

GW

COURAGE BEYOND THE COURT

GARRETT JOHNSON'S JOURNEY
FROM CHEMOTHERAPY TO
COLLEGE BASKETBALL







For a day in March, the University Student Center was transformed into an old-school roller rink.

JORDAN TOVIN

GW MAGAZINE

SPRING/ SUMMER 2024

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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ON THE COVER: Rising sophomore and men's basketball player Garrett Johnson. Photo by William Atkins.



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Prelude

NEWS AND INSIGHTS FROM CAMPUS AND BEYOND

CELEBRATING HERITAGE

For the 23rd year, GW hosted the Raas Chaos dance competition, showcasing the folk dance native to the Indian region of Gujarat and known for its colorful clothing, rhythmic dandiya sticks and creative props. Here a team from GW performs.

📷 JORDAN TOVIN





HONORING OUR NAMESAKE

GW leaders and community members took part in a wreath-laying ceremony commemorating George Washington at his Mount Vernon estate in Virginia. The annual event is held on Feb. 22, the first president's birthday—225 years ago this year.

WILLIAM ATKINS

BUILDING COMMUNITY

GW TOGETHER, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Since starting at GW in July 2023, President Ellen M. Granberg has been traversing the United States, meeting with alumni, families and friends of GW. This GW Together tour offered a chance for the president to hear from the university community and to share her thoughts about our collective future.

MARCH 14
SEATTLE



MARCH 13
SAN FRANCISCO



OCT. 18
DENVER



MARCH 12
LOS ANGELES



“Across the country, I’ve been inspired by the passion and engagement of our entire GW community. In every city, our alumni, families and friends expressed deep belief in GW and the future of this university. I look forward to their continued partnership as we work together to build a stronger GW and a greater world.”

President Granberg

GW TOGETHER TOUR BY THE NUMBERS

7
months



10
cities



2000+
participants



NOV. 16
NEW YORK CITY

SEPT. 16
PHILADELPHIA

★ SEPT. 30
GW

OCT. 19
CHICAGO

FEB. 13
PALM BEACH

FEB. 15
MIAMI

10999 1/10

10,992
miles traveled



11 bags of
airline pretzels

50 students interviewed
about their hopes
for GW's future

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

An Overachiever Comes Full Circle

In 2022, Josh Lasky, B.A. '07, M.P.A. '09, returned to GW as director of the Office of Sustainability, which he helped establish years earlier as a student. By Greg Varner

As a first-year student at GW, Josh Lasky was so enthralled by the smorgasbord of opportunities available to him on campus—things to learn, foods to eat, friends to meet, sports and games to play and more—that he tried to take advantage of them all, with predictable results.

“I got sick a lot,” Lasky recalled. “In my freshman year, I was playing ultimate Frisbee, I was pledging a fraternity, I was a Student Association senator, I was getting involved in everything, and I was trying to get straight A’s in my classes—just overextending myself because I didn’t want to miss a moment.”

Ultimately—an apt word, given Lasky’s time on the ultimate Frisbee team, eventually serving as co-captain—he managed to enjoy a large number of moments. Some days, in a certain light, some of those moments are going on even now.

“I still see the ultimate Frisbee team practicing in the same location next to the Reflecting Pool and throwing a disc on University Yard, just like I did,” Lasky said.

As for “only-at-GW” moments, Lasky had his share. One was an enjoyable personal interaction being teased by Rahm Emanuel, then President Barack Obama’s

“That’s a great thing that I hope never changes about this institution; we take the learning and the research seriously, but we don’t take ourselves too seriously.”



chief of staff and the speaker at Lasky’s master’s Commencement ceremony. Another was when, as a graduate student, Lasky attended Obama’s first inaugural parade. (“I was freezing my butt off,” he recalled.)

Then there was the time he flew down to Florida as a student volunteer for an alumni event with former GW President Stephen Trachtenberg, who ended up flying in coach while Lasky was somehow upgraded to first class. As they were waiting in the airport prior to boarding, Trachtenberg had given Lasky the draft manuscript of a book he was writing about leadership in higher education.

“He asked me to read his book and give him notes,” Lasky said, still shaking his head in slight disbelief at the memory. “I boarded the plane early, and I take out the manuscript, and a few minutes later someone is hovering over me, and it’s Steve Trachtenberg, and he announces to the cabin that I am his editor and everyone should treat me well. And then he proceeded to his economy class seat.”

Trachtenberg’s sense of humor was also in evidence when he purchased a large bronze statue of a hippopotamus, which was then installed on the corner of 21st and H streets, where it still stands. Apart from being the ultimate

Frisbee team’s namesake—the squad is still known as the Hippos—Trachtenberg’s sculpture came with fakelore invented by the former president, who installed a plaque describing how George and Martha Washington would gaze out on the Potomac and watch their children play with the hippos that lived in the river.

“That’s a great thing that I hope never changes about this institution; we take the learning and the research seriously, but we don’t take ourselves too seriously,” Lasky said.


Lasky grew up in suburban New Jersey but was eventually more drawn to city life.

“I became really interested in how cities offer opportunities to advance sustainability, from sharing walls with neighbors to sharing resources like parks and green spaces and taking advantage of shared infrastructure for water and electricity.”

As director of the Office of Sustainability, he leads an office he helped set up as a grad student. His focus is on the university’s sustainability initiatives, such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, phasing out single-use plastics on campus and empowering members of the GW community to take meaningful action to make the campus more sustainable.

He’s still overachieving. A couple of years before returning to GW as a staff member in the spring of 2022, Lasky wrote a book, “Every Step Is a Gift: Caregiving, Endurance, and the Path to Gratitude,” detailing his years caring for his father, who battled Parkinson’s disease.

For fun, he has played on the alumni team in ultimate Frisbee games with current students.

“I’m never quite in the shape that I used to be,” Lasky said, “and the alumni tend to get it handed to them. But sometimes there are some really crafty alumni who turn the tides.” 

Briefly...

SCOTT MORY, B.A. '96, J.D. '99,

was named President Ellen M. Granberg's chief of staff and senior vice president. Starting July 1, Mory will be a critical strategic partner to Granberg and within the university's executive leadership team, providing leadership for presidential initiatives across the university.



It's not easy being green. GW doctoral student Cal So was among a team of scientists who discovered **KERMITOPS GRATUS**. The 270-million-year-old amphibian ancestor, named in homage to the iconic Muppet, may change our understanding of the amphibian family tree.



Live from GW, it's **SCIENCE FRIDAY!** The popular radio show was taped at Lisner Auditorium before a live audience in March. GW professors joined host Ira Flatow on stage to discuss the latest in science and research.



Africa's **"IRON LADY" ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF** spoke at a March GW event. The Nobel Laureate and former president of Liberia was the first democratically elected woman of an African country.

In February, GW cut the ribbon on its new state-of-the-art **CAMPUS STORE**, a greatly expanded two-story space at 2125 I St.



"We speak with respect."

In March, GW hosted **SUPREME COURT JUSTICES SONIA SOTOMAYOR** and **AMY CONEY BARRETT** for a conversation about civil engagement. The justices, in a conversation moderated by Eric Liu, CEO of Citizen University, described the court as an extremely collegial workplace.

200
BICENTENNIAL
1824 ★★ ★ 2024

The **SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES** celebrates its bicentennial this year. In 1824, the school's precursor, National Medical College, became the 11th medical school in the U.S. and the first in Washington.

"You persevered, and you've emerged stronger and with a better understanding of the world than most graduating classes before you. And in the process, you learned the importance of resilience and the ability to respond to circumstances you can't control firsthand."

◀ Former White House Press Secretary and MSNBC host **JEN PSAKI** headlined GW's commencement ceremony on the National Mall.



An Anthropologist Looks Back at an Unorthodox Life

In a new book, alumnus Edward C. Green chronicles his more-than-a half-century quest to improve public health across the globe.

In 1971, **Edward C. Green, B.A. '67**, was living among the descendants of a runaway slave society in the Amazon.

Tempted by a travel poster, Green had traveled to Suriname for the first time the year before. He was then a graduate student in anthropology and quickly became fascinated with the then Dutch colony.

The two years he spent studying and being “adopted” by the Matawai tribe—a group of about 2,000 descended from slaves in the interior of what’s now an independent country—served as a foundation for his pioneering career in medical anthropology.

Green’s journey from rebellious prep school student to Vietnam War conscientious objector to renowned anthropologist is charted in his new memoir, “*On the Fringe: Confessions of a Maverick Anthropologist*” (Black Rose Writing, 2023).

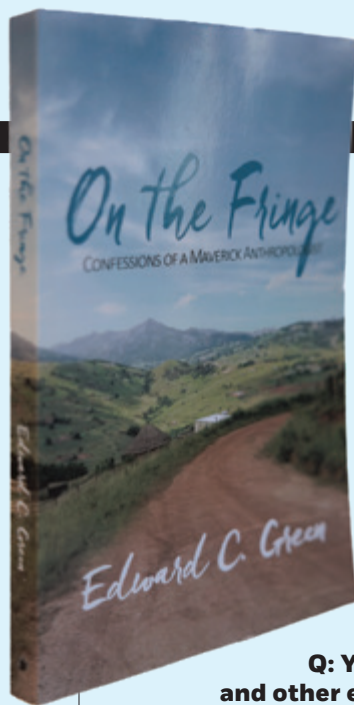
“GW Magazine” talked to Green, a GW research professor, about his storied career, how he found his calling for anthropology and why it was important to write with candor about his lifelong feelings of self-doubt.

Q: What drew you to the field of anthropology, and why did you choose the career path of applied anthropology?

A: *GW was the place that gave me direction in life. There, I discovered anthropology, a whole profession populated by nonconformists. GW professors, like Patrick Gallagher, treated us as peers and taught us to question conventions.*

After graduate school, I taught at several universities, but in 1977 I had the opportunity to visit African countries to help evaluate family planning programs. The more I talked to people on the ground, the more I believed anthropology was a missing element in international development and NGOs’ efforts to change behaviors. If you don’t understand the underlying cultural elements, how can you change people’s actions? I realized anthropology had the power to alleviate suffering and save lives.

In Ghana, I met Mike Warren, a professor who had already run successful programs partnering with Indigenous healers to improve health outcomes. I thought that’s what I want to do!



On the Fringe: Confessions of a Maverick Anthropologist (Black Rose Writing, 2023) by Edward C. Green

Q: You worked as a consultant for NGOs and other entities across the world. What were some of those experiences?

A: *In the 1980s, I spent four years in Swaziland developing health education strategies to prevent diseases with the input of local health workers, traditional healers and their patients. I spent time on the ground in Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa—all in programs aimed at incorporating traditional healers and Indigenous health practitioners in public health and education.*

As AIDS exploded in Africa, I became involved in large-scale prevention programs. I grew increasingly skeptical of the overreliance on condoms to prevent HIV in Africa, especially as Uganda, where condoms were not widely used, emerged as a success story. I wrote a critique in my book, “Rethinking AIDS Prevention,” which was widely read and controversial. In it, I advocated for low-cost behavioral solutions, namely, not having multiple concurrent sexual partners and delaying the age of first sexual activity.

Q: You’re open about your feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome throughout your life. Why was that important to include?

A: *I was a bit of a rebel when I was young and was kicked out of Groton prep school, where my father and brother had both excelled. Afterward, my mother told me, “You’re a failure, and you’ll always be a failure.” Those words stayed with me. I internalized them and often thought that I was a fraud and one day I would be found out by my peers and students.*

I hope it’s useful for young people entering the fields of public health, anthropology and international development to know about my struggles and not feel alone if they have experienced feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy.

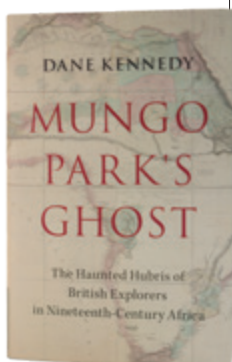
Q: You write about the importance of people who are “on the fringe,” their ability to see things that others can’t or don’t.

A: *A speech by Walter Goldschmidt, head of the American Anthropological Association in the ’70s, resonated with me. He essentially said anthropologists are outsiders, people on the fringe who distrust authority. History shows that people on the fringe challenge conventional paradigms and usher in new ways of thinking. Their view from the margins provides revolutionary new perspectives. I am not sure what I would have done had I not found refuge in anthropology—a whole field of nonconformists like myself. — Rachel Muir*



***Dixon, Descending* (Dutton, 2024)
by GW Karen Outen, senior marketing specialist, GW Law**

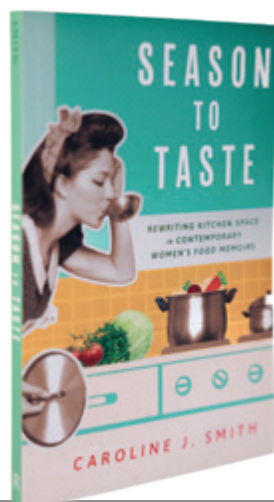
Outen tells the story of Dixon Bryant who embarks on a quest alongside his brother to become the first Black American men to summit Mount Everest. Until persuaded by his brother to make the attempt, Dixon, once an Olympic-level runner, had long given up pursuing seemingly impossible dreams. He puts his life on hold as a school psychologist, leaving behind, among others, a vulnerable student he's bonded with. Alternating chapters reveal the before, during and after of the expedition, capturing the terror and strange freedom on the mountain. "Black men on Everest, which was to say freed men," writes Outen. "Because their burdens here were of their own making." Words that become prophetic when tragedy strikes and Dixon is left scarred, struggling to return to his life, and grappling with what it means to survive and the responsibilities we have to one another.



***"Mungo Park's Ghost: The Haunted Hubris of British Explorers in Nineteenth-Century Africa"* (Cambridge University Press, 2024)
by Dane Kennedy, professor emeritus of history**

Kennedy examines two ambitious 1816 British expeditions in Africa centered on the Niger and Congo rivers. Their aim was to finish the mission of the dashing and celebrated Mungo Park, who disappeared a decade earlier exploring the same rivers. Both 1816 expeditions failed and were largely forgotten. Through an in-depth examination of them in the greater context of Britain in the early 19th century, Kennedy makes the case that they provide insight

into British ambitions in Africa and the sense of hubris that pervaded and often condemned them. "Most of the British explorers who ventured into Africa were propelled by the same unwarranted confidence and overweening ambition that drove Park to his destruction," writes Kennedy. "Most failed to complete their missions, and many lost their lives in the process."



***Season to Taste: Rewriting Kitchen Space in Contemporary Women's Food Memoirs* (University Press of Mississippi, 2023)
by Caroline J. Smith, associate professor of writing**

Smith takes readers on a tour of the ever shifting kitchen space. Examining food writing through memoirs, recipes and even "Better Homes and Gardens" articles, she traces the evolution of kitchens since the 1960s—not just from linoleum floors to stainless steel countertops but from feminist movements to contemporary writers. Along the way, she documents how the kitchen has been reframed from a gender prison to a stage for self-discovery. "In the '60s, the kitchen was seen as a place for women to escape from," says Smith, whose previous work has dissected pop culture staples including "chick lit" and the TV series "Mad Men." "I was asking how in the 21st century women redefined their relationship with this space."



***U.S. Museum Histories and the Politics of Interpretation* (Routledge, 2024)**

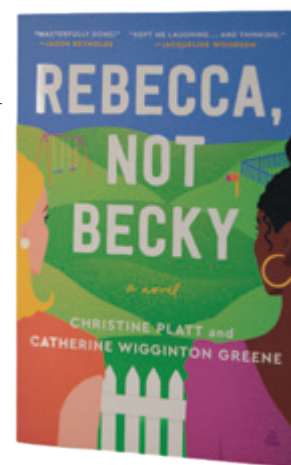
by Laura Schiavo, associate professor of museum studies and deputy director of the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design

Schiavo's book, a collection drawing on the scholarship of historians, art historians and anthropologists from across the country who study museums, traces U.S. museums' past to inform their future. From the nation-building narratives of the early 19th century to modern representations of inclusion and pressing issues like climate change, Schiavo writes, U.S. museums are both influenced by and help inform the events swirling around them. At times, she argues, they have either reinforced popular notions of race, gender and progress—or challenged them. "These are institutions of power that tell stories about identity," she writes. "Which objects [museums] choose to exhibit—and how they put these exhibits together—usually comes out of an ideology."

***Rebecca, Not Becky* (HarperCollins, 2023)**

by GW student Catherine Wigginton Greene and Christine Platt

The novel—by Green, a doctoral student in GW's Graduate School of Education and Human Development, and co-author Platt—tells the story of two upper-class stay-at-home mothers in an affluent suburb of Washington, D.C. The narrative alternates between the two women, Rebecca, who is white and a self-proclaimed progressive, and De'Andrea, who is Black and newly arrived from Atlanta, a move she reluctantly agreed to in order to be closer to her ailing mother-in-law. The pair's young daughters become fast friends, while a tentative friendship between the two women is put to the test when racial issues divide the community. **GW**



COURAGE *BEYOND* GO ^{THE} COURT

A JOURNEY FROM CHEMOTHERAPY TO COLLEGE BASKETBALL

By Lisa Conley-Kendzior





Numbers often tell a story in the world of basketball—points scored, rebounds grabbed, games won. But for Garrett Johnson, a GW rising sophomore forward, the number on his jersey—nine—carries a narrative far beyond the confines of the court. It symbolizes not just a statistic but a journey of resilience, determination and, ultimately, triumph.

Johnson's basketball career began like many others': playing with a Little Tikes hoop and trying to emulate some of his favorite college players, like J.J. Redick.

But basketball was always more than just a game to the DMV native; it was a family affair, the catalyst for his parents' relationship and a bond with his older brother, Braeden, who would later play college ball for Johns Hopkins University.

"I learned everything I know now from my older brother. Pretty much all my childhood memories are shooting in the driveway with him or playing one-on-one in the basement and crying to my mom that he was fouling me," Johnson recalled with a smile.

Johnson's parents, J.J. and Shubha, recognized their son's extraordinary talent early on; after all, it's not every day that a first-grader racks up 42 points in a single game.

"They both had a focus on the analytical side of basketball even at a young age," Shubha Johnson said of Garrett and his older brother. "And that carried on; as he got older and got serious about it, [Garrett] looked at it more from the strategy, gameplay and analysis side as he was playing."

"And he took every game seriously," J.J. Johnson added. "If he did something wrong in the game, he brought it home with him, even as a nine-year-old."

Johnson joined a travel basketball league, and by the time he enrolled at Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Va., he was already a star, scoring an average of 18.6 points per game and catching the eye of college scouts.

"Garrett was not only a scorer; he averaged six rebounds and almost two assists per game," said Episcopal coach Jim Fitzpatrick. "His elite athleticism was on display when he would make plays above the rim on offense, and his strength and quickness were evident when he was asked to defend several different positions on the floor."

As the coronavirus pandemic upended his senior season, Johnson maintained his skills through impromptu pickup games and an unofficial high school league held at The St. James fitness center in Northern Virginia. It was around that time that Johnson, who had already committed to Princeton University, noticed an unusual tightness in his hip.

Initially dismissing it as a stubborn muscle knot, Johnson sought relief from a chiropractor, who shared concerns that the young athlete's condition might be something much more serious.

"The chiropractor worked on it and basically told us, 'I don't think this is a knot. Something more is going on here,'" Shubha Johnson recalled.

A subsequent MRI and CT scan revealed a rare desmoid tumor nestled in Johnson's hip. The doctor called with the news on March 1, 2021—a day Johnson will never forget.

"I just remember being in the kitchen when my mom got the call. In that moment, everything you're thinking about changes in a second," he said. "I went from being on top of the world to thinking am I going to live to see the next year?"

Although the tumor was benign, its aggressive nature required swift action.

Johnson embarked on a four-month chemotherapy pill regimen, but when it proved ineffective, his doctors recommended a procedure known as cryoablation. >>

A basketball player in a white George Washington jersey with the number 9 is shown from the waist up. He is looking down with his hands held out in front of him, palms facing each other. The background is a blurred basketball court with spectators. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**“
IN THAT
MOMENT,
EVERYTHING YOU’RE
THINKING ABOUT
CHANGES IN
A SECOND.”**



TOP Garrett Johnson (FRONT) hanging out with fellow rising sophomore forward Darren Buchanan Jr. (BACK). LEFT Johnson scored 21 points during his collegiate debut Nov. 6 against Stonehill. BOTTOM Johnson underwent nine rounds of chemotherapy.



» The goal of the nine-hour operation was to freeze and destroy at least some—but hopefully all—of the tumor, which was too close to the sciatic nerve for a traditional removal.

“They told me, ‘If we hit something a little too far to the left or a little too far to the right, you might wake up and not be able to walk for a few years,’” Johnson recalled. “As a 19-year-old, that’s not something you ever think you’d have to worry about. It felt like the world was collapsing.”

The surgery ended up being the first in a series of four that would exact a heavy toll on the teen, both mentally and physically, eventually leading him to withdraw from Princeton to prioritize his health. But through it all, Johnson found solace in the familiar rhythm of the game he loved.

“The only thing I knew was just to go work out, get shots up, lift. I would do two workouts every day, lift conditioning, and then get on the court and just do what I’d done my whole life,” he said. “My irrational belief or hope was that one day I was going to be able to play again and be normal.”

“There were a lot of time I’d go with him at night, and he would shoot for two hours and take 1,200 shots and just really work on his game,” J.J. Johnson said. “Mentally, that’s what kept him going.”

But in August 2022, a full year after Johnson’s initial cryoablation surgery, the tumor was as large as it had ever been. So the young basketball player began chemotherapy, traveling to and from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York every few weeks for bloodwork and infusions.

“I kind of felt like I disappeared from the world a little bit,” he recalled. “Just sitting in my room every day thinking about what I should be doing, what all my peers and friends were doing...it was really tough mentally to go through that for two and a half years.”

The following spring, there were finally signs of progress; the tumor was shrinking, but moreover, Johnson was beginning to feel like his old self again, and he let himself dare to believe that maybe, just maybe, he’d be able to return to the court.

“I started to feel a lot of relief in my hip, in my leg and in my workouts,” he recalled, noting that he felt like he was returning to the level of mobility he had before the tumor.

Hopeful, Johnson entered the NCAA transfer portal and grabbed the attention of GW Men’s Basketball coach Chris Caputo, who invited the 6-foot-8 forward to showcase his skills for the coaching staff the morning

"I KNOW THIS COULD BE TAKEN AWAY IN A SECOND AND WHAT THAT FEELS LIKE, SO I JUST REMIND MYSELF, ESPECIALLY BEFORE EVERY GAME, THAT IT'S A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY THAT I'M ABLE TO DO THIS."

after Johnson's seventh transfusion.

The GW coaching staff wanted to understand the extent of Johnson's health journey and evaluate if he could not only be a part of the team but also thrive as a college athlete. Watching Johnson work out post-chemotherapy, Caputo saw a young man who exhibited not just potential on the court but also resilience in the face of adversity.

"He looked healthy," he said. "He had been through a lot to get to that point, but

the more we got to know him, the more we wanted him here."

Caputo offered Johnson a scholarship that same day. It was March 22, 2023—just over two years since his diagnosis.

"I was definitely very grateful for the opportunity," Johnson said. "You feel confident in your abilities and that you're going to get a chance to play somewhere, but to have the coaching staff's trust after everything I went through was a testament to

the work I did while I was out."

The decision to bring Johnson onto the team was coupled with a promise of patience. The coaching staff recognized that Johnson's journey to recovery might not follow a linear path, and they were ready to support him however they could.

"We told him that we were trying to build a program over time that the university was going to be very proud of, and that wasn't something that would happen overnight," Caputo said. "So we would have some patience with him, and he should have some patience with himself."

Johnson made his collegiate debut on Nov. 6, 2023, just months after his ninth and final round of chemotherapy. He scored 21 points, including five three-pointers, leading the GW Revolutionaries to a decisive 89-44 victory over the Stonehill Skyhawks.

"When he shot his first [three-pointer], I knew it was going in, and then he just kept going. I kept thinking yeah, he's back," said fellow rising sophomore forward Darren Buchanan Jr. "When we went into the locker room [after the game], I was like, 'If we're pouring water on anybody, it has to be Garrett Johnson,' because to come back after two years and drop 21 points is remarkable."

Johnson continued his explosive start to the season, averaging 13.4 points per game. But his success isn't something he takes for granted, and his jersey number—nine, symbolizing the nine rounds of chemotherapy he endured—serves as a constant reminder of life's fragility.

"I know this could be taken away in a second and what that feels like, so I just remind myself, especially before every game, that it's a special opportunity that I'm able to do this," he said. "It's something to be thankful for."

Beyond basketball, Johnson envisions using his experiences to help others facing adversity.

"I really want to be able to make an impact on people who feel the same feelings I felt when I was going through the roughest parts of it," he said. "Whether it's cancer or something else, I think there are a lot of people out there who feel like they're alone, so if I can let them know that they have people in their corner, then that's the best thing that I could do with my life."



Watch Garrett Johnson's inspiring story.

magazine.gwu.edu/courage-beyond-court



A Writer's Tragicomic Sensibility Shines



Story from Dearborn **Ghassan Zeineddine** | Question & Answer **Greg Varner** | Illustration **Maria Lucia Carbone**

Short stories by Ghassan Zeineddine, B.A. '02, give literary tradition a contemporary spin and give voice to the Arab American experience.

After Ghassan Zeineddine's debut collection of short stories was published last fall, it didn't take long for good reviews to appear. "The Washington Post" included "Dearborn" on its list of "10 noteworthy books for September," while "The New York Times" praised the stories as "funny and sincere."

The collection's 10 stories focus on Arab American characters in the eponymous suburb of Detroit where Zeineddine lived for some years after graduating from GW. They are set in various time periods, so that the city itself becomes a character moving through time. Zeineddine's tragicomic sensibility is reflected throughout, sometimes with the emphasis on tragedy, other times with humor winning out. His characters include a butcher with a secret queer life; a woman anguished by the realization that her neighbor is a victim of domestic abuse; and a survivor of the Titanic looking back on an idyllic day in Marseille.

Though he was born in Washington, D.C., Zeineddine, who is of Lebanese descent, grew up in Saudi Arabia before bouncing back to Washington. At GW, he majored in psychology with a minor in creative writing. (His mother, Wafaa Al-Awar, B.A. '76, and sister, Jana Abou-Zeineddine, B.A. '99, are also alumni.) His years in Foggy Bottom were transformative, he said. It was the first place he made an Arab American friend and where he first began writing about specifically Arab characters and experience.

Zeineddine talked with "GW Magazine" from his home in Ohio, where he teaches creative writing at Oberlin College, about his affection for the city of Dearborn, his research methods and his love for the fiction of Pulitzer Prize winner Edward P. Jones, who started teaching at GW after Zeineddine graduated.

What did you like best about your time at GW?

What I most liked about GW was its very diverse student body. Because it's in the capital, you get a lot of people who are interested in politics and hear so many different perspectives. I was there from between the ages of 18 to about 21. It was an important time for me not only because of the academics but because I had my first Arab American friend. Before then, I had never had that experience. And I made dear friends with people of many different ethnicities.

It was such a transformative experience at GW to finally have an Arab friend. My wife and I often talk about wanting our young daughters to have Arab friends. And when

I lived in Dearborn, it was the first time in my life that I was living in an Arab American community. That was something I'd never experienced before, which I really loved.

I recognize that like any city, any community, Dearborn has its faults. But it's still really dear to me. And I've been touched by the community's response to the book, which after all is a love letter to the city.

Was there a story in the collection that felt at all dangerous to write?

There's a story called "I Have Reason to Believe My Neighbor Is a Terrorist," and it deals with Islamophobia, anti-Arab sentiment and FBI surveillance of the Arab American community following the attacks of 9/11. It also deals with domestic abuse. Those are just really heavy themes. And I think there are a few moments of levity in that story, but it's more tragic than comedic.

Domestic abuse is a social ill in every community; I don't want people to associate domestic abuse with Arab men, but I thought it would be OK if I have domestic abuse in this particular story. It would have been a problem if every male character fits this stereotype of the Arab man who abuses his wife, but because it's just one instance throughout the collection, it's not a generalization. That was a tricky story to navigate.

The collection's opening story, "The Actors of Dearborn," also deals with serious subject matter; it's set in September 2019, and there's a strong presence of ICE agents in the community in the wake of Trump's Muslim ban and his anti-immigrant rhetoric. That story is tragicomic, but I was able to get comedy out of it because of the characters, not because of the political climate.

Your characters are deeply researched. Talk a bit about your research process.

Dearborn has a very entrepreneurial spirit, with many small businesses. There are a lot of butcher shops around town, and they're all halal butcher shops. I wanted to write a story about a character in this profession, so I went to one of the butcher shops and introduced myself to the owner. His grandfather and father were also butchers, and he emigrated from Lebanon to Dearborn in 1973 and ended up opening his own shop.

I shadowed him for several days. I saw how he interacted with customers and how he cut up meat. During

lulls in the afternoon, I'd interview him and take his story down. One morning, I met him at his shop at 7 a.m., and he drove me in his van to Detroit, where there are a lot of wholesale meat markets. My intent wasn't to fictionalize his story; it was more about just understanding what it takes to be a butcher in town and what the daily procedures are like.

The fictional character of the butcher, whose name is Yasser, bears no resemblance to the butcher I actually interviewed. To show how diverse this community is, I wanted to have LGBTQ representation in the story collection. There is an enclave of Detroit called Hamtramck. It's like a city within a city, predominantly inhabited by Yemeni Americans and Bangladeshi Americans. I thought, "What if this butcher goes to Hamtramck, maybe because he's trying to hide something? What if the butcher were actually queer and he goes to Hamtramck to embody his true self?"

People know the butcher as Yasser, but he has always seen himself as a woman named Yusra. When he goes to Hamtramck, he wears a niqab which covers his head and his body. You can only see his eyes. And underneath that niqab, he wears a dress, jewelry and heels. When he goes to the mosque, he prays in the women's section. And so it's really in Hamtramck, that city within Detroit, that he's able to embrace his true self.

You have previously talked about your love of ethnic American short story cycles by writers like Amy Tan and Edward P. Jones, a professor of English at GW. What do you admire in Jones's work?

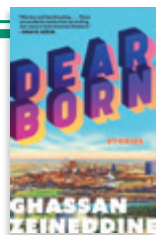
His short stories really inspired me while I was writing "Dearborn," specifically his second collection, "All Aunt Hagar's Children." Those stories are just so rich in detail and in capturing the African American experience. The characters are so complex, and each story is about so many different themes. You have the main narrative, but then it kind of splinters into these other narratives, and sometimes the omniscient point of view follows these other minor characters.

And having all these different minor characters in each story establishes a sense of community. I just find that so compelling. In Arab culture, society is not individualistic.

It's more collective. You have this web of different characters. For me to capture the Arab culture, I can't just write about only one character. That character is going to be connected to so many other characters—family members, cousins, friends. I see that a lot in Jones's work. I've always been interested in orchestrating a large cast of characters and seeing how they interact with each other in the confines of a short story. 



Ghassan Zeineddine



The following story is drawn from “Dearborn” (Tin House, 2023) by Ghassan Zeineddine.



Marseille

the corner of my living room next to the frosty window, sipping from a mug of coffee that my caretaker made for him. His tape recorder rests on the side table between us. The neighborhood street and the roofs of the brick houses are powdery white now, turning this part of East Dearborn, where I’ve lived for most of my life, into a scene from a charming holiday postcard.

I light a cigarette with the one still burning in my mouth and put out the stub in the ashtray next to my glass of water. My gnarled hand trembles. The journalist seems surprised that a woman my age, one year shy of a hundred, is smoking. His name is Ibrahim and he’s writing a profile of me, a survivor of the Titanic sinking in 1912. Although eighty-six years have passed since the disaster, the majestic ship has been on everyone’s mind since the release of the new film before Christmas. I haven’t seen *Titanic* and don’t intend to for two reasons: one, I only leave home to visit the doctor; two, I’d rather not relive the horror of the sinking. I haven’t seen the 1953 or the 1958 films about the wreck, either.

“I’m ready when you are, Madame Ayda,” Ibrahim says. His dark bangs are brushed to the side in a floppy arc. He wears silver-rimmed glasses, a wool blazer, and corduroy pants. He removed his bulky boots in the entrance so as not to dirty my carpet. There’s a hole in his argyle sock, revealing the pink skin of his big toe.

I look at the recorder. My voice is deep and guttural. My Arabic accent clings to my English words like a stubborn child. The last time I tried to tell my *Titanic* story, I was in my late twenties, married with two children and pregnant with a third. My eldest daughter’s fourth-grade teacher had invited me to visit her class to share my experience. They were learning about the ship and wanted to hear my firsthand account. I stopped halfway through my presentation to the class; my memories became too painful. I didn’t want to break down in front of nine-year-olds, including my daughter. I grabbed my purse and walked back home.

But there’s another story I plan to tell Ibrahim, not the one he’s expecting. It’s a story I’ve never told anyone before, one that I’ve carried with me since I was fourteen, my age when the ship sank in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. I tell Ibrahim to press record.

I was born in 1898 in Sofar, a Druze village in the high reaches of Mount Lebanon. There was a train station in our village, not too far from the Grand Sofar Hotel. The trains passed back and forth from Beirut to Damascus. Every time I heard their mournful wails, I imagined myself on one, headed elsewhere. I had only visited the neighboring towns and dreamt of going west to Beirut and seeing the sea up close. Don’t get me wrong, I loved Sofar, loved walking down its narrow roads lined with limestone houses with red-tile roofs. In summer I’d play with my siblings and cousins in the pine forest. We’d creep into terraced gardens to pick fruits—our village had the most delicious plums and apricots. When we got thirsty, we’d hike down to



the main square to drink from the communal spring. But the trains made me wonder about what lay beyond the mountain ranges.

A few of our village men had left for the Americas in the late nineteenth century in search of fortune. One such man, Ameen Fayyad, returned from Buenos Aires with hemp sacks overflowing with gold and his skin blistered by the sun. No one knew how he had made this money, but with it he built an Arabian mansion with marble floors and arched windows.

I was the eldest child of five. My family rented a one-bedroom house down from the main road. My parents slept in the bedroom and my siblings and I in the living room, on thin mattresses we rolled out at night and laid side by side. At the age of seven I had already become a chain-smoker. I see the look on your face, Ibrahim. Let me explain. You see, at the time I suffered from severe nosebleeds—I bled so much that my parents feared I'd bleed to death. The doctor in our village failed to cure me. That summer, my parents took me to a nomad camp in the woods for treatment. An herbalist rolled me a cigarette and told me to smoke it. I coughed with every puff, and my eyes watered. The herbalist rolled me more cigarettes and instructed me to smoke them all. My nose never bled again. From that point on, I kept a pouch of tobacco, rolling papers, and matches in my dress pocket.

My brothers and sisters would beg me for a puff, but I told them to bug off. "I've got a medical condition," I'd explain.

My father worked the fields as a hired hand, and I helped Mama clean the house and look after the younger children. I say the younger children even though I was a child myself. But back then girls my age were forced to become adults. At school, I was only allowed to smoke during recess. My classmates avoided me, saying I smelled like a stove. When I had free time, which was rare, I went to the train station and sat on a bench by the tracks and smoked alone.

My first husband arrived by train. I was fourteen and had already dropped out of school to work. I could sew, crochet, and even build things, like cabinets. Sometimes I cleaned houses. One day in early spring, as I was sewing a table cover for a customer, there was a knock on the front door. Baba was out in the fields and Mama was cooking in the kitchen. My siblings were at school. I rested my cigarette in the ashtray and answered the door to find a tall man in an overcoat and suit. His black hair was parted down the middle. He had a thin mustache and was clutching a handkerchief.

"Hello," he said. "Hi." He wiped his hands with the handkerchief. "Um, Ayda?"

"That's my name. Who are you?"

"Nabil Fayyad."

"Are you related to Ameen Fayyad, the millionaire?"

"I wish."

Mama came to the front door. Nabil introduced himself to her without shaking her hand. He seemed embarrassed about his own hands, the way he kept fiddling with his handkerchief.

"You and your brother went off to America, correct?" Mama asked.

He nodded. "We live in a city called Dearborn. I'm here on a short visit."

Mama looked down at me and then up at Nabil. "Please, come in."

We sat in the living room. I put in an extra log of wood in the stove to warm up the room. Nabil kept looking at his shoes, afraid to make direct eye contact with us. Through his awkward small talk with Mama, I learned that he worked with his older brother at a dry goods store in America. He was twenty years old.

Mama understood what he was after, as did I: a wife to take back to Dearborn. You may wonder, Ibrahim, why a man with some money

to his name would be interested in me. You can't tell now, but I was a looker in my youth. My hair was black and reached down to my waist. I had the body of a grown woman. Even then my voice was husky. Some men like husky voices. Word of my looks must have reached Nabil long before he arrived at our front door.

He stayed over for dinner to meet my father and the rest of the family. Before greeting Baba, I noticed that he wiped his hand with his handkerchief. Mama served lentil soup and bread. Nabil was quiet throughout the meal, and he only spoke when Baba asked him questions about his work and life in America. My siblings couldn't stop giggling. Once Nabil left, Baba said that he liked the man, though he thought Nabil had a weak, clammy handshake. "Felt like I was grasping a fish," he said.

Later that night, Mama asked me to join her for tea in the kitchen.

"We'll be blessed if the American asks for your hand," she said.

I sucked hard on my cigarette. Many girls my age had already been married off, mostly to their cousins. No one had shown interest in me because of my family's poverty. It didn't matter to me—I would have been fine with no husband. All I wanted from life was to ride the train every now and then.

"You can support us better by marrying him," Mama continued. "You understand?"

I stubbed my cigarette in the ashtray and pulled a new one from my pocket and lit up.

"If Nabil comes back, don't smoke in front of him. It might put him off."

On Sunday, Baba's only day off from work, Nabil appeared with his parents. He carried a bouquet of wildflowers and handed them to me as soon as he saw me.

"Flowers!" he said, as if I didn't know what they were. He laughed nervously, which I found endearing. Here was a man six years my senior who had sailed halfway across the world and was anxious in my presence. Did I have that kind of effect on men, I wondered?

In the living room, my family and I sat on one side and Nabil and his parents on the other. After an exchange of blessings, Nabil asked my father for my hand. Details were then worked out. The wedding would be held in a week, and two days later, Nabil and I would sail for America. As soon as Nabil and his parents left, I lit a cigarette and didn't stop smoking until dawn. My future had been arranged without my consent, and yet I couldn't blame my parents. At least I'd get to travel. I smoked on my mattress, surrounded by my siblings.

"Please don't go," one of my sisters said. "We'll miss you too much."

"Have a puff," I said, and let them each smoke. They all coughed. It was easier this way, distracting them.

I spent the next few days sewing myself a long-sleeved satin wedding dress. Mama sat next to me; since Nabil's proposal, she had become my shadow.

"I've never been in love before," I told her.

"There's no such thing as love, ya binti. There's only obedience. You need to cook for Nabil and wash and iron his clothes; you have to wake up in the mornings before he does to prepare his breakfast; you have to smile and never question anything he asks you to do; you have to pray for him; you have to accept him into your bed when he's in the mood; you have to bear him children. Do you understand, habibti?"

I nodded.

On the eve of my wedding, Mama could hardly look at me. When she did, her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't worry," I told her. "In a few years' time, I'll return from America with more gold than Ameen Fayyad. I'll build you the biggest house this village has ever seen."



The next day, I waited in my wedding dress for Nabil to arrive with the male members of his family. According to Druze custom, Nabil would take me back to his house for the wedding. My family wouldn't be in attendance. The groom's family was now responsible for the bride's well-being; they had to be trusted.

I heard the beating of drums from the living room. I peeked out the window and saw Nabil at the top of the road, perched on his father's shoulders. He was surrounded by a ring of dancers stomping their feet, their scimitars glinting in the sunshine. Nabil's arms were raised high; he was snapping his fingers. He looked handsome in his white suit, even though his movements were forced.

On our way to Nabil's house, he and I sat on the back of a mule, me up front. A relative held the reins and directed the beast of burden down the road. The troupe led the way, singing and dancing and beating on their drums. Villagers stepped out of their homes and onto their balconies and showered us with rice and rose petals and blessings and ringing ululations. At one point, I tilted to the side and nearly slipped off the saddle before Nabil caught me by the waist. He kept his arm around me for the rest of the journey. I hoped he'd always catch me when I fell.

In Nabil's bedroom later that night, we lay next to each other on the bed, under thick blankets. I was wearing lingerie that Mama had packed in my suitcase, along with dry foods.

"The first time will hurt," Mama had said. "Pretend to enjoy it. A few moans will do."

Apart from the winter room, which had the stove, the rest of the house was icy cold. A kerosene lamp cast everything in shadowy light. We had to get up early in the morning to take the train to Beirut. From Beirut we'd sail to Marseille, and from Marseille, we'd take a train up to Cherbourg. We'd board the Titanic at the port there. There was then a brief stop in Liverpool before making our way across the Atlantic to New York City.

"Mind if I smoke?" I asked Nabil.

"Not at all."

I lit up. He asked me when I had started smoking, and I told him about the herbalist and my nose bleeds.

"Do you think your nose bleeds would return if you ever chose to quit smoking?"

"You want me to quit?"

He shook his head.

"Good," I said, and lit another cigarette.

*"I'm a
married
woman,
I thought to myself
before drifting off to sleep.
I could hardly believe it."*



We didn't kiss that night, let alone make love. I was terrified to undress in front of him, but I wouldn't have minded a kiss. I was curious about how his mustache would feel against my lips.

"I'm a married woman," I thought to myself before drifting off to sleep. I could hardly believe it.

I hack up phlegm and spit it out into a wad of tissues. Ibrahim stops the recorder and combs his fingers through his bangs. He tells me he's seen the film three times. "Just breaks my heart," he says. I take a sip of water, adjust my false teeth, and continue my story.

My parents and siblings, as well as our neighbors and a handful of villagers, met us at the train station in the morning to bid us farewell.

"Send us gifts from America," my siblings said.

When Mama and I embraced, we spared each other the agony of making eye contact. If we had, we would have lost ourselves.

As sad as it was to leave my family, the train ride to Beirut was marvelous. I sat by the window, looking out at the passing landscape. At a bend round a mountain, I glimpsed the blue sea. We were sitting in the second-class carriage. Perhaps Nabil didn't have as much money as I thought, but I didn't mind. Traveling with us was a contingent of villagers also headed to America. We were all taking the same route.

"Is there a sea near Dearborn?" I asked Nabil.

"There are lakes—they call them the Great Lakes. I'll take you to Lake Michigan, which is so big that it looks like a sea."

I turned away from the window to look at him. He smiled.

"You have zaatar stuck in your teeth," I said.

He immediately cupped his mouth, and then reached inside his coat pocket and removed a metal container of toothpicks. He covered his mouth with one hand as he worked the toothpick between his teeth.

We got off the train in Mar Mikhaël, on the east side of Beirut, and took a horse carriage to a boarding house up from the port. The weather was much warmer, so I removed my winter coat. By the time we'd checked in at the boarding house and dropped off our chest and belongings in



a communal bedroom, it was dusk. We had supper with our fellow villagers and boarders in the dining room. Instead of going upstairs to bed, I wanted to see the sea up close.

Nabil took me down to the port. The streets smelled dusty, as if they hadn't been washed in years. The air was humid and salty. We walked through pools of lamplight and arrived at the Mediterranean. Our ship, the Lotus, was docked in the harbor. It was too dark to see the horizon, but flickering lights dotted the calm waters. Nabil told me those were lanterns swaying from fishing boats. We strolled down the boardwalk. I inhaled the smell of fish and seaweed. Stars glimmered above. In the distance the silhouettes of mountains loomed large. Somewhere up there was my family. I hoped I'd see them again.

It took a little under two weeks to reach the port of Marseille. Those first few days on the Lotus I was green with seasickness. I could hardly speak or eat I was so sick. How strange, I thought, to spend my first week with my husband feeling like I wanted to die. He, however, was used to the rocky waves. When I felt my stomach turn, I pushed him aside and ran for the toilet.

We shared a third-class cabin with three other couples from Sofar. There were four bunk beds in the room. I slept on the bottom bunk, Nabil on top. When I started feeling better, I joined our roommates in games of backgammon and cards. We sat in a circle on the floor. At night, we snacked on salted pumpkin seeds and exchanged stories. I was the youngest in the group, but no one knew my exact age except for Nabil. On my official documents it said that I was eighteen. I rolled cigarettes for the men, noting that I'd have to buy more tobacco and papers in Marseille.

Nabil didn't participate in the games and remained on his bunk, reading. He loved American poetry; Walt Whitman was his hero. He had told me he once tried growing out his beard to look like Whitman, but couldn't stand getting food caught in his facial hair. Our roommates kept pestering him to at least play a hand of cards, but he refused.

"My wife will play on my behalf," he said.

"My wife," I thought to myself. It still sounded strange to me.

During the day I sat on deck, gazing out and enjoying the sun on my face. I could look at the sea for hours, letting my thoughts roam. Nabil would sit next to me, his nose buried in Whitman. I wondered if he was more interested in the poet than me. But then I'd catch him staring at me, and when our eyes met, he'd quickly look away.

Having to share a room with others, Nabil and I had had no time to ourselves. Believe it or not, we still hadn't kissed yet. It would have been haram, improper, to kiss in public. Especially when we were surrounded by our fellow villagers and countrymen.

We arrived in the Vieux-Port de Marseille on a cold, stormy day in March. The pounding rain reminded me of the winter rains in Sofar, which was now thousands of miles away. Nabil took out two umbrellas from our chest and opened them on deck. We had to yell over the sounds of the storm to hear each other. The port was massive, with all sizes of ships and boats. Warehouses towered over the water.

Customs officials came on deck and set up a table to check our papers. Once our papers were stamped, we were permitted to walk down the plank and step foot in France. Before we disembarked, Nabil instructed me to wait on deck with the other women while he and the men went to look for a carriage to take us all to the Syrian Inn northeast of the port. The Syrian Inn was owned by a Beirut man who had immigrated to Marseille years earlier—as you must know, Ibrahim, back then there was no Lebanon; our land was called Syria. Almost all Arab voyagers stopped at his place en route to sailing west.

An hour later, Nabil and the men returned. The men carried our

luggage down to two carriages and then came back for us. They were all drenched, despite the umbrellas. It was too rainy to see anything clearly through the carriage windows. We were wet and shivering.

We shared a room with the same Sofar villagers at the Syrian Inn, which was old and made of brick with creaking wood floors. The cramped room held several bunk beds and an old chiffonier. After we arrived, the women and I took turns bathing in the women's restroom while the men did the same in theirs. By the time I bathed, the water had turned lukewarm.

That evening, we sat in the lobby, waiting for supper. A man played sonatas on a grand piano. The walls were decorated with framed landscape paintings of the Levant. I would have preferred to tour the city, but it was still raining hard and none of us wanted to risk getting sick. We were scheduled to spend two nights here in Marseille before taking the train north to Cherbourg, on the English Channel.

Nabil and I barely spoke that day. We were cold and exhausted after our sea voyage. We waited and waited, listening to the pianist. Finally, we headed to the cafeteria, where we were served a terrible roast beef; we were too hungry to care. I remember dipping pieces of a stale baguette into watery gravy.

The following morning the sun was shining, and the sky was bright blue. I told Nabil that I wanted to see Marseille. I wasn't interested in spending the day in the lobby playing cards, which was what our group intended to do. They preferred to rest up before the long train ride. Nabil and I needed time alone together, I thought to myself. We still hardly knew each other. Thankfully, he agreed to tour the city.

We asked the receptionist for tourist recommendations, explaining that we only had the day. He suggested we head a few blocks west and walk down La Canebière, the city's main avenue.

It was chilly outside, but with the sun out, it was perfect weather for a stroll. The air was fresh and smelled of budding trees. We walked down the pavement in search of a café. I lit a cigarette and raced to keep up with Nabil's pace. He had big strides; I took three steps for each one of his. The buildings reminded me of the ones I had seen in Beirut.

Nabil must have been nervous by our silence, because all of a sudden, he said he had a joke for me. "What did the wall say to the other wall?"

"Tell me."

"I'll meet you at the corner."

I laughed sympathetically.

"You're laughing to make me feel better," he said.

"You're right. That was a lousy joke."

We stepped inside a café. The floor had black-and-white tiles, wooden tables, and wicker chairs. The garçon dropped off paper menus. I had learned French in school and still remembered it.

"Do you read French?" I asked Nabil.

"Only English and Arabic. But I can say croissant. I feel like having a croissant."

"Me too."

When the garçon returned to our table, I ordered croissants for us and two black coffees. The croissants came with strawberry jam and creamy butter. We devoured them.

"You've got jam stuck in your teeth," I said, leaning back and lighting a cigarette.

"Get used to it," he said, and smiled.

Beads of sweat glimmered on his fingers. When he saw me looking at his hands, he put them in his lap.

"No reason to be embarrassed," I said. "You're my husband. We're supposed to tell each other everything. Or something like that."



"I wouldn't know. This is the first time I'm married."
 "Did you ever have a girlfriend in America? Tell me the truth, I won't be jealous."

"No."
 "How come? You're a handsome man, Nabil."
 He blushed. "You're beautiful."
 More people started to enter the café, mostly businessmen.
 "I've always been shy around girls," he said. "I'm shy around everyone."

"Because of your hands?"
 "Yes. They sweat constantly, since I was a boy. Whether I'm happy or anxious, they drip with sweat. I can't help it. My underarms and feet also sweat uncontrollably."

"Who cares if your hands sweat?"
 Whenever he was forced to shake someone's hand, he said, he'd notice how they'd then wipe their hand against their thigh, as if they were disgusted. He dreaded social occasions where the shaking of hands was required. He had avoided participating in the games of backgammon and cards on the boat because he didn't want to touch the game pieces with his sweaty hands.

"I have a smoking problem and you have a sweating problem," I said.
 He looked at me intently. "I'm glad my hands sweat and not yours."

Nabil paid the bill and we continued down the street until we reached La Canebière. The wide avenue was bustling with horse carriages, men in suits and hats, and some women in crinoline dresses. I had never seen such dresses in Sofar and wondered how they were made. Shops, cafés, bakeries, saloons, and restaurants lined the avenue on either side. The columned buildings were massive, the sun reflecting off their windows. We walked down the pavement, looking up at this new world like the obvious tourists we were. We came across theater houses, grand hotels, and historic churches; shoeshiners, barbers, and beggars. Vendors pushed carts of dry goods and merchandise. We bought fresh orange juice from a stand and stopped at a tobacconist so I could replenish my supplies. We heard French, Italian, Spanish, and Arabic being spoken. A woman in a long black coat stood on a wooden box and sang patriotic songs in French. A metal bowl lay at her feet for tips. We sat down on a bench to rest our feet.

"The winters in Dearborn are gray and cold," Nabil said. "But summers are beautiful."

"Are there Arabs in Dearborn?"
 "There's a small community. We all live in an area called the Southend with other immigrants."

"Do you have many friends?"
 "A few. I'm not as social as my brother. He can walk into a room and capture everyone's attention. I rather cower in a corner." He looked at me. "Maybe now you regret marrying me."

"I didn't have a choice." When I saw the concern on his face, I said that I was trying to be funny. He didn't laugh.

I asked Nabil if I could work at his and his brother's dry goods store. I didn't care to be a housewife.

"We need an accountant," he said. "Are you good with numbers?"
 "I can learn."

"I'm sure you won't have any problems adapting to America."
 "What was it like for you?"

"Terrible. I was only ten when I left Sofar. I cried myself to sleep every night, missing my mother. I had to sob into my pillow, because if my brother heard me, he'd yell at me and accuse me of being a sissy. I didn't continue my schooling and instead worked with my brother. When I was seventeen, I found comfort in the poetry of Whitman. I read him every night before I went to sleep. I even tried to write free verse myself, but everything I produced was horribly sentimental."

"I'd like to read your poetry."

"It'll only make you seasick again."

For lunch we ate cheese sandwiches from a street vendor and then had coffee and chocolate éclairs at an outdoor café. As we were sipping our coffees, Nabil revealed that he remembered his former life—you may not know this, Ibrahim, but Druzes believe in reincarnation. It's one of our main tenets. I grew up listening to stories of family members who remembered their previous lives and, in some cases, had reconnected with their loved ones from them. It's said that one remembers their former life if they had died tragically.

When Nabil was a toddler, he kept telling his parents that he wanted to visit the white house with the pomegranate trees. His parents had no idea what he was talking about and suspected he was remembering his former life. Some days he'd weep and weep, and no matter what his mother did to comfort him, he couldn't stop crying. Over time, his family came to understand that he was weeping over the loss of this past life.

With each passing year, Nabil's visions intensified. He saw himself climbing up a pomegranate tree, brushing up a young woman's hair, playing with a pistol in a shed. In each vision he remained a boy. The visions continued while he was living in Dearborn. He wrote letters back home asking his parents to survey the neighboring villages to determine if any boy who had lived in a white house with pomegranate trees had been tragically killed around the time Nabil was born. His parents asked around but came back with nothing. Whatever had happened to the boy, whoever he was, his soul now belonged to Nabil.

"Do you remember your past life?" Nabil asked me.

"No. I must have died an old woman."

We crossed the avenue and made our way in the direction of the port. As the sun started to set, the streetlights came on, and La Canebière lit up. Pedestrians flooded the pavement. I was sad that our day was coming to an end, and that tomorrow we'd be leaving Marseille.

We dined at a bistro in a narrow alleyway off La Canebière. The tables were packed next to one another. We both ordered steak and potatoes. Nabil also asked for a bottle of red wine. I had never had alcohol before. When I took my first sip, it tasted terribly bitter. But the more I drank, the warmer I felt. I poured myself a second glass. In the dim light, I noticed that Nabil's hands were dry. When I pointed that out to him, he looked down at them and a moment later they began to sweat.





"It's that quick," he said.

I extended my own hands across the table. "Hold them."

"No."

"It's me, your wife."

He held my hands.

Nabil ordered a second bottle, and we drank it down. We stumbled out of the bistro and into the cold, laughing hysterically—over what I can't remember. We held onto each other so as not to lose our balance. Under a streetlight, Nabil stopped, held my face in his hands, and kissed my lips. We kissed with hunger while pedestrians walked around us. Our breaths tasted of wine.

We strolled down to the port. The icy wind coming off the sea was refreshing. To the east was the Levant, to the south Africa, and to the west the opening to the Atlantic.

"Can we come back to Marseille?" I asked. "I love this city."

"Yes," he said.

Back at the inn, we tiptoed into our room. Our roommates were asleep and snoring. Nabil crept into my lower bunk. Under the covers, in that darkness, we kissed in silence. And then we made love. I bit on Nabil's shoulder so as not to cry out in pain and in pleasure. When we were finished, he soon fell asleep. I kept my palm on his chest, feeling his heartbeat, the sense of his skin on mine.

The next morning, my feet were blistered and sore. We slept for most of the train ride up to Cherbourg. When we were awake, we could hardly keep our hands off each other, despite Nabil's sweaty palms. I ached for him.

We spent two nights in Cherbourg, and on the third day we boarded the Titanic.

It's stopped snowing. The plow trucks will come out soon, disrupting the picturesque scene. And yet I'm not in Dearborn. I'm in Marseille, with my husband Nabil, walking down La Canebière.

Ibrahim sits at the edge of his chair. "Are you all right? Do you need to rest?"

"I'm fine," I say. Eighty-six years have passed since that day in Marseille, and yet it still feels like yesterday. How's that even possible? Are my memories to be trusted?

"Where were you when the ship struck the iceberg?" Ibrahim asks. "What happened to Nabil?"

We were asleep in the third-class cabin when we heard the commotion, I say. When people found out about what had happened, they began to scream and push one another. It was mayhem. Somehow Nabil and I made it up top to the deck. It was pitch-dark and cold. Only women and children were allowed to board the lifeboats. Officers were shooting men who tried to get on. I refused to go without Nabil, but he promised he'd follow me in the boat for men. He was standing on deck as I climbed down to the lifeboat and put on a life jacket. That was the last time I saw him.

We were on the lifeboat, freezing, as I saw the ship sink into the frigid waters, its stern up in the air. Hours later, we were rescued by the Carpathia. The seamen provided us with blankets and

hot tea, but I couldn't stop shivering. I've felt cold ever since then.

I was never able to board a ship again, let alone approach a large body of water. I haven't seen my family since I left them all those years ago. Most of them are dead now. God rest them.

I ended up working at Nabil's brother's store on Dix Avenue, in the Southend. I lived with Nabil's family in a bungalow. I was given Nabil's room, which still had his clothes hung up in the closet, his socks and underwear in the cabinet drawers. A stack of books lay on his desk. I asked Nabil's brother and his family for their stories about him. I asked neighbors. They all mentioned his painful shyness, his long silences, his love for reading, his kindness. I craved these stories, always wanting more.

When I was twenty-six, I married a Lebanese man and moved to East Dearborn, to this house, where I raised three children. My second husband knew that my first husband had died in the sinking of the Titanic. I didn't mention Nabil's name and he didn't ask any questions. When my children were old enough, I told them a brief version of my story, hardly mentioning Nabil. I wanted to keep my memories of him to myself. But there were times when I was overcome with sadness and withdrew to my room. My husband and children knew to leave me alone.

My children are now all grandparents and live in Michigan. My eldest daughter resides nearby and keeps insisting that I live with her. I prefer to remain in my house.

I ask Ibrahim when he intends to publish the article. In two days, he says. He'll go back to his office and begin typing it up.

"I'm sorry for your loss," he tells me on his way out.

I doubt he'll have enough space in his article to capture the story that I've told him. But I'm glad that I've shared it and that Nabil will live on in Ibrahim's recording, for anyone who cares to listen to it.

My caretaker makes us dinner and then retires to her room. I sit by the window and sip tea. My children call to check up on me. We have brief conversations, as I'm in no mood to talk. I light a cigarette and look out onto the snowy lawn bathed in yellow streetlight.

For years, I often pictured Nabil's reincarnation appearing at my front door in Dearborn and asking for me. Although I had only known Nabil for about a month, my intense longing for him was a feeling that I never experienced with my second husband, a decent man who died of pancreatic cancer more than twenty years ago.

When I arrived in New York City in 1912, Nabil's brother was there to greet me at Pier 54. He was a beefier version of his younger brother; the moment I saw him I rushed into his arms and wept. We had lunch in lower Manhattan and then went to Grand Central Station and boarded the train for Michigan. As we journeyed west through woods, I looked out the window, imagining myself on the train to Cherbourg sitting next to my love, holding his sweaty palm. 



PPLASMA

PROMISE

STORY // SARAH C.P. WILLIAMS
PHOTOGRAPHY // WILLIAM ATKINS

Aerospace engineer and GW professor **Michael Keidar** has spent his career studying the physics of plasma and how to harness this fourth state of matter for real-world applications. His research is yielding big results in everything from satellite propulsion to cancer treatments.



IN 2015, MICHAEL KEIDAR STOOD IN THE VIEWING AREA OF AN OPERATING ROOM

in Louisiana watching as surgeons opened the abdomen of a 56-year-old woman whose body had been ravaged by stage 4 colon cancer. He remembers being surprised by the classical music playing in the background. As an aerospace engineer, Keidar didn't usually spend much time in ORs; after decades developing thrusters for rockets and satellites, he was more familiar with physics labs and launchpads.

Carefully, over the course of more than seven hours, the surgeons removed tumors from the woman's colon, gallbladder, spleen, pancreas, liver and diaphragm. After removing each tumor, they grasped a small light-saber-like wand that emitted a bluish-purple jet of charged gas called plasma and traced the boundaries around where each tumor had been in the body. This is what Keidar was here to watch.

He had recently discovered in the lab that very short bursts of "cold" plasma—cold because it doesn't give off heat—could kill cancer cells without harming healthy cells. Now, at a hospital in Louisiana, he watched as a combination of electromagnetic waves and charged molecules passed through a device he'd invented and bombarded the patient's tissue.

Long after the patient was wheeled to recovery and the

concertos and symphonies were silenced, biopsies would confirm that Keidar's findings in the lab had held true in a living human patient: Cold plasma could be used safely to destroy cancer cells.

"I've always been driven more by curiosity about physics than by the potential for my results to have translational outcomes, but it was absolutely incredible to see my device being used in the operating room and know that it could make a difference for patients," says Keidar, who today is the A. James Clark Professor of Engineering at the George Washington University.

ROCKET MAN

Growing up, Keidar was fascinated by space. As an undergraduate at Kharkov Aviation Institute in Ukraine, he studied new electric propulsion systems for spacecraft. Scientists had long used chemical propulsion to send rockets into space—when a fuel burns, its chemical bonds break, releasing a powerful burst of energy. But chemical propulsion relies on a weighty fuel supply and provides diminishing returns: A heavier craft requires more fuel to move, which in turns adds to its weight.

Electric propulsion, on the other hand, uses solar panels or nuclear reactors to generate an electric charge that can propel a rocket with lighter components and less waste.

"These electric

rockets were incredibly efficient and were really at the forefront of research in rocketry at the time," says Keidar.

As he began his graduate studies at Tel Aviv University in Israel, plasma—the charged gas generated by many electric propulsion systems—captured Keidar's interest.

When a typical gas is heated to thousands of degrees, its atoms are ripped apart into positively and negatively charged particles. Both visible light and heat are often emitted. This plasma—different enough from typical gas that it is considered a fourth state of matter—makes up most of the universe, including the center of our sun. On Earth, you can see plasma within flames, flashes of lightning and the auroras.

"What's so fascinating about plasma is that it's very abundant in the universe but very rare here on Earth," says Keidar. "We

can't experience it and learn how to manipulate it unless we recreate it in the lab. I really wanted to understand it better."

When plasma is created within an electric field—positive at one end and negative at the other—its charged ions are ejected out of the system at incredible speed because of the repulsion of the charges. This forceful burst of gas propels whatever is attached to the thruster, in the same way an untied balloon buzzes around a room as air shoots out.

When he launched his research career, first at Cornell University and then

This micro-cathode arc thruster was launched into space in 2015 and used to maneuver a 1.5U CubeSat called BRICSat-P.



"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN DRIVEN MORE BY CURIOSITY ABOUT PHYSICS THAN BY THE POTENTIAL FOR MY RESULTS TO HAVE TRANSLATIONAL OUTCOMES, BUT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE TO SEE MY DEVICE BEING USED IN THE OPERATING ROOM AND KNOW THAT IT COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR PATIENTS."

Michael Keidar

at the University of Michigan, Keidar saw incredible promise in using plasma to maneuver small satellites around in space. Tiny shoebox-sized satellites are increasingly used for communication, to track weather patterns and to carry out reconnaissance. But controlling the motion of such satellites, which can't support large fuel tanks or bulky solar panels, has been tricky. Keidar helped solve the problem, becoming a leader in the design of small plasma thrusters that use powerful magnetic and electric fields to turn gas into plasma.

Over the years, he has filed more than a dozen patents related to plasma propulsion and seen multiple versions of his devices launched into space to guide satellites designed by the United States Naval Academy and NASA.

But Keidar didn't stop at rocket science.

BRANCHING OUT TO BIOLOGY

When Keidar moved his lab to GW in 2007, he saw an opportunity to collaborate with biologists and biomedical engineers to study the impact of charged plasma on living tissue. First, he needed to create a device that could generate plasma at a safe temperature and still be small and nimble enough for a person to wield, whether in the lab or the hospital.

While the plasma thrusters Keidar developed for steering satellites aimed to convert 99 percent of the atoms within a gas into charged ions, his new cold plasma device for medicine aimed to convert just one charged particle in every 100,000 atoms into such charged ions—essentially, a weakly ionized gas.

"What we do is use a very high electric field for a very, very short period of time," Keidar explains. "Because it's such a short interaction, you don't heat up the material. You can touch this stream of plasma with your finger, and you won't feel anything at all."

Once he had a toothbrush-sized device that could eject a stream of cold plasma, Keidar approached Mary Ann Stepp, a professor of anatomy and cell biology at GW's School of Medicine and Health Sciences who studies the cellular basis of wound healing. Some researchers had proposed using plasma to improve and speed wound healing.

"They were physicists and really didn't know anything about culturing cells and carrying out these studies," says Stepp. "I didn't know anything about plasma but felt like I could cross these bridges between

physics and biology and really help them advance their research a lot."

In their first tests of applying cold plasma to living cells, Keidar and Stepp's research groups aimed cold plasma at cells in a Petri dish for 30 seconds at a time. The rush of charged particles ejected from Keidar's cold plasma device had little effect on most cells but subtly slowed the movement of some. The researchers began to wonder whether, in addition to wound healing—a situation when you want cells to stay still—cold plasma could keep cancer cells from spreading around the body. So they tested the impact of cold plasma on isolated cancer cells.

"I still have those first images," says Keidar. "It was unbelievable, really a shock. We thought we might see a small effect, but it was dramatic. The plasma was incredibly selective in killing cancer cells."

In 2010 and 2011, a few chance encounters further shaped the direction of this work. While on a treadmill at the gym, Keidar struck up a conversation with Johns Hopkins University researcher Barry Trink, who studied head and neck cancer. The scientists began collaborating and, together, tested whether cold plasma could kill the cells making up these tumors.

Then neurosurgeon Jonathan Sherman joined the faculty at GW and was mistakenly referred to Keidar while searching for a radiation system he wanted to use to treat brain cancer. Keidar didn't have the system but told Sherman about his results with cold plasma. Sherman was intrigued and suggested they study whether Keidar's device might help treat glioblastoma, one of the most aggressive types of cancer.

"Brain tumors are incredibly complex, making them difficult to study, and we have very few good treatment options," says Sherman, now director of surgical neuro-oncology at West Virginia University Berkeley Medical Center. "Many of these therapies show promise in the lab yet don't work once you test them in patients, so I was very cautiously optimistic."

Keidar's results with both Trink and Sherman were promising: In test after test, cold plasma had no impact on healthy cells but killed cancer cells—from an ever-expanding list of tumor types, including not only head and neck cancer and glioblastoma but also breast, ovarian, prostate, colorectal and lung cancers.

Yet one question remained: Why?

MAKING SENSE OF COLD PLASMA

GW graduate student Vikas Soni watches a glioblastoma cell under the microscope. It is fluorescently stained blue so he can see its internal structures. He has just exposed it to one minute of cold plasma.

"First, you see the nucleus being fragmented into pieces. In biology, that means the cell has DNA damage," he narrates. "That cell is not going to survive." Indeed, within 30 minutes of incubation, the cell shrivels up, its contents spilling into the surrounding culture dish. Ultimately, it dies.

Keidar, Stepp and their colleagues knew that some of the charged atoms contained in cold plasma were oxygen and nitrogen.

In biology, these are called reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS); they carry out more chemical reactions within cells than the usual oxygen and nitrogen in the air we breathe. In general, higher levels of these reactive molecules are bad for cells. Cancer cells typically have higher-than-usual levels, thought to be both a cause and

consequence of their faster-than-usual growth.

In a series of experiments, Soni and other members of the Keidar lab showed that when tumor cells are barraged with cold plasma, ROS and RNS seep through their outer membranes and overwhelm the cells, causing death. When otherwise healthy cells, however, are exposed to cold plasma, they end up with only moderate

"I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT PLASMA BUT FELT LIKE I COULD CROSS THESE BRIDGES BETWEEN PHYSICS AND BIOLOGY."

Mary Ann Stepp





Graduate student Vikas Soni blasts cancer cells in a Petri dish with a jet of cold plasma. After 30 minutes, the cancer cells shrivel up and die.

levels of the reactive species.

Part of that difference is attributed to the initial amounts of reactive species in the cells—cancer cells start out with higher levels, so are in greater danger of becoming overloaded. But some of the differences also have to do with mutations, the membranes of cancer cells and pores within those membranes, which allow more reactive species through. Other dysfunctional molecules within cancer cells also make it harder for the cells to combat the reactive species once they are inside.

“Healthy cells can proofread themselves and get those reactive species back down to a normal level pretty easily and attain homeostasis [stability],” says Soni. “But cancer cells can’t do that.”

After incredibly positive data on the ability of cold plasma to shrink tumors on the sides of mice, even with skin acting as a barrier, Soni wondered whether the technology might work on brain tumors not only during surgery but from the outside. To mimic the protective shield made by the skull, he cut slices of thick human leg bone and placed them on top of lab dishes containing glioblastoma cells. After Soni aimed the plasma wand at the setup, the cancer cells died. He then tested this in mice with brain tumors—the first time a non-invasive treatment for glioblastoma using cold plasma had ever made it to animal models. Once again, the tumors shrank.

“We thought maybe we did something wrong,” Soni laughs. “But we repeated the experiment a few times and kept getting similar results.”

The results did not make sense at first; ROS and RNS molecules cannot penetrate bone. But cold plasma releases something more than charged atoms—a unique spectrum of electromagnetic waves. Those

waves, students in Keidar’s lab group discovered, traveled through skin and bone and coaxed cells to increase their own production of reactive species, having the same impact as the direct physical effects of ROS and RNS. Keidar, Soni and Sherman reported this finding in a 2021 article in the journal “Cancers.”

TOWARD CLINICAL TRIALS

In 2013, Keidar’s patented cold plasma technology was licensed to a biomedical device company, US Medical Innovations (USMI). USMI carried out its own experiments with cold plasma using the device and began to plan clinical trials. The Food and Drug Administration’s “compassionate use” program allows new treatments to be used on seriously ill patients who have no other treatment options—this allowed several tests of the device, including the 2015 surgery that Keidar watched in Louisiana.

More recently, USMI led a larger Phase I trial at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago and Sheba Medical Center in Israel. The trial tested the cold plasma device on 20 patients undergoing surgery for a variety of advanced stage 4 cancers. While many patients ultimately succumbed to their cancer, the trial helped establish the safety of

the technology and showed that few patients had any tumor regrowth in the areas treated with cold plasma.

“What’s amazing about this technology is that there’s no damage to the normal tissue, so if it hits a nerve, an artery or a normal brain cell, it has no effect,” said USMI CEO Jerome Canady in a 2023 interview. “It’s truly a lifesaver.”

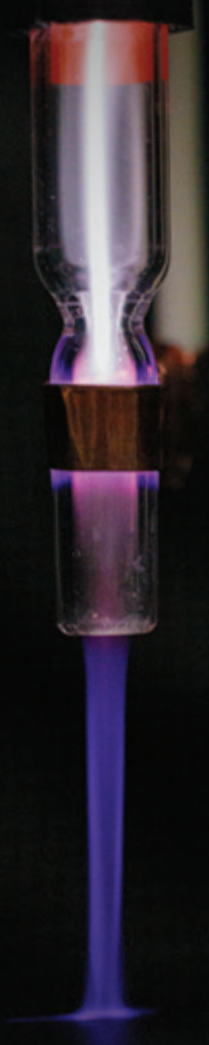
At the same time USMI was moving forward with Keidar’s initial device—which projected a physical stream of cold plasma, full of reactive molecules—Keidar’s group was developing a second type of device, based on the finding that the electromagnetic waves alone could have a biological impact. The new device keeps the plasma contained within a tube that simply has to be held in the vicinity of tumor cells. Keidar won a National Science Foundation Innovation Corps (I-Corps) grant to help commercialize the technology and began talking to surgeons and oncologists about how they might use it.

“We talked to hundreds of doctors and hospitals, and everyone was, in general, intrigued. Most surgeons, though, said, ‘It’s interesting, but I have lots of other tools and don’t know exactly how this works,’” remembers Keidar. “But there was one group of people who were really excited: neurosurgeons.”

When removing a brain tumor, neurosurgeons must walk a fine line between ensuring they get all of a tumor out and protecting healthy brain cells. While a surgeon removing a breast tumor may be able to err on the side of removing extra healthy tissue, inside the skull this can cost patients their brain function. Moreover, few drugs are effective in treating glioblastoma after safely removing as much tumor as possible. Using cold plasma to kill the remaining cancer cells around where a brain tumor was removed without harming other cells could help save a patient’s ability to walk or talk. Shrinking a tumor from the outside before surgery could similarly mean a smaller area of the brain affected by surgery.

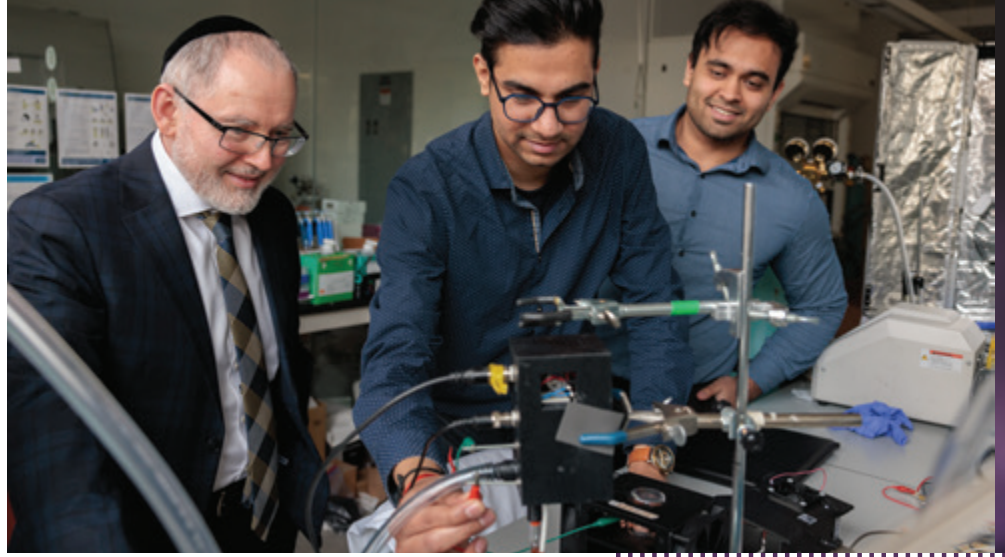
With collaborators at Duke University—which has one of the largest banks of brain tumors in the world—Keidar and Sherman are now moving their new, contained cold plasma device toward clinical trials for glioblastoma.

“It’s incredibly exciting to think about the potential this has, but we’re also trying to be cautious,” says Sherman. “We want to go to clinical trials with a high confidence of success. So over the years, I’ve really pushed to wait for trials until we have enough data to determine how best to deliver treatment with the device. We’re trying to be patient right now; however, we are very close to moving into the trial phase of our research.”



"WHAT'S AMAZING ABOUT THIS TECHNOLOGY IS THAT THERE'S NO DAMAGE TO THE NORMAL TISSUE, SO IF IT HITS A NERVE, AN ARTERY OR A NORMAL BRAIN CELL, IT HAS NO EFFECT, IT'S TRULY A LIFESAVER."

Jerome Canady



"I think my students enjoy being a part of this lab because they end up having really versatile skills, getting a very broad education and being able to go into different fields," says Keidar (LEFT) with graduate students Vikas Soni (MIDDLE) and Anmol Taploo (RIGHT).

BALANCING A BROAD RESEARCH PROGRAM

Since discovering the effect of cold plasma on cancer cells, Keidar's lab has also continued studying rocket propulsion; some of its most impactful work on satellites has come in the last few years. Keidar keeps both lines of research active and engaged, splitting his students and staff between projects.

"I think my students enjoy being a part of this lab because they end up having really versatile skills, getting a very broad education and being able to go into different fields," says Keidar. "I have several students who did their Ph.D.s on propulsion but then ended up working for biomedical companies."

Graduate student Anmol Taploo agrees. His research, funded by DARPA, focuses on developing plasma thrusters that convert air from Earth's upper atmosphere into plasma to guide very low-Earth orbit satellites. But he collaborates regularly with Soni, helping with plasma diagnostics.

"There's definitely a bridge between propulsion and medicine," says Taploo. "We both have to be able to do plasma diagnostics—measuring the properties of plasma. And so there's knowledge that can be shared there."

Keidar also doesn't shy away from taking his work in new directions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, members of Keidar's lab wondered whether the same plasma devices they were using to kill cancer cells could also be used to inactivate the COVID-19 virus. Initial results suggested that they could, and Keidar won an NSF RAPID grant to develop a "plasma brush" that could decontaminate personal

protective equipment like masks.

Since then, Keidar's student Soni has tested the experimental brush on other pathogens, including the flu virus, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) bacteria. In all cases, the plasma brush killed the germs—something potentially useful for decontaminating surfaces at hospitals or other places prone to spreading infections. Now, armed with a GW Technology Maturation Award, Soni is moving the technology toward commercialization.

Keidar's broad research portfolio is reflected in the diversity of funders who've supported his work over the years, including NSF, the Department of Defense and DARPA, the Department of Energy, NASA, the National Institutes of Health and even industry partners through corporate research agreements.

Yet, after all his successes in translating his research to both outer space and medicine, Keidar remains grounded in basic questions about plasma. He says what he most wants to know right now is how to better control low-temperature plasmas in very subtle ways. That could not only improve medical devices and thrusters but also the use of extremely precise jets of plasma to etch patterns onto computer microchips—a third area plasma research has the potential to impact. It's a topic he's only recently begun to explore but is already making strides in.

"He is really a genius outside-the-box thinker," says Sherman when talking about Keidar. "He's an easy-going guy who is an innovator and an entrepreneur at heart and wants to take his ideas and have success with them."

For Keidar, the sky's no limit. **GW**

Alumni Profiles

WHETHER THEY ARE
ADVOCATING FOR THE
NATION'S CAREGIVERS,
CONSERVATION,
ACCESSIBLE HEALTH
CARE OR A HEALTHY
PLANT-BASED DIET,
OUR ALUMNI ARE
CHANGING THE WORLD.

HERE ARE SOME
OF THEIR STORIES.



JENNIFER OLSEN

DEFENDING THE FRONT LINE

THROUGH HER WORK WITH THE ROSALYNN CARTER INSTITUTE, JENNIFER OLSEN, M.P.H. '04, IS COMBATING A NEW KIND OF PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS: UNDERSERVED CAREGIVERS.

by CAITE HAMILTON

More than a decade into her career as an epidemiologist, **Jennifer Olsen** decided to take a step back. Her grandmother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and her mother had chosen to oversee her care.

"I wasn't the primary caregiver for my grandmother, but I was trying to find ways to help my mom," Olsen said. "I was caring for the caregiver."

What she found was a disconcerting dearth of resources for caregivers. Despite there being more than 50 million family caregivers nationwide, Olsen saw that there was surprisingly little support for this shadow workforce.

Until, that is, she came across the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers, a nonprofit organization that "promotes the health, strength and resilience" of America's caregivers. Today, she serves as its CEO.

Rosalynn Carter established her eponymous institute for caregivers in 1987. The former first lady had spent much of her husband's Georgia governorship and presidency advocating for mental health reform, helping to bring about the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980 through her work on the President's Commission on Mental Health and, later, working to pass legislation that requires equal coverage of mental and physical illnesses when insurance policies include both. By the end of the 1980s, with many of the programs she'd implemented well underway, she turned her attention to caregiving.

Carter is often famously quoted saying, "There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers." She understood a fundamental truth that, even now, often escapes the public consciousness: that





→ caregivers—a friend, family member or neighbor caring for someone who is ill, aging or disabled—are the invisible front line of the national health care system.

“Without [caregivers], where would our country be?” Carter asked in testimony before the Senate Special Committee on Aging in 2011. “The demand for institutional care would increase dramatically and so would the overall costs. Our already over-taxed health care system would be hard pressed to find the workforce necessary to deliver high-quality institutionalized care. And millions more older people would have to live out their final days deprived of the comfort and security of being in their own homes.”

Carter noted that not only do up to 50 percent of caregivers report struggling with depression (and the rates are even higher when caring for someone with dementia), but caregivers report chronic conditions—such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes—at

As CEO of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers, Jennifer Olsen pushes for a public health approach to support the nation’s 50 million caregivers.

twice the rate of their non-caregiving peers. This is, in part, because the job of a caregiver can be vast and all-consuming, including fulfilling day-to-day tasks as well as overseeing significant clinical health needs.

“Caregiving itself can mean everything from going and getting the mail and shoveling the snow to really complicated medical tasks like infusion treatments and IV changes in the household,” Olsen said. “It’s pretty broad in terms of the types of things that you could do in that role, with both medical task elements and financial and insurance challenges.”

Carter knew the effects of caregiving firsthand, having witnessed her father’s death from leukemia when she was just 13. In

her Senate testimony, she recalled running to the outdoor privy to cry, burdened by the task of caring for her father at such a young age. Less than a year later, her grandmother died, and her grandfather came to live with their family. Carter’s mother became his caregiver until he passed away at age 95. The last few years of his life, Carter said, her grandfather was totally dependent on caregiver support.

Much in the way the former first lady launched RCI out of her direct experience with caretaking and the challenges therein, Olsen came to RCI following her own time in the caretaking space. She had spent her career gaining the skills it would take to converge on this long-neglected public health issue.

Olsen’s interest in public health dates back to high school, when she contracted chicken pox on her first day. The experience piqued

her interest.

“Why didn’t I get chickenpox when everybody else did? Why is this happening now?” she remembers asking herself. “I’ve always been interested in the intersection of who gets sick, when they get sick and how they get sick.”

That curiosity led her to a degree in biomathematics from Rutgers University and a master’s in public health from GW.

After stints at the Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, she earned her DrPH from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She then took a job with Skoll Global Threats Fund. Established by eBay founder Jeff Skoll, the foundation collaborated with academic and community partners to find new ways to detect outbreaks faster. Olsen worked mainly in the area of pandemics, focusing on the animal populations (where outbreaks often originate) in Southeast Asia and East Africa.

One of her proudest achievements in that role was recognizing the need for farmers and mechanics to work together to identify and report early outbreaks.

“Why mechanics? Because people spend a lot of time sitting in those shops waiting for their motorcycle to be ready, so a lot of news flows through those places,” Olsen said. “That job taught me that you can have amazing technology funded by Silicon Valley, but it still requires engagement with the local community to find outbreaks faster.” It was around that time that Olsen began trying to find more ways to support her own family, who had begun caring for her grandmother with Alzheimer’s disease and her uncle with multiple chronic health conditions.

In 2017, she stepped away from her position to be another set of hands for her loved ones.

“I realized that there aren’t very many resources for friends and family who are caring for someone, despite all that health training, all that public health knowledge,” Olsen said. “It seemed like there was nothing out there.” Meanwhile, she was seeing the physical and mental health of her own immediate family members decline.

Her search led her to RCI, which by that

time had been advocating in support of this shadow workforce for 30 years. “I saw a job posting and thought, ‘I think I could contribute to solving some of these issues,’” she said.

Olsen traveled to Georgia for the interview, the second half of which was at the home of the Carters.

“I opened the door and [Rosalynn Carter] is standing there with my resume with highlights and notes on it, and I’m just overwhelmed,” she said. Olsen sat down with her and began to explain the ways she felt she could contribute to the institute when President Carter came in. “They both asked me in their own polite ways, didn’t I think I’d be a better fit at the Carter Center?”

She understood what they were asking. With her degree in epidemiology, wouldn’t she be more suited for a position at their Atlanta-based organization, where they work in global health and neglected tropical diseases, areas that are more closely related to the work she’d been focusing on her entire career?

“I can see why that makes sense,” she told them. “However, caregivers are a vulnerable population who are at risk for so many health challenges—at greater

rates than their non-caregiver peers. So it was very much, at its core, a public health issue.”

She made the case that a public health approach is needed to support the nation’s caregivers and was hired in 2018 as the organization’s executive director. In 2021, she was named its CEO. In her role, Olsen serves as the nonprofit’s brain trust, the driving force behind its initiatives and long-term projects.

“She is truly the visionary behind the work at RCI,” said Megan Shepherd-Banigan, an assistant professor in population health sciences at Duke University and a frequent collaborator with RCI and Olsen. “She can kind of see things 10 steps ahead. She’ll explain an idea she has to me, and it often takes me a couple months to wrap my head around how to actually make it happen. As a trained epidemiologist, she knows it can happen, but it’s so visionary and so out of the box.”

One of those ideas, Shepherd-Banigan said, was to totally reconceptualize the way we think about caregivers. Rather than seeing them as an extension of the care recipient, the project took a caregiver-centered approach, asking: What are the experiences of caregiving? What is the experience like from a caregiver’s perspective?

“The way that caregivers are connected to resources are often in the guise of very siloed medical or social service systems that are very based on the care recipient’s condition,” Shepherd-Banigan said. “We wanted to think about the experiences of caregiving and what it is like from their perspective in a way that is agnostic to the care recipient’s condition.”

With the help of Shepherd-Banigan’s colleagues at Duke, Olsen assembled a team that comprised a physician, a behavioral scientist, qualitative researchers and a health economist. Together, over two years, this kind of fusion cell developed a list of 10 caregiver “profiles,” so instead of being classified as a “dementia caregiver” (which centers on the care recipient), one might be categorized as “managing the decline of an illness” (which centers on the caregiver).

It’s this reimagining of the way we talk about caregivers—and the plight of caregivers—that’s at the core of RCI’s mission.

The three pillars of the organization—support, which provides education in the form of virtual or classroom-style training as well as coaching programs; advocacy, which looks for ways to engage lawmakers at the federal level to think about ways to support caregivers, as with RCI’s current goal of creating a federal Office of Caregiver Health; and initiatives, which entails working with employers and other partners to make sure caregivers are seen and supported in the workplace—are all in service of RCI’s ultimate goal: to create an environment where, as Olsen puts it, “caregivers are able to spend more time holding the hand of the person they’re caring for and less time holding the phone dealing with insurance or doctor’s appointments.”

Like any formidable societal issue, supporting caregivers will require systemic change. Olsen knows the key to caring for caregivers—and easing their burden—is to meet them where they are.

“It’s not that we’re going to make caregiving easy,” Olsen said, “but we want to make it less hard. Part of that speaks to the broad public health principle of engaging with people early and from the preventive space, instead of what we do now, which is wait for caregivers to hit a crisis point. That’s the culture we’re trying to see. That’s the shift we’re trying to make happen.”

“I REALIZED THAT THERE AREN'T VERY MANY RESOURCES FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO ARE CARING FOR SOMEONE, DESPITE ALL THAT HEALTH TRAINING, ALL THAT PUBLIC HEALTH KNOWLEDGE. IT SEEMED LIKE THERE WAS NOTHING OUT THERE.”

PLANTA

SOWING SEEDS OF SUCCESS

STEVEN SALM, B.B.A. '07, IS THE FOUNDER AND CEO OF PLANTA, A COLLECTIVE OF 100 PERCENT PLANT-BASED RESTAURANTS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA.

by **LISA CONLEY-KENDZIOR**

When you walk into a PLANTA restaurant, you'll hear the sizzle of bacon, smell the grilling of burgers and see the careful assemblage of spicy tuna rolls. The catch? PLANTA doesn't serve any meat.

Born and raised in eastern Long Island, **Steven Salm**, founder and CEO of PLANTA, discovered a passion for food and cooking at an early age.

"Growing up, our home was a gathering place for family and friends, and there was always a copious amount of homemade food," he said. "So I was introduced to the idea of food being the center of all activity as a kid, and it's something I've carried with me throughout my life."

After graduating from GW's School of Business in 2007, Salm ventured into the hospitality industry, eventually establishing a foothold in Toronto. In 2012, he founded his own hospitality group and opened his first restaurant the following year.

The idea for PLANTA came three years—and three more restaurants—later when Salm, a committed carnivore until then,

transitioned to a plant-based diet after watching "Cowspiracy," a documentary about the ecological damage of animal agriculture and factory farming.

"I noticed that once I went plant based, I had more energy and just felt better overall," he said. "It really opened my eyes to the idea of food as medicine, and I learned that nothing could taste as good as I feel when I eat a plant-based diet."

Faced with the challenge of aligning his newfound lifestyle with the existing menus of his burgeoning restaurant empire, Salm converted 25 percent of his offerings to be plant based.

He focused on crafting menu items that appealed to all, defying preconceived notions about vegan cuisine through creative dishes like potato chorizo breakfast burritos and ahi watermelon hand rolls.

"PLANTA is not just about the food; it's about creating an experience that surprises and delights," Salm explained. "We want people to leave not just satisfied but inspired by the possibilities of plant-based dining."

And those possibilities have grown immensely since Salm's personal shift to plant-based eating; what once felt lonely has since transformed into a movement, with an array of plant-based alternatives that were unimaginable in 2016.


"It's a totally different landscape now compared to eight years ago," Salm said. "It used to be difficult to find alternative milks, but today you can walk into almost any grocery store and find everything from pistachio milk to hemp milk."

Now that sourcing quality plant-based ingredients is a problem of the past, Salm is setting his sights on a new challenge: enticing meat-eaters to explore the world of plant-based options.

The restauranter recognizes that to effect real change in the larger issues of sustainability and climate impact, engagement with the broader audience—the 90% who consume animal



PLANTA **QUEEN BROWNIES**

 **22–25 min.**

BROWNIES

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| » 330g granulated sugar | » 4g salt |
| » 250g all-purpose flour | » 220g water |
| » 80g unsweetened cocoa powder | » 200g vegetable oil |
| » 5g baking powder | » 5g vanilla extract |

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease a 9x13-inch baking pan and line it with parchment paper.
2. Combine the sugar, flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt in a large mixing bowl. Add the water, oil and vanilla extract to the dry ingredients; mix until incorporated, making sure the batter is smooth.
3. Spread the batter in the prepared baking pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center of the brownies comes out clean, 22 to 25 minutes.

CHOCOLATE SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| » 120g granulated sugar | » 120g rice syrup |
| » 50g unsweetened cocoa powder | » 50g plant-based butter |
| » 250g oat milk | » 120g 70% dark chocolate |

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a saucepan, whisk together the sugar and cocoa powder.
2. Add the oat milk and rice syrup.
3. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat. Let it come to a bubble.
4. Whisk in the butter, remove from the heat and add chocolate. Mix well and serve hot.

products—is crucial.

“At the end of the day, the issues that we’re trying to solve for on a sustainability aspect, like the overall climate crisis, are not going to be solved by only focusing on the 10% of people who eat a vegetarian diet,” Salm said. “It’s about taking 100% of the market and saying, ‘We have an opportunity to use plants differently, and we just want you to come in and experience it.’”

“If you’re open to the idea of trying it, then we feel like we can do a pretty good job of convincing you that it’s not some scary, ‘other’ type of eating,” he added.

Sustainability isn’t just a buzzword for Salm; it’s a philosophy that extends beyond the walls of PLANTA and begins with educating the next generation about the positive impact they can have on the food industry.

“I’m really confident in mankind, and I’m really confident in our youth. Younger generations are seeking options that align with their values, and we’re here to meet that demand,” he said. “The shift toward plant-based is not just a trend—it’s a fundamental change in how people view their relationship with food.”

And as a father of three, Salm has witnessed that fundamental change firsthand.

“One day our 6-year-old noticed that our 4-year-old was sneezing and said, ‘I’m going to go tell mom and dad to make you a green juice to help you get you better,’” he recounted with a smile. “So they’re already starting to form conclusions that food can be medicinal, and it can solve problems.”

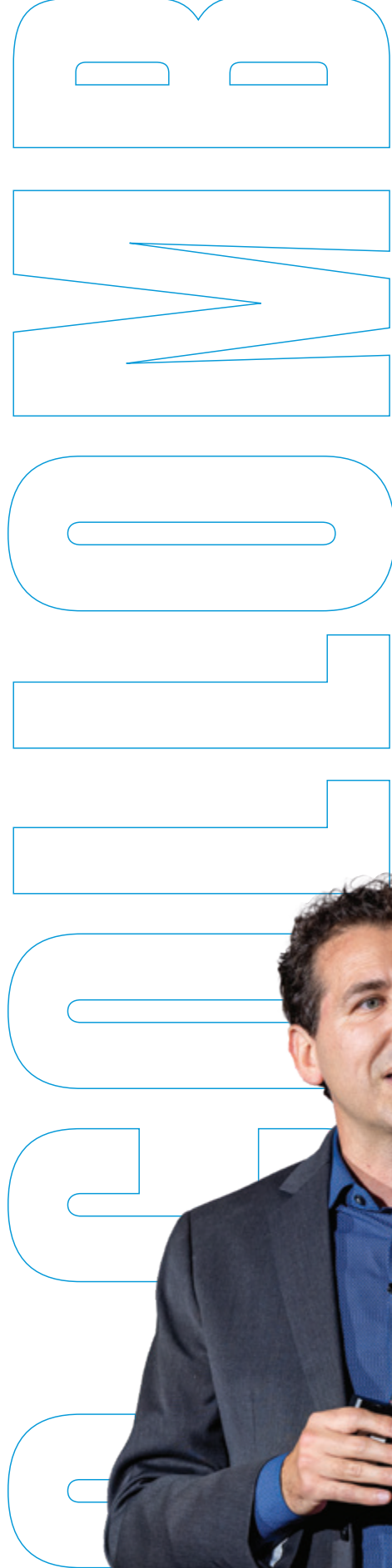
PLANTA now has more than a dozen locations across North America, including two specialized dining concepts: PLANTA Queen, focusing exclusively on Asian-inspired dishes, and PLANTA Cocina, specializing in pan-Latin cuisine.

As PLANTA continues to grow, maintaining core values is a priority for Salm. His goal is to make plant-based dining accessible to everyone and prove that eating out can be mutually beneficial for both the patron and the planet—an “unguilty pleasure.”

“The mission here is to create an environment where delicious food in beautiful spaces with great service can be the norm,” he said. “And seeing a menu that only has fruits and vegetables on it can be the norm.”

“There’s this whole world out there that is better as a result of these decisions,” he added. “By taking these steps forward with creativity and making and designing amazing environments and curating incredible experiences, we know that this is the future.”





CIRCLE OF LIFE

*CONSERVATIONIST
AND NONPROFIT
LEADER JG
COLLOMB, B.S. '96,
IS AN ADVOCATE
FOR PEACEFUL
COEXISTENCE
BETWEEN HUMANS
AND ANIMALS.*

by CAITE HAMILTON

Change happens because people make change happen. That's been a longtime belief of **Jean-Gaël "JG" Collomb**, CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), a nonprofit tasked with supporting conservationists who promote coexistence between people and animals. Collomb faces the reality daily that while the greatest threat to endangered species (or any

species) is humans, it's humans that will also be the remedy.

"It is really about addressing human behaviors, because humans are going to be the solution at a local level and global level," Collomb said. "The threats speed up when we make bad choices, when we are driven by greed, by poor covenants, when we lose respect for nature and for each other."

It's not just about one individual or one species, he said. It's about having a healthy relationship with our surroundings.

Collomb was born and raised in Paris, and while his family took plenty of trips to various European countries, it wasn't until he'd come to the United States to earn his bachelor's degree at GW that he went anywhere one might classify as "tropical." For a kid who had long felt a connection to nature and wildlife, botany fieldwork in Peru was a dream come true. He loved it.

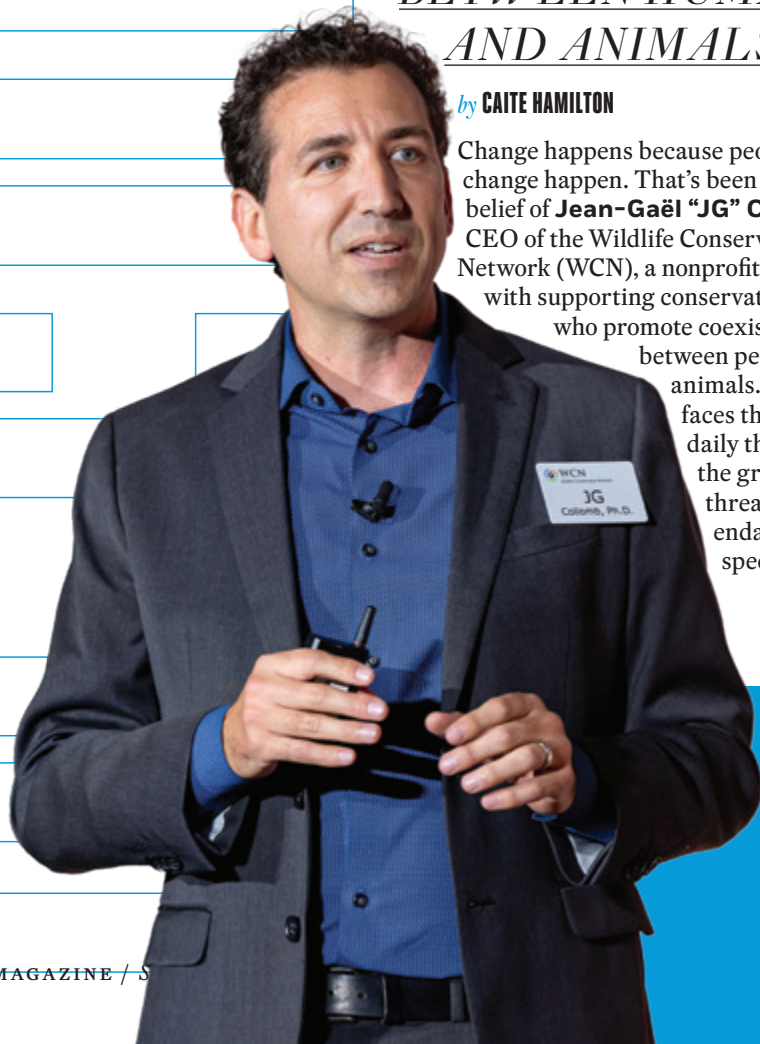
"I also love primates and great apes in particular," he said. There are no great apes in the Americas, so he headed to the Congo Basin.

It was a professor at GW, Geza Teleki, who convinced him to hold off on going to graduate school and instead "go to Africa, put yourself under a tree and protect that area." Teleki opened up his Rolodex ("It really was a Rolodex," Collomb said) and put Collomb in touch with conservationists with whom he might be able to study.

Collomb wrote letters to many of them, including Jane Goodall, the world-renowned anthropologist. Following graduation, Collomb was off to Gabon, working for a decade in the field—for the Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Resources Institute—before returning to earn a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary ecology from the University of Florida.

"I set on this path to work with wildlife in a new way," Collomb said. "If I just studied them, then they would disappear because their environment was under threat. The only way to resolve that was to work at the intersection between people issues and wildlife issues."

WCN focuses on community-led conservation, relying on conservationists who are based in the field and know the species and the cultural context. That way, they can adapt quickly to make their projects successful. A big part of WCN is finding those people and understanding what they need to succeed. "We take a venture capital-style approach to philanthropic funding, and we connect these field-based conservationists with the people who can provide them the resources they need to carry out their mission," said Collomb.





WCN focuses on community-led conservation.

WCN's strategy is threefold: working with partner organizations, investing in the work of emerging local conservationists and creating wildlife funds. WCN starts by vetting conservation groups working with myriad species, from more familiar ones like lions, elephants and cheetahs to the more obscure, like saiga antelopes in Central Asia, which date back to the Ice Age, or cotton-top tamarins, a critically endangered species (there are only 2,000 left) found in Colombia that look a bit like if a monkey joined a hair band.

Collomb said these conservationists take a holistic approach in their work, helping communities lead decision-making that affects their resources, and WCN supports them by writing foundation grants, obtaining solar power for remote field stations and creating opportunities for student internships.

"For community-led conservation projects to be successful, they need to take this kind of cross-sectoral approach that addresses the needs of those communities, and often those needs are fairly universal," Collomb said. "It's making sure that kids have access to education. It's making sure that there is some level of good governance in the community that's providing alternative income so people don't engage in behaviors that are detrimental to the environment. It's making sure that their interests are represented with local governments and then filtering up."

Take, for instance, Saiga Conservation

Alliance, a network of researchers and conservationists who work together to protect the aforementioned antelope population of Central Asia. With the help of WCN, the alliance and its partners have been able to increase the animal's population from 48,000 in 2005 to 1.9 million in 2023.

WCN also invests in emerging local conservationists because, Collomb said, "ultimately, conservation success is going to come from local nationals. So it's really important to make sure that we've got a cadre of local conservationists coming through."

And finally, WCN employs a portfolio-type approach with wildlife funds for individual species. With this method, the organization has provided donor opportunities for lions, elephants, rhinos and pangolins.

Lance C. Williams has donated to WCN for roughly a dozen years and specifically to the Lion Recovery Fund.

"It has become one of the most vital tools for lion conservation funding throughout the lion range, having raised and deployed well over \$30 million to some 250 projects in 25 African countries," said Williams, who serves as a special adviser to the LRF. "More than just saving lions, the LRF seeks to create a global movement to build the political and philanthropic will toward achieving healthy and sustainable human-wildlife coexistence."

It's not only about saving the populations of endangered wildlife species. It's about ensuring humans and wildlife can live and thrive synchronously.

"With healthy ecosystems, we have healthy human populations. And it's not just the healthy human populations in Zimbabwe or in the middle of the Amazon," he said. "The health of those ecosystems affect us here as well because of the global connections that tie our lands and seascapes together."

Beyond the logistics of how and why the organization operates, WCN also offers a few distinctive selling points (so to speak) when it comes to donor benefits, which may account for the \$300 million it's raised since its founding in 2002. WCN guarantees 100 percent of a donor's funding goes where the donor intends. If someone writes WCN a check for \$1,000 and indicates they want it to help painted dogs in Zimbabwe, all \$1,000 will go to helping painted dogs in Zimbabwe. What's more, donors are able to see their money at work.

"The organization operates with great transparency and with the highest integrity, but, vitally, it values and encourages collaboration, knowing that no one organization (and no one funder) can save our planet's wildlife and wild places alone," said Williams.

He notes that WCN donors are brought into the process in a much deeper and more immediate way, logging into WhatsApp chats with on-the-ground conservationists and learning in real time of their daily successes and challenges.

"Donors are invited to give their time and talent to become an active and involved part of the solution," Williams said. "[JG brings a] high level of strategic vision, combined with a high EQ and empathy for staff and conservation partners," said Peter Lindsey, who serves as the director of the Lion Recovery Fund. "He has introduced a mutually supportive working culture that brings the best out of staff members and encourages people to stay in their roles long term."

Empathy is the name of the game for WCN's ultimate success, Collomb said. Without it, the organization will have a difficult time effecting the changes it wants to make. While he's happy to take the small victories at an individual species level—as in 2017, when China banned elephant ivory trade, thanks to a coalition of conservationists of which WCN was a part—the bigger win he's looking for is a shift in perception.

"[The goal is] a change in attitude, a recognition that people should care about the relationships that we have with nature," Collomb said. "It matters to [the animals'] quality of life, and ultimately their quality of life then ripples down to everybody else's quality of life."

CLINIC+O
NASSER
DIALLO

MERCY MISSION

*NASSER DIALLO
FOUNDED
CLINIC+O TO
IMPROVE HEALTH
CARE ACCESS FOR
MILLIONS IN
HIS NATIVE
GUINEA AND
ACROSS WEST
AFRICA.*

by JOHN DICONSIGLIO

Nasser Diallo, B.A. '18, was just 9 years old when he became, for all intents and purposes, his father's primary caregiver.

Growing up in a rural community in Guinea, Diallo watched his dad struggle with diabetes, the "silent killer," he said, that is still rampant throughout the impoverished West African nation. It was Diallo's job to help his father manage his medications and maintain a healthy diet. And it was Diallo who accompanied him on 14-hour trips to the capital, Conakry, where the nearest physician could write prescriptions and check his blood-glucose levels.

"I turned myself into a little doctor," Diallo remembered, "not because I had the skills, but because I was there at the right time, and I needed to help my dad."

Eventually, the burdens of Guinea's skeletal infrastructure—from affording the \$12 medication and the \$22 travel fare in a nation where many people make less than \$3 a day to navigating the dearth of clean drinking water and proper sanitation—were too much for his father to overcome. He died from complications due to diabetes when Diallo was a teenager.

Diallo saw the same health crises consume his neighbors. In the past decade, Guinea has suffered outbreaks of Ebola, measles, Lassa fever and Marburg virus—along with COVID-19 and the everyday epidemics of diabetes, high blood pressure and malaria. And throughout West Africa, experts estimate that 100 million people lack adequate access to health care.

"I was traumatized by how broken the system was,"

Diallo said. "I promised myself that I would do something to help—however I can."

Now the former political communication major and recent recipient of a Spirit of GW Award is making good on that vow.

He's the founder and CEO of



Clinic+O, a tech platform that connects medical providers with low-income communities in Guinea, bringing primary care services to people who may never have seen a doctor in their lives.

Pairing telemedicine with on-the-ground community health care workers, Clinic+O—the “O” stands for *oublié*, the French word for “forgotten”—has provided virtual and in-person medical consultations to more than 35,000 patients since 2020. It’s enabled checkups and screenings, pharmaceutical services and home care visits—without the crushing expenses of travel and fees. Diallo’s work has been recognized by Echoing Green and the Obama Foundation Leaders Africa Program.

But Diallo sees it as just a first step. He plans to expand the project into Uganda, Senegal and Liberia. His long-term goal is nothing short of transforming health care throughout Africa.

“I have seen people dying from pneumonia and diarrhea—conditions that cost literally a few dollars to treat,” he said. “This can’t go on.”

Through Clinic+O, Nasser Diallo, B.A. '18, (IN BLUE) combines virtual medical consultations with in-person care in his native Guinea.

PAYING IT BACK

Diallo began his professional career as a journalist in Guinea. But in 2009, after reporting on a government assault on a protest rally in Conakry, he feared for his own life and fled to France. He eventually arrived in New York City, teaching himself English at public libraries and attending community college.

When he transferred to GW in 2014, Diallo had never written an English-language paper longer than five pages, he said—and he still remembers his panic when he was assigned a 30-page midterm. “I thought, ‘How will I ever do this?’” he recalled. But he credits GW faculty—like Professor of Media and Public Affairs Steven Livingston and Associate Professor of Writing Jessica McCaughey—with “empowering me and supporting me,” he said.

“In my 32 years at GW, I have met many extraordinary students. Nasser Diallo is certainly one of them,” Livingston said. “His personal story of endurance and fortitude... is the stuff of legends. He is a remarkable human being.”

Even while studying at Foggy Bottom, Diallo’s home country was never far from

his mind. During a 2017 study abroad project in France, he worked on social media campaigns to reform elections in West Africa. His 2018 GW New Venture Competition project proposed ways to transform waste management in Conakry. In 2019, he returned to Guinea as a public policy analyst with Facebook, designing programs to nurture digital literacy and improve technology access in sub-Saharan Africa.

He began Clinic+O from his Brooklyn apartment, connecting a handful of doctors to just a few patients in Guinea through a WhatsApp number and a Google Doc. After six months, he left Facebook to devote himself to Clinic+O, splitting his time between his wife and two young children in New York and the Guinea region where his siblings still live.

“I have been extremely privileged to come to the United States, to study at GW, to work at Facebook,” he said. “It is an obligation for me to pay that back.”

THE CLINIC+O MODEL

In the Clinic+O model, community health workers go door-to-door in rural Guinea communities screening for high blood pressure, testing glucose levels and promoting good nutrition. If a patient shows signs of, for example, hypertension or diabetes, they are connected remotely with qualified health care providers. Clinic+O also ships medications to district hubs, where the community workers distribute it.

Recalling his father’s struggles, Diallo said it’s “key to take away barriers like transportation costs or time burdens—things that make people give up on their care.” At the same time, Clinic+O promotes much needed digital literacy skills through donated smartphones, tablets and internet services.

“What makes [Diallo] a great leader is not just his willingness to listen to other people,” McCaughey said, “but his real desire to hear those experiences...whether that is listening to or traveling to rural remote villages in Africa to really understand the needs of those communities.”

And while Diallo sees himself as a “small player,” he has big goals. In addition to improving access to health care, Diallo hopes Clinic+O can prepare future generations to address systematic challenges like poverty and education in West Africa.

“We want to raise awareness, we want to enable an environment that ensures universal access to health coverage, and we want to change policy,” he said. “Not just for a village. Not just for a country. But for 650 million people.” **GW**



IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY



Michael and Jane Rice

INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

A Chip Off the Old Block: Family Behind Utz Brands Endows GW Law Scholarship



TOP Michael Rice and many of his GW Law '68 classmates have maintained their friendship for more than a half century. Pictured at a recent gathering are, from left: D.C. Superior Court Senior Judge Robert Tignor, Michael Rice, James Stein, Dolph Sand, Martin Snider and Larry Thomas.

GENERATIONS OF GW ALUMNI CONTINUE A LONG-STANDING FAMILY TRADITION OF GIVING BACK WITH THE RICE FAMILY FOUNDATION'S \$1.6 MILLION GIFT // By Mary Dempsey

M

ore than a century ago, Bill and Salie Utz founded a potato chip operation in their Hanover, Pennsylvania, kitchen and began selling their product door-to-door.

Today, Utz Brands, Inc., is the third largest branded salty snack platform in the United States, producing over 3.3 million pounds of snacks each week and generating more than \$1.4 billion in annual sales.

The pair's grandson and his family are still involved in managing the now public company. With deep roots at GW, these alumni recently created a need-based scholarship to GW Law, the Rice Family Endowed Scholarship.

"My grandparents founded Utz, and they instilled in us an obligation to give back to the community," said Utz Chairman Emeritus and Special Advisor Michael Rice, J.D. '68.

Rice started his family's GW tradition, although a law degree wasn't originally part of his career plan. Indeed, unsure of what he wanted to do with his life, he dropped out of college during his sophomore year. His father immediately put him to work at Utz shoveling

potatoes in the potato cellar.

"By spring of that year, I said I didn't want to do this, and I decided to complete college and then get a law degree," Rice said. He passed the Pennsylvania bar exam after graduation but never planned to practice law as a career.

"I wanted the skills that come with a law degree," he said, describing his GW Law education as "extremely valuable" in preparing him to join the leadership team at Utz. Rice and his wife, Jane, a former Utz public relations director, created the Rice Family Foundation in 2017. Their daughter, Stacie Rice Lissette, J.D. '92, serves as director of the family foundation.

The Buff and Blue is a family affair: Stacie's husband, Utz Chairman Dylan Lissette, B.B.A. '93, studied business economics and public policy. Their daughter, M. Payton Lissette, B.A. '18, was a communications major. Dylan's twin brother, James Lissette, B.A. '93, earned a degree in political science, and his sister, Michele Schimpp, B.A. '86, was a communications major.

"My father and I both had really great experiences at the law school," said Rice Lissette. "We were so blessed that we were able to go to GW Law, and we felt really fortunate that we didn't have to go into debt to do it. We are conscious that this is not necessarily the case for others.

"We wanted to create this scholarship to pay it forward and give someone the same opportunity we had," she said.

GW President Ellen M. Granberg

expressed gratitude for the family's support of student scholarships, a top university priority. "GW Law offers unmatched exposure to some of our nation's most respected legal scholars and practitioners," Granberg said. "This generous gift helps support talented students who face financial challenges, allowing them to focus on their studies, take advantage of only-at-GW opportunities and gain a meaningful hands-on legal education, particularly in nonprofit and government service where funding is more limited."

Rice's decision to study in the nation's capital was driven by his admiration for the early U.S. presidents that grew out of learning to read with a set of childhood books given to him by his mother. He still keeps in touch with a sizable group of law school friends. "In those days, classes were divided alphabetically, so I knew everyone from R to Z," he said. "A group of us have gotten together regularly through the years to share special occasions and stay in touch with each other."

He and Jane were married between his first and second years of law school, and he was still a student when Stacie was born. To support his new family, he took a job at the Census Bureau and switched to night classes at GW Law.

GW's connections to the Washington, D.C., community influenced Rice Lissette's decision to attend GW Law. Even though her family was based in Hanover, her parents spent a lot of time in Washington when she was growing up. The city felt like home.

"I loved studying law in the nation's capital. My professors were awesome, and my classmates were such a diverse group of people. And I loved the clinics. That kind of hands-on experience, to be able to use the skills I was learning, was really meaningful." Today, she serves on the school's Clinical Law Advisory Council.

Rice, his wife and his daughter are deeply committed to providing opportunities for others. By supporting education in particular, Rice Lissette said, "you provide people with the ability to create their future."

Donna Arbide, GW's vice president for development and alumni relations, hopes the family's "heartwarming" legacy will inspire others. "It's so gratifying to see generations share the Buff and Blue tradition. It really validates the impact that GW can have on students and entire families, and it's incredible when they give back so generously so that others can follow in their footsteps."

GW

INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Brandman Foundation's Gift to Support Veterans Creates \$1 Million Scholarship Fund



Saul and Joyce Brandman

PROMINENT PHILANTHROPIST JOYCE BRANDMAN ENDOWS FUND TO CLOSE FINANCIAL NEED GAPS AFTER MILITARY EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

// By Ann McMaster

Joyce Brandman has a self-described “soft spot in my heart for our military.” Her father, husband and brother served in the United States Navy, and their selfless patriotism and willingness to risk the ultimate sacrifice for their country motivates the California philanthropist’s support for military veterans.

Educational access for veterans is a high priority for Brandman, and the opportunity

to double her \$500,000 impact through GW’s Third Century Scholarship Match was a natural fit. GW enrolled the nation’s first beneficiary of the G.I. Bill and was one of the first institutions to join the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Yellow Ribbon Program. “It’s important to help those who have protected our country,” Brandman said. “I think that often not enough is done for them when they return.”

Many service members may have extra challenges such as young children or other family obligations that limit their ability to work while studying full time, she explained. “It’s tough today,” Brandman said. “You can’t just go to night school like my generation could, and student loans are a tough way to start out.” Brandman is grateful that college debt wasn’t an issue for her despite her working-class roots.

The university has a strong tradition of commitment to veteran and military-affiliated students and offers numerous resources that ease their transition to civilian life.

“As a country, we owe tremendous gratitude to our military veterans,” said GW President Ellen M. Granberg. “This unique student population already has the experience and leadership skills to be successful at GW and beyond. And thanks to the Brandman Foundation’s generous scholarship support, many of our student veterans can focus more on achieving that success than dealing with the worries of financial needs.”

The Joyce and Saul Brandman Military Veteran Endowed Scholarship Fund carries on the legacy begun by Brandman’s late husband, Saul. A self-made man who left pre-med studies to “serve his turn” during World War II, he returned from combat to a long and successful career in the garment industry and real estate.

“A lot of what we do is in our own backyard,” said Brandman, who takes an active, hands-on approach as president of the Joyce and Saul Brandman Foundation.

GW Trustee Michelle Rubin, B.A. ’91, is a very dear friend of her and her late husband. Rubin serves on the board of the Brandman Foundation and facilitated the introduction that led to the gift.

“Joyce and the Joyce and Saul Brandman Foundation are incredible friends of GW, and we are beyond grateful for this gift,” said Donna Arbide, GW’s vice president for development and alumni relations. “These scholarships can make all the difference in our veteran students’ ability to complete an academic program and gain the life-changing power of a GW degree.”

Arbide, who lived in Germany and Taiwan during her father’s Army career, understands firsthand the sacrifices and special challenges returning veterans face. Many students still struggle to make ends meet despite the Yellow Ribbon Program and other military education benefits, Arbide explained. The Brandman Scholars receive

“It’s important to help those who have protected our country. I think that often not enough is done for them when they return.”

Joyce Brandman

supplemental funding that can cover costs not met by tuition scholarships, such as books, housing and emergency aid.

“I’m really proud to be part of an institution that has so much to offer veterans and military-affiliated students to prepare them with viable career options,” Arbide said.

Veteran Parker Reese, a senior in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, is an inaugural Brandman Scholar. Reese enlisted in the United States Marine Corps after his 2017 high school graduation. Stationed in Hawaii for four years, he “loved the Marines” and his work in military communications. He plans to return to the Marines as a commissioned officer.

Reese chose GW because of its quality reputation, proximity to his hometown of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and the Yellow Ribbon Program availability.

“I would not have been able to come here and get this valuable education without Yellow Ribbon and donors like the Brandman Foundation,” Reese said, adding that GW’s Military and Veteran Services has been “incredibly helpful” assisting with educational issues.

With approximately 1,400 students, GW’s military veteran student population is one of the largest at any private university in the United States, thanks to the proximity of the Pentagon, Coast Guard Headquarters and a number of active military bases. GW also hosts a large cross-town enrollment Naval Officer Training Corps (GW NROTC) unit of midshipmen and prior-enlisted sailors and Marines from GW and other area universities. **GW**

INNOVATIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Michael and Lori Milken Create New \$6 Million Endowment



Michael Milken, a top GW benefactor, onstage at a university event in New York City

THE GIFT FROM THE LONGTIME PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCATES WILL FUND TWO PROFESSORSHIPS, INCLUDING ONE THAT HONORS DEAN LYNN R. GOLDMAN, AT THEIR NAMESAKE GW SCHOOL

// By Kristen Steele Hatcher

A major gift from Michael Milken, HON '23, and his wife, Lori, will advance scholarship and research at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, furthering its mission to address the world’s most pressing public health issues.

The Lynn R. Goldman Professorship and the Michael and Lori Milken Professorship will provide support for two faculty positions at the Milken Institute SPH.

“Michael and Lori Milken are visionary philanthropists who have made a transformational impact on public health,” said GW President Ellen M. Granberg. “With their partnership, our Milken Institute School of Public Health is a world-class leader in academic public health. I am grateful for their continued support and particularly pleased that they are choosing to invest in our faculty who are creating a healthier, more equitable world.”

Michael Milken, named one of the “75 Most Influential People of the 21st Century” by “Esquire” magazine, has long been recognized as an innovator in access to capital, medical research, education and public health. Improving lives around the world by enhancing health is a key part of his Milken Institute’s mission.

Milken, who received an honorary Doctor ▶

► of Science degree from GW in 2023, chose to name one of the professorships for Dean Lynn R. Goldman to honor her “inspirational leadership.”

“Despite her important responsibilities—teaching, recruiting, fundraising, writing peer-reviewed articles, speaking on Capitol Hill, chairing the Association of Schools and Programs in Public Health—she’s never too busy to counsel a student or meet with parents of a prospective student,” Milken said.

The Milkens are GW’s biggest benefactors, jointly donating \$80 million, along with Sumner M. Redstone, in 2014 to advance research, fund scholarships and create a global center for prevention and wellness.

The school was renamed the Milken Institute School of Public Health, and Goldman was installed as the Michael and Lori Milken Dean the next year. The two public health professorships are the Milkens’ first contribution supporting faculty positions at GW.

“I’ve always believed that human capital—the skills and experience of people—is the world’s most valuable asset,” Milken said. “In business, the quality of management far exceeds the value of factories and equipment. In public health education, the quality of the faculty is the most important asset, and endowed professorships are key to recruiting and retaining the finest talent. We’re delighted to have played a role in helping attract the best researchers, teachers and mentors for GW students.”

Both professorships tapped matching funds from GW, a historic investment by the university designed to significantly increase research and teaching within the broader academic medicine enterprise. In 2022, GW announced it would direct proceeds from the university’s partnership interest in GW Hospital to fund endowed professorships supporting the academic medical enterprise, including public health.

“The Milkens have transformed GW’s ability to unlock actionable solutions to complex public health issues that improve countless lives,” said Donna Arbide, GW’s vice president for development and alumni relations. “Our outstanding faculty, including Dean Goldman, are the very foundation of our excellence. I thank the Milkens for recognizing and rewarding the cutting-edge research, teaching prowess and community action of our public health professors.”

BUILDING A GREATER WORLD

Wolcott Foundation Expands Legacy of Supporting Students with \$4 Million Gift

ENDOWMENT CONTINUES A 70-YEAR TRADITION THAT HAS OPENED DOORS FOR MORE THAN 500 GW STUDENTS PURSUING CAREERS IN PUBLIC SERVICE. // By Rahim Jessani



FROM LEFT Provost Christopher Alan Bracey, President Ellen M. Granberg and Wolcott Foundation Chair Michael Clark

To realize her dream of working in international trade policy, Tiffany Smith, M.A. ’91, knew she needed a graduate degree. But attending GW’s Elliott School of International Affairs in the nation’s capital seemed out of reach for the Texan.

Smith’s career path opened up when she received the Wolcott Foundation Fellowship, which helped with her tuition and gave her the financial stability to pursue unpaid internships during her studies.

“I never would have made it to D.C. for graduate school without the Wolcott Foundation Fellowship,” said Smith, now the National Foreign Trade Council’s vice president of global trade

“I believe in GW, and I am thrilled that the positive impact we have on students now will last forever because of the tremendous work of GW.”

Michael Clark
Chair of the Wolcott Foundation

policy. “Everything that I have achieved in my career in trade policy is directly a result of being selected as a Wolcott fellow and attending GW.”

Since 1953, more than 500 GW students like Smith have benefited directly from the foundation’s annual funding of the Wolcott Foundation Fellowship program. Now, thanks to a \$4 million gift to GW’s endowment from the Wolcott Foundation, more students like Smith can pursue careers in public service for generations to come.

The Wolcott Foundation’s investment in these students stems from its mission of using education as the driving force to create a

“moral compass in government,” a nod to its Masonic origins. According to Michael Clark, chair of the Wolcott Foundation, GW is the ideal university to unite education and public service because of its location in the nation’s capital and its revered founder, George Washington, who was a Mason.

“I believe in GW, and I am thrilled that the positive impact we have on students now will last forever because of the tremendous work of GW,” said Clark. The Wolcott Foundation is a nonprofit supported by High Twelve International, an organization of master Masons dedicated to the welfare of humankind and civic affairs.

The fellowships provide critical support for students seeking to learn from GW’s internationally recognized faculty, participate in impactful research and service, and take advantage of the mentoring and career development opportunities that prepare them to serve the public interest and influence public policy, GW President Ellen M. Granberg noted.

“Students seeking public service careers have a passion for changing the world, and GW is one of the best institutions in the world when it comes to cultivating the next generation of leaders in this sector,” Granberg said. “We are immensely grateful for the Wolcott Foundation’s long-standing support of talented students, and we value their trust in our ability to continue their legacy.”

Donna Arbide, GW’s vice president for development and alumni relations, said that alumni from this cohort have gone on to serve in important capacities in the federal government and international business and to represent the U.S. in foreign relations, such as former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Charles Ford, M.A. ’75.

“It’s impossible to overstate the positive impact of the Wolcott fellows on individuals, society and, frankly, on our democracy,” Arbide said. “At GW, we change the world one life at a time, and the Wolcott Foundation has helped hundreds of students go on to make a real difference. It’s an amazing illustration of the power of philanthropy in action.”

The Wolcott Foundation funds fellowships of up to \$30,000 for graduate students in GW’s School of Business, Elliott School of International Affairs and Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration. Award criteria are outstanding academic, civic and social credentials and a commitment to civic service. **GW**

INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Heartfelt Connections: GW Scholarship Dinner Brings Donors and Students Together

THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS EVENT HIGHLIGHTS THE POWER OF PHILANTHROPY.

// By Lisa Conley-Kendzior

When you ask people to recall the best gift they’ve ever received, they might pause for a moment before describing a toy robot Santa tucked under the tree one Christmas or a gold necklace a beloved aunt gifted at a birthday party. But if you ask Trustee Michelle Rubin, B.A. ’91, her answer will be a little bit different: The best gift she’s ever received is her education.

Rubin’s parents, Mark and Pam, never had the opportunity to graduate from college, but they understood the value of a quality education, so through hard work and sacrifice, they ensured that all three of their children could pursue their academic dreams.

“My parents believed that education is the greatest gift you can give someone, so it was never a matter of if we were going to college, but where we were going,” Rubin said. “My mom always said, ‘You have to go and get the piece of paper,’ meaning a degree. So I did.”

Inspired by her parents’ selflessness, Rubin in 2022 created the Mark and Pam Rubin Scholarship in memory of her late father and in honor of her mother. The endowed scholarship provides crucial support to aspiring George Washington University students facing financial obstacles, allowing

Rubin to invest in their future just as her parents invested in hers.

“What better way to honor your parents—the people who paid for your education—than with an endowed scholarship in their name?” Rubin said.

Rubin and her mother were among the more than 275 guests at the annual Celebration of Scholarships and Fellowships Dinner on April 5. The event, which unites scholarship donors and recipients, marked the first time that Rubin and her mom met junior Max Wiener, the inaugural recipient of the Mark and Pam Rubin Scholarship.

Wiener—who’s majoring in business analytics with a concentration in hospitality management—said the financial support from Rubin has given him the freedom to focus on his academics and extracurriculars, including his upcoming summer internship at Hilton’s corporate office in McLean, Va.

“In my case, a lot of the responsibility falls on my shoulders for making sure I can sustain myself in the summer here, so taking

FROM LEFT GW Trustee Michelle Rubin, junior Max Wiener and Pam Rubin





ABOVE: Scholarship recipient Yannick Fotseu with donor Anthony Arias TOP RIGHT: Professor and donor Steven L. Schooner with his scholarship recipients, Evan Matsuda and Ethan Syster MIDDLE CENTER TOP ROW: Jeff Ahn and John Lach CENTER BOTTOM ROW: Kat Engleman, Angela Ahn, Anna Lee, Alice Tchangoum and Miya Liu



“No words can display and describe the relief and the joy I felt. I’m grateful to endowments like the Josephine Shepard Scholarship for enabling students facing wide financial gaps to attend GW.”

Yaseen Shah
Student and scholarship recipient

► that burden off of tuition has really enabled me to have more options,” he said. “It’s not easy being a college student, so having someone recognize all the hard work that we do and help us get past those potential financial hardships means a lot.”

GW President Ellen M. Granberg addressed the gathering, noting that she’d been looking forward to attending the celebration since joining GW last summer.

“Since coming to GW, I have heard from so many people about how special and inspiring this event is, and I am thrilled to be here,” Granberg said. “Tonight is about recognition, gratitude and, most importantly, celebration.”

“It’s a time for us to come together and celebrate our talented students and their achievements, recognize the amazing strength and support of their families, and, of course, honor and thank our incredible donors, whose commitment and generosity continue to open doors to a world-class education.”

Student speakers also shared their stories during the event. Yaseen Shah, a senior from

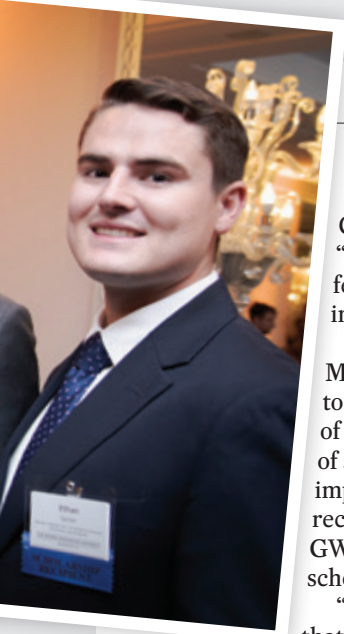
Nevada and a recipient of the Josephine R. Shepard Scholarship, talked about his determination to pursue higher education beyond his home state, despite financial constraints.

“Even though I was still taking on thousands in student loans, I was committed to maximizing every opportunity a GW experience would offer,” said Shah, who after graduation will join ClearSight Advisors as an investment banking analyst.

But at the beginning of his senior year at GW, Shah didn’t receive the merit aid he had anticipated, leaving him anxious about financing his final year. It was then that he discovered he had been awarded the Shepard Scholarship.

“No words can display and describe the relief and the joy I felt,” he said. “I’m grateful to endowments like the Josephine Shepard Scholarship for enabling students facing wide financial gaps to attend GW.”

Sophomore Andrea Mendoza-Melchor, a recipient of the Schneider-Taylor Family Endowed Scholarship, recounted how growing up in a small border town in



California made “anything ambitious feel out of reach,” including college.

And when Mendoza-Melchor lost her mother to cancer her senior year of high school, her dream of attending college felt impossible...until she received an email from GW informing her of her scholarship.

“It was in that moment that I got my hope back.”

she said. “So, I sincerely thank you. But it’s not just the woman standing here thanking you. It’s the little girl back at home in Calexico, playing being a reporter with her dolls, thinking that was the closest she’d ever get... It’s so many Mendoza and Melchor ancestors who thank you for what you’ve done to restore hope for me and for them.”

Donna Arbide, the vice president for development and alumni relations, commended the scholarship recipients on their achievements and thanked the donors for their generosity.

“In this room this evening, the donors have created over 49 named scholarships at GW, and helped more than 250 students just this year,” Arbide said. “Through your selfless actions, you demonstrate how citizens have both the power and the influence to change the lives of individuals and their families.”

Scholarship and fellowship support stand as a cornerstone of GW’s mission. In 2021, GW launched *Open Doors: The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships & Fellowships* to expand access to GW. Since then, average annual contributions from donors to scholarships and fellowships have increased 32% compared to the previous three years. The average annual donor contribution to undergraduate need-based endowed scholarships grew by 74% in FY21-23 over FY18-20, thanks to GW’s Third Century Scholarship Endowment Match.

And any scholarship gift, no matter how small, can have a ripple effect, Rubin said.

“I think people believe that they have to have millions of dollars or make a huge commitment, but that’s not true. No gift is too small,” Rubin said. “If you believe in education—and especially if you were a scholarship recipient yourself—and you have the capacity to give back, why wouldn’t you?”

GW

GIVING DAY BREAKS RECORDS

The George Washington University community rallied together to raise \$1.8 million during Giving Day 2024, the most successful in GW’s history.

“Giving Day is an important day for GW to show our donors and alumni that every gift, no matter the size, has an impact,” said Daniel J. Burgner, the executive director of annual giving at GW. “It is such a blast to see the excitement around hitting the goal and knowing that every donor played a part.”

GIVING DAY BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL RAISED: \$1,862,799

3,499

DONORS

\$600,000

**LARGEST
SINGLE GIFT**

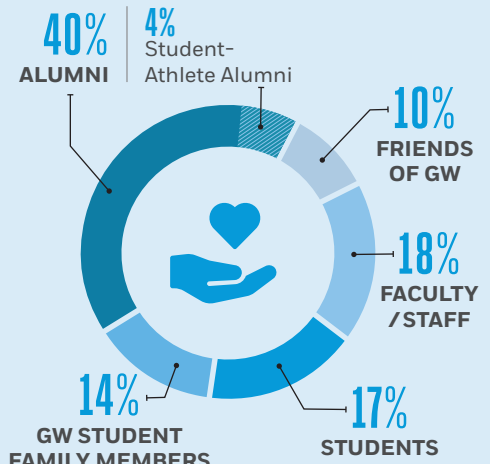
86

**MATCHES AND
CHALLENGES**



**All 50 States
& 25 Countries**

**DONORS AROUND THE
NATION AND THE GLOBE**



CLASS NOTES

// '60s

J. Clifton Fleming Jr., J.D. '67, received a lifetime achievement award from the Tax Section of the Association of American Law Schools.

William A. Gralnick, B.A. '65, M.A. '68, published the third book in his memoir trilogy, "That's Why They Call It Work," (Barringer Publishing/Schlesinger Advertising, 2024).

Steven Michael Selzer, B.A. '69, J.D. '72, has had his book, "Civility: George Washington's 110 Rules for Today" (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2019), accepted for availability at Mount Vernon.

// '70s

Steve Graybill, B.A. '75, published "Murder By Conceit" (Dorrance Publishing Company, Inc., 2023), a murder mystery novel set in New York City, Moscow and Prague.

Máel Embser-Herbert, B.A. '78, retired from Hamline University after 28 years teaching sociology.

J. Stuart Showalter, M.F.S. '77, published the 10th edition of his textbook, "The Law of Healthcare Administration" (Health Administrative Press, 2023).

// '80s

Richard E. Cytowic, clinical professor of neurology at GW, wrote "Your Stone Age Brain in the Screen Age" (MIT Press, 2024), which offers insight into and advice on how we can change the way we use technology, resist its addictive power over us and take back the control we have lost. The book is scheduled to be published in October.

Toya (Atkinson) Evans, B.B.A. '85, has signed a development agreement with V/O Med Spa, the leading med spa

franchise in the U.S. She opened her first location in Woodbridge, Va., in February.

John Sanders, M.A. '89, was featured in the Philadelphia Tribune, where he shared his story of surviving prostate cancer.

Sarah Schneiderman, B.F.A. '80, was featured in Woman Made Gallery's "Small Works" exhibition. Schneiderman's portrait of Geo Soctomah Neptune, the first transgender, non-binary and two-spirit person elected to public office in Maine, was also included in the Sedona Art Center's Big Gay Art Show.

// '90s

Adina Renee Adler, B.A. '99, has been appointed executive director of the Global Steel Climate Council, a coalition of steel companies taking real action to decarbonize.

Frank Cisco, B.A. '95, has received numerous awards for his first indie movie, "Lion of Judah Legacy." The film, which follows the transformative journey of a disabled veteran named Marly, has been licensed to Filmhub and picked up by Amazon Prime Video Direct.

Susan Davis, M.P.H. '96, was named director of equitable giving at the Segal Family Foundation, which champions African leaders to advance positive change and helps other funders do the same.

Desiree Goldfinger, J.D. '97, was promoted to partner at Pryor Cashman.

Haig Najarian, B.A. '90, published "Is the end of the FERC vs. the bankruptcy courts upon us?" in the ABI Law Review. The article analyzes the nearly 20-year struggle between energy regulators and U.S. bankruptcy courts regarding the treatment of certain contracts in bankruptcy.

Tony Palermo, B.A. '91, M.P.A. '93, received the 2023 Roland Eastwood Planner of the Year in recognition of his dedication and contribution to the planning profession in southwest Florida.

Michael Price, Ed.D. '99, has published his sixth book, "Everyone Has a Story," (Indigo Sea Press, 2023), which explores the life of 11 young men from one of Ohio's least populated counties who lost their lives in the Vietnam conflict.

Anand Ramana, M.A. '99, J.D. '03, was named to the 2024 class of fellows of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity.

Alexander J. Reyes, B.B.A. '93, joined Leech Tishman as a partner and co-chair of Leech Tishman's Corporate Practice Group. He will focus his practice on corporate legal matters, including mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, securities, financing and corporate governance.

Thomas J. Rowland, Ph.D. '92, published "Patriotism is a Catholic Virtue: Irish American Catholics, the Church in the Era of the Great War" (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

Susan Sperber, J.D. '92, was appointed to Lewis Roca's executive committee.

Burke Strunsky, B.A. '96, joined Glenn Agre Bergman & Fuentes as special counsel dealing with complex commercial litigation matters.

Amber (Moore) Taylor, M.A. '98, opened Fonts Books & Gifts, an independent neighborhood bookstore in McLean, Va., in November.

Wendy Travis, M.U.R.P. '94, has been appointed southwest regional director for transportation for engineering firm Garver.

// '00s

Lelaine Bigelow, M.A. '03, was named executive director of the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality.

Courtney Granville, Ph.D., M.S.P.H. '08, joined GO2 for Lung Cancer as chief scientific officer.

Marnie Maton, B.A. '00, published "Vote for You: Take Your Seat at the Table" (Manuscripts LLC, 2024), a career development guide for women.

Doug Miller, B.A. '01, currently serves as deputy director of the Special Operations Division of the Montgomery County Police Department, where he helped launch a Drone as First Responder program (DFR). DFR utilizes unmanned aircraft systems to support officers during calls for service.

Dan Muhlstock, B.A. '05, published "Domestic Beasts" (Austin Macauley, 2023), which follows Scout, a loyal and loving pet dog, who is abandoned when his family flees foreclosure in Detroit.

Louis Perron, M.A. '04, published "Beat the Incumbent: Proven Strategies and Tactics to Win Elections" (Radius Book Group, 2024), which describes tactics to assess the strength of an incumbent, the quality of the challenger and how to control and win a campaign.

Heather Schweizer Greenleaf, B.A. '00, was named executive director of The Pennsylvania Society, a nonprofit, charitable organization.

Trevor Theunissen, B.B.A. '06, joined the Molson Coors Beverage Company as vice president of government affairs.

Susan M. Vignola, M.A. '01, was promoted to partner at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP.

Sarah Vogler, B.A. '08, M.A. '11, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a research staff member in IDA's Intelligence Analyses Division.

// '10s

Handa S. Abidin, LL.M. '10, was appointed as rector of President University in Jababeka, Indonesia.

Eleanor Aldous, B.A. '14, was selected for membership in the National Trial Lawyers Top 40 Under 40, an invitation-only organization for trial lawyers practicing civil plaintiff and/or criminal defense law.

Brittany DeLong, M.P.S. '14, published "Sterling—Images of America" (Arcadia Publishing,

2024), one of the first local history books covering the history of Sterling, Va., from the 1600s to present day.

Neha Dhindsa, J.D. '16, was promoted to counsel at Venable LLP. Dhindsa focuses primarily on international trade and customs, and maritime and transportation issues, including import and export controls, regulatory compliance and international arbitration.

David Farrell, M.S. '13, was selected to lead the Army Concepts and Analysis Group at the MITRE Corporation. Farrell also joined the board of the Edward J. Madden Open Hearts Camp, a summer camp in Great Barrington, Mass., for children who have had open-heart procedures.

Brian J. Stevens, J.D. '14, was promoted to partner at ArentFox Schiff. His work focuses on patents, primarily in patent

preparation and prosecution, particularly within the realms of telecommunications, computer software, automotive and medical devices.

Rosemary Tropeano, M.A. '19, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a research associate in the Operational Evaluation Division of IDA's Systems and Analyses Center.

Cristina I. Vessels, J.D. '15, was promoted to counsel at Venable LLP. Vessels focuses her practice on matters related to nonprofit organizations.

// '20s

Darla Bishop, DrPH '22, published "How to Afford Everything" (2023), which offers a practical and accessible approach to financial wellness broken down into achievable steps and exercises.

Leigh Frame, CERT '20, program director of GW's Integrative Medicine Program and associate professor of clinical research and leadership, was featured in a CBS Evening News with Norah O'Donnell segment, "Can Cutting Back on Drinking Improve Heart Health?"

Ebony Grey, M.B.A. '23, is the CEO of Greys Consulting Group, LLC, which focuses on assisting small businesses and nonprofits in securing grants and government contracts. Grey recently received the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award and the Shining Entrepreneur Award, recognizing her contributions to entrepreneurship, philanthropy and community service.



And what about you? Submit your own class note update:

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IN MEMORIAM

Joanne Barkett Conway Philanthropist's passion for supporting nursing leaves a strong legacy at GW.

Members of the George Washington University community are mourning the loss of Joanne Barkett Conway, a noted philanthropist and owner of the Golden Door, a popular health resort. She died at age 75 on Jan. 8 at her home in McLean, Va., after a short illness.

Much of Mrs. Conway's philanthropy focused on nursing. Support from the Conways has helped produce more than 7,000 nurses at 15 nursing schools at universities throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, GW Nursing among them.

Mrs. Conway and her husband, William, have given more than \$2.6 million to GW, primarily to establish the William and Joanne Conway Transitioning Warriors Nursing Scholars Initiative in the School of Nursing. The initiative provides scholarships for military veterans enrolled in GW Nursing's accelerated bachelor of science program. To date, 49 scholarships have been awarded to help veterans continue their service through a civilian career in nursing.

Associate Vice President and Chief Development Officer for Health and Medicine Jackie Wood noted that the Conways were particularly proud of providing a financial bridge for veteran nursing students to reenter the civilian workforce into a profession experiencing a critical shortage of qualified practitioners. "The Conways recognized this unique population has the experience and leadership skills to be successful, and that their service to their country makes them highly

deserving of assistance."

GW Nursing Dean Susan Kelly-Weeder said she is "deeply saddened" by the loss of Mrs. Conway and remembered the impact she made.

"Mrs. Conway touched so many lives," Kelly-Weeder said. "Her vision to support nursing students and specifically her commitment to military veterans was revolutionary. Together, Mr. and Mrs. Conway have transformed the lives of students here at GW and around the country, providing them the opportunity to pursue their calling in the field of nursing."


President Ellen M. Granberg offered similar praise for the Conway legacy.

"Joanne Conway was a valued friend of the George Washington University," said Granberg. "Her visionary commitment to advance educational opportunities for veterans entering the nursing field has had a life-changing effect on many."

In a nod to the fictional setting of the classic 1940s holiday film, "It's a Wonderful Life," the Conways named their family's major avenue for giving the Bedford Falls Foundation.

Mrs. Conway became interested in assisting nursing students after a restaurant waitress shared details of her struggle to pay for a nursing degree.

Though she avoided the limelight, Mrs. Conway was recognized for her philanthropic work with several honorary doctorate degrees.

In addition to her husband, survivors include her sisters Elaine Joseph and Denise Pontius; six nieces and nephews, 14 grandnieces and nephews; stepson William E. Conway III and his wife, Brittany, and their three daughters. 

"Mrs. Conway touched so many lives. Her vision to support nursing students and specifically her commitment to military veterans was revolutionary."

Susan Kelly-Weeder
GW Nursing Dean

Dr. John Raymond Campbell, M.S. '86 (Sept. 17, 2023, 82),

had a 42-year career with the federal government across several agencies, including Goddard Space Flight Center, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Defense. A trailblazer in digital programming and security systems, he earned five degrees, including a Master of Science from George Washington University. Campbell is survived by his wife of 56 years, Deirdre, and his daughter, Sheila.


Dagmar Renate "Reni" Henney (Sept. 16, 2023, 92),

was born in Berlin in 1931. After her mother was tragically killed in Auschwitz, Henney and her father, a scientist, had to flee from the Nazis and later from the invading Russian army. Henney's father taught her chess and mathematics at home, and at the age of 10, she was admitted to the Abitur High School in Hamburg, Germany. In 1951, Henney immigrated to the U.S. where she earned a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's degree in pure mathematics. She later became the first woman to earn a doctorate in pure mathematics from the University of Maryland. As a tenured professor at George Washington University, Henney earned numerous accolades and awards. She is survived by her son, Alan.

James Woodrow Johnson Jr., J.D. '75 (Nov. 30, 2023, 80),

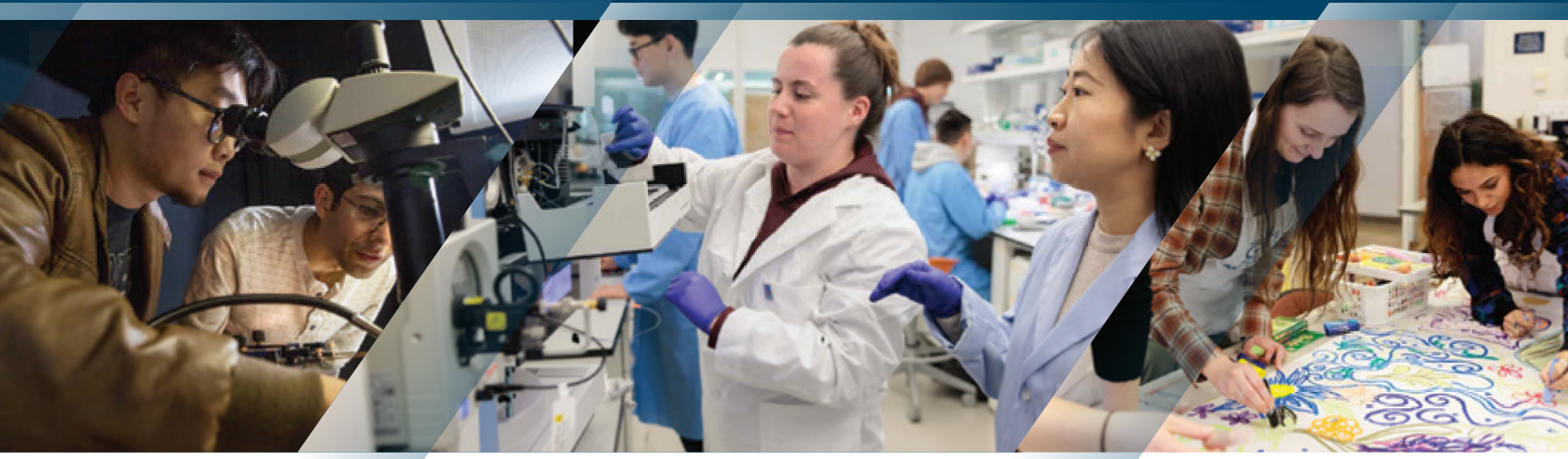
rose from segregated schooling in Virginia to a distinguished career as a criminal defense attorney in Washington, D.C. His passions included boating and mentoring youth, and he had an enduring love for dogs. Johnson is survived by his ex-wife, Viki; daughter, Christina; granddaughter, Vivian; girlfriend, Stacey; sister, Jacqueline; brother, Jonathan; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Irene Thompson (Nov. 12, 2023),

was born in Harbin, a small town in northern China. She later moved to Shanghai, where she graduated from a Russian high school, and then to the U.S., where she earned a master's in linguistics from Georgetown University and a doctorate in psychology. Thompson became a nationally recognized Russian-language teacher, textbook developer and key figure in Russian-language test development. She taught at George Washington University from the early 1960s until her retirement in 1995. 

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