 with \$20 in my pocket. SEAS accepted me with open arms and provided scholarships and work programs. I am profoundly grateful and want to help a young person achieve his or her professional dream and one day continue the tradition of giving."*

Alessandro Chierici, SEAS BS '65, MS '67



## SCHOLARSHIP MATCH

# GW TO DOUBLE IMPACT WITH LANDMARK DOLLAR-FOR-DOLLAR MATCH

**The Third Century Scholarship Endowment Match: *Unlocking Access to Undergraduate Education* launches with an eight-figure commitment to generations of students. // BY RUTH STEINHARDT**

Joseph Decilos, a junior at GW, had almost “lost his will to fight” for the education he’d worked so hard to achieve. The last few years were tough for his family in Harlingen, a town in south Texas. Like many families, they have been scarred by loss since 2020—loss of resources, of income and, most devastatingly, of life.

“Going into the pandemic, there were a lot of hardships for my family, including the loss of my nephew,” Decilos said.

“Then my brother, his partner and her child moved in with us. And my mother is a teacher. So, there were three or four of us trying to get accustomed to online learning at the same time.”

“This had a big financial impact on our family,” he said. Decilos, who is majoring in journalism and photojournalism in the School of Media and Public Affairs and the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design, began thinking that he would have to take on loans or leave GW.

Then he learned he had received GW’s Margaret D. Rust Memorial Scholarship, an endowed scholarship that has offered financial support to students since 1997.

For Decilos, the news he had earned a scholarship “reignited my spark.”

Nov. 1, at the start of National Scholarship Month, GW announced a major new initiative to dramatically accelerate investments in endowed scholarships to offer critical financial support to undergraduate students.

The Third Century Scholarship Endowment Match: *Unlocking Access to Undergraduate Education* is the most significant fundraising match in GW’s history and will double transformative new gifts to need-based, undergraduate scholarship endowments.

The Match launches with a \$12 million commitment from the university, which will

double support from generous donors to yield a \$24 million investment in need-based endowed scholarships for undergraduate students. The university commitment is funded by a portion of the proceeds from the recent sale of university real estate. Gifts matched by the university will contribute to GW’s endowment and benefit students in perpetuity.

“Scholarships enable our students to realize their full potential, both in and out of the classroom, and endowed funding enables the university to support our students in perpetuity,” President Mark S. Wrighton said. “This undergraduate, need-based scholarship match is a critical piece of our commitment to increasing access and retention to the George Washington University for talented students, regardless of financial means. I am



**Fernando Decilos watches his son Joseph deliver remarks at a GW Celebration of Scholarships and Fellowships event.**

ABBY GREENAWALT

excited by what this effort can achieve for GW students now and for years to come."

Support for GW students has an enormous impact on their families and on their horizons.

Joseph's parents, Estelle and Fernando Decilos, said the news of the scholarship brought relief, elation and enormous pride during a very difficult time.

"We knew this scholarship would smooth the path of his educational journey, help him focus on his studies and minimize financial stress as we build back up from the pandemic," they said.

Endowed scholarships have the power to impact generations of students over time. The Margaret D. Rust Memorial Scholarship, for example, offered critical support to Decilos.

GW has placed special emphasis on raising funds for scholarships and fellowships and encouraging conversation across the university about the need for greater financial support to attract and retain talented students. GW's Open Doors: *The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships* has motivated a 32% increase in donors for scholarships in the past five years compared to the previous five years. GW has increased its financial aid budget by approximately \$2 million per year to support undergraduate students with the greatest need. GW contributes approximately \$230 million annually to undergraduate aid, a more than 61% increase since 2011.

"This is a transformative commitment to creating opportunity, reducing student debt and ensuring a strong future for GW," Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations Donna Arbide said. "I'm thrilled to see GW taking this bold step, and I'm excited by the conversations we are having with our GW community of alumni, families, faculty, staff and friends about doubling investments in endowed scholarships. GW students are the problem solvers, caretakers and changemakers who will lead our world, and I can think of no better group to invest in."

College students at GW and elsewhere face daunting financial gaps. A 2020 survey by The Ohio State University found that 71 percent of all college students felt stress regarding their financial situation, and about 60 percent agreed that they worry about having enough money to pay for school. Unsurprisingly, finances are the most commonly cited reason that students drop out of postsecondary education.

More than 40 percent of GW applicants say that affordability and financial aid are major factors in their final college choice. Even after scholarships, grants, loans, work study and family contributions, approximately 900 incoming GW undergraduate students face an average financial gap of \$3,000 to \$6,000 that they struggle to meet each year.

## 'IT'S ABOUT THRIVING'

J.B. and M.C. Shapiro Professor of Media and Public Affairs Steven V. Roberts has taught over 2,000 students in his 31 years at GW, and he's seen many take on additional work waiting tables or shelving books to support themselves and their families.

They may miss "only at GW" experiences because they lack time to join student groups or explore extracurricular interests.

"You don't have the benefit of our location when you have to work 20, 30, 40 hours a week to support yourself," Roberts said. "To take full advantage of the GW experience, students need the financial help that can free them from having to work the maximum number of hours. It's not just about surviving, it's

# \$50K

Minimum donation  
to create a new,  
named endowment  
fund\*

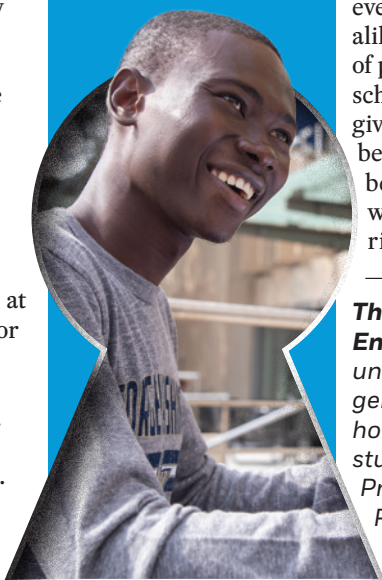
# 1:1 MATCH

Match for  
significant gifts\*

# \$12M

GW's starting  
investment in the  
Third Century  
Scholarship  
Endowment  
Match\*

\*Applies to need-  
based undergraduate  
scholarships



about thriving."

GW senior Elizabeth Benjamin took on two jobs to support herself alongside a full course load from the Elliott School of International Affairs. When she received the Edward M. Felegy Scholarship Endowment in honor of GW President Emeritus Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, Benjamin was able to drop one job and focus on her studies and passions. Her "pride and joy" is her work as a guide and events and services coordinator with GW TRAILS, where she has held multiple leadership positions.


"The fun, meaningful moments I have spent with other students, faculty are invaluable, and I cannot thank GW enough for making this possible," she said.

Jay Goff, vice provost for enrollment and student success, noted that many generous donors have already made the dreams of GW students a reality. "During COVID we saw new levels of need and the GW community stepped up to keep our students enrolled. With community support at all levels," Goff said, "we can hold the doors of GW open for years to come. Every single gift matters in the lives of our students."

Like Benjamin, Decilos is grateful to donors for "believing in my ability to keep fighting."

"The help you have given is immense, and I will not forget its impact and the drive it's given me to excel in school," he said.

But for donors like Steven Roberts philanthropy doesn't demand gratitude. Roberts established the Cokie Roberts Tuition Relief Fund, the Dorothy and Will Roberts Prize and a major endowment of GW's student-run food pantry, the Store.

"Everybody has a stake in this, because every one of us, teachers and students alike, benefits every day from the presence of people who would not be here if not for scholarships," Roberts said. "When you give a student a scholarship, you are not just benefiting that student and her family, you're benefiting everybody who comes in contact with her. The community is wider and richer and fuller because she's there." 

### The Third Century Scholarship

**Endowment Match** unlocks access to an undergraduate GW education for future generations of leaders. Learn more about how you can open more doors for GW students. Contact the Office of the Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations at 202-994-1058 or [match@gwu.edu](mailto:match@gwu.edu).



# IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY



Ric Duquès and Dawn Brill Duquès at the ribbon cutting for Duquès Hall on the Foggy Bottom campus in 2006.

## Duquès Family to Revitalize GW's Infrastructure with \$2.5M Gift

**Alumni couple's generosity  
will fund game-changing  
technological upgrades and  
physical enhancements.**

Soulmates who found each other at Foggy Bottom, Henry "Ric" Duquès, B.B.A. '65, M.B.A. '69, and Dr. Dawn Brill Duquès, B.A. '69, began their lifelong love for each other—and the university—on campus. Married mere days after graduation 57 years ago, today they are among the George Washington University's most influential alumni families.

While making their mark in financial services, the field of education, the hospitality industry, GW and more, they have given generously of time and treasure to strengthen their alma mater and their family's affiliation


***“The Duquès family’s latest gift will dramatically elevate the teaching and learning experience with capital infrastructure quality that is commensurate with GWSB’s global brand.”***

**GWSB Dean Anuj Mehrotra**

has grown. Ric Duquès is a GW trustee emeritus and a Monumental Alumnus, and two of the Duquès’ children—David, B.B.A. ’97, and Tiffany, B.B.A. ’02—are alumni, with the third generation now considering joining the Buff and Blue tradition.

Their most recent gift, of \$2.5 million, will fund game-changing technological upgrades and physical enhancements at the GW School of Business building bearing their name, Ric and Dawn Duquès Hall. The family’s previous \$5 million gift, announced to a standing ovation at Tiffany’s 2002 commencement, funded the initial construction that allowed GWSB to relocate from its former home in the Hall of Government.

Now their philanthropy will expand and provide state-of-the-art updates to the instructional design studio, transform the reach of two global classrooms, and upgrade the entrance foyer into a welcoming mini lobby for networking or simply relaxing between classes. The enhancements are slated for completion in fall 2023.

“The modernization will ensure that the business school’s facility mirrors our stellar academic offerings and catalyzes inspiration and innovation,” said GWSB Dean Anuj Mehrotra. “The Duquès family’s latest gift will dramatically elevate the teaching and learning experience with capital infrastructure quality that is commensurate with GWSB’s global brand.” 

## New Seva Teaching Kitchen Fund Expands GW’s Culinary Medicine Program

**Generous gift from former medical resident and professor will promote health through better nutrition at Foggy Bottom teaching kitchen space.**

Every day in the nearly 20 years she practiced medicine at the George Washington University’s School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Seema Kakar saw the impact of unhealthy eating in her patients living with diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease and other chronic diseases.

Once she learned about an innovative curriculum on the new discipline of culinary medicine, an evidence-based field that blends food and cooking with clinical medicine as a tool to treat and prevent disease, Kakar was determined to share these knowledge and skills with future physicians. She launched culinary medicine education at SMHS in 2017, renting teaching kitchen space and teaching the “Health meets Food” curriculum.

Kakar and her husband, Sonny, recently established the Seva Culinary Medicine Teaching Kitchen Fund, creating the Seva Teaching Kitchen, a new learning space for GW.

The teaching kitchen will occupy a former restaurant space on K Street until it moves into permanent space on the Foggy Bottom campus.

In addition to serving as a research laboratory on culinary medicine’s impact, the Seva Teaching Kitchen will host in-person and virtual immersive hands-on cooking classes for students, staff, faculty and patients. Participants will learn basic cooking skills, nutrition information and recipe knowledge that builds a firm foundation for eating delicious food that is also great for their health.

“Learning healthy cooking and eating and encouraging our patients to do so serves everyone,” said Seema, who will also serve on the kitchen’s advisory board. “I believe the Seva Teaching Kitchen will be a unique resource that is a source of pride for GW and our community.” 

***“I believe the Seva Teaching Kitchen will be a unique resource that is a source of pride for GW and our community.”***

**Seema Kakar**

**Seema (LEFT) and Sonny Kakar**





# Alumna Jenna Segal Establishes Fund to Help Scholars in Ukraine

**Generous gift will bring visiting fellows to GW and support others abroad.**

Just three weeks after Russian troops invaded Ukraine, Tony Award-winning producer Jenna Segal, B.A. '98, and her husband, Paul, approached the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs to offer immediate assistance to scholars under fire in Ukraine.

These scholars, many of whom have fled their homes, have important stories to tell, said Segal, whose gift establishes the Fund for Scholars Affected by the War in Ukraine. "The Dark Ages were the downfall of educated societies," she said. "The best we can do [now] is to support educated societies. An educated refugee is invaluable to this goal."

Run by GW's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, the Segals' innovative gift creates two different avenues for support. Each semester for

**"The best we can do [now] is to support educated societies. An educated refugee is invaluable to this goal."**

**Jenna Segal, B.A. '98**



five years, the Elliott School will welcome three visiting fellows to campus. In addition, 10 Ukraine-based scholars each year will receive annual stipends to allow them to continue their work either in parts of Ukraine at a distance from the violence or in neighboring countries.

Donna Arbide, GW's vice president for development and alumni relations, said the Segals' gift "is a shining example of the power of philanthropy to improve people's lives."

"We all read the news of this horrifying situation and wish we could help, and the Segals took the initiative to show us how individuals can change the world one life at a time," Arbide said. "Their incredible generosity enables the Elliott School to meet a truly urgent need to keep learning alive at a critical time in world history."

GW



Seymour "Sy" and Ruth R. Perlin

## Endowed Professorship Celebrates Family's 100-Year GW History

**Couple's gift endows The Seymour and Ruth Perlin Professorship in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.**

For more than a century and over four generations, their family has been a part of the George Washington University. This year, Jonathan "Jon" B. Perlin and Donna J. Perlin found a way to celebrate the couple at the very center of that long history.

The Seymour and Ruth Perlin Professorship in Psychiatry and Behavioral


**“Just as GW has played a significant role in our family’s success, it’s wonderful to pay it forward through this professorship and invest in others who will also experience the benefit of a GW education.”**

**Jonathan “Jon” B. Perlin, M.D., Ph.D.**

Sciences fund they endowed at GW’s School of Medicine and Health Sciences honors Jon’s parents and supports an up-and-coming faculty member in psychiatry who shares SMHS Professor Emeritus Seymour Perlin’s passion for training residents in the field.

“We wanted to recognize my parents, their contributions and their love for GW,” Jon said. “Just as GW has played a significant role in our family’s success, it’s wonderful to pay it forward through this professorship and invest in others who will also experience the benefit of a GW education.”

Jon’s father, Seymour or “Sy,” was a professor of psychiatry and director of GW’s psychiatry residency program at SMHS from 1977 to 1998. Both Sy and Ruth are founding members of the Friends of the Luther W. Brady Art Gallery. Ruth, an art historian and museum educator, also serves as a member of the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum board.

The family’s affiliation with GW began more than 100 years ago when Ruth’s father began his law studies at GW in 1921, earning a law degree in 1924. Rome Hall is named after Ruth’s cousin, local construction legend Benjamin Rome. Sy joined GW’s clinical faculty in 1974, and two of their sons—Jon’s brothers—earned graduate degrees from GW. This fall, a fourth generation came to GW when grandson Connor began medical school. 



## New SMPA Conversation Series Aims to Promote Civil Discourse

**The Frank Sesno Newsmaker Conversation Series, supported by alumni Ted Segal and Meredith Perla Segal, will showcase leading voices in politics and culture.**

Ted Segal, B.A. ’03, and Meredith Perla Segal, B.Accy. ’05, created an endowed fund honoring former School of Media and Public Affairs director Frank Sesno through an annual conversation series designed as a platform for enhanced civil discourse. With the political arena increasingly defined by rancorous partisan divides, the series’ goal is to promote public understanding and enrich student experiences at GW.


“If we can do a small part to broaden the perspectives of our audience, to elevate the dialogue, it will be of great service to our GW community, to the D.C. community and to the national conversation,” said Ted Segal, founder and president of the EJS Group, a real estate development and financing company. The Segals are longtime supporters of numerous GW initiatives as well as other causes including Type 1 diabetes research, food insecurity and veteran

**“If we can do a small part to broaden the perspectives of our audience, to elevate the dialogue, it will be of great service to our GW community.”**

**Ted Segal**  
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT,  
THE EJS GROUP

service organizations. They proposed the series in honor of Sesno’s more than three decades in journalism and his 11 years of service as SMPA director. Through the series, which will examine trends in media, highlight compelling public figures and provide insightful analysis of current events, they hope to expose students throughout the university to thought-provoking, respectful conversations across political and cultural spectrums.

“I am honored beyond words by this remarkable gift and the series it will support,” said Sesno, who currently serves as SMPA director of strategic

initiatives. Throughout each conversation, “we will explore the ideas that shape our world. We’ll probe the opportunities and challenges confronting our democracy. We’ll ask tough questions in pursuit of edifying, fact-based civil discourse. This is what GW stands for.” 



# CLASS NOTES

## //50s

**Gus A. Mellander, A.B. '59, M.A. '60, Ph.D. '66**, had two articles accepted by "The Hispanic Outlook in Education": "The Unstoppable Women" in October 2021, which highlighted the significant educational achievements of Hispanic women and "Increasing College Enrollments Among Hispanic Men" in June 2022, which discussed the disappointing academic record of young Hispanic men and suggested corrective action.

## //60s

**Thomas A. Cseh, B.A. '67, M.A. '73**, was appointed general manager for SISTEC (Sistemas y Tecnología Industrial de Protección Preventiva, SA de CV), a wholly owned subsidiary of Banco Atlantida, the largest banking institution in Honduras. Based in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, Cseh and his team of 650 personnel provide guarding and cash-in-transit services around the country.

**Michael Zagaris, B.A. '67**, published "Field of Play: 60 Years of NFL Photography" (Harry N. Abrams, 2022). A professional photographer, Zagaris has covered 42 Super Bowls and spent 49 seasons as team photographer for the San Francisco 49ers.



## //70s

**Sarah Birnbach, B.A. '71**, published "A Daughter's Kaddish: My Year of Grief, Devotion, and Healing" (Wonderwell, 2022) recounting her yearlong odyssey to persevere through an unfamiliar world of Jewish prayer. To honor her father, she committed to reciting the Mourner's Kaddish twice a day in synagogue for 11 months—a ritual that was historically reserved for sons.

**Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak, M.F.A. '77**, received a Fulbright Scholar Award to Poland for the academic year 2022-23. She is participating in a collaborative study of socially and politically informed art created by contemporary Ukrainian artists.

**Max Hirshfeld, B.A. '73**, published "Sweet Noise: Love in Wartime" (Damiani, 2019), which is now in development as a traveling exhibition with Curatorial Exhibitions and will begin touring in 2023.

**John Hoglund, J.D. '73, and Patricia Olwell Hoglund, M.A. '71**, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this year. They met as residence hall advisers; John was in Madison Hall, and Pat was in Thurston Hall.

**Margi Kramer, M.A. '79**, published "Molli & Me and the Family Tree" (Friesen Press, 2021), a picture book that tells a story about a whimsical girl, a nostalgic mom and a wise old family tree that take a journey back in time to reveal beloved ancestors, mysteriously appearing as root vegetables and imaginative characters.

**David Leaf, B.B.A. '73**, published an updated edition of "God Only Knows: The Story of Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys & the California Myth" (Omnibus Press, 2022). The book charts how Leaf befriended Wilson and worked with him on many projects, and features contributions from Paul McCartney, Barry Gibb, Elton John and more.

**Scott McGeary, B.A. '77**, was appointed by the Circuit Court of Arlington, Virginia, to a three-year term on the locality's electoral board. As its secretary, he helps administer annual primary and general elections. He also serves on and has chaired the Legislative Committee of the Virginia Electoral Board Association.

**Karyne Messina, M.A. '76**, has published "Resurgence of Global Populism: A Psychoanalytic Study of Projective Identification, Blame-Shifting and the Corruption of Democracy" (Routledge Publishing, 2022), which examines populism in various countries through a psychoanalytic perspective.

**Todd Platek, B.A. '74**, has published "G88" (Bilbo Books, 2022), a novel that incorporates the twin threats of climate change and artificial intelligence.

**Peter R. Silverman, B.A. '77**, was recognized in the 2023 edition of "The Best Lawyers in America for Arbitration, Commercial Litigation, Franchise Law, Litigation - Intellectual Property, Litigation - Securities, & Mediation." He is a partner and retail and consumer sector co-chair in the Toledo office of Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP.

**Gary Sprouse, B.S. '78, M.D. '82**, a family care physician, wrote "Highway to Happiness: The Roadmap to Less Stress," an in-depth look at what is causing stress in humans, who is being impacted and how people can reduce their stress.

## //80s

**Katie Beecher, B.S. '87**, wrote "Heal from Within: A Guidebook to Intuitive Wellness" (St. Martins Press, 2022). The book shows readers how they can take control of their own physical, emotional and spiritual health.

**Terry Emmens, B.A. '86**, was listed in the 2023 edition of "The Best Lawyers in America for Trusts & Estates."

**R.J. Hinkemeyer, M.P.A. '82**, published "Sins of Stone: A Maryland Mystery," which tells the story of an investigative reporter who covers cultural tensions in a small Maryland town.

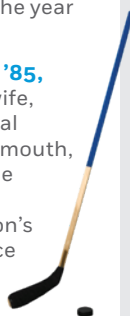
**Gary Lesser, B.A. '89**, was sworn in as president of the Florida Bar. Lesser is managing partner of Lesser, Lesser, Landy & Smith, a firm his grandfather founded in West Palm Beach, Florida.

**Samuel Maizel, J.D. '85**, was recognized as one of Los Angeles' "Top 100 Lawyers for 2022" by the "Los Angeles Business Journal" and received the 2022 Outstanding Nonprofit Lawyer Award for distinguished service as outside counsel to nonprofit organizations by the American Bar Association's Nonprofit Committee. "The Los Angeles Daily Journal" named him one of California's top health care lawyers in 2021, and Global M&A Network named him the restructuring lawyer of the year in 2020.

**Steve Nearman, M.B.A. '85**, moved—along with his wife, autistic teen and financial advisory business to Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he created the only South Shore program for his son's favorite sport, "special ice hockey," which is open to anybody who wants to learn and play ice hockey but cannot play for any other team. The Great Blizzards of Massachusetts Special Hockey program now boasts more than 37 players and their families with dozens of head coaches and assistant coaches.

**Cindy Newberg, B.A. '88**, director of the stratospheric protection division at the Office of Atmospheric Programs, is the recipient of the Partnership for Public Service 2022 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal in Science, Technology and Environment. Newberg has played an instrumental role internationally to curb the use of hydrofluorocarbons, incredibly potent greenhouse gases that are major contributors to climate change.

**Sarah Schneiderman, B.F.A. '80**, had a solo show, "Breaking Political Barriers," in the Windsor Public Library in Connecticut in October. Her artwork was also included in "Waste Management: Reuse, Reimagine, Repurpose" at the Institute Library, New Haven, Connecticut.



## //90s

**Yahia Lababidi, B.A. '96**, published "Desert Songs: Poetry by Yahia Lababidi" (Rowayt, 2022), a spiritual love letter to the deserts of Egypt, including profound Arabic translations by Syrian poet Osama Esber, alongside powerful photos by Moroccan photographer Zakaria Wakrim.

**Sherry Levin Wallach, B.B.A. '92**, was recently sworn in as the president of the New York State Bar Association. Levin Wallach serves as deputy executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Westchester County and has spent most of her career as a criminal defense attorney for people who cannot afford one.

**Tami Levin, B.A. '95**, was named a winner in the 23rd Annual Women in Technology Leadership Awards in the Non-Profit and Academia sector. She is the director of premedical and applicant resources at the Association of American Medical Colleges as well as the founder of Uncommon Essays.

**Jennifer Morrison, B.A. '90**, was appointed the first female commissioner of public safety by the governor of Vermont and has launched the Hero Maker podcast.

**Karen Myers, Global M.B.A. '93**, received the W.Y. Smith Award from the Institute for Defense Analyses, which recognizes extraordinary individual or group contributions to IDA from non-research staff members.

**Michael Price, Ed.D. '99**, published "17 Days That Changed America: How the Silver Bridge Collapse Made Life Safer for All of Us," exploring the events surrounding the collapse of the West Virginia's Silver Bridge in 1967, considered the deadliest bridge disaster in U.S. history.



**Tania Said, M.A. '98**, recently launched Tania Said Consulting to provide organizational and program development services for museums and nonprofits.

**Lisa Schroeter, B.A. '92**, was honored by the Association of Women in International Trade with its 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award. Schroeter is Dow's global director of trade and investment policy, and the award recognizes leaders who have contributed significantly to advancing trade policy and contributing to the growth, skills and empowerment of women in the field.

**Yosefi Seltzer, B.A. '93**, won the American Bar Association's LAMP Distinguished Service Award as the U.S. Army's representative. According to the ABA, Seltzer, an administrative law attorney, "demonstrated dedication to clients and to the wider military community," especially in his work to research and advocate for a change to New Jersey Department of Taxation guidance that penalized non-resident servicemembers.

**Amy E. Serino, J.D. '99**, opened Serino Law LLC, an employment law firm focusing on independent investigations of workplace complaints, such as claims of discrimination, harassment, retaliation and other wrongful conduct.

**Irina Carlota Silber, B.A. '91**, published "After Stories: Transnational Intimacies of Postwar El Salvador" (Stanford University Press, 2022). The book builds upon Silber's nearly 25 years of ethnographic research centered in Chalatenango, El Salvador, to follow the trajectories—geographic, temporal, storied—of several extended Salvadoran families.

## //00s

**Lauren Marks Alperstein, B.A. '05**, won her election to become a circuit court judge in the 17th Judicial Circuit in Broward County, Florida. She was also honored as attorney of the year in 2021 by Legal Aid Services of Broward County.

**Liz Castelli, B.S. '05, Adette C. Contreras, B.B.A. '06**, and **Erica Taylor Haskins, B.A. '06**, co-founded the New York City-based event design agency, Tinsel Experiential Design, which is celebrating its 12th year in business. Last summer, they teamed up with

**Ashley Spillane, B.A. '06**, and her team at Impactual to design and produce #THEPartyThenThePoll, a massive celebration and expression of gratitude, held in D.C. in June, for campaign workers, volunteers, poll workers, activists and others who supported the democratic process in 2020.

**Avon Hart-Johnson, M.S. '01**, is the founder and president of DC Project Connect, which provides crisis intervention and information resources to families affected by incarceration. The organization is currently working with families to address these issues through literacy and has created host of children's books on parental incarceration.

**Stephen McGuire, Ph.D. '03**, a professor of management at California State University, Los Angeles, received the 2022 President's Distinguished Professor Award for superlative teaching and exceptional commitment to students as well as professional accomplishments and service.

**Divani R. Nadaraja, J.D. '07**, was named a partner in Feldesman Tucker Leifer Fidell LLP's Family Law Group.

**Stephanie Vance, M.S. '02**, published "Across the Aisle" (Entangled Publishing, 2022), a romcom based in D.C. about two lobbyists from opposing sides falling in love. Vance is also an adjunct professor in GW's Graduate School of Political Management.

## //10s

**Kevin Frey, B.A. '15**, covers the New York state congressional delegation for Spectrum News NY1. He got his start in journalism with GWTV while a student and has interviewed members of President Biden's cabinet and covered the COP26 International Climate Summit.

**Christina Hawatmeh, B.A. '10**, has published "The Year Time Stopped: The Global Pandemic in Photos" (HarperOne, 2022). The book includes 200 images and stories from 2020 from around the world. Hawatmeh is the founder and CEO of Scopio.

**Najma Khorrami, B.S. '06, M.P.H. '12**, founded startup Gratitude Circle that recently launched a #GratitudeHotline. She is also the author of two books.

**Daniel Lippman, B.A. '12**, a White House and Washington reporter for POLITICO and former co-author of Playbook, proposed to artist Sophia Narrett in July on the beach at the Rosewood Baha Mar in the Bahamas.



**Chandrally Mahajan, M.P.H. '18**, is in her second year of medical school and speaks on client-centered communication for skin care concerns at Aveda South Florida Institute.

**Mark F. Mashack, J.D. '16**, has joined Blank Roman LLP's Washington, D.C., office in its nationally recognized Intellectual Property & Technology practice group.

**Monique May, M.H.A. '17**, wrote "Doc Fix My Plate! The Physician in The Kitchen's Prescriptions For Your Healthy Meal Makeover," a cookbook for those who want to eat a plant-based diet.

**Sabrina Puppo, E.M.B.A. '10**, started a fundraiser at sabinapuppo.com that uses greeting cards to support the UN Refugee Agency in its efforts to protect refugees and displaced people during the war in Ukraine.

**Laura Shuey-Kostelac, B.A. '14, M.A. '15**, was promoted to partner of global public affairs at global independent marketing and communications firm FINN Partners.

**Jessica Stewart, M.H.A. '18, M.P.H. '22**, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as director of the Strategy, Forces and Resources Division within the Systems and Analyses Center, an IDA-managed federally funded research and development center.



# IN MEMORIAM



**Norma Lee Funger receiving GW's President's Medal in 2013.**

**Norma Lee (Cohen) Funger**, a pillar of the George Washington University whose name graces the front of Norma Lee and Morton Funger Hall on GW's Foggy Bottom campus, died July 4. She was 90.

Funger, along with her husband, Morton "Morty" Funger, A.A. '52, B.A. '53, received the university's President's Medal for service, engagement and leadership to GW across five decades.

A native Washingtonian, Funger graduated from D.C.'s Roosevelt High School and attended Syracuse University and Wilsons Teachers College.

She spent much of her life giving back to the community that raised her, including GW. Her and her husband's philanthropic support to the university includes gifts and endowed funds across many schools, including professorships in the Columbian College of

Arts and Sciences, the Elliott School of International Affairs and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, as well as funds to support the arts.

One of the Fungers' four children, Scott, graduated from GW Law in 1983. After his death in 2012, the Fungers endowed the W. Scott Funger Memorial Scholarship in his memory at GW Law. Three of their grandchildren also graduated from GW.

"The Fungers are philanthropic giants who have made the world a better place, and I'm so proud that our university can represent their legacy," said Donna Arbide, GW's vice president for development and alumni relations. "Their impact cannot be overstated, and their love for GW and their incredible leadership, support and generosity is well known in philanthropic circles. Norma Lee and Morty were among the first donor names I heard even before I assumed my position. She will be sorely missed."

Funger was a licensed real estate agent with Lewis & Silverman, which later became Long & Foster Realtors. In recognition of her outstanding sales record, she was named a member of the Chairman's Club at Long & Foster Realtors.

She served on the boards of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, American Art Museum and National Gallery of Art, as well as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, to which she was appointed by President Barack Obama.

Funger served on the Foundation Board of Children's National Hospital for 31 years, where she and Morton established the Cohen-Funger Endowed Chair of Cardiovascular Surgery. She was also a board member of the Children's Inn at NIH (formerly Ronald McDonald House).

She is survived by her husband, children Lydia McClain, Melanie Nichols and Keith Funger, as well as Holly, the wife of her late son W. Scott Funger.

## REMEMBERING

**Theodore V. Fishman, B.A. '68, J.D. '71 (Aug. 2, 2022, 76)**, spent a long and distinguished legal career with the State of New Jersey Office of the Public Defender and represented hundreds of defendants. He was awarded the N.J. Office of the Public Defender Stanley C. Van Ness Award, which recognizes a person who demonstrates "a persuasive voice for the voiceless and effective advocacy for the rights of the individual." He was an adjunct professor at Mercer County

Community College and Trenton State College. He is survived by his wife, Karen Seltzer, his two sons and two grandchildren.

**Charles Sherfy Jones, J.D. '61, (May 2, 2022, 91)**, had a long career in the insurance field with Jefferson Standard in its Arlington, Virginia office. Jones was committed to professional education and community service. He served as president of the D.C. chapter of the Society of Financial Service professionals and was selected as the recipient of the Bernard L. Wilner award, now the Legacy Award, for

outstanding service to his industry and to his community. He is survived by his three children, their spouses and eight grandchildren.

**Kenneth Starr, B.A. '68, (Sept. 13, 2022, 76)**, had a storied career in the law and public service as an attorney, judge, independent counsel and university leader. He served as a judge on the District of Columbia Circuit from 1989 to 1993, as U.S. solicitor general under George H.W. Bush, and the independent counsel for five investigations in the 1990s. In all, Starr argued 36 cases before the Supreme Court. He also was a

partner in two national law firms: Kirkland & Ellis and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher. He taught constitutional law as an adjunct or visiting professor at a number of law schools and served as the Duane and Kelly Roberts Dean of the Pepperdine School of Law from 2004 to 2010 and as president and chancellor of Baylor University from 2010 to 2016. He is survived by his wife, Alice Mendell Starr, three children and nine grandchildren. ☞

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored checkered shirt and a lanyard with an ID badge, is smiling and pointing his right index finger at a blue mosaic tile. The tile is part of a larger wall mosaic made of many small, rectangular tiles in various shades of blue and white. Each tile has a name and graduation year printed on it. Some visible names include "Eric and Beth Gunderson and Family", "Edward Keith Freedman BA '93", "Mona L. ... BA '69", "Nathan Sloan BA '81 and Julia Sloan", "Alexander M. Hankin BA '10", "Stuart Ollanik BA '81", "Amy R. Reich BBA '00", and "Aria A. Varasteh BA '12, MBA '17". The man's ID badge says "Aria Varasteh". The background shows more of the mosaic wall and a hallway.

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