



Taft

BULLETIN

ONWARD

Adam Nagler '85

FALL 2021



Colorful, crazy fun, and community connections to kick off the school year with Super Sunday!
ROBERT FALCETTI

FALL 2021

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FALL 2021

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ON THE COVER

A photo by Adam Nagler '85, 560 miles deep into his solo paddleboard expedition; photo taken 3 miles WSW of Sakonnet Point, Little Compton, Rhode Island. ADAM NAGLER '85

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COMMENTS? TELL US!

We'd love to hear what you think about the stories in this *Bulletin*. We may edit your letters for length, clarity, and content, but please write.

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On MAIN HALL

A WORD FROM HEAD
OF SCHOOL WILLY
MACMULLEN '78

“[In 2001] we struggled in all the good ways a community of people with so many lived experiences will as it works to create belonging, as it finds ways to function, as it aspires to meet its mission. But it was nonetheless an extraordinary achievement, and for us it can serve as a model.”

Each year the head of school addresses the school community at the opening of school. Here is an excerpt from Convocation 2021.



A Reflection: On Destruction and Creation

If every September has that feeling of renewal and hope, perhaps this year we feel so more than ever. Every one of us in this room, teachers and students—we all need this.

COVID shredded social ties, left us isolated and lonely, and took loved ones; we witnessed social injustice over the fact that not all lives mattered equally; we followed environmental calamities of flood and fire; and we saw this nation's democracy totter. It was a year of disruption, destruction.

But we are here, whole and hopeful.

September is always about looking ahead, but we need to start in the past, almost 20 years ago to the day, when on our first day of classes,

those hijacked planes destroyed buildings, lives, and ideas.

Here's why: 9/11 is not just a page in the history books. For Taft, what happened that day and in the year that followed marks us still, and in good and important ways. That day showed us what this school was and could be: a community where every member felt they belonged and were even loved, a campus marked by stubborn resilience and fierce resolve, a school determined to achieve its mission despite the challenges. That's the legacy of that year passed on to us today.

Perhaps, with the passion and commitment of everyone in this school, and following a year that brought similar pain and confusion, we might create something special, so that 20 years from now, in this same room, on another opening day, they will be talking about us and all we have bequeathed them.

9/11 was the very first day of classes—and we will take a moment of silence on Saturday to honor the anniversary—and the day before looked a lot like what you all experienced yesterday. Cars lined up in the circle. Greetings, handshakes, welcomes. Bags and suitcases and boxes piled outside the elevator. Teary goodbyes. Orientation, a cookout, dorm meetings.

On September 11, we all woke for class. When the bell rang ending class, we all filed in, just as you have, and found our seats at 9:20 for our first meeting. We all filed out to find our world had changed.

In the hours that followed, we saw the images, of the towers crumbling, the Pentagon burning, wreckage smoldering in Pennsylvania. We went to classes—what else could you do? Cancel and sit in front of TVs?—but the fear and anxiety rippled and then washed through campus.

We knew we had to come together, and so we did, here in this room, immediately after class. Our chaplain offered a prayer. We sat in silence. We wept. We held hands. Here's part of what I said:

I find it inexpressibly tragic that I spoke only a few hours ago about this sacred place, and the history of The Taft School gathering here to share in joy and pain, and we are here again. But here we must be, for what we all know is that we ease suffering by sharing, and some of use are suffering now.

But we will go on. Nothing is better for all of us than getting back to work, than doing what we are here to do: teach and learn. We will not allow darkness to descend.

Some of you asked if school might be canceled. No. To what end? That's what the people who did this want. What we need is reaffirmation of life, and to that end, school will go on. The lawnmowers will cut the grass, coaches will blow whistles, and your dorm head will tell you to get in your room.

You will have study hall tonight. Be there. You have homework. Do it. You have classes to go to. Go to them. You have a team to try out for. Go out to the field.

We are going on with our lives with the faith that we are a community that will endure. So we will emerge through this as a community, linked and loving, one characterized by great compassion and resilience.

That is the legacy of that day. By the end of the day, we were raised aloft, and that year became one of creation. That was a day that told all of us that the Taft community had a strength and unity that would not be shaken. That day we feel still.

You can see the connection I am making: two years, separated by two decades, each following events of great destruction. The school that emerged in 2001 was, of course, imperfect. We struggled in all the good ways a community of people with so many lived experiences will as it works to create belonging, as it finds ways to function, as it aspires to meet its mission. But it was nonetheless an extraordinary achievement, and for us it can serve as a model.

9/11 offered us stark evidence of what radical extremism can bring, and what followed on our campus was a concerted shared effort to prove that we, a diverse community, with members from around the world, worshipping in different ways and holding disparate political views and speaking in many tongues and with the full palette of skin colors—that we could fashion a respectful and functioning community.

9/11 also showed how resilient we were. We were stronger than we ever knew we were. Setback was not permanent. That we were shaken was clear, but in driving to campus, in walking out of the dorm to class, in completing homework, in starting rehearsal, in trying out for the team—every small act was proof that we could persevere, endure, thrive.

9/11 gave evidence of how connection in community makes everyone more centered, valued, and happy. We were vulnerable, feeling pain and fear, and so every act of connection—a look in the eye or hand on your shoulder, an invitation to sit at a table, an introduction in the Main Hall, an empathic “I am listening”—was deeply impactful. And these acts seemed to pile on each other, affirming and deepening trust and belonging. Every act said, “You belong. I belong. We need each other.”

9/11 reminded us that we are all fractured and wounded, that we need help and support, and that our emotional and mental health cannot be taken for granted: they must be carefully, honestly, and vulnerably nurtured.

The school of 2001 left us a legacy of how a community can emerge out of rubble, how creation might follow destruction. It was a gift.

So here’s my dream.

It’s Bingham, 20 years from now. The school head is addressing the school. She’s looking out on a school of students from around a totally connected globe. They are new and returning, day and boarding, nervous and excited in equal measure. Behind her are the faculty: brilliant and passionate, chosen as if by calling to be here. She asks everyone to think back on Taft in 2021. “It’s almost impossible for us to imagine that fall of 2021,” she says.

“Think of that school, those teachers and students and staff. They had seen a pandemic kill millions. There were students who had not set foot in a classroom in a year. They had quarantined in strange hotel rooms and looked out on empty city streets. They lived behind masks, seeing only screened faces, separated from those they loved. They had witnessed a nation’s reckoning with racism and injustice. They watched images of flood and fire that seemed almost Biblical. They had seen a democracy shaking, leaders screaming at each other. How could they possibly create anything out of such destruction?”

Maybe she pauses, realizing the year is now beginning, this great and imperfect school, the hard labor of meeting aspirations, the continual striving to meet its mission. She looks out at Bingham. Feels a rush of hope.

“But somehow they did. Look at what they created that year. Marvel at their work. Be awed by their optimism. Be grateful for their legacy. *Look what they gave us.*”

William R. MacMullen ’78



ADMISSIONS NOW

Director of Admissions Peter Frew ’75
and Associate Director of Admissions
Suzanne Campbell with Nicole
Balbuena ’22, now a co-head monitor.

Join us for a yearlong celebration and help us honor the voices of the Women of Taft: students, faculty, and staff whose journeys have made Taft a better school and whose potential will continue to shape it for years to come; alumnae who impact their communities, transform the places where they work, and create a better world.

Both virtual and in-person programs will be offered throughout the year celebrating this defining milestone.

Visit www.taftschool.org/coeducation

50 YEARS
COEDUCATION
Taft



ADMISSIONS THEN

The first coed Admissions interview at Taft in 1971 for Wendy Hoblitzelle ’74, with, at left, Director of Admissions Joe Cunningham and, at right, Assistant Director Mrs. Gould.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Taft

The Road to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A Q&A with Thomas Allen, Dean of Community, Justice, and Belonging

Thomas Allen joins the Taft community after a tenure in the Watertown, Connecticut, public school system as a school social worker. Prior to that, he had an extensive career in the Hartford, Waterbury, and Philadelphia school systems in various capacities, including program administration, guidance counseling, and school social work. Allen has led courageous conversations on issues of acceptance, equality, and justice. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling from Springfield College, a Master of Social Work also from Springfield College, and a Master of Science in counseling psychology from Rosemont College.

Originally from Philadelphia, Allen and his family relocated to Watertown seven years ago. An avid football fan, he has been coaching high school football for the past 13 years. He is also a certified personal trainer and the cofounder of Triple Threat Training Sports Performance in Waterbury. Joining the Taft community with Thomas is his wife, Kim, and their three children Jaiden, Kai, and Maila.



Thomas Allen, Dean of Community, Justice, and Belonging, getting to know Taft students.

II Here's an interesting fact about the Office of Community, Belonging, and Justice: It is actually the largest department on campus. In this office there are 601 students and 250-plus employees. As the dean of this office, I am extremely proud of these numbers! II

Tell us a bit about yourself and why you decided to join the Taft community.

I am really excited about the opportunity to be part of this amazing community. As a Suffield Academy graduate ('96), I understand the challenges that students in the independent school community are struggling with. Historically, students from marginalized communities have a harder time feeling accepted into the independent school culture, regardless of the efforts put forth by the school. Here at Taft, we are working extremely hard to help all students have a sense of belonging and are invested in this community.

How are you getting to know students?

I am meeting students in a variety of ways. We've spent time eating meals together. I have been working in one of the male dorms on campus getting to know the students in that phase of life as well. In addition, I've spent time at the athletic fields speaking with or watching the students engage in some of the various afternoon activities that are provided here on campus. Students also frequent my office, which is located in a great location, right near the dining halls!

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

What are your hopes for your office?

The Office of Community, Belonging, and Justice strives to create a safe space for *all* students, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity (or any other characteristic), while helping to give a voice to those who feel voiceless. The DEI Strategic Plan has given us a great starting point to ensure we are working as a community

toward equity and inclusion for all in all areas of the Taft School experience. We will be using the DEI Strategic Plan (as well as continuous feedback from community members) as a road map in the work that we do.

Here's an interesting fact about the Office of Community, Belonging, and Justice: It is actually the largest department on campus. In this office there are 601 students and 250-plus

employees. As the dean of this office, I am extremely proud of these numbers!

I look forward to being part of this process, and welcome the opportunity to communicate and interact with as many people as possible who hold this community in such high regard.

Taft is a community where everyone should feel like they belong. We can't change our history...but we *can* create the future. ■

II The Office of Community, Belonging, and Justice strives to create a safe space for all students, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity (or any other characteristic), while helping to give a voice to those who feel voiceless. II



Dyllan McGee '89, founder and executive producer of McGee Media and *MAKERS*, and two-time Emmy Award-winning filmmaker.

Well Told

Illuminating stories of ancestry, race, and gender with Dyllan McGee '89

CERTAIN FORMULAS should never be meddled with—especially when they keep viewers tuning in year after year to a top-rated PBS show and famous Americans lining up for the chance to learn about their ancestry.

But what happens when a pandemic threatens to upend that?

For Dyllan McGee '89, to go remote with the “big reveal” on each episode of *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates Jr.* would have been antithetical to the long-running show’s key to success.

It’s the moment when Gates, the show’s host and a revered African American historian, enlightens celebrities, politicians, and journalists about their lineage.

“That was probably our biggest challenge,” says McGee, the show’s executive producer. “That show is built around the reveal that Henry Louis Gates does. It requires an emotional safe space.”

McGee, a two-time Emmy and duPont-Columbia Journalism Award-winning documentary filmmaker, says that the

show’s producers even looked into a robotic camera setup for the episodes. But that just wouldn’t have replicated what audiences and show participants had come to expect from the program, which will air its eighth season in 2022 and is in production for a ninth.

So, working with a minimal crew and strict health protocols, *Finding Your Roots* went on, albeit with the requisite social distancing between the show’s subjects and Gates, a Harvard University professor who goes by the nickname Skip.

“At the end of the day, we decided we had to be in the room,” she says. “We give such a gift to the person in the chair across from Skip Gates.”

The partnership between McGee and Gates began while the two were working for Oxford University Press. An editor suggested that they would be a match. It proved to be a dynamic pairing, from their collaboration on *Finding Your Roots* to *The Black Church*, a four-hour PBS series that aired earlier this year. During the pandemic, they also produced *Making Black America*, a series showcasing African American people’s ability to collectively prosper and define Blackness in ways that transformed America itself. It will air in the fall of 2022.

When they first teamed up, Gates had been working on *The African American National Biography*.

“He wanted to produce a series chronicling the stories of living African Americans at the time,” McGee says. “He had been the subject of early DNA genealogy

testing. He thought, Is there a way to bring DNA and genealogy into the series?”

After several months of planning, the premise was conceived for what was then known as *African American Lives*, a groundbreaking series that traced the ancestry of the likes of Maya Angelou, Morgan Freeman, and Whoopi Goldberg.

Nothing quite established the show as a force than did landing Oprah Winfrey, whom Quincy Jones connected with Gates.

“Once we got Oprah Winfrey, we knew other people would agree,” McGee says.

Two seasons later, the producers expanded the show’s scope to include prominent Americans from all walks of life: it became *Finding Your Roots*. The format’s popularity, McGee says, has been enduring, especially during times of adversity.

“The pandemic, racial injustice, all just contributed to the reactions and the emotions of our guests,” says McGee, the founder of New York City-based McGee Media.

The show makes viewers realize

something else: “It celebrates our heritage and our differences, but also our commonality,” she says.

From African Americans to women, telling the stories of the underrepresented has been a life calling for McGee, who previously served as an executive producer of *MAKERS: Women Who Make America*. The critically acclaimed PBS series developed such a substantial following that it spawned *MAKERS* conferences, yet another platform to tell the stories of the accomplishments of women and the barriers that they overcame.

“When I started *MAKERS*, I remember knocking on doors and people constantly saying, ‘Are people really going to be interested in women’s stories?’” McGee says. “Then the interest and demand for women’s stories really exploded. That felt exciting.”

Then came the pandemic, delaying the release of *Not Done: Women Remaking America*, a PBS series charting the last five years of the women’s movement and its intersectional fight for equality. Pushed back from June 2020 to November 2020, the show was nominated for an Emmy and received a Gracie Award, which recognizes “exemplary programming created by, for and about women.”

“It felt like we were in a new era, like the 1970s activism,” McGee says.

McGee left her role with *MAKERS* in March to focus on her production company, but she says that doesn’t mean that there aren’t more stories of perseverance and inequity to tell. Only 38 Fortune 500 CEOs, she says, are women.

“That’s not a lot,” she says. “The pandemic completely set back a lot of progress for women. It really was hard for women to keep up their jobs.”

McGee says that a commitment to inclusion transcends numbers.

“It’s not enough to just hire a woman or a person of color,” she says. “It’s about creating communities that allow different people and perspectives to be heard.” ■

—Neil Vigdor '95

Left: McGee with her colleague, renowned African American historian and author Henry Louis Gates Jr.



It's About Service

IT'S LIKE BUILDING THE PLANE WHILE you're flying it, says Dr. Tarik Asmerom '01. As an emergency room physician at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, she says the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed medical personnel to the brink.

"I think there is a good amount of burnout," she says. "We're going on two years of this, and there's only so much pandemic anyone can tolerate. There's significant burnout, but we continue to be present for our patients."

As the science evolves on treating COVID patients, treatments change as well, forcing medical personnel to adapt to changes that seem to happen daily, she notes.

"We know a lot more about COVID than we did back in March," she says. "We're seeing a lot more pediatric patients now" who are suffering from a dual problem: COVID and RSV, a respiratory virus that ordinarily affects infants. The dual whammy means sicker children, she notes. "It's quite intense in the pediatric hospitals, because both are happening at the same time."

She and her colleagues at the hospital have been frustrated by vaccine refusal and the politicization of science and medicine. Those who are unvaccinated are showing up in greater numbers due to the Delta variant.

"The medical community thought this [vaccine] was our way out and that science had saved us," she says. "It's just disheartening, it really is. You're trying to hold on to your zeal for medicine and your love of people, but...you feel like that's being thrown in your face. As far as mandates are concerned, that's a political question not a medical one. Professionally, I recommend the vaccine to essentially everyone who qualifies."

Her choice of practice has always focused on those needing help.

"I work in the emergency room where

we treat all patients: children, elderly, pregnant, all ages and genders. I did my training at a county hospital, which acts as a safety net for underinsured, uninsured, undocumented, county jail patients, and everyone else who is in need of help. I also previously worked at the Indian Health Service in Navajo Nation," she says. "In short, it's about service, about being present for people in their most vulnerable [situations]."

As an assistant professor who works with Baylor College of Medicine, Asmerom teaches at the patient's bedside. "Being a teacher for six years prior to going into medicine made me already acclimated to the triad of parent, child, and provider—educator or doctor—so focusing myself on

mass—I even got a trainer," she says. "I need to focus on myself—my trainer brings me so much happiness—that's been a source of happiness for me. I am protecting myself and my light. I also purposely avoid media; I sometimes unplug from what's going on politically and what's going on generally to give myself a break. I surround myself with positive people."

Those people include the doctors with whom she worked during her residency and those she works with daily at Texas Children's Hospital.

"My coworkers understand...the day to day, and that's been paramount," she says. "Just being able to talk to your colleagues about what's going on, feeling like you have

"The medical community thought this [vaccine] was our way out and that science had saved us. It's just disheartening, it really is. You're trying to hold on to your zeal for medicine and your love of people, but...you feel like that's being thrown in your face."

pediatric care was a smooth transition," she says. "I have to really commend the residents and medical students I've worked with. I find that...they're still very much dedicated to what they signed up for. They're present for all the changes and working through the challenges on behalf of our patients."

Asmerom also holds an administrative position where she is helping to liaise an endeavor to make Texas Children's Hospital a home institution for patients born with congenital heart disease who are now living decades into adulthood. "We want these adult-aged patients to have [care from] physicians trained in general emergency medicine and adult congenital heart disease to manage their specific needs all in one place," she says.

To release the stresses that build daily, Asmerom has developed a passion for fitness, specifically weightlifting.

"I'm a petite person, so I'm lifting weights. I'm working on building muscle

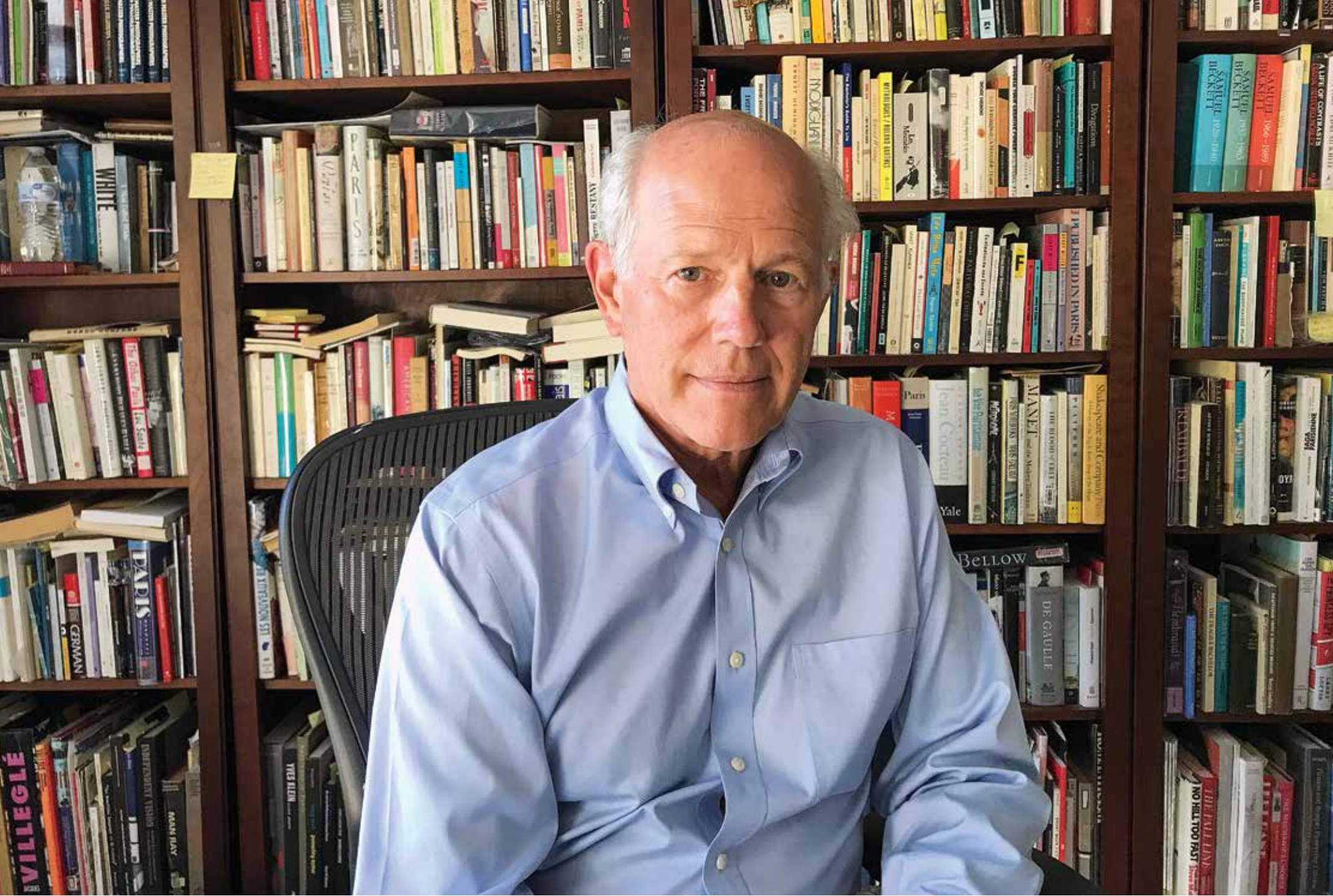
other comrades you can relate to who can take a negative situation and make light humor out of it and let off some steam."

Taft classmates may remember that Asmerom was the first female student of color elected to the head monitor position her senior year at Taft, in 2001. The early lessons of leadership she gained in that position have helped her throughout her career, she says.

"I'm so profoundly grateful for my entire Taft experience," she says. "I appreciate the level of trust we were given at Taft. As a student, your vote counts as much as [the administration's and faculty's]. I was a young African American woman at Taft and trying to find my voice. [I learned to] believe in [myself] as a leader, a changemaker. Someone who has impact. Honestly, I was very shy, and as I look back, I was very grateful for that space and that level of trust I was given." ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84

Left: Dr. Tarik Asmerom '01, emergency room physician at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, and assistant professor at Baylor College of Medicine.



he draws inspiration. “I think it’s good to write about what you like,” he says. “People may not get it, but you’ve got to do what’s going to keep you excited if you’re going to do a long book.”

Conrad’s latest long book was birthed particularly slowly. His interest in the Parisian mixed-media artist Jacques Villeglé began forming almost two decades ago. At first, Conrad was just going to write an article—until finally, 256 pages later, he had something weightier on his hands.

“It became the thesis that I never wrote

at Yale,” says Conrad, who considers Villeglé to be “France’s greatest living artist.”

Still remarkably spry and lively at age 95, Villeglé guided Conrad around the streets of Paris, offering a vibrant history lesson with practically each building they passed, and pointing out the spots where he snatched the posters that became his famous “décollage” works.

Some of Villeglé’s pieces today hang in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the Tate Gallery in

Tearing Into Art

BARNABY CONRAD III '70 has a penchant for finding iconic subjects that are still worthy of a second look.

He landed on that formula with his first book about the history of absinthe, the forbidden “muse” that inspired and tormented artists and writers including Gauguin, Van Gogh, Baudelaire, and Wilde. He followed that up with a best seller on the history of the martini, as well as

deeply researched and colorfully illustrated books about cigars, blonde actresses, even Pan American Airways, aka Pan Am.

“Maybe it’s just simple ideas for simple minds—my own included,” Conrad jokes. He credits the *New Yorker* writer John McPhee with popularizing the concept. But Conrad—who is also an editor, artist, skilled angler, and world traveler—has his own deep well of unique interests and experience from which

“I think it’s good to write about what you like. People may not get it, but you’ve got to do what’s going to keep you excited if you’re going to do a long book.”

—Barnaby Conrad III '70

Above: Barnaby Conrad III '70, author, editor, and artist.

Right: Jacques Villeglé and Conrad with one of Villeglé’s artworks at the Modernism gallery in San Francisco in 2007.



“Where there’s work, there’s a fence. And where there’s a fence, there are posters.”

—Jacques Villeglé

Below: Art dealer Martin Muller, Brasserie Lipp manager Claude Guittard, artist Jacques Villeglé, and author Barnaby Conrad III in Paris in 2014. FRANÇOIS POIVRET



London; and dozens of museums throughout France and Germany. But compared to other members of the French Nouveau Realisme movement, such as Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and Arman, Villeglé felt due for more recognition among American audiences. That made him an interesting subject, Conrad says.

He also came to see Villeglé as an archivist whose work reflected the city’s history and personality as it emerged after the war. “He is one of the last of his generation,” Conrad says. “Villeglé’s art preserves the history and street life of postwar Paris.”

Conrad, like his bullfighter-writer-saloon-owner father, Barnaby Conrad Jr. ’40, is an artist himself and lived in Paris in the 1980s. But he first met Villeglé at a gallery in San Francisco in 2003. “Jacques is a real character,” Conrad says. “Caustic, funny. At his heart, he’s still 19 years old.”

Villeglé later showed him where, in 1949, he and a buddy, Raymond Hains, spotted a dirtying collection of torn movie posters on a fence in the Boulevard du Montparnasse. Thinking the haphazard arrangement actually looked somewhat artistic, they ripped the posters down and brought them back to their apartment. Weeks later, Hains and Villeglé reconstructed the poster fragments and glued them onto an eight-foot canvas. The resulting piece, titled *Ach Alma Manetro*, is in the permanent collection at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Villeglé went on to scavenge more than 4,500 works from Paris’s streets. “When I saw a crane on the skyline, I headed that way,” he told Conrad, “because it meant construction was going on. Where there’s work, there’s a fence. And where there’s a fence, there are posters.”

“He is really one of the grandfathers of street art,” Conrad says.

Like Conrad’s other books, the Villeglé biography is stuffed with colorful images and graphics. Published by the San Francisco gallery Modernism Inc. and Oakland-based Inkshares, *Jacques Villeglé and the Streets of Paris* will roll out this fall.

“He is one of the last of his generation. Villeglé’s art preserves the history and street life of postwar Paris.”

—Barnaby Conrad III ’70



After five years of unbroken focus on a single French artist, Conrad says he is excited about exploring new directions, including trying his hand at writing fiction. He still keeps the eight rejection letters he received from publishers while pitching around his absinthe book, which went on to sell 70,000 copies.

He was a founding editor at *Art World* (in NYC), senior editor of *Horizon*, editor-at-large for *ForbesLife* magazine, and co-founder of Kanbar & Conrad Books in San Francisco. Conrad also edited his father’s books for 30 years.

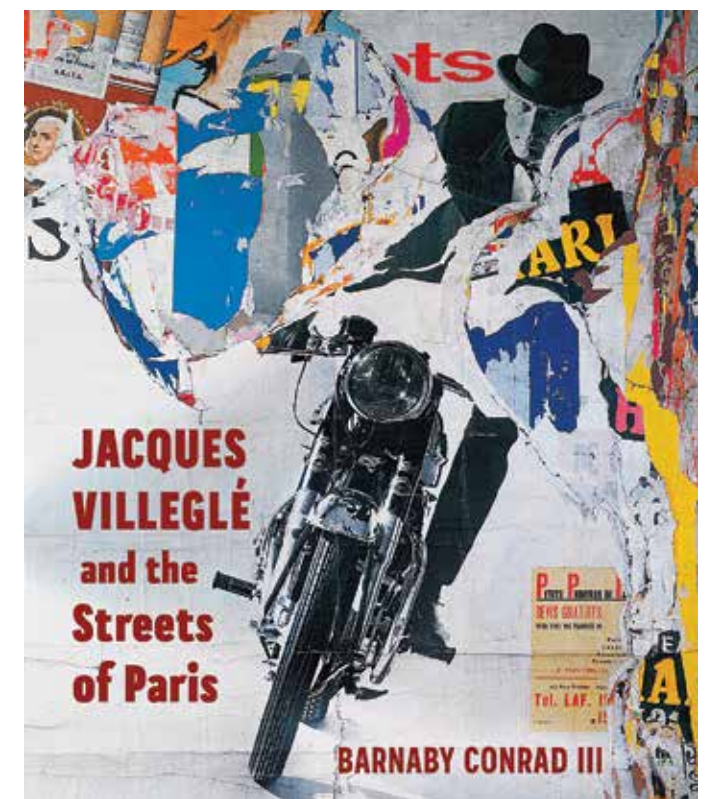
He’s the author of 10 books of non-fiction, but is now working on a novel. “I’ve always been a very good editor, and I love helping writers,” Conrad says. “I think it’s just taken me this long to learn how to write [for myself].” ■

—Zach Schonbrun ’05

Also see *In Print*, page 78.

Above: Villeglé ripping posters on the Quai d’Ivry in 1989. FRANÇOIS POIVRET

Right: The cover of Conrad’s large-format art book and biography, *Jacques Villeglé and the Streets of Paris*.



Immersed in Watersheds

"I feel good about the fact that I am making a positive impact on the world and can feel like I've done some good."



Chris Malik '76, Southwest Coastal, South Central Coastal, and Connecticut Mainstem watershed manager for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

CHRIS MALIK '76 has always been interested in water. At the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, where he serves as Southwest Coastal, South Central Coastal, and Connecticut Mainstem watershed manager, he gets to help keep Connecticut's water clean.

"My primary role is to work on developing watershed plans for polluted rivers and manage a grant program to help solve the impairments and pollution sources," says Malik, who has worked for the state of Connecticut since 1989. A watershed is an area of land that drains, or sheds, water into a receiving body of water, like a lake, river, or Long Island Sound.

According to the DEEP website, "As rain-water or melted snow runs downhill in the watershed, it collects and transports nutrients, pathogens, sediments, and other pollutants and deposits them into the receiving water-body. Watershed management is a term used to describe the process of implementing land use practices and water management practices to protect and improve the quality of the water and other natural resources within a watershed by managing the use of those land and water resources in a comprehensive manner."

After studying geology and geophysics at the University of Connecticut, which qualified him to work with wetland delineation and permitting, the state's Department of Transportation recruited Malik to work on those issues. After 11 years at the DOT, Malik moved to what was known at the time as the Department of Environment Protection.

Malik mainly focuses his attention on the nonpoint aspects of watershed management—including failing septic systems and illicit discharges—as opposed to permitted point sources like wastewater plants.

While industrial and wastewater discharges were previously the largest source of water pollution in Connecticut, Malik says that now stormwater runoff constitutes a more significant problem with regard to preventing wildlife and people from designated uses like recreation. A few of his recent projects have involved removing dams that have outlived

their life cycles. "Taking down the dam often improves water quality," Malik says. Some state dams have been retrofitted with hydropower, but many of them are so old that they are not suitable for hydropower use.

Malik has also worked to remove aquatic life impairments and water quality impairments, including trying to restore anadromous fish like river herring and blueback herring, which he says are "very important links in the chain of fish for marine birds and fish in Long Island Sound."

Another rewarding aspect of Malik's role is working with the public. "I act as a first contact point for people when they have watershed concerns," he says, "and the vast community of people working on these problems provides me with the motivation to keep helping them with these issues."

Malik has been involved with legislative inquiries and grant management, often working with volunteers and representatives from NGOs like Save the Sound and Harbor Watch. He says that there are many opportunities for anyone who would like to join up with grassroots organizations and that there is currently a lot of momentum in reducing nutrient impact, like the nitrogen inputs to Long Island Sound.

Ultimately, it's a job that he has found to be especially gratifying. "I feel good about the fact that I am making a positive impact on the world and can feel like I've done some good," Malik says. ■

—Sam Dangremond '05

Fun fact: The son of a former Taft headmaster was involved with adding an extra "E" to the agency's name. Dan Esty, son of John Cushing Esty, who led Taft from 1963 to 1972, became the agency's commissioner in 2011. It was that year that two state agencies, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Public Utility Control, merged to become the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Today, DEEP has 950 full-time employees, a budget of more than \$170 million, and a state park and forest system offering 142 locations for recreation around the state.



A Twist on Perspective

READING THE NEWSPAPER, WALK-ING down the street, going into a store—these are all places where Margeaux Walter '01 finds inspiration for the colorful reflections on society she creates and then photographs.

Walter is far more than a photographer. She creates tableaux to present concepts of humans' relationships with their environments. And she does it all—from conception to props to staging, and even becomes part

of the image herself. She sculpts, designs, paints, creates costumes, and performs. She has created costumes made from pine bark and grass, decorated sets with multiple rolls of toilet paper, and covered subjects with candy sprinkles. Humans (usually Walter herself) are included in most of her images, but they are generic representations of flattened personalities.

"My characters are more stand-ins for generic people," she told the *New York*

Times, where she often is commissioned to create images for the paper. "I'm never replicating them as personalities."

Walter received her MFA from Hunter College in 2014 and her BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in 2006. Her work has been featured in publications including the *New York Times*, *New York Post*, *Seattle Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Courrier International*, and *Blouin Art Info*. In her work, "the people disappear into the scene.



"People just buy things and there's no relationship [in their minds] between what they're buying and the effect on the planet."

Opposite page: Photographer and multimedia artist Margeaux Walter '01

Above: *Checkmate*, digital C print, 2015, Sign Language series

Left: *In Bloom*, digital C print, 2015, Sign Language series

I have always thought of them as a stand-in—a lot of my work is influenced by and trying to replicate advertising. I think of these characters as someone you would cut out of a magazine and [present as an] ideal. My face is a lot less present in my current work so that the characters are less recognizable. I am using my body as a tool."

Excess consumption is a running theme. She has a particularly fraught relationship with IKEA, the Swedish purveyor of home goods.

"I used to go and pick a random room to sit in and do my sketches," she says. "It's a pretty awful experience, but I find it full of inspiration for people watching."

IKEA's contributions to the world's pollution problems were part of the inspiration for her works that are focused on the effects of consumerism on the environment.

"People just buy things and there's no

Below: *Patch of Grass*, digital C print, 2020, All Natural series

Bottom: *Cumulus*, dye-sublimation on aluminum, 2019, Believe Me series



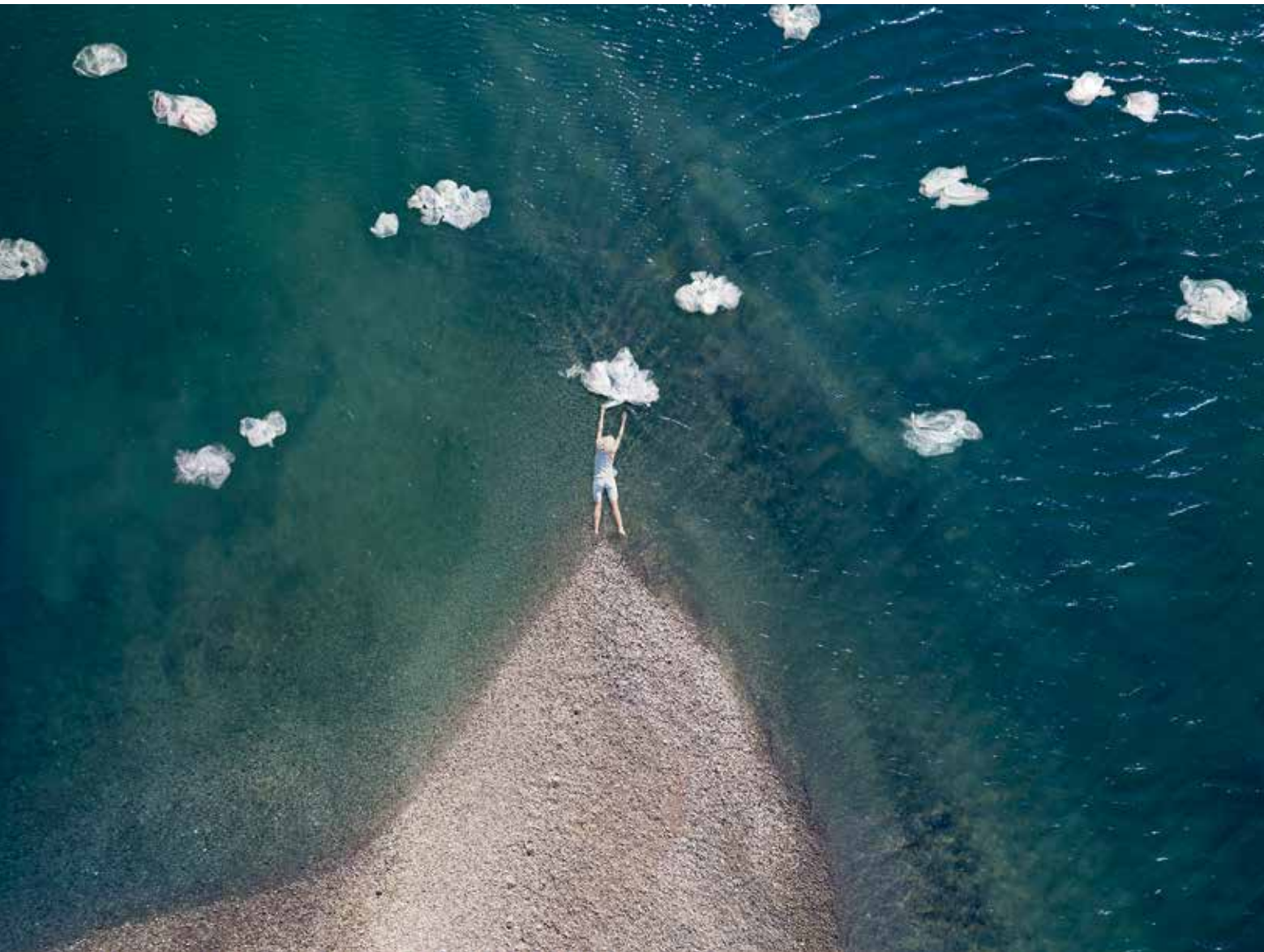
relationship [in their minds] between what they're buying and the effect on the planet," she says. They are "buying things in an effort to shape their identity. This process of buying makes you think you're bettering yourself, yet it often has the opposite effect. Our relationship with consumption is really complicated. I find the mindset behind it really fascinating."

Her most recent series, Believe Me, takes its inspirations from the same expression oft-used by a certain former president. In Believe Me, Walter used a drone to capture a "God's-eye view" of images she staged featuring herself as a faceless character in various environments. Prior to receiving a drone as a gift, she would shoot in a studio, unable to reach the heights available with a drone. Walter usually takes pictures in sections and tiles the results together to get maximum resolution, she told the *New York Times*.

"I was blown away by this new perspective," she says of the drone. "That series looks at and reimagines our environment from a distance."

That project was thinking about climate change and waste, Walter says. "I substituted consumer goods for natural objects in a tongue-in-cheek way to reveal environmental concerns through humor and perspective play."

The photographs in Believe Me resemble "surveillance images that one might find in Google Earth," she says in her artist statement. These "site-specific temporary installations in the environment...challenge our current post-fact world influenced by scripted and hyperbolic reality television, fake news, sensational journalism, and virtual experiences." Believe Me took three years to complete, and Walter says she doesn't print



MARGEUX WALTER HAS RECEIVED MULTIPLE HONORS from the Magenta Foundation Flash Forward, HeadOn Photo Festival, Photolucida, Prix de la Photographie Paris, International Photography Awards, the Julia Margaret Cameron Award, and other organizations. She has been awarded artist-in-residence programs at Montalvo Arts Center, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Marble House Project, VCCA, Red Gate Gallery in Beijing and BigCi in Bilpin, Australia (Environmental award). In 2020, she was the recipient of the 2020 Sony Alpha Female Award.

She is represented by Winston Wachter Fine Art in New York and Seattle, and Foto Relevance in Houston, and has participated in dozens of exhibitions at institutions including MOCA in Los Angeles; Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton, New Jersey; the Center for Photography in Woodstock, New York; the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio; Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa, California; Tacoma Art Museum in Tacoma, Washington; and the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, Massachusetts. Visit her website at margeauxwalter.com.

Left: *Snow Day*, digital C print, 2021, All Natural series

Below: *Dip Your Toes*, digital C print, 2020, All Natural series

the images until the entire series is complete.

Throughout the pandemic, Walter has continued to brainstorm new concepts. Her in-progress series, All Natural, is an ongoing exploration created in quarantine.

Within the All Natural series are images of bare feet inside an aquarium complete with puzzled goldfish. A faceless woman staples flowers to the upholstery of chairs. And a pair of feet in scuba flippers swims past a shoe holder filled with tropical creatures.

"These images reflect a human desire to connect with nature, and the failure of that connection with the influence of commerce, consumerism, lifestyle, and comfort. Due to COVID-19, we have become even more isolated from nature, from each other, and from the world, multiplying some of these emotions," she says. ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84



"To enjoy the rainbow, first enjoy the rain."

—Paulo Coelho



Summer Journeys

Making an Impact Across the Globe

DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, THE PANDEMIC CHANGED NEARLY EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE AROUND THE WORLD. FOR TAFT STUDENTS, THOSE CHANGES MEANT THAT THE SUMMER OF 2020 WAS NOT FILLED WITH THE SERVICE TRAVEL AND GLOBAL LEARNING THAT HAVE BECOME HALLMARKS OF A TAFT EDUCATION FOR SO MANY. BY THE SUMMER OF 2021, HOWEVER, THE WIDESPREAD AVAILABILITY OF VACCINES MEANT THAT, IN SOME CASES AND PLACES, TRAVEL PROGRAMS COULD RESUME, OR AT LEAST ADAPT. WE'RE GRATEFUL TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO AGREED TO SHARE THEIR STORIES OF GLOBAL IMPACT, SERVICE, AND LEARNING WITH THE *BULLETIN*.

Uniqueness & Beauty

► Macy Cherneff '22

MACY CHERNEFF '22 has always been passionate about environmental issues. In her role as editor-in-chief of Taft's *Global Journal*, Macy works with student authors and editors to bring the awareness, understanding, insights, and vocabulary that members of the Taft community need to engage in meaningful dialogue around current global and environmental issues. Over the summer, Macy took her commitment to that work one step further, engaging in a student service and leadership program in the Galápagos Islands.

"I think that my travels to the Galápagos relate well to the objectives of the *Global Journal*," says Macy. "I immersed myself in a new culture while helping to better the global community."

A province of Ecuador, the Galápagos Islands are a volcanic archipelago. They

are home to a plethora of plant and animal species, many found nowhere else in the world. Charles Darwin visited the Galápagos in 1835; his work there helped inspire his theory of evolution. The Galápagos Islands are also a UNESCO-designated heritage site, making cultural preservation and environmental conservation paramount. That work was the core of Macy's 14-day experience.

"The objective of our service work was to clear out invasive tree species and plant endemic trees in their place to restore the natural habitat," Macy explains. "We began by digging large boulders from the ground using iron spades and transporting them in wheelbarrows to the planting area. Then we used machetes to cut down invasive blackberry, guava, and Cuban cedar trees. We then used the spades to dig large holes

for the endemic *Scalesia* trees. Finally, after planting the *Scalesia* seedlings and watering them, we moved three large boulders on all sides of every tree to ensure that the giant turtles that share the land cannot eat or step on the *Scalesia* seedlings."

The work was difficult, Macy notes—back-breaking, in fact. But the results were substantial and will have a meaningful impact on environment: Macy and her team planted 67 *Scalesia* trees during her time there.

"The most meaningful part of my experience was conversing with the local people of the Galápagos and experiencing a completely different culture from my own," Macy says. "Each person has their own culture, their own backstory, their own opinions, desires, and dreams. Those differences are what makes the world beautiful."



But to Serve

► Julissa Mota '22

JULISSA MOTA'S PASSION FOR GLOBAL studies came into focus during her sophomore year at Taft.

"We were learning about workers' rights, immigration rights, and systems created to suppress them in my AP Human Geography class," Julissa recalls. "It was so interesting to me, and it felt very important."

Now in her senior year, Julissa is a candidate for Taft's prestigious Global Studies and Service (GSS) Diploma, a demanding course of study that requires students not only to complete specific coursework with a broad, global view, but to engage in service work locally and abroad. Determined to meet those requirements at a time when a worldwide pandemic made the latter nearly impossible, Julissa found a way to serve young students in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia last summer as an online English language teaching intern.

"The students I worked with were entering at the very first level of language learning, meaning we worked on simple conversation tools—"Hello, how are you?" "I'm fine, how are you?"—and things like colors and shapes."

As a member of the Hartford, Connecticut, Capitol Squash program, Julissa, who is bilingual, has worked with young learners in the past, though more as a bridge and translator between players, coaches, and parents than as a teacher.

"Outreach 360, the organization I worked with over the summer, supplied teaching guides, books, and lesson plans," Julissa explains. "There was an orientation period up front where teachers helped us with general teaching skills



and strategies, and well as tips for engaging students in a virtual learning space, which adds a whole different component."

Each day before class, Julissa met virtually with other teachers and program leaders to review the day's material and lesson plans and to practice delivering the content. There were circumstances, however, that were both eye-opening for Julissa and challenging for the young learners.

"During orientation we were told that some students would not have a private or quiet space to learn," Julissa says. "Even knowing that going in, actually seeing students taking care of their siblings during class was unexpected for me. Some were learning in small rooms with other siblings running around, making it very difficult for them to focus. It made me so proud of them—they were so dedicated and so resilient and so committed to learning, even under those challenging circumstances. And learning a whole new language, that's something to praise—that's incredibly hard work. It was really amazing."

To fulfill the local service requirements

for her GSS Diploma, Julissa worked passionately to impact food insecurity in Connecticut. With fellow Taft senior Angel Chukwuma, Julissa hosted fundraising events for the Connecticut Food Bank while working to educate the Taft community about the disparities that exist among racial groups and geographic locations across the state. Through that work and her teaching internship, Julissa was continually reminded of one underlying philosophy.

"Something a teacher said during orientation really stuck with me—it is something we always hear in GSS as well. We were reminded that we aren't helping, we are *serving*, and that there is a difference. What we are doing is not charity work, it is taking skills we possess and offering them in service to others," Julissa explains. "I didn't learn English until I was in first grade, but I feel so blessed to be almost a native speaker. I grew up understanding that speaking English is such an important tool. Being able to share that in service to brilliant, strong, determined, resilient, mature young learners was such a rewarding experience."

A Greater Purpose

▼ Lily Spencer '22

WHAT LILY SPENCER '22 LEARNED through a middle school report on Saudi Arabia fascinated her. It also stuck with her.

"I have remained interested in the Arab world—it's culture, language, and traditions—and have fostered that interest through books, movies, restaurants, and the news," Lily says.

Lily spent three weeks in Morocco last summer engaged in service work in the remote mountain village of Zaouia Ahansal. Located in the High Atlas Mountains, Zaouia Ahansal was founded in the 13th century by an Islamic traveler and scholar named Sidi Said Ahansal, whose mentor encouraged him to establish a religious school. Today, the needs of the village are great and many. The projects Lily and her fellow travelers engaged in were selected by community leaders to address their most immediate needs.

"Our service projects included construction work on a local water cleaning station, working in the public gardens, planting trees, cleaning up trash around the village, and working in the summer program at the local school," Lily says.

The team's days started early with breakfast at the home of the village Sheikh, followed by Arabic lessons.

"For about an hour each day we would learn some basic phrases in Arabic that would help us communicate with members of the village who were not familiar with English," says Lily. "After our lesson we would prepare for our morning service project, which would last about three hours. We would return for another three hours of afternoon service work. After dinner our group would meet on the roof of the guesthouse for our nightly meeting. We'd debrief about the service we completed, talk about our highs and lows of the day, and discuss what we were looking forward to. It was a great way to tie our

service work to a greater purpose and better understand our impact on the community."

Lily also came to appreciate the full impact of her service work in Morocco through an independent research project focused on education in the village. She investigated government funding, the local politics surrounding women in education, the effect COVID had on schooling, and the economic benefit of educating community members. As part of her research, Lily interviewed local community leaders. She learned that education in the region is fully funded by the government, but that sending children to school is a decision that is made by each individual family; more conservative families are less likely to send their children to school. And while the overall literacy rate for women is around 65 percent, it remains much lower in the more rural areas, something that NGOs and supplemental education programs are working to change.

"The supplemental teaching program that I worked at costs about 10,000 euros a year and is mainly funded through student travel programs and other nonprofit organizations. That program, which offers local students extra time in the classroom and more learning opportunities, is not very common across Morocco," Lily says.

Her research also uncovered the impact of the pandemic on education in the village. While the government worked to provide online learning for students at every grade level, many did not have access to electricity, let alone the technology. As a result, 70 percent of students lost a year of learning and had to repeat classes. Thus, the supplemental summer program Lily worked with last summer, was more important to the village than ever.

"Teaching students in the local village school impacted me quite profoundly. The

language barrier made communication in the classroom challenging, but not impossible. I used hand motions and hand-drawn pictures to communicate with the students and noticed their eyes glistening when they understood a new word or concept in English," Lily recalls. "There were two boys in my group who were incredibly motivated to learn the words of the water cycle in English. We made a game of who could recite the water cycle the loudest. A few days after our lesson I was walking back from a service project in the gardens, and the two boys were playing on the side of the road. They recognized me as I passed by and began reciting the water cycle at the loudest possible volume they could, including the hand motions of rain falling, water evaporating, and more. It made me so happy to know that the lesson I had prepared and taught was understood by the students, and they were practicing it outside the classroom."





The Road to Discovery

▲ Ayden Cinel '22

FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN REMEMBER, Ayden Cinel '22 has been curious about how the universe works. He is an avid and passionate learner with a strong interest in science.

"I've just recently narrowed my interest down from such a broad scope to the biomedical field, which I hope to turn into a career," Ayden says.

Ayden took a deep academic dive into biomedical building blocks over the summer through a new, virtual and immersive course in modern biology, part of Columbia University's prestigious program for high school students. The course explores the basic elements of molecular biology, genetics, and evolution, and how those sciences affect modern medicine, agriculture, and ecology. Summer study began with a review of the structure, function, and synthesis of DNA, RNA, and proteins. Students

then applied that knowledge to a range of topics, including modern biological research techniques, genetic engineering, immunology, cancer, and virology.

"The most interesting part of the program for me was the unit on cancer because it was all brand-new material to me," says Ayden. "I had never learned about the various treatments used to combat it, the mechanisms through which it emerges in the human body, and the ways it interacts with bodily systems. The unit piqued my interest and sparked a desire within me to maybe join the effort to cure cancer, although I'm not sure yet."

Each day began with a "mini-talk" by the program instructor, which often aligned with the day's subject matter but was sometimes just new or fascinating information in the world of science. Soon after, students were fully immersed in lectures and learning.

"The lab sessions were the most useful part of the program, where you were asked to work alongside your classmates," Ayden says. "It helped to brush up on my scientific method skills—formulating and testing hypotheses and carrying out experiments—and practice problem-solving with others, exactly what I'd be doing in a professional setting."

For a student with Ayden's commitment, curiosity, and passion, the intensive academic nature of the program seemed a good fit. And for a student with a clear vision of the path he will follow in the future, the program marked a meaningful and important step in that direction.

"My biggest takeaway is that there is a lot that goes along with biomedical engineering and molecular biology," says Ayden. "There is so much to know and much, much more to discover."

Education & Opportunity

▼ Angel Chukwuma '22

TAFT IS A SCHOOL FILLED WITH seemingly endless opportunities. Angel Chukwuma '22 does her best to take advantage of as many of those opportunities as she possibly can. She is on track to receive a Global Studies and Service (GSS) Diploma at Commencement next year, and has honed her leadership skills as a Global Leadership Institute (GLI) Scholar. Both the GSS and GLI programs at Taft require exceptional commitment and dedication from participants, with academic obligations both in and out of the classroom, and service work with both local and global reach. Angel is very active in Taft's Community Service program. Locally, she and fellow GSS candidate Julissa Mota launched a Thanksgiving Food Drive for low-income families in the greater Waterbury area.

"During the winter term, I also volunteered for a nonprofit called Distributed Proofreaders, for which I proofread PDFs of a variety of texts to be used for free virtual libraries," Angel explains. "I took some tests to learn about proper formatting, punctuation, and more."

The worldwide pandemic made it more difficult for Angel to engage in the kind of service travel GSS Diploma candidates often do to fulfill all of their global service requirements. Just before the pandemic hit, Angel made plans to travel to the Dominican Republic with a group of Taft teachers and students through a program called Outreach360; that trip was cancelled. Over the summer, Angel turned to Outreach360 once again and signed on as a virtual teaching intern.

"During the internship, I worked with a

set group of students from either Nicaragua or the Dominican Republic. I taught two different class periods, but the classes rotated among the other teachers, so I still did not see the same students every day," Angel explains. "Each class contained about 10 students at most, ranging in age from 6 to 12 years old. It was a bit more difficult to get some of the younger students to pay attention in class, but they were definitely an entertaining group!"

Angel entered the program with some teaching experience. As a Wight Foundation Scholar, she spent a summer working with third graders at the Boys and Girls Club of Newark, New Jersey. That experience was limited, and very different from teaching virtually.

"One of Outreach360's lead teachers guided us through an orientation period," Angel says. "She performed a demonstration of what effective and ineffective teaching looked like by teaching us Hebrew vocabulary. When she showed how not to teach, I felt very lost and confused, and I knew that I did not want my students to feel like that in class. She also taught us to enunciate, speak at a slower pace, encourage quieter students to participate, and to always congratulate students for trying."

There were moments during Angel's internship that surprised her and amazed her—like when pet parrots joined a set of siblings for class, and when students spontaneously shouted, "God bless you," in gratitude at the end of class. There were also moments that made her swell with pride.

"I was teaching students the words for different toys, things like bikes, and

skateboards," Angel recalls. "I asked a student if he had a bike, and I expected him to simply answer with 'Yes, I do,' or 'No, I don't.' He said, yes, but then went on to say, 'But I want a new bike because my bike is old.' I was so surprised, but also really proud because he formed a much more advanced sentence completely on his own. It was amazing to witness how fast the students learn. Education is an important tool that can open doors for many more opportunities in life. It should not be a privilege, but rather everyone should have the right and access to it. I have known this for a long time, but my experience with Outreach360 made it clearer to me."



Conservation & Connection

► Khai Shulman '23

A FEW YEARS AGO, Khai Shulman '23 studied biodiversity in mangrove plants in the context of varying salinity levels at The Island School in the Bahamas. But what really captured his attention was something much greater.

"I saw how human-made trash from other parts of the world can end up in remote islands," says Khai, "which made me more aware of the interconnectedness of our environment."

It also prompted him to begin working to reduce waste—he created a composting program for residents of his building in New York City—and to seek out new opportunities to make a real impact on the environment. Over the summer, Khai traveled to the Galápagos Islands, where he engaged in hands-on conservation work designed to protect and preserve the famed Galápagos tortoises.

"I wanted to visit the place that inspired

Charles Darwin in his game-changing research on evolution," says Khai.

San Cristóbal Island is home to the oldest permanent settlement on the Galápagos Islands. It is also where Charles Darwin first went ashore in 1835. Today, sea lions, red-footed boobies, marine iguanas, and dolphins are among the creatures sharing the island with the giant Galápagos tortoises, whose ancestors arrived there two to three million years ago.

"The nature of our conservation work during the first week was to ensure that the unique ecosystem of the Galápagos Islands—and more importantly, San Cristóbal—can thrive," Khai explains. "During the first week, we got a special permit to enter the island of San Cristóbal to care for the local tortoises by cleaning their spaces, feeding them special plants, and maintaining their walkways. The laws in the Galápagos do not allow people within 2 meters of the animals

and totally forbid touching them. This made me understand how special our work with the tortoises was. Having access to them is a privilege that is not extended to tourists no matter how much they are willing to pay."

Khai and other Projects Abroad students also spent time collecting trash around the island and, during the second week of the program, spent a portion of each day at San Cristóbal's Alejandro Alvear School teaching young students English and the rules of soccer. They closed out each day by working on a wall mural close to another local school.

"The most impactful part of my experience was definitely interacting with the young students on the island" says Khai. "I discovered that each of the students, usually under the age of 10, had very strong work ethics, were down to earth, and had a great sense of humor. It was uplifting to see the progress the students made in my limited time with them. They are fast and enthusiastic learners!"

Inspired by both the mission and leadership of Projects Abroad, as well as the totality of his experience in the Galápagos Islands, Khai is hoping to share that inspiration with the Taft community through the creation of an International Film Club on campus this fall, featuring short films from a broad range of countries followed by thoughtful, film-driven conversation.

"The idea behind this program is to appreciate and recognize the different points of views in the world," Khai says, "because when humans on a fundamental level understand each other, we are more willing to put aside our differences and work toward a common goal."



Vaccination Education

ELISE TAYLOR '24 takes the concepts of community and service very seriously. Over the summer, she was pounding the pavement in her hometown, going door to door spreading the word about the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID-19. Elise was part of the Grace Baptist Church street team, a group that is using its share of a \$2.7 million grant from the Connecticut Department of Public Health/Vaccine Equity Partnership grant to flip the script in Waterbury, Connecticut, where just under half the population had received at least one dose of the vaccine. Connecticut Public Radio caught up with Elise and her colleagues. You can read their story here: <https://bit.ly/Elise24Taft>.



PHOTO BY TYLER RUSSELL/CONNECTICUT PUBLIC RADIO

From the Amazon to the Andes



FOR NEARLY 10 SUMMERS, TAFT students have engaged in prestigious internships, working side by side with renowned scientists at The New York Botanical Garden. The internships are part of a decade-long partnership between the Garden and Taft School. This summer, Sophia Sheumack '21 worked with Dr. Fabián A. Michelangeli, Abess Curator of Tropical Botany, in the Garden's Institute of Systematic Botany. Her study examined leaf size and shape variations in the *Melastomataceae* plant family across environments, with a particular focus on elevational gradients from the Amazon to the high Andes. ■

Summer Renovations: Making Up for Lost Time

TRADITIONAL SUMMER PROJECTS TOOK A BACK SEAT TO COVID-DRIVEN CAMPUS CONVERSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS IN 2020, REQUIRING TAFT'S FACILITIES TEAM TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING IN JUNE TO CATCH UP ON A LONG LIST OF PROJECTS. SIMPLE BUT IMPORTANT THINGS LIKE TREE TRIMMING TOOK PLACE ALONGSIDE MAJOR RENOVATIONS, INCLUDING FACULTY HOME AND APARTMENT WORK AND THE RESURFACING OF A NUMBER OF ATHLETICS VENUES. IT WAS, NOTES CFO JAKE ODDEN '86, "BY ALL ACCOUNTS ONE OF THE BUSIEST SUMMER SEASONS OF CAMPUS CONSTRUCTION IN RECENT MEMORY." *Philanthropic donor support helped make the Geoffrey C. Camp '91 Field, Snyder Field, Odden Arena, and McCullough Fieldhouse projects possible.*



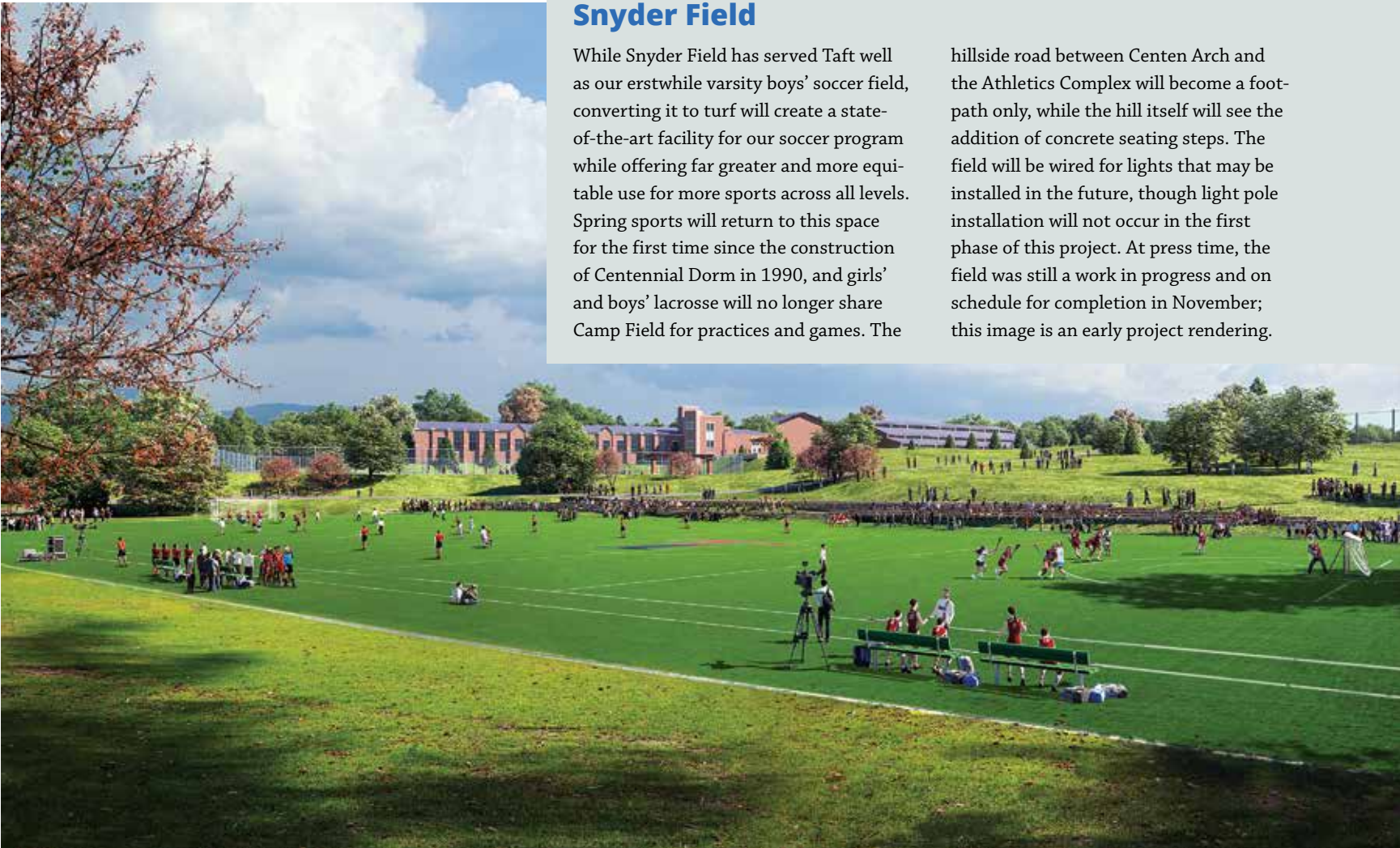
Faculty Housing

Twenty-eight faculty housing units got new occupants this year, each requiring varying degrees of updates and upgrades. While most residences required attention to paint and flooring, a dozen required substantive infrastructure remodeling, from kitchens, bathrooms, and floor-plan changes to landscape drainage, sewer, and water main replacement. Phase III of our ongoing CPT renovation project added work on seven faculty apartments to the mix.



Geoffrey C. Camp '91 Field

Where does the time go? It's hard to believe that 13 years have passed since then state-of-the-art synthetic turf hit Camp Field. The old turf was removed in June and replaced with field padding, a new technology in athletic field turf. A new walkway, fencing, barrier netting, scoreboard with shot clocks, and area grading rounded out the project.



Snyder Field

While Snyder Field has served Taft well as our erstwhile varsity boys' soccer field, converting it to turf will create a state-of-the-art facility for our soccer program while offering far greater and more equitable use for more sports across all levels. Spring sports will return to this space for the first time since the construction of Centennial Dorm in 1990, and girls' and boys' lacrosse will no longer share Camp Field for practices and games. The

hillside road between Centen Arch and the Athletics Complex will become a foot-path only, while the hill itself will see the addition of concrete seating steps. The field will be wired for lights that may be installed in the future, though light pole installation will not occur in the first phase of this project. At press time, the field was still a work in progress and on schedule for completion in November; this image is an early project rendering.



McCullough Fieldhouse

The Donald F. McCullough '42 Athletic Center is a multipurpose, well-utilized space. Perhaps the most used section of McCullough is the fieldhouse, making its 30-year-old “rubber” floor ripe for replacement. The new surface improves both shock absorption and overall texturing, improving its suitability for tennis and the range of other activities taking place there each day.



Odden Arena

After 21 years of service, the ice in Odden Arena was ready for a face-lift. The main work involves replacing our Olympic-size playing surface with the slightly narrower NHL size, the standard for secondary and collegiate hockey programs. Along the way, new subfloor and flooring will secure the mechanical infrastructure of the rink for the next 25 to 30 years and beyond, while new dasher boards will employ substantially advanced technology that offers greater safety for our student-athletes. At press (and photo) time, work in Odden remains ongoing, with completion projected for early to mid-November.

Bluestone Sidewalks

Badly worn sidewalks near Wu and Jig Patio were replaced with the bluestone walkways currently found across campus. Heated walks use the steam generated from Taft's power plant and protect our buildings and grounds from salt contamination, making them an environmentally sound alternative. They are also the long-term, fiscally responsible option, saving labor costs, liability, and salt damage to our beautiful buildings.



General Campus Maintenance

Our commitment to the health and safety of all our community members meant our campus was nearly empty during the summer of 2020, meaning a good deal of routine work was deferred to this year. We added two all-gender restrooms on Main Hall, added the school's first electric car charging stations, installed new gates, and caught up on landscaping, tree work, and window maintenance. ■



Convocation 2021



“

9/11 cannot just be a page in the history books. For Taft, what happened that day and in the year that followed marks us still. And in good and important ways. That day showed us what this school was and could be. A community where every member felt they belonged and even loved. A campus that was marked by a stubborn resilience and a fierce resolve; a school that was determined to achieve its mission despite the challenges. My thought and my challenge is that, perhaps with your passion and commitment and following a year that brought a similar kind of pain and confusion, we might this year create something special so that 20 years from now, in this same room on another opening day they will be talking about us and all that we bequeathed them. Two years separated by two decades, each following years of enormous destruction. Surely we, too, can create something enduring and beautiful following the year we have known, and I'm asking for you to be a part of it.”

—From Head of School Willy MacMullen's 2021 Convocation Address

”



Tafties Earn Theater Awards

WATERBURY'S SEVEN ANGELS THEATRE recognized talented Tafties and Taft's theater program with two Halo Awards and an extraordinary 17 Halo nominations this year. Taft's Award winners, announced over the summer, were Harry Wang '21 and Ivy Zhuang '21. Harry

was recognized in the Best Incidental or Original Music category for his work in *The 39 Steps*, while Ivy won recognition as Best Performance by a Supporting Actress in a Play as Zuzu/Joseph/Mrs. Hatch in *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. Halo Awards honor high school student

achievements in all aspects of theater, from acting and dancing to set design and stage management. Productions mounted by high schools across Connecticut were considered during the nominating process. Congratulations to Harry, Ivy, and all the nominees! ■

Lax Players Honored

FOUR MEMBERS OF TAFT'S CLASS OF 2021 were selected to play in the 16th annual Under Armour All-American Lacrosse Classic in July. Chris Kavanagh, Ryan Levy, Tucker Mullen, and Jeffery Ricciardelli competed with the nation's top players on the turf in a matchup that aired on ESPN.

“The game featured the best high school players in the game,” says Nic Bell, head coach of Taft's boys' varsity lacrosse team. “It is widely viewed as the greatest individual recognition that a player can earn at this point in their career.”

The top 44 senior boys and girls are selected by *Inside Lacrosse* and a committee made up of the nation's most knowledgeable voices in high school lacrosse. Seniors in good academic standing are considered for participation, and will compete in separate boys' and girls' North vs. South All-Star Games. With four players each in the 2021 Classic, Taft and Malvern Prep (Pennsylvania) have established a new player-selection record, the highest since the event began 16 years ago. ■



TUCKER MULLEN

CHRIS KAVANAGH

RYAN LEVY

JEFFERY RICCIARDELLI



Welcome Back, Tafties!

STUDENTS ARRIVED IN WAVES THIS YEAR, WITH PRESEASON ATHLETES AND MONS MAKING THE FIRST RIPPLES, FOLLOWED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, A TSUNAMI OF BOARDERS, AND, ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASSES, OUR DAY STUDENTS. AFTER TWO DAYS OF CLASSES, THE COMMUNITY RECONNECTED ON AND AROUND JIG PATIO FOR A WELCOME BACK BARBECUE. AND, IN A WELCOME AND HIGHLY ANTICIPATED RETURN TO TRADITION, SUPER SUNDAY WAS BACK IN ALL ITS GLORY—A BEAUTIFUL BLEND OF COLORFUL PAINTS, COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, EGG-TOSSING, THREE-LEGGED RACES, A TUG-OF-WAR, AND OF COURSE, THE CRISCO SLIDE.





The Sounds of Silence

During the COVID-19 pandemic, kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms around the United States and the world were hastily converted into home offices and makeshift classrooms, but for musicians accustomed to playing to live audiences, sheltering in place meant an end to performance as they knew it. In the midst of this worldwide shutdown, two Taft alums found innovative and inspiring ways to keep the arts alive, even as theaters and concert halls were closing their doors.

by Christopher Browner '12



Djong Victorin Yu '76

After nearly 40 years as a celebrated conductor and composer, how does Djong Victorin Yu '76 evaluate his body of work? "I haven't accomplished many things, not really," he says modestly. "Sure, I did everything I set out to do, and I have no regrets. But my time stopped in 1977, and only now do I feel that my clock is about to move again." Despite a lifetime spent in concert halls all over the world, it would take a global standstill to help him refocus his passion for making music and rekindle one of his earliest musical loves, the cello.

It's impossible for Yu to remember a time when he wasn't interested in music. At 3 years old, he was already listening with rapt attention to the family record player, and by 5, he had his sights set on

becoming a conductor. Pretty soon, he was a skilled cellist, performing throughout his time at Taft and then studying music theory at the University of Pennsylvania under composers George Crumb,



Left: Composer and conductor Djong Victorin Yu '76, of South Korea, in 2021.

Opposite page: Details of Yu's new edition of Chopin's *Sonata for Piano and Cello*, Op. 65, which he finally was able to realize after pondering for several decades.



“[La dernière feuille d’or, or The Last Golden Leaf] is a piece which reflects my state of mind at that time. In this part of the world, a golden leaf can symbolize the ginkgo leaf. When they all fall and the wind takes them, they form a wave. So I was thinking of the last leaf that falls off and floats on to a different kind of life.”



Above: A past performance with Yu playing cello and conducting *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*, by Heitor Villa-Lobos, a Brazilian composer he became familiar with at Taft, thanks to his French and Russian teacher, Jan English.

Jay Reise, and George Rochberg, three of the foremost musical minds of the mid-20th century.

Everything was on track for a successful career when Yu was drafted into compulsory military service in his native South Korea. “Before completing my first year at Penn, I had to return to Korea, and during my military service, I injured my ulnar nerves and could no longer play the cello,” he says. The injury derailed his hopes of becoming a musician, but Yu did not let it keep from him pursuing his passion. He continued his studies with Maestro Vakhtang Jordania before gaining prominence as a conductor in both his homeland and throughout Europe and the U.S., including recording more than a dozen albums with London’s Philharmonia Orchestra, serving as principal conductor with various orchestras in South Korea, and composing his own music as well as orchestrating and creating new editions of other composers’ works.

But everything came to a halt with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. “Every day, they were

reporting how many people were infected and how many had died. It was scary to see the numbers rise, and for a while, I just couldn’t concentrate,” he recalls. “I had to do something to keep my sanity.”

The increasingly worsening situation brought to mind a short story by O. Henry, “The Last Leaf,” which tells of a young artist struck by pneumonia who won’t give herself up to death until the tree outside her window sheds all its leaves. “I wanted to write my story after the last leaf falls off—or does it?” he says. The result was *La dernière feuille d’or*, or *The Last Golden Leaf*, a piece for two violins and piano that Yu describes as his attempt at impressionistic music. He chose the style purposefully because it was a musical language that was very foreign to him—just as the pandemic was such uncharted territory.

“It is a piece which reflects my state of mind at that time. In this part of the world, a golden leaf can symbolize the ginkgo leaf,” he explains. “When they all fall and the wind takes them, they

“No composer has so comfortably portrayed life

as something so vulnerable as we all have witnessed for the past year and a half.

Even at the frailest moment, Chopin shows us the power of expression itself.”

form a wave. So I was thinking of the last leaf that falls off and floats on to a different kind of life.”

He also spent this period rediscovering his love for the cello—and how to play it pain-free. “It’s been almost five decades since my injury, and only this year I discovered that the problem was already there before the military service,” he points out. “I had a cello teacher whose instruction for a passage in Chopin’s *Cello Sonata* actually caused the damage in the first place, and realizing this, I finally could start to undo the knots in my palm and play in a way that doesn’t cause pain.”

In reacquainting himself with his instrument, Yu was inspired to reexamine a piece that had fascinated, and perplexed, him from the very beginning, Chopin’s *Cello Sonata in G Minor*. He worked on the sonata as part of his Independent Studies Project at Taft, and even then, he couldn’t wrap his head around some sections of the score. “Chopin was never happy with the first movement, so he kept revising it. But he was dying and finally decided that he didn’t have enough time left and had it published as it was,” Yu says. “I felt bad for him. Had he lived five more years, he would have fixed those problems, and I wanted to figure out what he would have done if he had had more time.”

Working like an investigator, he pored over Chopin’s notes, trying to piece together the composer’s unfulfilled vision. “I wasn’t trying to improve Chopin’s music—it was to help realize his intentions,” he says. “Chopin understood when the same notes in the same range are doubled by both the cello and the piano, the cello sound gets covered by the piano. He was being considerate, perhaps too considerate of the cello.” For Yu, the solution was simple. “In a few places, I switched the piano and the cello parts. It’s the same notes, and they go by so fast that you don’t hear the change, but it works out more naturally. And it’s completely Chopin!”

He completed his edition of the Chopin *Cello Sonata in G Minor* this past summer and looks forward to one day performing it—and his new composition—before a live audience. “I’ve been tinkering for the last 48 years, but it was all in my head. Finally, I decided to commit these ideas to paper,” he says proudly. And more so, Yu feels that this piece uniquely addresses the current moment. “No composer has so comfortably portrayed life as something so vulnerable as we all have witnessed for the past year and a half. Even at the frailest moment, Chopin shows us the power of expression itself.”

Below left: The cover of Yu’s concert program from his 1975 performance of Chopin’s *Cello Sonata*, a recital that was part of his Taft independent studies work. The cover is a silkscreen which Yu designed and handprinted.

Below right: Yu conducting a concert several years ago.



Vanessa Holroyd '90

Before March 2020, Vanessa Holroyd '90 was juggling two successful careers—as an in-demand classical flutist performing throughout the Northeast, and as the co-owner of the music/entertainment agency Music Management—all on top of being a mom to two kids. But when stay-at-home orders shuttered concert halls and ruled out any in-person events, she had to quickly evolve and adapt to the “new normal.”

Below: Holroyd, at left, performing with her trio, TriChrome, at the Boston Public Library.

For Holroyd, who serves as principal flute of the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music at Boston's historic Emmanuel Church and can often be found in the woodwind sections of the New Bedford and Portland symphony orchestras, the sense of community and collaboration is at the core of her love of making music.

“Although it's [really] fun to play in an orchestra, my happy place is really as part of a chamber group or supporting a vocalist,” she says. “I like working with people and communicating with them, and in a large orchestra, sometimes it's hard to have relationships with everyone around me. But in smaller ensembles or supporting an aria, it's like we're having a conversation, and I love that. I love that one-on-one interaction.”

Unfortunately for musicians, this kind of close collaboration became impossible, and performances were canceled one by one—an experience Holroyd compares to watching a really slow car crash. Like many people during the past year and a half, Holroyd was forced to work from home, though for her, that meant converting her bedroom into a practice room/office, with her husband setting up in the living room and their children learning remotely in the dining room and second bedroom.



“In most cases, we would gather in an empty space

*—10 feet apart, with the string players masked and the winds surrounded by Plexiglass—
and record a piece all the way through and then upload it online.”*

Professional classical flutist
Vanessa Holroyd '90.

JILL PERSON @JILLPERSONPHOTOGRAPHY



JILL PERSON @JILLPERSONPHOTOGRAPHY

Thanks to Zoom, Holroyd was still able to lead some private lessons, and by the fall, a number of organizations had devised clever ways to offer virtual concerts for their audiences. “Everyone solved it differently. Sure, it was a bit chaotic, but people were getting super creative and scrappy with livestreams,” she recalls. “In most cases, we would gather in an empty space—10 feet apart, with the string players masked and the winds surrounded by Plexiglass—and record a piece all the way through and then upload it online.”

“We’re missing a crucial piece

without a live audience because we really do miss the interaction with them.”

One time, Holroyd joined a woodwind quintet for program that was filmed with multiple cameras. Then, after the footage was edited together, the group released the concert like a live event, with live introductions and an interactive chat, so members of the audience could comment and interact with the players while enjoying their performance.

Playing in even these modified setups proved to be a powerful experience for Holroyd after months of isolation. “I was able to play the Christmas Eve service at Emmanuel, and I actually started crying at the first rehearsal. To be able to play with real people, even though there wasn’t a congregation, was very moving.”

But this style of performing also presented artistic challenges. “We’re missing a crucial piece without a live audience because we really do miss the interaction with them,” she says. “When it’s just you and the cameras, you’re hyper aware of them. You feel like your playing is being looked at under a microscope, whereas a live, in-person concert is so much more about the energy of that performance.

“Virtual concerts are so strange. On the one

Below: Holroyd performing
J.S. Bach’s *Mass in B Minor*
with Emmanuel Music, Boston
SAM BREWER



hand, it’s not like recording an album in a studio. It can’t be perfect because it’s live, and we usually only do one or two takes,” she continues. “But since it’s going to exist in perpetuity online, you feel like you can’t take the risks you can in live performance. It became a question of bringing the energy, the courage, and the risk taking of a live performance without throwing all caution to the wind.” Between January and the end of the freelance season in May, Holroyd stayed busy with a series of small projects, and by July, she was finally able to play before an audience again, as part of a special concert with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra

featuring the woodwind and brass sections to thank donors for their support during the pandemic.

But even now, as venues are slowly beginning to reopen, companies are still cautious about planning full in-person seasons. And while she too is uncertain about the year ahead, Holroyd is extremely proud of all that she was able to accomplish over the past 18 months. “Some amazing things have come out of this! It’s been exhausting, and it’s been a ton of hustle, but we’ve been able to make it through. For me, it was so important to stay relevant, to be able to say I’m still an artist, I still have something to give musically, I’m still here.” ■

Above: Filming for a virtual
online performance by Holroyd
in fall 2020. DAVE JAMROG

“For me, it was so important to stay relevant,
to be able to say I’m still an artist, I still have something to give musically, I’m still here.”

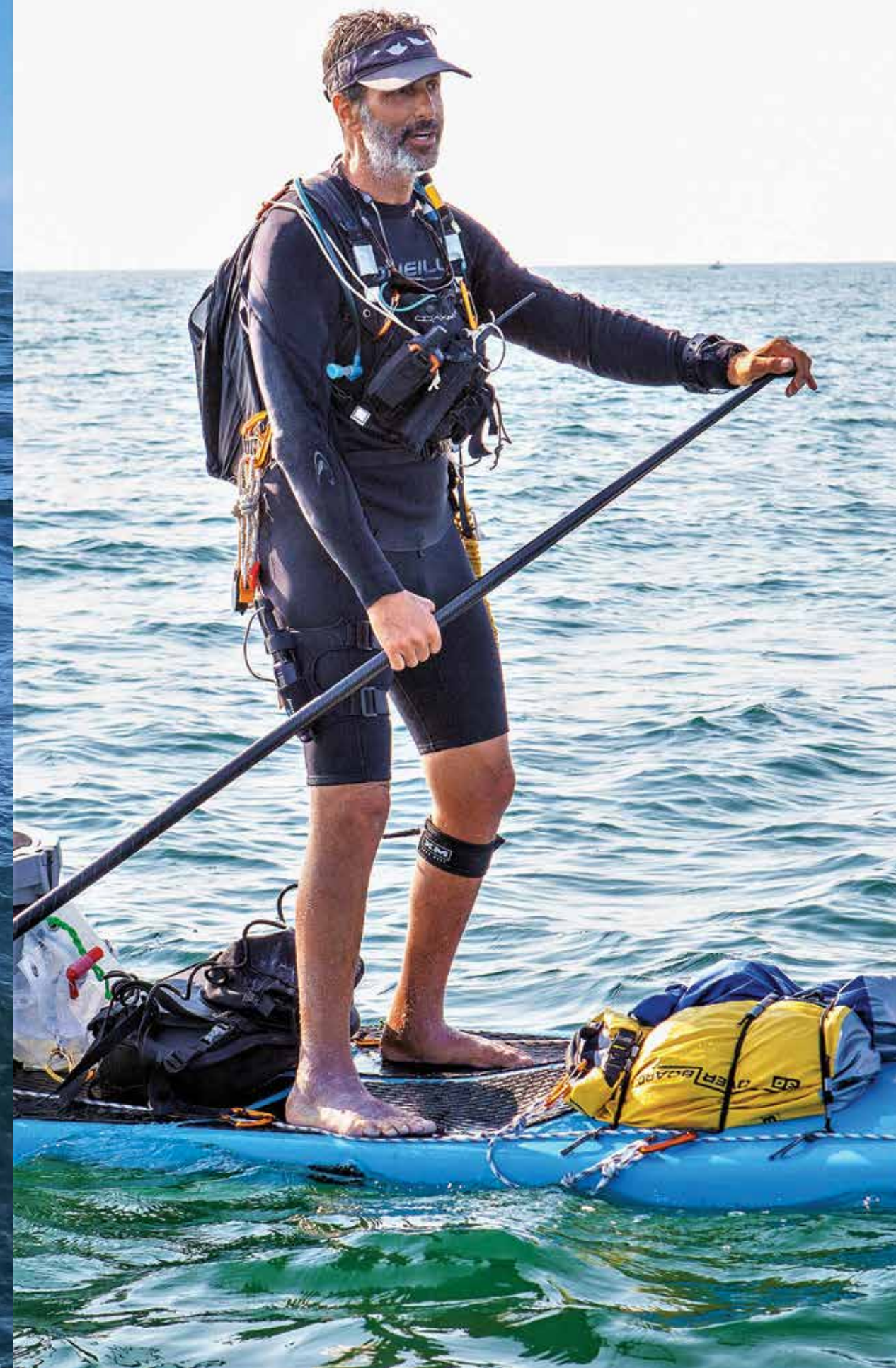
ONWARD

Adam Nagler's
epic 724-mile
paddleboard
expedition

BY ZACH SCHONBRUN '05

From Adam Nagler's
paddleboard: a container
ship moving at 25 knots in
6-foot seas, 18 miles ESE,
Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

Right: Just before landing
at Brant Point Light on
Nantucket. DEAN GEDDES

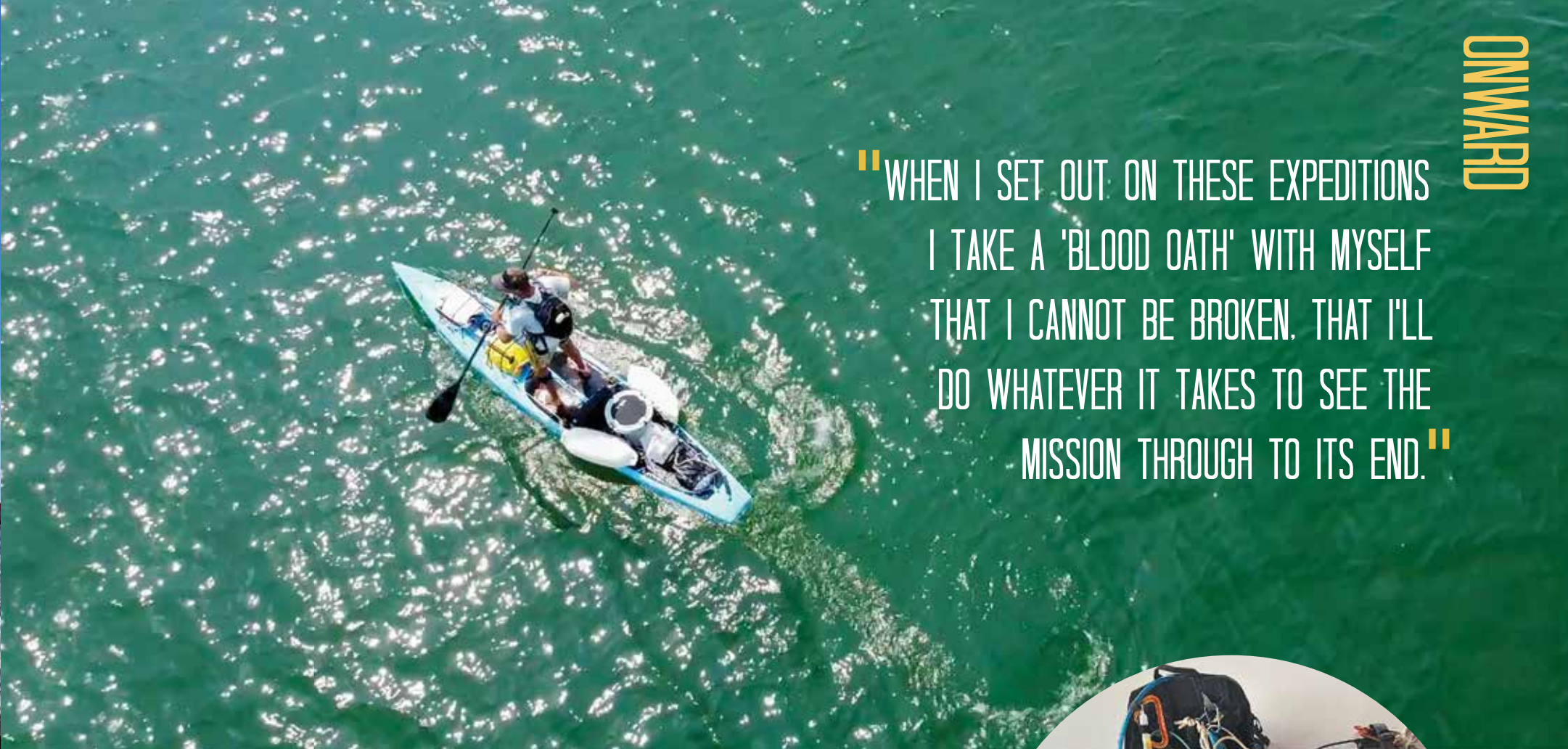


"WHEN I SET OUT ON THESE EXPEDITIONS I TAKE A 'BLOOD OATH' WITH MYSELF THAT I CANNOT BE BROKEN. THAT I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SEE THE MISSION THROUGH TO ITS END."



Left: Nagler's launch from Kiptopeke, Virginia, at the mouth of the Chesapeake, with the sled he had to ditch due to an approaching tropical system.

Above: Overhead view of Nagler from drone footage outside Moriches Inlet, Westhampton Dunes, New York. BILLY MACK



Less than two days into the most daring endeavor of his life, Adam Nagler '85 knew he needed to "improvise, adapt, and overcome" like never before. Hurricane Elsa was on his track four days to the south and Nagler was a good three days from the nearest navigable inlet, hauling a 300-pound sled across 160 square miles of shoals.

He had provisioned 28 gallons of water, 50 pounds of endurance "fuel," 20 pounds of medical supplies, and almost as much safety and backup equipment as a Coast Guard patrol boat. Now, with Elsa coming, he was going to have to ditch the sled. Nagler gave himself one hour to triage a year's planning.

Already things had gotten off to a rocky start. His expedition, named "Deep Fog Direct," was originally charted to go from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, to Nantucket, Massachusetts, following a line to the west of the canyons of the continental shelf—two weeks out of sight of land, across hundreds of miles of open ocean. Alone and standing.

On a paddleboard.

But a series of unpredictable early-season tropical systems off Cape Hatteras during the first weeks of the expedition "weather window" made such a route implausible. A fool's errand, Nagler thought. Better to launch from the mouth of the Chesapeake and stick nearer the coast.

A safer trip, but hardly easier. Two pitch black, moonless nights in, he set the sea anchor so he could get some rest. An hour later, hundreds of yards outside the breaker line, a rogue 8-footer tossed him like a piece of flotsam. All his gear was tied down, so



Above: Nagler's safety, communication, medical, and hydration pack, which weighed approximately 30 pounds fully loaded.

"ORIGINALITY IS IMPORTANT TO ME. I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THE FKT—FASTEST KNOWN TIME—ON A WELL-WORN COURSE. I'M ABOUT THE OKT—ONLY KNOWN TIME—ON A COURSE THAT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL."

he didn't lose anything; but underwater, in the dark, wearing a 25-pound pack, Nagler had to disconnect and jettison the anchor. A parachute with 40 feet of line wrapped around the upside-down 150-pound board and Nagler himself, in breaking waves, in a blacked-out sea, may not have been survivable. Two hours later, having navigated 3 miles of shoals to a barrier island, he came ashore, hard, on an oyster bed, slicing both his feet. The infection set in almost immediately. Within a day his feet and legs below the knee blew up to the size of small honey-baked hams. It would take three more days of paddling plus a day before he received treatment beyond his rather useless topical salve.

He took refuge with a "godsend" who brought him to a hospital in Lewes, Delaware, where he received intravenous antibiotics for cellulitis, while the storm raged outside. By the time he was released late the following

afternoon, all that was left of Elsa was an angry sky. At sunrise the next morning, he set out from Cape Henlopen. It was 21 miles across the mouth of Delaware Bay. "Deep Fog" was about to live up to its name.

There are many ways to get to the island of Nantucket. Arriving by standup paddleboard, a "stock" 14-footer fully laden, is arguably the hardest conceivable.

For Nagler, 54, it's another notch in a Herculean quest to remake his life—physically and mentally—that began on New Year's Day in 2014. He had gone as hard as he could in the ocean and mountains through his late 20s, until the "desk" took over for too many years. Then, a rare heart infection at 42 led to open heart surgery. As his past life receded, he became resigned to his reality and eventually embittered.

"I'd gotten fat and angry and mean," Nagler says. "I looked at myself in the mirror and said, 'If I don't do something about this, I'm going to die young.'"

He dreamed up the "This is 50 Sufferfest Tour"—a unique series of solo and self-supported, self-inflicted, brutally challenging "epics"—to prove to himself that he could far outdo anything he had accomplished in his "prime"...to take care of "unfinished business." Some might call it a midlife crisis. But the efforts evolved into an ethos, with 15 principles for "building your path," as he calls it.

"I need to maximize my potential," Nagler says. "When I set out on these expeditions I take a 'blood oath' with myself that I cannot be broken, that I'll do whatever it takes to see the mission through to its end."

Along the way to becoming a world-class ultra-endurance athlete, he never set his sights on any organized event. Nagler instead focused on pushing his limits in ways rarely tested.

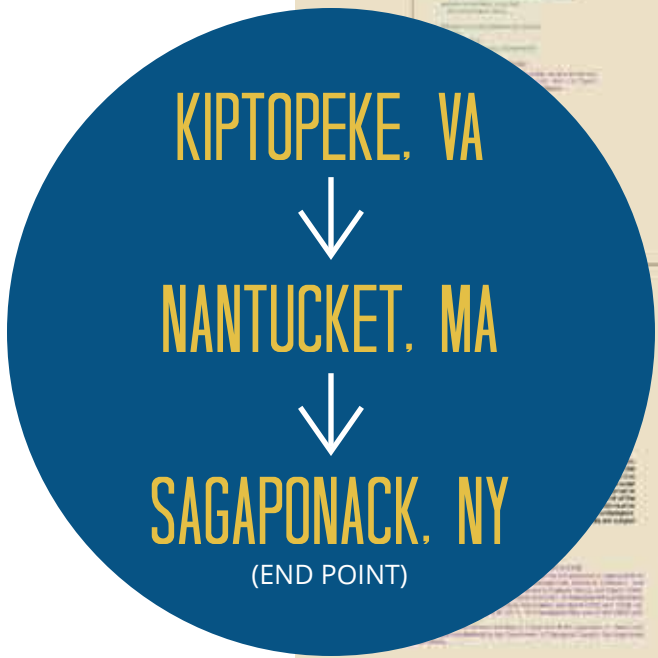
"Originality is important to me," Nagler says. "I'm not interested in the FKT—Fastest Known Time—on a well-worn course. I'm about the OKT—Only Known Time—on a course that makes no sense at all."

In July 2017, he set out to quantify his fitness and mindset with two "test pieces." The first, a 140-mile standup paddle

FACTS & STATS

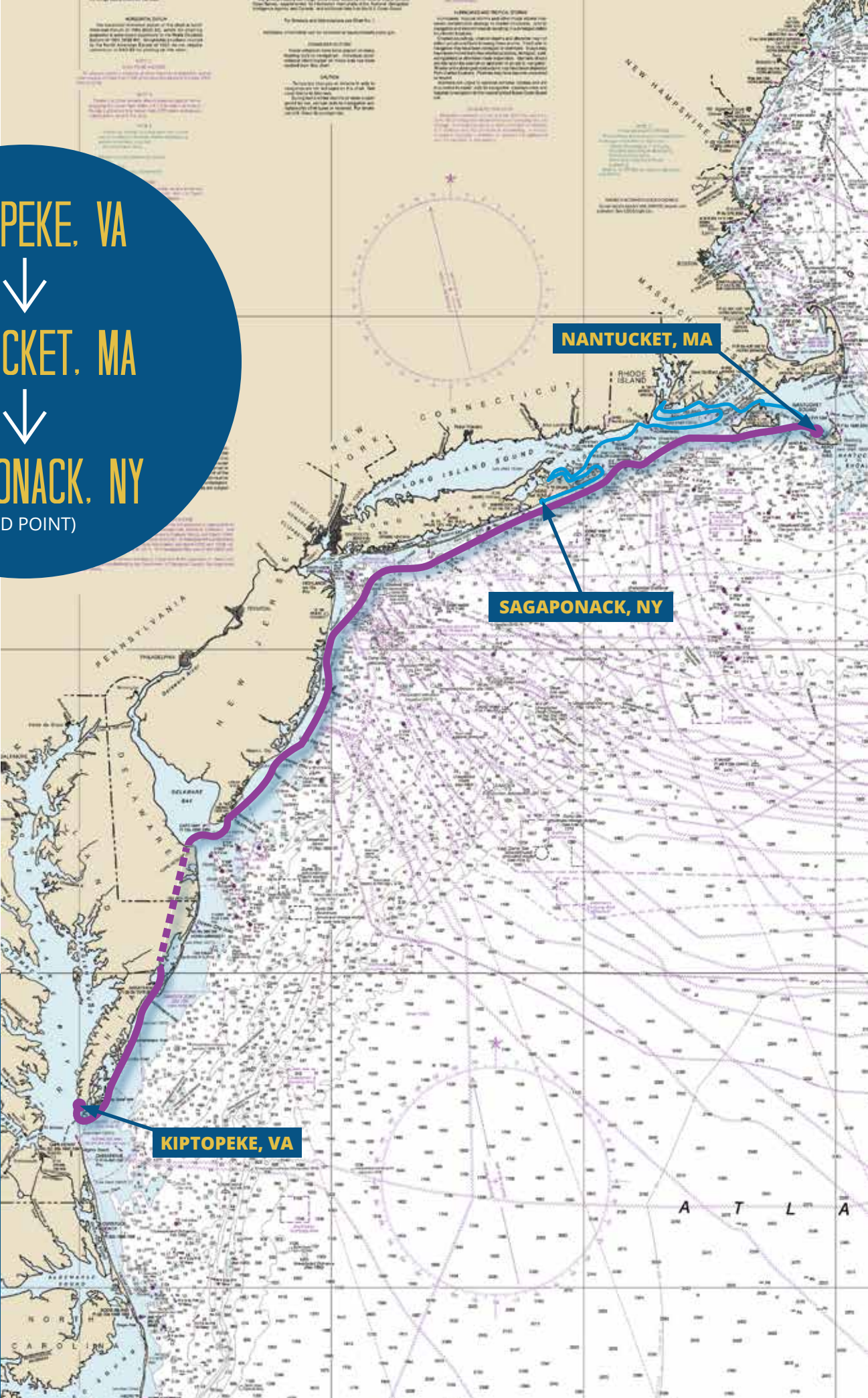
EXPEDITION NAME: "Deep Fog Re-Redirect"*	DURATION (time on the water): 353:47:00	OVERNIGHT PASSAGES: 16
STARTING POINT: Kiptopeke, VA	AVERAGE SPEED: 2.05 mph	CALORIES OUT: 217,931 (616 per paddling hour)
TURNAROUND: Nantucket, MA	LEGS: 29	NOTE ON CALORIES OUT: Equivalent to eating 1,557 x 1.5 pound Maine lobsters
END POINT: Sagaponack, NY	PADDLING DAYS: 34	
DISTANCE: 724.1 Miles		

*In advance of and during the expedition, Nagler was impacted, at some level, by eight tropical systems.



Right: A bird's eye view of Nagler's long paddling route from starting point Kiptopeke, Virginia, to turnaround point at Brant Point on Nantucket, Massachusetts; he completed the overall expedition at end point Sagaponack, New York.

PROVIDED BY NOAA
OFFICE OF COAST SURVEY,
NAUTICALCHARTS.NOAA.GOV





Above: Nagler after he reached Nantucket.

KIT NOBLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Right: Morning scene at Shagwong Point, Montauk, New York.

Opposite page: Outside Shinnecock Inlet, Southampton, New York.

NORM STUMP



from the Brooklyn Bridge to Montauk Point, at the tip of Long Island, which he completed in 74 hours (a time he has since improved to under 55 hours).

Three months later, he in-line skated 122 miles of the Pacific Coast Highway from the Pier in his hometown of Santa Barbara, California, to Malibu and back—in 18 hours and 45 minutes—on one of the hottest, windiest days of the year. The 5,300 feet of combined elevation gain and loss—on skates—was positively frightening. Nagler was only getting started.

He lost 14 pounds and three toenails during the first epic in April 2018, while beach and trail running, mountain biking, in-line skating, and standup paddling 1,000 miles around Santa Barbara for 10 days straight.

Six short weeks later, after running 128 miles from Manhattan to Montauk and then cycling three times that distance, both direct, he reached Nantucket via standup paddleboard for the first time

during the second epic—having set off from Manhattan, a distance of 247 miles. After a few days of rest, he paddled 178 miles back to the east end of Long Island.

The expedition he was embarking on now—a natural evolution of years of commitment—would be complex for reasons Nagler had anticipated and some he could not foresee.



Twenty-five miles northeast of Manasquan Inlet, New Jersey, Nagler met a lone boat chumming and fishing for sharks.

But it wasn't the chum slick that concerned Nagler. It was the 15 to 18 knots of wind and 4- to 6-foot seas driving him off his line to Long Island. It would take him 25 hours to complete this leg of the journey: the open expanse east of the tip of New Jersey's elbow forming the main shipping lanes into New York Harbor. The length was equivalent to three laps of the English Channel. He was

one lap in, and his right hip began to throb.

Part of what Nagler relishes about the challenge of paddleboarding for long stretches is that it is so often deeply uncomfortable, the constant balancing of board and body with every ocean variable. Simply remaining upright can be an arduous task. Remaining on course when the wind and swell are not with you for hundreds of hours requires uncommon grit and determination.

Out there, in the thick of it, Nagler's body finally said what his mind refused: "Enough." The piriformis muscle on his right side—a muscle deep beneath the glute—"just exploded," Nagler says. "I collapsed. I'm in shock, about to pass out. I'm lying in the water screaming."

On the satellite GPS unit he uses to communicate by text with his on-land safety manager, Kyle Collins, there is a toggle that will deliver an SOS signal to Garmin's International Emergency Response Coordination Center; triggering a search and rescue operation. For the first time, after 10,000 hours and 55,000 miles of training and expeditions, Nagler says, he almost pushed it. "It was close, really close." But as he likes to tell Collins (who winces at the thought), "I've gotta be pretty much dead to push that thing: bleeding out, direct lightning strike, run over by a ship...that kind of stuff."

"I knew first I had to get a wetsuit and hood on," Nagler says. "It was cold enough I was going to be hypothermic in a couple hours regardless, because physically I couldn't get into anything other than a 'shorty.'"

Though barely able to bend his leg, Nagler gritted through the morphine-worthy pain, and found a little bit of support in that area, the compression, helped after the suit was on.

Somewhat. Enough.

"I'm going to make it," Nagler told himself.

NAGLER OFTEN SAYS WHAT DRIVES HIM TO PURSUE HIS ULTRA-ENDURANCE ENDEAVORS ARE THE PROSPECTS OF "BRUTALITY AND BEAUTY RIGHT NEXT TO EACH OTHER."

He paddled for 17 more hours until he reached the beach a couple miles east of Fire Island Inlet at first light. Even in a delirious state and barely able to stand, he went through his checklist, as he always did, ferrying equipment in stages to a spot well above both the high water line but below the dunes, and sent Collins their procedural safety check. He got into his silver-lined bivy bag, shaking from hypothermia, and fell fast asleep. Eight hours later, he woke up, and tested the right hip. Horrendous. He said to himself, Here we go, Nags—we're headed to OT.



How does he do it? How? Stroke after stroke, hour after hour, day after day. Alone. Carbohydrate powder for food, rationed water to drink. Between a relentless sky and an unforgiving sea. Physically drained but mentally stoked, constantly running down a navigation checklist of wind switches and swell movements. Lots and lots of math. And still there is "enough time out there to think about probably every thought I've ever had," Nagler says.

Nagler often says what drives him to pursue his ultra-endurance endeavors are the prospects of "brutality and beauty right next to each other."

The moments when the sunrise bathes the whole sky in pink and orange and there is nothing else visible except the water stretching toward the horizon as calmly as a carpet. Such rare visions reward the many hours of torturous effort, through the darkness and the cold. "Diametrically opposed forces are right next to each other pretty much the whole time," Nagler says.

Nagler's epics also always have a "mission," in this case raising funds to support those islanders who cannot afford to pay for services at a Nantucket nonprofit called Fairwinds, a community-based mental health clinic and addiction treatment center. The choice was obvious—Nagler doesn't hesitate to discuss his own struggle with depression and psychological challenges, and remains committed to removing the

stigma around therapy and mental health.

"I believe therapy has value for every person," Nagler says. "Don't shut it out just because it hasn't been in your life before or you feel it's voodoo. If you shut it out, you will have limitations on your personal growth for the rest of your life."

He ultimately raised \$74,600 for Fairwinds, more than twice his goal.

The stretch between Menemsha, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket harbor is 41 miles, took 19 hours to paddle, and like many other legs, it was hairy. Hundreds of seals danced around his board as he passed Muskeget Island and then crossed the Madaket flats, which put him on high alert for "Whitey Bulger," says Nagler. He never did see a fin, but you can be sure "the fins" saw him.

Around 6 p.m. on July 27, Nagler could finally see it—the Brant Point Lighthouse framing the inner harbor. A boat came out to greet him and families cheered from shore. He had grown a thick beard and lost 37 pounds on the 24-day journey, but he cracked a wide smile when his friend, Jim Mondani, doused his head with Champagne. "I couldn't really collapse in a heap, because I had this group around me shaking my hand, and I still had to go through the checklist."

Four hundred and sixty-five miles were behind him. And yet Nantucket was only the turnaround point, a place to recuperate for four days before he cast off to suffer again. He finally stopped in Sagaponack, New York, another 260-mile push.

But Adam Nagler is nowhere close to finished. ■

Zach Schonbrun '05 is a senior editor at *The Week* magazine.

Photos provided by Adam Nagler except where noted.

Right: Nagler gets doused with Champagne by a friend after arriving at Nantucket's Brant Point. KIT NOBLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Below: Nagler's arrival at Brant Point Light with a welcoming crowd after his long journey to raise funds in support of Nantucket counseling center Fairwinds. FAIRWINDS-NANTUCKET'S COUNSELING CENTER



NAGLER'S EPICS ALSO ALWAYS HAVE A "MISSION," IN THIS CASE RAISING FUNDS TO SUPPORT THOSE ISLANDERS WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO PAY FOR SERVICES AT A NANTUCKET NONPROFIT CALLED FAIRWINDS, A COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC AND ADDICTION TREATMENT CENTER.

Looking
BACK

Looking Back Opening Doors



The 1971-72 Girls' Interim Council, the first group of young women who were chosen to help new female students make Taft their school; this photo ran with an October 1971 *Papyrus* article. BRAD JOBLIN '73

As we recognize the 50th anniversary of coeducation at Taft, we've been looking through the Archives' material to celebrate how we have grown as a community.

One group that stood out was the Girls' Interim Council. This group of mostly upper-school female students was elected by the 82 girls who were enrolled in the fall of 1971, the first school year that included female students. The Interim Council was a creation of the Coeducational Committee. The hope was that this group would represent the interests and concerns of the female students as well as act as a sounding board for students who had concerns to convey to the faculty and administration.



An article in the October 1971 *Papyrus*.

During the fall of 1971, the council met with Headmaster John Esty, the head monitor, and the senior monitors to address student issues and the tension of that first year. They fought for privileges such as late lights, dress code changes, and for seniors to be out of the dorms after 10:30 p.m. They also met with the school's trustees and class agents to report on their experiences as members of the Taft Community. This group of young women started the transition from the all-boys' school to the Taft we are today.

—Beth Nolan Lovallo '93,
The Leslie D. Manning Archives

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