

# WALKED

15 Hours and 59 Minutes

Story on Page 26

SPRING '14

## A Growing Knowledge: From Plants to Pollinators

In a cover story titled “A World Without Bees,” *Time* magazine this past year addressed the troubling disappearance of honeybees — leading to questions of what it may mean to humankind should bees, bats, moths, and other pollinating animals worldwide continue to face such threats as loss of habitat and pesticide usage.

What exactly do we know about the planet’s pollinators? As botanist Krissa Skogen ’08 Ph.D. is quick to point out, “for most, we know next to nothing.”

An alumna of UConn’s ecology and evolutionary biology doctoral program and a conservation scientist at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Skogen (pictured, second from right) has dedicated her research to exploring the vital relationships between numerous forms of plant life and the pollinators on which they depend for survival.

Her research has taken her from the prairies of rural Colorado to the dusky dunes of New Mexico’s White Sands National Monument and has recently received support from the National Science Foundation’s Dimensions of Biodiversity Program. This past year, Skogen was also featured on the YouTube web series “Plants Are Cool, Too!” — an educational botany series created and hosted by fellow UConn alumnus Christopher Martine ’06 Ph.D. (far right).

Through her work, Skogen is beginning to gather answers to a variety of questions, including what role pollinators play in the life cycle of certain plant species. In one research project, she is studying evening primroses and sundrops, many of which are night-blooming wildflowers, and their chief pollinators, hawkmoths, which may travel up to an astonishing 20 miles each night on their quest to collect nectar from these fragrant blossoms.

“Projects like this help create a baseline knowledge about pollinators — bees, hawkmoths, bats — and help move the field forward and contribute to a greater understanding about plants and the insects that rely on them,” says Skogen, who also serves as an adjunct biology professor at Northwestern University. “Only through studies like this can we understand how that works and be able to make predictions about the consequences of loss of plants or loss of pollinators.”

Botanist Krissa Skogen ’08 Ph.D. (pictured here, center, at White Sands National Monument in Alamogordo, N.M.) conducts research on plants and their pollinators in locations nationwide.

Photo by Patrick Alexander

VIDEO



Watch Krissa Skogen ’08 Ph.D. at work at [s.uconn.edu/desertblooms](https://s.uconn.edu/desertblooms) on the latest episode of the YouTube web series “Plants Are Cool, Too!,” an “adventure botany” series created and hosted by her fellow UConn ecology and evolutionary biology alum Christopher Martine ’06 Ph.D. (right). Read more about Skogen and Martine at [s.uconn.edu/plants](https://s.uconn.edu/plants).

# A Great Time to GO GREEN

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In 1933, UConn students designated the husky as the symbol of strength that has come to define the true spirit of the University. Eleven proud alumni speak out about their own enduring spirit, sharing their darkest struggles as well as their greatest triumphs.

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### BIG IDEA

How might the disappearance of pollinators impact the world as we know it, from plants to humankind? With the help of the National Science Foundation, botanist Krissa Skogen '08 Ph.D. has begun seeking out the answers.

After battling an eating disorder that nearly took her life, national mountain biking champion Jena Greaser '10 (CLAS) started over at UConn, where she ultimately found — and followed — her path to healing. See Page 12.

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Photo by Shana Sureck

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### LEADERS OF THE PACK

Surviving against all odds, yet told he would never walk again, UConn student and motivational speaker John Tartaglio '14 MBA is proving to people across the country that adversity does not define who you are.

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## BY MICHAEL HARDY

Lt. Christopher Renshaw '01 (CANR), '07 MS spent much of his youth in the forests of upstate New York's Adirondack Park, the largest publicly protected area in the contiguous United States. Going on to earn a bachelor's degree in wildlife management and a master's degree in natural resources from UConn, he now serves as a firefighter and EMT on the Storrs campus. Each year during peak fire season — from about May to October — Renshaw also travels throughout North America fighting wildfires with the U.S. Forest Service.



To see more photos of Lt. Christopher Renshaw '01 (CANR), '07 MS in action, download UConn Magazine's free app for your tablet device at [magazine.uconn.edu/app](http://magazine.uconn.edu/app) or visit [s.uconn.edu/spring14](http://s.uconn.edu/spring14).

## 1 How did you first get interested in firefighting?

My grandfather was a volunteer firefighter in upstate New York when I was growing up. Then, in 1988, I was watching on a small black-and-white television set as the Yellowstone fire unfolded on the nightly news. I was hooked from that moment on, fascinated by what the fire was doing, how the wildlife was reacting, and the army of firefighters who were thrown headlong into the fray. I decided it was what I wanted to do.

## 2 When did you start fighting fires?

My first wildland fire was in 2000. I had kind of geared myself up by studying natural resources, forestry, and wildlife as a profession.

## 3 Why did you choose UConn?

I met somebody who had a significant role in my life, Dr. Tom Abbott [now assistant-professor-in-residence in molecular and cell biology at UConn]. He kind of steered me along and influenced me. I ended up going with him to Alaska, to a small village called Kotzebue, and I spent a summer with him up there. He really opened my mind to all the possibilities that a young guy could have working with natural resources. I came to UConn because Tom was finishing his Ph.D. there, and I saw him as a role model.

## 4 Why did you decide to study wildlife management? Was that part of you wanting to become a firefighter?

That was definitely part of it. One of the things I learned early on in studying natural resources is that everything's connected. There are so many interrelationships between the disciplines of forestry, wildlife, soils, fisheries — you name it. That ended up becoming the foundation for how I view wildfire and fire ecology now. If you were just a basic firefighter, you wouldn't have the appreciation for, or the ability to really see, how specific tactics affect [wildfire] suppression.

## 5 What is fire ecology?

It's the science of understanding the role that fire has had in the world's ecosystems through evolution. ... Fire has been on this planet since this has been a planet with an atmosphere, and it's the only planet that we know of that has fire. It has shaped many of our ecosystems — our vegetation, our animal species. In the last hundred years, we've seen a great influx of fire because of some of the misconceptions we've had as human beings about fire's role in the ecosystem. In modern society, we usually view fire as an enemy — something that should not be allowed to exist freely, something that needs to be completely managed and contained. That was never its role. ... Some of the severity and size of the wildfires that we're seeing now on the national news is because of those policies of trying to overmanage fires, and not allowing it to exist in its natural ecosystem.

## 6 How do you strike a balance between allowing a fire to run its natural course and preventing it from doing too much damage?

You have the ability to choose the tactics — there are different fire suppression and management styles. But when you're on the ground, and your mission is to protect property or life, you really don't get to have those choices. You have to put the fire out. The fire service has its priorities, and No. 1 is safety.

# NATURE OF THE BEAST

Last year, we were reminded of how dangerous firefighting is when 19 of Arizona's Granite Mountain Hot Shots died near Yarnell, Ariz. Did you know the firefighters who died?

The wildland firefighting community is pretty small — people know each other. The crew that I'm on had the distinct privilege of working alongside the Granite Mountain Hot Shots in 2011. When this whole episode unfolded last summer, it really struck home. Seeing familiar faces on the television, knowing what difficult choices they faced, and then seeing the end result — it was a big weight to carry.

8 How do you assess the risks when you're going in to fight a fire?

It's definitely a challenge. ... There are moments in this career when you question the sanity of it. But the reward in doing it greatly outweighs some of the risk. The risk is always there.

9 You've fought fires throughout the continental U.S. and Canada. What's it like traveling far from home to fight a fire?

That's part of the adventure. You get flown into these beautiful, remote places, and essentially camp and fight fire along the way.

10 What's the greatest reward of fighting fires for you?

The real-time problem solving. I honestly love having a situation or an issue in front of me, and having to solve it with what tools I have, in a given amount of time, for a desired outcome. It's the MacGyver feeling.



number cruncher

UConnSERVATION

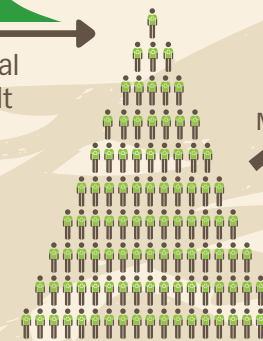
Ranked the nation's No. 1 "Coolest School" in 2013 by the Sierra Club



UConn's ongoing commitment to sustainability, green technology, and environmental stewardship is stronger than ever.



Number of acres in Hillside Environmental Education Park, a conservation area built on the site of UConn's former landfill



MORE THAN 100

Number of UConn students living in the EcoHouse Learning Community, one of the hubs of student environmental activity on campus

NEARLY 600

Number of classes that UConn offers related to environmental sustainability

Up to 500,000

Gallons of water reused each day by UConn's water reclamation facility to run the Storrs campus power plant

2013

The year UConn launched its first electric vehicle charging station

2050

The year by which UConn seeks to achieve a carbon-neutral Storrs campus

Upgrading the light bulbs in 80 buildings on the Storrs campus has saved 4,065,870 Kwh of energy = The equivalent of electricity use in 395 homes for 1 year

Cost to rent a bicycle on the Storrs campus through UConn's bike-sharing program \$0



80 BUILDINGS



Electricity use in 395 HOMES

= 4,065,870 KWH SAVED



4,000 POUNDS of CO2



Saved per year by retrofitting the Sherman Sports Complex with new energy-saving stadium lights = The equivalent of not driving your car for 4 months

vantage point

Taking steps

to identify and prevent wrongful convictions

# THEY WAS GUILTY UNTIL

BY STEPHEN SALOOM '90 (CLAS), '96 JD

# PROVEN INNOCENT

The truth is not always what it seems. As senior policy advisor at the Innocence Project in New York City, UConn alum Stephen Saloom '90 (CLAS), '96 JD faces this reality on a daily basis. Here, he offers a closer look into his ongoing work to prevent wrongful convictions.

Imagine there has been a shocking murder in your neighborhood. The police question you and others. You tell them all you know, because you want to help them identify whoever did it.

You start to realize, however, that the police think you did it. You're stunned and panicked all at once, trying to reassure yourself. Surely, they will see that they're mistaken. Yet you are taken into a lineup. The witness identifies you as the perpetrator. You are questioned further, and the police think something you said, or the way you've acted, suggests your guilt.

You are arrested for a heinous crime — even though you are completely innocent.

News of your arrest spreads through your community like wildfire. Your face is plastered in the papers and on TV as the alleged murderer. You're treated like a pariah, as is your family. You are incarcerated, with bail set in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It will cost tens of thousands of dollars more to prove your innocence — if you and your family can even scrape that money together. At trial, you present alibi evidence and point out the weaknesses in the case against you, but the jury doesn't believe you. You are found guilty, deemed remorseless for not accepting guilt, and sent to prison for decades, if not life. Perhaps you're even sentenced to death.

For far more people than we had ever before realized, this terrifying nightmare is reality. Having endured the horror of a false accusation and conviction, these individuals now face the daily torture of a life obliterated by wrongful conviction and imprisonment.

Meanwhile, the real perpetrator is free, typically going on to commit additional violent crimes.

For nearly a decade, my career has focused on identifying, preventing, and remedying wrongful convictions like this. I work for the Innocence Project, a legal organization that uses post-conviction DNA testing to prove the innocence of wrongfully convicted people. It is also a policy reform organization that uses the lessons learned from each of the nation's DNA exonerations to understand what factors commonly mislead the criminal justice system into believing, beyond a reasonable doubt, that an innocent person is guilty of having committed a crime.

To date, 312 individuals nationwide have been exonerated through DNA testing. By examining these cases, the Innocence Project has identified the leading factors that contribute to wrongful convictions, from eyewitness misidentification to invalid or improper forensic evidence. We then advocate for the adoption of solutions proven to minimize these problems.

As policy director, I led the organization's efforts to work with police, legislators, judges, and other criminal justice policymakers across the nation to implement reforms that will help prevent wrongful convictions — and increase the likelihood that the real perpetrators of crime will be found.

## BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT

While I find policy work satisfying, it can, at times, feel theoretical. It's not often that I get to see for myself how the reforms we enact actually impact individuals. In one of my most cherished policy experiences, however, I helped a family clear the name of their son, Cameron Todd Willingham, who had been wrongfully accused, convicted, and executed.

Convicted in 1992 for setting the fire that killed his three young daughters, Willingham was executed in 2004 in Texas. Yet his arson/murder conviction rested almost wholly on forms of arson evidence that had long been discredited as "folklore" by fire scientists.

Tragic in his case was the fact that, at the time of Willingham's trial, no one knew what fire science had since established: Markings such as spidered glass at the fire scene did not indicate a fire had been intentionally set, but simply that the fire had been intensely hot. As one of the world's most respected fire scientists, Gerald Hurst, issued in a sworn affidavit prior to Willingham's execution, "There's



TO DATE, 312 INDIVIDUALS NATIONWIDE HAVE BEEN EXONERATED THROUGH DNA TESTING. ON AVERAGE, THESE PEOPLE SERVED 13 YEARS IN PRISON.

nothing to suggest to any reasonable arson investigator that this was an arson fire ... It was just a fire."

Willingham was executed nonetheless. But his mother and cousin never stopped seeking to clear his name, to let the world know that he did not kill the daughters he so dearly loved.

Challenging the forensic evidence central to Willingham's conviction and execution, the Innocence Project and Willingham's family filed an allegation with the Texas Forensic Science Commission, claiming that Willingham's arson/murder conviction was based on arson myths that had been scientifically disproven. The Commission is not a court. Its members are primarily scientists, and its mission is to provide an independent assessment of allegations of problems with forensic evidence in Texas.

Five years later, the Commission finally completed its investigation, declaring it "untenable" that the State Fire Marshal could stand by its original findings of arson, in light of scientific advances. Almost two decades after his family members sought to prove Willingham had not set the fire, the Commission report was a true victory in clearing his name.

The Commission's findings also clarified for criminal justice systems nationwide that such arson evidence — in cases past, present, and future — should be regarded as unreliable. As a result, the Texas Fire Marshal is specifically addressing these problems in past and present Texas arson cases, and new life has been given to exoneration proceedings in similar questionable arson cases across the country.

For me, cases like this will forever serve as a living reminder that policy reform is never simply a theoretical endeavor. It can, in fact, have priceless meaning for real people, in matters of life and death — and even beyond. 🐾

# PORTRAITS OF Strength

It was 1933 when UConn students so insightfully designated the husky as the symbol of strength, grit, and resolve that has come to define the true spirit of the University. In this special feature, *UConn Magazine* invited 11 proud UConn alumni to speak out about what defines them, from their darkest struggles to their greatest triumphs. And no matter how different their backgrounds, their hardships, or the mistakes they may have made along the way, that same enduring strength and indomitable spirit remains, living on at the heart of every Husky.

gratitude

## LUCAS MASSELLA

>> LUCAS MASSELLA '13 (CLAS) WAS 10 YEARS OLD when doctors told him that his kidneys were failing.

"I physically couldn't get out of bed to go to school. I had no energy at all. I knew something was wrong," recalls Massella, who had always loved spending his free time playing basketball and various

other sports with his twin brother and their friends. "I remember asking the doctors, 'What are we going to do?' And they said, 'We don't really know.'"

Massella had already spent more than his fair share of time in the hospital. Born with a birth defect called spina bifida, he had endured more than a dozen surgeries throughout his infancy and childhood. Although he had fared well, disproving doctors' expectations that he would likely never walk, he now found himself feeling worse than ever before.

A malfunctioning bladder, doctors discovered, was causing Massella's kidneys to fail. Because a kidney transplant would not resolve the problem, treatment options were few: Massella could either spend the rest of his life on dialysis or try an experimental, unproven surgery offered by Anthony Atala, a new doctor on the team at Boston Children's Hospital.

Despite the risks, Massella's parents opted for the latter. That summer, doctors removed a small piece of Massella's bladder and, over the next two months, used it to grow a new bladder — one made entirely of his own cells. After a 14-hour surgery to implant the new organ, a month spent recovering in the hospital, and another month at home restricted to his bed, 10-year-old Massella finally began to feel better, itching to return to school and see his friends.

Today, Massella is known as nothing short of a medical miracle, an identity he admits he has come to embrace. "There were times when I was frustrated, thinking, 'Why can't I be like everyone else

You've got to use anything you've been through — good or bad — to your advantage, to make yourself the best person you can be.

—Lucas



Get a special glimpse into the lives of these and our four other featured alumni with this edition's exclusive tribute videos and other bonus content. Download *UConn Magazine's* free app for your tablet device at [magazine.uconn.edu/app](http://magazine.uconn.edu/app) or visit [s.uconn.edu/spring14](http://s.uconn.edu/spring14).

and not have to deal with this?" he says. "But now I feel like it's made me who I am."

Gradually regaining his health over the next few years, Massella was able to return to playing sports, making it back out onto the basketball court with his friends, going on to join the baseball and wrestling teams from middle school through high school, and even becoming captain of his high school wrestling team. Eventually, he headed to UConn. A communication major, he studied among classmates who remained largely unaware of his celebrated status in the medical world — until his story began to make headlines following his appearance at a 2011 TED-Talk. There, at the celebrated conference series watched by billions worldwide, he reunited for the first time with the physician who had saved his life 10 years earlier, Dr. Atala.

Now 23, Massella has since been featured on a "National Geographic" special, served as a keynote speaker for the Regenerative Medicine Foundation, and has been written about in such publications as *Wired* magazine.

"I'll always have spina bifida, but I'm totally happy with where I am. I'm thankful not only that I'm able to walk, but also play sports. I can now live close to a normal life," says Massella, who today works as a special education paraprofessional and as a coach for his former high school wrestling team.

"No matter what it is that you're going through, you can always do what you can to fight through it," he says. "You've got to use anything you've been through — good or bad — to your advantage, to make yourself the best person you can be."

—Stefanie Dion Jones '00 (CLAS)

## JENAGREASER

>> IT DOESN'T MATTER IF IT IS A FRIGID, 11-BELOW-ZERO winter morning or the 50th mile of a grueling summertime mountain biking marathon at an unforgiving altitude of 9,000-plus feet. Either way, you will find Jena Greaser '10 (CLAS) on a bicycle, putting the pedal to the metal.

"I've had races where your hands are so cold you can't feel them," Greaser says. "Or you've fallen 10 times, or your chain has come off your bike and it's jammed and you don't think you're going to make it to the end, but you just keep going, and you're cursing and it's the worst race ever, and then you get to the end and you say, 'I want to do that again.'"

At 28 years old, Greaser has clearly worked hard to earn her reputation as an elite cyclist. This past summer, she claimed the USA Cycling Marathon Mountain Bike National Championship title for her age category. And if her dozens of other bike racing titles are any indication, it is a sport she lives for every day of the year. But her ride to success was not always smooth.

Greaser had long been a talented athlete, competing throughout her youth in numerous sports, including soccer, track, and ski racing; even attending a ski academy in Maine in her early teens. At 18, she entered her very first triathlon and won — not just for her age group, but for women overall.

Yet lurking behind her competitive spirit was a gradually worsening eating disorder.

"I'm an athlete and I'm strong, but there was a difference between me and the popular girls at school ... I was a tomboy," she says. "That was the beginning of it."

By ninth grade, her fixation on athletic performance was consuming her thoughts. "I had to be perfect. I couldn't let anything else get in the way," she says. "I started internalizing that and pulling away — not socializing with friends, and working out all the time."

Healing through therapy and the support of her family, Greaser thought she was through the worst of it, only to relapse during her first year at Smith College, where she had planned to compete in cross-country, skiing, and lacrosse. "I felt this weird pressure to prove myself all over again," she says. "I thought I had to train harder than anybody to make an impression, to be accepted ... I started to use food as a way to control that."

I started to understand the bike as a way to happiness. —Jena

drive



SHAWN LORTIE PHOTOGRAPHY

This time, Greaser took an extended break, leaving Smith and working to recover fully through an inpatient program, while reflecting on what she wanted out of life. She arrived at UConn in 2007, eager for a fresh start. "At UConn, I just wanted to be me," she says. "No titles, no strings attached."

There, she discovered UConn's Cycling Club, entering — and winning — collegiate races from day one. Excited for the approaching spring bike season, she bought her first high-end road bike, only to end up on crutches for four months after sustaining multiple injuries during a ski competition. "All I kept thinking that whole time was, 'I want to ride my bike,'" she says.

When she finally returned to biking, however, her passion for the sport moved far beyond physical fitness. "It became a vehicle for healing, and not just sport or the adrenalin side of me," Greaser says. "I started to understand the bike as a way to happiness."

Crediting UConn's Cycling Club with propelling her into the sport for good, Greaser continues to compete in mountain biking competitions, road bike races, and a hybrid form of bike racing called cyclocross. Living in Ketchum, Idaho, surrounded by hundreds of miles of biking terrain, Greaser recently landed sponsorships through Scott Sports and the athletics organization Play Hard Give Back, which will help fund her racing endeavors — all while she attends graduate school and works a number of jobs, including as a ski instructor, mountain bike coach, and outdoor educator.

Despite her tough road to recovery, she has no regrets. "The eating disorder was kind of my way of coping through my adolescence. But as difficult, scary, and frustrating as it was, I feel blessed that I went through it because it made me who I am now," she says. "Just be who you are and be happy, and if you're happy doing what you're doing, then you're doing it right. Cycling has been that transformation for me. It's helped me to value a holistic approach to what it means to truly live healthfully."

—Stefanie Dion Jones '00 (CLAS)

## MIKEY CHASE



When an American couple began the process of adopting Mikey Chase '13 (CANR) and his twin brother from an orphanage in the slums of Honduras, doctors could not guarantee the infants would survive. To read Chase's story, download *UConn Magazine's* free app for your tablet device at [magazine.uconn.edu/app](http://magazine.uconn.edu/app) or visit [s.uconn.edu/spring14](http://s.uconn.edu/spring14).

courage



I never wanted to depend on anyone else. —Bessy

BESSY REYNA

>> BORN IN CUBA, BESSY REYNA '72 MA, '82 JD immigrated with her family to Panama before the revolution. Curious and intellectual, she rebelled against the traditional roles expected of women in Latin American society. Adversity takes many forms, she says. "Sometimes it's surviving a culture when you don't want to be part of that culture."

Her mother's life served as a warning. "She was so bright, with so much to offer, but all she could do was take care of a husband and children," Reyna says. "She was not allowed to work, and I knew I couldn't do that."

Reyna discovered a love of poetry as a child in Cuba, and soon found that writing helped clarify her feelings. "A teacher selected me to recite 'Los Zapaticos de Rosa' by José Martí, the poet and martyr of Cuban independence. It was a long poem and, as I stood in front of the school reciting it, the beauty of the words and the meaning of the poem greatly affected me." A few years later, she began writing seriously in response to the death of a school friend.

Today, Reyna is an award-winning, bilingual poet; an activist and opinion columnist who writes on issues of gender, ethnicity, and equality; and a sought-after

lecturer and guest artist. She is the author of two bilingual books of poetry: *The Battlefield of Your Body* (Hill-Stead Museum, 2005) and *Memoirs of the Unfaithful Lover/Memorias de la amante infiel* (tunAstral, A.C., 2010, Toluca, Mexico). In 2010, she was one of 10 women honored by the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame.

Reyna first came to the United States in 1968 on a scholarship to Mount Holyoke College. A first-generation college student, she says her father, who never finished high school, dreamed that both his children would attend university, something she and her brother, now a civil engineer, accomplished.

If there is a thread that weaves through the tapestry of Reyna's life it is determination. "I saw women in cultural quicksand who couldn't get out. I didn't want that. I never wanted to depend on anyone else," she says.

Graduating magna cum laude from Mount Holyoke, Reyna never did return to Panama to live, in part because of the military dictatorship. Instead, she arrived at UConn, where she earned a master's in child development and family relations and a law degree.

UConn was also where she found community through activism. Joining students in working to establish the Women's Center and the gay and women's movements on campus, Reyna helped create various educational and social programs, including a gay speakers bureau that gave informative talks in classes. "Just being there and for people to see us as human beings was, by itself, an educational experience," she says.

On her trips to UConn nowadays, she enjoys visiting the Student Union. "I see the Women's Center and the Rainbow Center and the Cultural Centers, and I feel like a little part of me is there," she says.

It was also at UConn that Reyna met Susan Holmes, then-manager of von der Mehden Recital Hall. The two, who were both activists in the marriage equality movement, have been together for 35 years, marrying just weeks after same-sex marriage was legalized in Connecticut in 2008.

Now retired, after 16 years at the Reporters of Judicial Decisions office of the Connecticut Supreme Court, Reyna is teaching and lecturing and pens an arts page for *Identidad Latina*, a Hartford-based newspaper.

And there are poems, always poems. "Ever since reciting the poem in fourth grade," she says, "poetry has integrated my life." —Mary Howard

determination

devotion



ALFREDO FUENTES

>> ON THE MORNING OF 9/11, CAPT. ALFREDO FUENTES '08 MPS, a 26-year veteran of the New York City Fire Department, was one of the first responders on the scene during the attack on the World Trade Center.

When the North Tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m., he became one of many trapped under the rubble.

It would take hours before he was rescued — and years to recover, after enduring numerous massive injuries to his lungs, ribs, and skull.

Though his disabilities ultimately forced him to retire from the job he loved, Fuentes wasn't about to let physical challenges stand in his way. Instead, he was determined to find a new career that would allow him to continue giving back to his country.

"I was devastated when I couldn't continue being a firefighter," says Fuentes. "It's something that I am always going to miss. But I had to find some way to get back on that horse."

In 2004, he founded The Patriot Group, a nonprofit organization devoted to making the lives of emergency responders — and citizens — safer, by training and consulting with underfunded municipalities on updated technology and information gathering systems. Since The Patriot Group's inception, its volunteers have traversed the globe from Ireland to Thailand, doing everything from speaking about rescue operations to helping communities rebuild after devastating natural disasters.

Wanting to expand his education and potential work prospects, Fuentes enrolled in UConn's Master of Professional Studies Homeland Security Leadership degree program in 2006. The cohort-based program gives students from different professional backgrounds the opportunity to share their insights and experiences with one another. For Fuentes, being in a cohort surrounded by people from private organizations, military backgrounds, and law enforcement was an opportunity too valuable to pass up. "The program gave me a higher perspective, and it also allowed me to network," says Fuentes, adding that he still consults with some of his former UConn professors.

It's no surprise that Fuentes chose such a program. Helping others has been a trademark of his. In addition



“You don’t have to go it alone.” —Khaliyl



DAVID HAWKHURST

to his nearly three decades with the FDNY, he has worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a part of search and rescue teams following such events as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the Humberto Vidal explosion in Puerto Rico in 1996. In recent years, he has also offered his expertise as a consultant for organizations across the country — from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee to the Knights of Columbus — on a spectrum of security and emergency response-related projects.

“We all need to give back and to make the world a better place,” he says. “It’s not all about making money at the end of the day. We’re all in this together.”

It’s been more than a decade since Fuentes had to leave the profession he loved so dearly. But rather than giving up, he has found a way to keep giving. It’s a virtue he hopes his story is able to instill in others.

“I hope people ... learn that you should never give up,” says Fuentes, who has also published a book about his experiences called *American by Choice* (Fire Dreams Publishing, 2004). “There’s always something big that you can do. You are always able to reinvent yourself. I was in my 50s when I got my master’s degree.” —Andrew Clark

## KHALIYLLANE

>> ABANDONED BY HIS MOTHER AT THE AGE OF 14, Khaliyl Lane '10 (CLAS), '13 MSW became a ward of the state, with nowhere to call home.

Fortunately for Lane, Barbara Allison, the mother of one of his close childhood friends, welcomed him into her home, eventually becoming his foster parent. Allison knew Lane had potential and was impressed by his innate intelligence, his poise, and his grit. But she took him into her home on one condition — he had to obey the family rules. He had to stay in school, be respectful, and do what was expected of him. Lane embraced order from his world of chaos.

“Barbara is the main reason I’m talking to you today,” says Lane. “She’s an amazing person. She encouraged me to play sports, to keep a high GPA, to treat people with respect. I was able to turn my life around at an early age. She kept me from heading down the wrong path.”

trust

With Allison’s support, Lane graduated from high school with honors and enrolled at UConn. In 2007, he played cornerback as a walk-on member of UConn’s Big East Champion football team, while majoring in communication sciences with a minor in sociology. He earned his bachelor’s degree in 2010.

Time and again, Allison says, Lane’s inner strength carried him through.

“No one is more proud of Khaliyl right now than I am,” says Allison. “He proved himself in the worst of circumstances. He is an individual of strong character; a young man of perseverance, resilience, and consistency. The last thing Khaliyl ever wanted to do was disappoint me, because he saw all that I was doing trying to help him.”

If there is a motto Lane lives by it is that when life teaches you a lesson, learn from it. And if there is one piece of advice he would share with others, it is this: The choice to overcome is always your decision to make.

“I believe everything happens for a reason,” Lane says. “So if my experiences can help others navigate through tough times, then I am making good on all of the help I’ve received along the way.”

After getting his bachelor’s degree, Lane enrolled in the UConn School of Social Work, where he secured an internship at the United Nations, working on such issues as human

trafficking and poverty eradication. He would go on to earn a master’s degree in international social work, specializing in community organization and international policy.

Lane segued from his job at the U.N. to an internship in the Washington, D.C., office of U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal. As part of his internship this past summer, Lane prepared a formal policy report on foster care and child welfare issues for the senator. When the internship ended, Blumenthal hired Lane as a full-time assistant. Lane has recently been promoted to legislative correspondent.

“From his first day here, Khaliyl was a hard worker and demonstrated wisdom beyond his years,” says Blumenthal. “I am proud to count Khaliyl as a member of my staff, and I know he’ll serve the people of Connecticut and the nation well.”

For anyone else who is facing a personal struggle, Lane wants them to know it is OK to look for help. Even the strongest among us sometimes need a helping hand.

“You don’t have to go it alone,” Lane says. “The ability to trust those that are worthy is an incredibly liberating experience.” —Colin Poitras '85 (CLAS)

action



“When you’re told you have this chronic illness that could lead to death, you think, ‘OK, I’ve got to get more out of life,’” says Dominique (Soucy) Matteson '03 (CLAS). To read Matteson’s story and watch her featured video, download *UConn Magazine’s* free app for your tablet device at [magazine.uconn.edu/app](http://magazine.uconn.edu/app) or visit [s.uconn.edu/spring14](http://s.uconn.edu/spring14).



# BEYOND THE GOALLINE

BY ANDREW CLARK PHOTO BY HEATHER AINSWORTH

The call came from his agent in late 2012. The New York Jets were interested in bringing him in for a tryout.

It had been three years since Danny Lansanah '08 (CLAS), a former UConn linebacker, had been in the NFL. But the Harrisburg, Pa., native had never given up on his dreams.

Giving up was never an option for Lansanah. He was a role model, after all. Having spent the past year counseling at-risk youth in his hometown, Lansanah wanted to show the kids he worked with that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

"I am able to show the kids that you can come from a rough area and still have a positive outcome in life," says Lansanah, who ended up spending the majority of the 2013 season on the Jets practice squad.

The year before the call from his agent came through, Lansanah had been serving as a counselor at Alternative Rehabilitation Communities in Harrisburg, which puts court-adjudicated youths through structured programs, from one-on-one education to group counseling. With a degree in sociology from UConn, Lansanah was providing support for at-risk teens who came from criminal backgrounds or suffered from drug addictions.

Even though he is now a plane ride away, Lansanah still makes it a point to go back and visit those teens he worked with "every chance he gets." During the Jets bye week this past season, he went back to Harrisburg and stopped by the center. He says that it makes an impact for the kids to see his face and let them know that they are supported.

"Seeing their faces light up is priceless," says Lansanah. "These kids are coming from the bottom of the totem pole. To see them working to get their GEDs and going through a transformation, that's what it's all about."

## TOUGHING IT OUT

Though the NFL was always his dream, Lansanah never wavered on his goal of counseling those in need.

"A lot of people grow up with struggles," he says. "I wanted to help kids who grew up without role models. I wanted to show them that someone who came from the same place can do something good."

Once his football career is over, Lansanah says he wants to get right back into counseling. For the 6'1", 255-lb. linebacker, there's something inimitable about having the chance to help others, especially those

who have come from a similar background.

Like the youths he has counseled, Lansanah grew up in a tough area. But rather than get swallowed by the darkness he saw around him, he chose a different path — and that's the message he hopes to convey to the youths with whom he has worked.

"Where I came from was one of the worst areas of Harrisburg," he says. "I saw drugs and violence. Being from the same areas, it helps the kids relate to me. ... I've seen both sides, and they can see the road that I ended up taking."





**Danny Lansanah '08 (CLAS), right, now a linebacker for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, finds time to offer guidance to at-risk teens in his hometown of Harrisburg, Pa.**

STEN HARTMAN

Lansanah is particularly qualified to teach about perseverance. At UConn, where he played from 2004 to 2007, he was the team's leading tackler as a sophomore, junior, and senior, recording 299 tackles, 10 interceptions, and seven sacks over his final three seasons. After his college days, he went undrafted, but was able to land a contract with Green Bay. He appeared in five games for the Packers, notching a pair of tackles, but was eventually released. Lansanah would go on to have stints with the Miami Dolphins and Detroit Lions, yet he never made either team's active roster. He later spent a few seasons in the now-defunct United Football League with the Hartford Colonials and Las Vegas Locomotives.

And though the call would eventually

come from the Jets, it wasn't always easy to keep grinding.

"It was tough; it all didn't come right away," he says.

#### BACK IN THE GAME

Now back in the NFL, the hard work hasn't stopped for Lansanah. Each morning, he is up by 5:30 a.m. and ready to start weightlifting. After breakfast, he attends meetings for several hours before hitting the field for practice at noon. And following another two-and-a-half hours of practice, he is icing down and then hitting the hot tub, for a nearly 12-hour workday.

The hard work seems to be paying off. Toward the end of the regular season, Lansanah's life changed once more — again

for the better. Early this past December, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers signed Lansanah from the Jets practice squad, adding him to their active roster and giving him a chance to stand on the sidelines once again.

For Lansanah, this season has brought a feeling like none other. "It's great to have your dream job," he says. "It's what I always wanted to do."

As he continues to bask in getting another chance in the pros, he knows that having the opportunity to put on that pewter No. 51 jersey on Sundays has an impact that extends a thousand miles beyond Tampa.

"For the kids to be able to see me on TV, it shows them what you can do," he says. "It gives them a perspective on what you can do with your life." 🐾

#### notes

### WHAT ONE BOOK WOULD YOU WANT IF YOU WERE STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND?

We asked our UConn Facebook fans, and here are a few of their answers!



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**"The Anatomy Coloring Book, for everything that goes wrong as you grow."** —Ellen (Stevens) Brannigan '56 (ED)

**"The sixth and final book of Game of Thrones by George R.R. Martin."**

—Will Warren Curtis Jr. '90 (CLAS)

**"To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee."**

—Ray Bailey '80 (ED)

**"The Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind by Joyce Meyer."** —Caroline (Jones) Wright '83 (CLAS)



# ALUMNI

The late **Dwight Thompson '52 (CLAS)** and the late **Cleora (Barnes) Thompson '53 (CLAS)** were featured in "Unforgettable: Letters from Korea," a play based on their love letters written during the Korean War. The play, written by their daughter, Susan Thompson, a playwright and lecturer in theater at Boston College, was performed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., as part of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Korean War this past summer, as well as at locations across the country. ❖ **Marshall Jenkins '55 (ED), '72 Ph.D.** is the author of *Intellectually Persecuted*, published in December 2012 by Tate Publishing & Enterprises LLC. The book is available at Barnes & Noble and on amazon.com. ❖ **Lois Greene Stone '55 (ED)**, author and poet, has work that is part of the collection at the National Toy Hall of Fame at the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, N.Y. A chess set, handmade by Stone, is featured in the museum's 2013 Hall of Fame's games collection. ❖ **Roger Shatanof '56 (CLAS)** is the author of *A Principal's Diary/Memoir of a Big City Principal* and *The Many Joys of Travel or How We Managed to Escape Alive*, published by Creative Press, Dallas, Texas. Both books are available at creativepress.org. ❖ **Nancy Mattoon Kline '59 (SFS), '61 MS, '94 Ph.D.**, retired academic librarian, received in November an Excellence Award for leadership, innovation, and

service to the library and information sciences profession from the University of Rhode Island (URI) Graduate School of Library and Information Studies in Warwick, R.I., where she had earned her master of library science degree. ❖ **Milton J. Northrop '59 (CLAS)**, sports reporter at *The Buffalo News* since 1967, was inducted into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2013 in October in Buffalo, N.Y. ❖ **Lenny Carlson '62 (ED), '63 MS**, assistant men's basketball coach at August State University — Georgia Regents University in Augusta, Ga., was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame in June 2013 in Worcester, Mass. ❖ **Philip F. Nohrr '64 (BUS), '67 JD**, managing partner of the law firm GrayRobinson PA in Melbourne, Fla., was recognized as an outstanding attorney in the *Best Lawyers in America 2014*. ❖ **Margaret "Maggie" (Shafra) Rosa '64 (ED)**, an advisor for the Mortar Board National College Senior Honor Society at the University of Vermont, received in August the 2013 Excellence in Advising Award from Mortar Board, presented annually to an advisor who has provided exceptional support to help a Mortar Board chapter achieve its goals. ❖ **Linda T. Darling '67 (CLAS)**, professor of history at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Ariz., is the author of *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East*, published by Routledge Press in 2013. ❖ **Richard F. Dods '68**

**MA, '72 Ph.D., '76 JD** is the author of *Understanding Diabetes: A Biochemical Perspective*, published by Wiley & Sons in March 2013. He is married to **Linda D. Yuccas '69 Ph.D.** After graduating from UConn, he was a postdoctoral fellow at Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research and later held research associate positions at New York University Medical Center and Northwestern University Medical Center. He served as an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Illinois Medical School and as director of clinical chemistry at Louis A. Weiss Memorial Hospital in Chicago. He was also an instructor of organic chemistry and biochemistry at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy for 17 years. ❖ **Perry Zirkel '68 MA, '72 Ph.D., '76 JD**, professor of education and law at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa., received the Edwin M. Bridges Award from the University Council for Educational Administration in September. The award recognizes original, outstanding work in the area of research and/or development that contributes to the preparation and continuing professional development of educational leaders. He is the author of more than 1,350 publications and presentations. ❖ **Angelo L. dos Santos '70 (ED), '73 JD**, a senior judge on the Windham District Superior Court in Connecticut, received in October the Americo S. Ventura Lifetime Achievement Award from the

Portuguese Bar Association of Connecticut; the Our Lady of Fatima Appreciation Award; the Outstanding Member Medal from the Portuguese Club of Hartford; official citations from the State of Connecticut Senate, the General Assembly, and the Office of the Connecticut Secretary of State Denise Merrill; and an official statement from the Office of Connecticut Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman. ❖ **Stanley F. Battle '75 MSW** is professor of social work at the University of Saint Joseph in Hartford, Conn., and founding director of the master's degree in social work program, which will be offered at the university in the summer of 2014. He previously worked in higher education administration at Central Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and Coppin State University. ❖ **Tom Ingrassia '75 (CLAS)** is the co-author, with Jared Chrudimsky, of *One Door Closes: Overcoming Adversity by Following Your Dreams*, published by Wyatt-Mackenzie Publishing in October. The book is available at amazon.com. ❖ **Lynn Segal Mark MA '75** received the 2013 Tomko Award for Outstanding Achievement from the South West Ohio Rehabilitation Association in December, in recognition of her lifetime achievement in the rehabilitation of people with disabilities. She previously served as a senior vocational rehabilitation counselor for the

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**"Hawaii by James Michener."**

—Tammy (Hitchiner) Gaghan '85 (CANR)

**"War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy. Plenty of time to read this lengthy book!"**

—Eric Simpson '05 (CLAS)

**"Easy: The World Almanac and Book of Facts!"**

—George Samuel Dominguez '85 (CLAS)

**"The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon."**

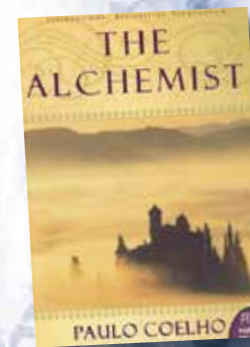
—Andrew Arnell '92 (CLAS)

**"Cryptonomicon by Neal Stephenson."**

—Lior Trestman '15 (ENG)

**"The Godfather by Mario Puzo."**

—Shafin Mohammad '15 MBA



**"The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho"** —Christie Scheer '14 (CLAS)

**"Survive! Ultimate Edition by Les Stroud."**

—Jeffrey Alton Jr. '04 (CLAS), '06 MA

**"Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer."**

—Eddie Fitzgerald '12 (CLAS)

**"I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai."**

—Mawra Malik '15 (BUS)

**"Life of Pi by Yann Martel."**

—Victoria Smey '13 (CLAS)

**"Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific in a Raft by Thor Heyerdahl."**

—Jim Belmont '72 (CLAS)

**"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey!"** —Julie Nicole Rome '15 (NUR)

state of Connecticut and later became a senior vocational rehabilitation counselor in the state of Ohio. ♦ **Sarah Degnan Kambou '80 (CLAS)**, president of the International Center for Research on Women, a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., was honored by the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area in December with the Perdita Huston Human Rights Award, which recognized her outstanding work improving human rights around the world. In 2012 President Barack Obama named her to the President's Global Development Council. That same year, she was named by former President Bill Clinton as an advisor to the Clinton Global Initiative. ♦ **Ken Martino '80 (BUS)**, '82 MBA was elected to the board of directors of Kid's Chance of America, a nonprofit based in Pottstown, Pa., that provides educational opportunities and scholarships for the children of workers seriously injured or killed on the job. He has more than 30 years of experience in the insurance industry and recently started his own company, Injured Workers Pharmacy, a service that helps people injured in accidents return to a productive life by collaborating with the legal, medical, and insurance communities. ♦ **Denise E. Wilbur '80 MA** is interim vice president for academic affairs at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. She previously served as vice president for academic affairs and professor education, chief academic officer of the Gwynedd-Valley College in Gwynedd-Valley, Pa. ♦ **Lisa**

**Begin-Kruysman '81 (CLAS)** is the author of *Dog's Best Friend*, to be released in July by McFarland. She lives in New Jersey and writes a blog at nationaldogweekbook.wordpress.com. ♦ **Carol Masheter '83 MA**, '88 Ph.D., the world's oldest woman at age 65 to have reached the top of every one of the highest mountains on each of the seven continents, completed three more summits in 2013: Nepal's Island Peak (20,340 feet) last April, Mount Rainier (14,441 feet) in Washington state in July, and Mont Blanc (15,770 feet) in the French Alps in August. ♦ **Rich J. Antous Jr. '85 (CLAS)** is downtown UNIT (Unified Neighborhood Inspection Team) coordinator for the Office of Neighborhood Assistance in Danbury, Conn. He is responsible for policy/enforcement and the well-being of the downtown for Mayor Mark D. Boughton. ♦ **Drew Maciag '85 MBA** is the author of *Edmund Burke in America: The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism*, released in April 2013 by Cornell University Press. ♦ **Robin Petgrave '85 (SFA)**, founder and chief pilot of Celebrity Helicopters as well as founder and executive of Tomorrow's Aeronautical Museum, a nonprofit flight academy and after-school program in Compton, Calif., was named one of the nation's most influential African-Americans in *EBONY Magazine's* 2013 "Power 100" list this past October. ♦ **Geoffrey Silverstein '85 (BUS)** and Amy Rabinowitz married on Oct. 27, 2013. ♦ **Nicholas S. Zaharias '85**

**(CLAS)**, vice president for marketing and philanthropy at Lawrence General Hospital in Lawrence, Mass., has won 16 national/regional health care marketing and advertising awards since 2011. ♦ **Joseph Nigro '86 (CLAS)**, executive vice president of Exelon and CEO of Constellation, Exelon's Baltimore-based competitive retail and wholesale business, was elected to the board of directors of the National Aquarium in Baltimore. ♦ **James Purcell '86 (ENG)**, technical director of the New Jersey Asphalt Pavement Association, is vice president of the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying's Northeast Zone, and will serve on its board of directors and as the zone's administrative officer through 2015. ♦ **Andrew M. Klos '87 (CLAS)** is project chemist for the Tucson, Ariz.-based office of Conestoga-Rovers and Associates, an international engineering and consulting firm, where he provides data-validation services to several U.S.-remediation projects for Freeport McMoran, a large international mining firm. ♦ **Chris LaRoche '88 (CLAS)**, a usability consultant at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., is a member-at-large of the User Experience Professionals Association's International Board of Directors. He will serve a three-year term. ♦ **Kristie (Anderson) Scott '91 (SFS)**, '93 MSW is director of social work for Natchaug Hospital in Mansfield, Conn. ♦ **Kenneth Whittemore '91 (CLAS)** is a pediatric otolaryngologist at

Boston Children's Hospital and an assistant professor of otology and laryngology at Harvard Medical School. He previously practiced in Rochester, N.Y. He received his MD from the University of Rochester School of Medicine, followed by a surgical internship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, a residency in the Harvard Combined Otolaryngology Program, and a yearlong pediatric otolaryngology fellowship at Boston Children's Hospital. His current research involves hearing loss in children. ♦ **Jennifer J. Natale '92 (CLAS)** is academic resident librarian at Miami University Libraries in Oxford, Ohio. ♦ **David Medeiros '93 MS**, engineer at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport, R.I., received the National Defense Industrial Association Bronze Medal for 2013 in September in Groton, Conn. This annual award recognizes outstanding individual achievements in science or engineering in the field of undersea warfare. ♦ **T. Stephens (pseudonym) '93 (CLAS)** is the author of *Dante's Cypher*, published by Tate Publishing in February. ♦ **Chris Sullivan '93 (CLAS)** is vice president of sales at North America for NEC Display Solutions, a manufacturer of computer monitors and large-screen public-information displays in Norwalk, Conn. ♦ **Leasella "Lea" (Owens) Bongiovanni '94 (SFS)** and James Bongiovanni married on Dec. 15, 2012, in Norwalk, Conn. They reside in Philadelphia. ♦ **William McGuinness '95 (CLAS)** and **Christine (Raucci)**

**McGuinness '06 (CLAS)** married on Oct. 19, 2013, in Clinton, Conn. ♦ **Joseph D. Petrella '95 (CLAS)** is division chief of recreation services in Alexandria, Va. He has more than 20 years of public administration experience, and recently earned his MS in recreation management, sports, and tourism from the University of Illinois. ♦ **Craig Coleman '96 (CLAS)** and Evan Coleman announce the birth of a daughter, Bennett Lee, on Oct. 15, 2013, in New York, N.Y. ♦ **Holly M. Perkins '96 (BUS)** is an attorney at Joseph, Hollander & Craft LLC's Topeka/Lawrence offices in Kansas. ♦ **Laura (Pascale) Zaino '96 JD**, partner at Halloran & Sage in Hartford, Conn., is an adjunct professor in the interterm moot court program at the UConn School of Law. ♦ **Sherri Estela-Harton '98 (CLAS)** is academic program director for communications and mass media at Lincoln College of New England in Southington, Conn. She has worked in higher education for more than 10 years. ♦ **Albert Lee '98 (SFA)** is director of the Nevada Chamber Opera at the University of Nevada-Reno. ♦ **Hugh Bailey '99 (CLAS)**, assistant editorial page editor and columnist for the *Connecticut Post*, received the Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship for editorial writing, which awards \$75,000 each year to an outstanding editorial writer or columnist to help broaden his or her journalistic horizons and knowledge of the world. ♦ **Kristen (Heiligman) Shanley '99 (ED)**, '00 MA, a seventh-grade language teacher at Dodd Middle School in Cheshire, Conn.,

was named the 2013-14 Cheshire Public Schools' Teacher of the Year. ♦ **Jennifer (Casavant) Telford '99 (NUR)**, assistant professor at the UConn School of Nursing, received Southeastern Connecticut's "40 under 40" Award in January for excellence in her profession, as well as leadership, commitment, and service to her region. ♦ **Michael Kmec '00 (CANR)** and Lori Kmec announce the birth of a son, Jonathan Carl, on Dec. 31, 2013. ♦ **Kim (Carlucci) Boisvert '01 (BUS)** and **Jeffrey Boisvert '01 (BUS)** announce the birth of a son, Ryan, on Aug. 27, 2013. He joins his big

sister, Megan, and his big brother, Michael. ♦ **Kathryn (Scoville) Desrosiers '01 (ED)**, music coordinator for Bolton (Conn.) Public Schools, was named the 2013-14 Bolton Public Schools' Teacher of the Year. A flutist, she also teaches high school concert band, seventh- and eighth-grade concert band, advanced placement music theory, and music technology. ♦ **Tara (Kozulko) Stritch '01 (ED)** is assistant athletic trainer for the U.S. Lacrosse Women's Senior National Team. ♦ **Christopher Lebonitte '02 (BUS)** is senior director of finance at NBC Sports in New York, N.Y. He has been with NBC Universal for nine years. He and his wife, Allie, announce the birth of a son, Benjamin Vincent, on Aug. 31, 2013. ♦ **Jessica (Alcantara) Olivieri '02 (CLAS)**, '13 MBA and **Angelo Olivieri III '04 (BUS)**, '07 MS announce the birth of a baby girl, Aria Josephine, on Sept. 30, 2013, in Hartford, Conn. ♦ **Theodore "Ted" Yungclas '02 MA**, '07 Ph.D. is principal of academic affairs at the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education in Hartford, Conn. He previously served as the assistant dean at UConn's School of Fine Arts. ♦ **Bryan E. McEntee '03 (CLAS)** was appointed to the Waterbury (Conn.) Board of Education by Waterbury Mayor Neil M. O'Leary. ♦ **Uyi Osunde '03 (ED)**, '08 MA, former UConn football star and defensive end for the Buffalo Bills, is assistant principal at Illing Middle School in Manchester, Conn. ♦ **John "Jack" H. Sheedy '03 (BGS)**, news editor at *The Catholic Transcript* in

Bloomfield, Conn., is the author of a memoir, *Sting of the Heat Bug*, published in 2012 by Signalman Publishing in Florida. ♦ **Jocelyn Tamborello-Noble '03 (ED)**, '04 MA, '09 6th Year, a Spanish teacher at Glastonbury (Conn.) High School, received a 2013 Polaris Award from Leadership Greater Hartford in October. ♦ **Erik Diaz '04 MFA** is assistant professor of theatre arts at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, Calif. ♦ **Zato Kadambaya '04 MA** is math/science department head and STEM administrator at New London (Conn.) High School. ♦ **Amanda Falcone '05 (CLAS)** is public relations account executive at Duffy & Shanley in Providence, R.I. She previously worked as deputy press secretary for U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy (Conn.) and as a multimedia journalist for *The Hartford Courant*. ♦ **Shoshana "Shana" (Cook) Mueller '05 MPA**, '06 JD, attorney at Bernstein Shur in Portland, Maine, was elected as a shareholder of the firm. Prior to joining Bernstein Shur, she was a public policy researcher and analyst at an economics and management consulting firm in Boston. ♦ **Meghan Angeletti '06 (ED)**, community relations manager for USTA New England, was named to *Racquet Sports Industry's* "30 under 30" list in November. ♦ **Tierney (Steele) Callaghan '06 (CLAS)** and Christopher Callaghan married on Aug. 10, 2013. ♦ **Karin Edwards '06 (BGS)** joined the Peace Corps and will depart for China in June to begin training as an education volunteer, teaching English as a foreign language to

local residents. ♦ **David Garvey '06 Ph.D.**, director of UConn's Nonprofit Leadership Program and adjunct professor in UConn's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, received the ACCESS Community Action Agency's 2013 Community Service Award in recognition of his dedication to low-income families. ♦ **Lindsey (Susmeyer) Giliberto '06 (CLAS)** and **Paul Giliberto '06 (BUS)** were married on Sept. 14, 2013, in Madison, Conn. ♦ **Janet Robinson '06 Ph.D.**, superintendent of Stratford (Conn.) Public Schools, was named the 2014 Superintendent of the Year in November and received the Exemplary Leadership Award in July, both through the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. She previously was superintendent of Newtown (Conn.) Public Schools and of Derby (Conn.) Schools. She also received the 2013 Neag School of Education Alumni Society's Outstanding Superintendent Award last May. ♦ **Jesse Senko '06 (CANR)** is a Ph.D. student at Arizona State University and sustainable seafood consultant for the Blue Ocean Institute. His research and conservation efforts to help save endangered sea turtles along the coast of Mexico's

Baja Peninsula have been covered in *The New York Times*. ♦ **Nick Paquette '08 (BUS)**, CPA, is manager of the audit practice at accounting and consulting firm Baker Newman Noyes in Portland, Maine. ♦ **Dan Rousseau '08 (SFA)**, assistant lighting director at the CNN studios of the New York-based Lighting Design Group, won an Emmy in October for Outstanding Lighting Direction and Scenic Design for "NBC Nightly News: Decision 2012 – Election Night Coverage from Democracy Plaza." ♦ **David Gershaw '09 (ENG, BUS)** is president of RemPhos Technologies, a design and manufacturing firm for the lighting industry based in Danvers, Mass. ♦ **Carly Buehler '11 (ED)**, '12 MA is a volunteer, training teachers and developing curriculum at a free community school for AIDS orphans in Zambia. To learn more, visit [chikumbuso.com](http://chikumbuso.com). ♦ **Arron Lloyd '11 (SFA)** made his television debut in CBS' fourth season of "Blue Bloods," which aired in November. ♦ **Benjamin Wargo '11 (ENG)** served in the U.S. Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic, designing and supervising the construction of a water system that has supplied 32 families with water.

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One August morning shortly before he was to start his senior year of high school, John Tartaglio '14 MBA woke up with what he calls a “really alarming pain deep in my legs.” What he didn’t yet know was that an extremely rare bacterial infection — so uncommon that only 35 other people have ever been diagnosed with it — was raging throughout his body.

Over the next 24 hours, doctors did everything they could to save his life. Tartaglio, 17 years old at the time, returned to consciousness following what he thought would be exploratory surgery to devastating news: He no longer had legs. The infection — the source of which was never determined — had spread so exceptionally fast that both his legs had to be amputated above the thigh.

“A nurse came in and told me,” says Tartaglio, now 26. “I had tears in my eyes, and they were coming down my face, but I was just cold. I didn’t want to deal with it. I didn’t want to respond to it. I didn’t want to acknowledge it.”

# THIS SIDE OF SURVIVAL

BY STEFANIE DION JONES '00 (CLAS)



Learn more about John Tartaglio at [johntartaglio.com](http://johntartaglio.com), or watch his TEDxUConn talk at [s.uconn.edu/tartaglio](http://s.uconn.edu/tartaglio).

## 15 HOURS AND 59 MINUTES

Tartaglio spent several weeks recuperating in the hospital before moving on to physical therapy sessions at an outpatient facility. Because of the level of amputation, he was told by doctors and prosthetists alike that he would probably never walk again. “That wasn’t really the answer I wanted to hear,” he says.

By Christmas, however, he had found a prosthetist who could help. That April, at a 2-mile walk held in his honor, he walked a quarter of a mile for the first time since the amputation — a moment that he says changed his perspective for good “about what I was able to do, what capability I had.” He had reached another milestone by June, walking at his high school graduation ceremony to accept his diploma.



“I MADE IT PRETTY CLEAR TO PEOPLE THAT IF I WANTED TO DO IT, IT WOULD HAPPEN.”

That summer, one of his physical therapists suggested Tartaglio take part in a team triathlon. Then his prosthetist offered him the opportunity to try out a prosthetic that would allow him to run.

“I didn’t ever think I’d have the opportunity to run,” says Tartaglio, who laughingly admits he had despised running before his amputation. “That was a big mindset change.”

Tartaglio went on not only to complete in a triathlon, but also numerous other endurance races — from a 100-mile cycling race to a half-Ironman.

“It starts out as one thing,” he says. “Then I was thinking: How can I step it up? How can I challenge myself even more? These weren’t ever things that I saw myself doing. So to be able to challenge myself and to be able to succeed, I was just pushing my own boundaries to see what I could do.”

In 2009, a mere five years after being told he would never walk again, Tartaglio became the first person with no legs to complete the New York City Marathon — crossing the finish line after a grueling 15 hours and 59 minutes. His record still stands.

“I made it pretty clear to people that if I wanted to do it, it would happen,” he says.

## ‘HOW FAR YOU FALL’

Tartaglio has not stopped making things happen. Today, he travels the country to inspire audiences with his story and has even appeared on “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” A UConn student, he is finishing his MBA at the School of Business and interning in business development at Philips in Stamford, Conn. He and his wife have a daughter, Lily, who turns 1 this month.

He also recently co-authored a memoir, *From Tragedy to Triumph: The Story of John Tartaglio* (No Limits Publishing, 2013), now available on Amazon. And this past October, he spoke at UConn’s first student-organized TEDxUConn (available on YouTube), a conference series that features lectures on technological, sociocultural, and global trends.

One of the main messages he shares with his audiences centers on his own personal mantra: “How far you fall doesn’t determine who you are; it’s how hard you work to get back up.”

“Regardless of who you are, you’re going to have adversity,” he says. “You’re going to face some type of obstacle. How do you quantify that? You don’t. You can’t compare my adversity to your adversity. It’s different. I don’t care who you are, what your demographic is, what your background is, you have it. But it’s not about that. It’s not about what your adversity is compared to other people. It is what you do to face it, what you do to overcome it. *That* really defines who you are.”

With his UConn MBA nearly complete, Tartaglio says he will look to get back into road races while continuing with his speaking engagements. At the same time, he has his sights set on pursuing a career in the business world as an internal consultant, using the same talent he has worked so hard to cultivate these past 10 years: reaching new goals.

“For me, it has to do with being able to influence people and leading them to improve their performance,” he says. “I want to be able to help people get there. I like the idea of being able to help drive a strategy and have that bigger positive impact. That’s really the tie-in. Having the personal connection is what would make it something I’d be happy doing for a career.” 🐾

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