



# Taft

BULLETIN

SPRING 2021



Elena Echavarria '21 works on a project in Advanced Ceramics class, where students do hands-on learning in the ceramics studio with teacher Claudia Black. ROBERT FALCETTI

SPRING 2021

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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 THE COVER

Students enjoyed the warm spring weather and the beautiful flowering trees on the Jig Patio following Community Time. ROBERT FALCETTI

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### CORRECTION

In our Winter 2021 Alumni Spotlight, "Water, Water—Not Everywhere"—about Matt Rice '94, director of the Colorado River Basin for American Rivers—we apologize for a section of text that was missing in the printed version of the magazine (between pages 10 and 11). The entire article can be found online at [www.taftschoo.org/bulletin/winter-2021](http://www.taftschoo.org/bulletin/winter-2021).

## On MAIN HALL

A WORD FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL WILLY MACMULLEN '78



### Managing Stress in Trying Times

This is a column about a talk I gave and a talk I heard—and about how schools need to help students in managing stress. Needless to say, this year has provided ample reason for this to be a singularly important focus for schools.

In September 2018, during my opening remarks to the faculty, I spoke about student stress, and how I thought we needed to think about it in new ways.

I gave that talk because it was clear to me that adolescents today were experiencing stress and managing stress in different ways than when I began teaching and even when I began as head of school just 20 years ago. Put simply, students seemed to be feeling more *sources* of stress

than a generation ago—and ample research affirms this—and they were also struggling more to *manage* that stress. And so, that summer I did a lot of reading.

One source I found fascinating was the work of Stanford psychologist Kelly McGonigal and her TED Talk, "How to Make Stress Your Friend." McGonigal, author of *The Upside of Stress*, confesses to her audience that for years she argued that stress was bad and led to unhealthy things. And this is true: unrelenting and severe stress, especially for those without support and resources, is very harmful. But the more she read into the research, the more convinced she became that a lot of the time, if we *thought* about stress differently, we would not *feel* so stressed. Stress, she argues, isn't necessarily a bad thing. *Believing* stress is bad might be the actual problem.

This is not just wishful thinking. The research is compelling. A study at Harvard with participants who were taught to think about stress as helpful for performance proved to be less stressed out, more confident, and more successful. An eight-year nationwide study of over 30,000 participants showed that those who reported high levels of stress but saw the stress as helpful were healthier than their counterparts: they had the lowest mortality rates. Mindset matters, McGonigal says.

But it was another work that I found even more informative: psychologist Lisa Damour's *Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls*, which comes at the issue from a similar place.

Dr. Damour begins the work this way:

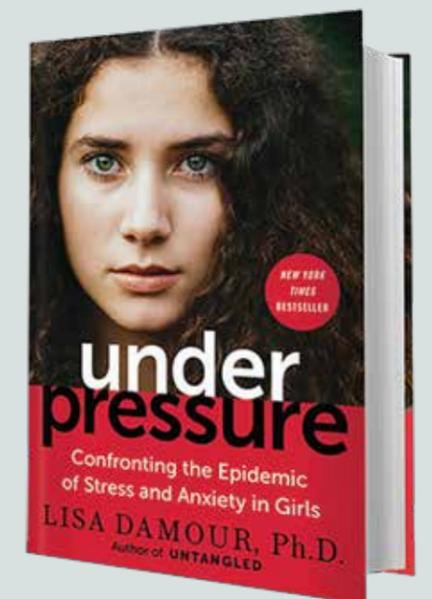
"I have good news. Actually, I have two pieces of really great news. First, stress and anxiety aren't all bad. In fact, you won't thrive without them....Second, the field of psychology has a lot to say about how to alleviate stress and anxiety."

Her work is helpful not only for girls, and those two points should be very much in our mind when talking to students: stress in appropriate levels is not bad, and skills and habits can be developed to deal with it. She adds, "Somewhere along the line, we got the idea that emotional discomfort is always a bad thing. This turns out to be a very unhelpful idea."

I recall encountering those lines thinking, This is really helpful.

Let's fast forward to life at Taft in COVID 2021. As we all know, adolescents have experienced *enormous* mental health challenges during COVID. Schools have been closed

"A study at Harvard with participants who were taught to think about stress as helpful for performance proved to be less stressed out, more confident, and more successful."



or only partially opened, teenagers have been isolated and grieve the loss of social contact, daily life and routines have been upended, and family pressures of all kinds have intensified. And Taft students, even as they were comparatively incredibly lucky to be on campus in a safe and supportive community or connected virtually to caring teachers, felt higher levels of stress, loneliness, and anxiety than ever. Life at school had fewer sources of connection, respite, and fun. We could not have games, dances, or concerts; visiting in the dormitories was limited; seating in the dining hall was spaced to three per table; parents could not visit campus to take their child and friend out to dinner; we held no Bingham Assemblies; and on and on. As a school, we saw all students feeling the stresses of life under a pandemic. And parents, of course, also felt anxious. How could they not? So we brought to bear all of our resources, from advisors to counseling to yoga. The mental health of students was a top priority.

And one resource was Dr. Damour, whom we introduced to the parent body one evening in March for a Zoom webinar on how to understand ways we can help teenagers—their children, our students—as they experience stress. Damour’s talk was informative, reassuring, funny, and wise. She recognized how hard and painful the world of teenagers was today—her own practice provided plenty of data. But as adults, we could help, she advised. To parents, she suggested nine steps for navigating those moments of “meltdown,” and the advice, grounded in research and her own clinical work, was singularly helpful. If we used these steps, she noted, and paused after each one, in most cases we would not even have to get to the later steps: “Listen without interrupting,” and then “Offer sincere empathy” might be all our child needs. Teenagers, she pointed out, are astonishingly resilient. I could see parents nodding in recognition as she spoke of those moments when we get the upset call from a son or daughter. I found myself scribbling notes on phrases I wanted to use the next time I had an advisee upset in my office. “I have a bookmark with the nine steps available on my website,” she added, suggesting that it might be helpful to have on hand. (See it on this page.)

That adolescents today are living in an upended and unpredictable world is clear. That they grieve what they have lost is visible. That they feel depths of isolation and levels of stress that we have never seen before is obvious. So if our mission is the education of the whole student at a challenging school, we must see helping them think about stress in healthy ways and learning the skills to handle it as central to our work every day and on every corner of campus.

I printed out Damour’s bookmark. It’s taped to my desk.

William R. MacMullen '78

“If we used [some of Lisa Damour’s] steps... and paused after each one, in most cases we would not even have to get to the later steps: ‘Listen without interrupting,’ and then ‘Offer sincere empathy’ might be all our child needs.”

## HOW TO MANAGE A MELTDOWN

by Lisa Damour, PhD

Pause between each step to see if it worked. If not, move forward to next step.

### 1. Listen without interrupting

#### 2. Offer sincere empathy

“That stinks!” or “I’m so sorry that happened.”

#### 3. Validate distress

“You have every right to be mad/sad/upset.” or “A good cry is the right thing right now.”

#### 4. Support coping

“Is there anything I can do that won’t make this worse?” or “Would some tea help?”

#### 5. Express non-dismissive confidence

“This is tough, and so are you.” or “As hard as this feels right now, I do think that you’ll get through it.”

#### 6. Offer to help problem solve

“Do you want my help trying to tackle this?” or “Any ideas about what might work to make this better?”

#### 7. Divide problem into buckets

Things that *can* change and things that *can’t* change

#### 8. Brainstorm possible solutions to the things that can change

#### 9. Support acceptance of what cannot be changed

“There’s always some stuff we just have to live with.” or “Let’s focus your energy where it can make a difference.”

drisadamour.com

Lisa Damour’s helpful bookmark for adults responding to young people experiencing stress. LISA DAMOUR

## SOCIAL SCENE

Follow @thetaftschool on Facebook, @taftschool on Instagram and Twitter for daily glimpses of Taft life.



Thank you, Seniors! 📖❤️🎉

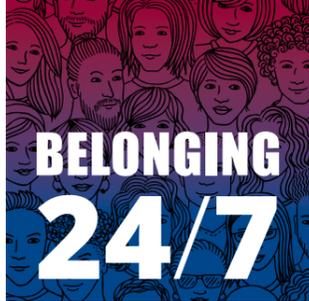


Some say that the falcon signifies wisdom and vision, and brings with it higher knowledge and clarity; that it represents a rise above challenging situations. It seems fitting, then, that a rare peregrine falcon has arrived to keep watch over Taft’s campus from atop the Lady Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center. #lifeattaft #inthistgether



This year, the newest class of Rhinos was welcomed to the crash (n. a group of rhinos) with, well, a Rhino. Acceptance packages for the Class of '25 included adoption certificates for an African Rhino, a species spotlight card, and a photo of their Rhino species. Adoptions were made through the World Wildlife Fund. @WWF #BeARhino #ChooseTaft #LifeAtTaft





BY ANDREW PRINCE, dean of multicultural education

# An Update on the DEI Strategic Planning Committee Process: The Audit

If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going.

—Maya Angelou

As a part of our communal commitment to radically improve our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practice, Head of School Willy MacMullen '78 and Chair of the Board Grant Porter '69 authorized the creation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Planning Committee (DEISPC). This committee is rooted in the school's long-standing commitment to become a more diverse community where everyone has what they need to succeed and everyone belongs. It is also rooted in the awareness that Taft "has failed on its promise that all students will feel they belong, and traditionally marginalized students—especially Black students—have too often experienced discrimination or racism on campus." (DEISPC Charge) I view this committee as the vehicle for ensuring systematic improvement to our DEI practice that will "call in" all members of the Taft community and help keep the school accountable to all constituent groups.

The composition of this committee reflects the diversity of the Taft community, an essential reality for this group to be as effective as possible. Identity matters, and while it is not perfectly predictive of the kinds of experiences that any one individual will have, there will certainly be commonalities across identifiers. Of course, we can never represent the particular intersections of identity in each and every member of the community, but the intentional construction of this committee to represent many of the identifiers that comprise the Taft community

was vital. The members include myself as co-chair and six other employees (Sierra Berkel, Shavar Bernier, Erin Duffy, Baba Frew, Joyce Romano '92, and Parker Washburn); five trustees (Jon Albert '79, Foster Chiang '01, Michael Humphreys '93, Ernest Kwarteng '98, and committee co-chair Jacqueline Rosa '82); and two graduate students from the Klingenstein Center at Columbia's Teachers College (Megan Nuxoll and Arnelle Williams).

The committee's charge consists of three distinct and important elements: an audit of Taft's current DEI practice, the formulation of recommendations to address the findings of the audit, and the creation of accountability metrics to ensure continued progress. The audit was likely the most involved part of this process and is the topic of the bulk of this article. The group was charged to "establish a baseline understanding for all community members, [and] conduct a comprehensive audit of the school's DEI status." In order to do this, the committee considered the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Accreditation Report of 2018, considered results of past survey data, created and administered a climate (student experience) survey, collaborated with key stakeholders in the Taft community, used data stored in Taft databases, considered Taft's curriculum, researched the practices of our peer schools, and more. The members of the committee were divided into six groups, and each group was charged with looking at one of the following facets of school life:

academics; admissions; alumni relations; DEI resources; student life; and faculty recruitment, retention, and training. This process was necessarily extensive and took the better part of four months to complete.

Once the DEISPC compiled all of our data, we put it together in a rather lengthy audit report. After the broader introduction, each section of the report featured an introduction to that facet of school life, a list of findings, and discussion of those findings and appendices. In total, the audit was 60 pages long, and the level of detail and specificity of each section will be vital to the school making calculated and precise interventions to improve our practice. The same things that make this document extremely valuable to the stakeholders who will use it to review and improve their practice also make it difficult to navigate for those who are less familiar with the precise functioning of the school. For this reason, the DEISPC and Head of School Willy MacMullen are creating an executive summary that will be available on the school website. This executive summary includes a brief introduction and a number of key affirmations and areas for improvement for each facet of the audit. As I write this article, the executive summary is still being created, but I think it's important to include an example of the findings from the audit here. With this in mind, I will include key Affirmation and Area for Improvement findings from my vantage point.

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## Academics

- **Affirmation:** There is a strong desire among classroom teachers for more interdisciplinary work centered on DEI principles accompanied by training to ensure that school employees are doing this work in a culturally competent way.
- **Area for Improvement:** Students on financial aid, students of color (SOCs), and SOCs who identify as girls have a less affirming experience in the classroom and are less likely to feel as though they belong in their classes.

## Admissions

- **Affirmation:** Taft will admit a record number of domestic students of color for the 2021–22 school year, far more than in any preceding cohort of admitted students.
- **Area for Improvement:** Taft has the fewest domestic SOCs and total SOCs of any of the Ten Schools Admission Organization.

## Alumni Relations

- **Affirmation:** Taft is creating more affinity groups and sponsoring more events specifically for alumni of traditionally marginalized groups in partnership with members of those groups.
- **Area of Improvement:** Taft does not have demographic data for all alumni, which limits our ability to engage alumni for affinity groups and similar events.

## DEI Resources

- **Affirmation:** Taft has supported all of the financial needs of our DEI program in the last four years using the dedicated DEI budget as well as the Lee Klingenstein Program budget, one-time contributions from community members, and the newly created DEI Current Use and Endowed Funds.
- **Area for Improvement:** There are very few "communal hours" dedicated to DEI work and no time explicitly carved out in the class or afternoon program spaces for DEI leadership. —Taft dedicated 305 communal minutes to DEI work for MLK Day and Black History Month programming. In that same time frame we dedicated 1,350

minutes to each class block, 2,460 minutes to the afternoon program, and 4,320 minutes to study hall.

## Faculty Recruitment, Retention, and Training

- **Affirmation:** 37 percent of new hires have identified as BIPOC between 2016 and 2020, up from 16 percent in 2013. In that same time frame, 57 percent of hires have had a marginalized identifier.
- **Area for Improvement:** Taft does not have a required professional growth process as it pertains to DEI work, which means that there is not a process by which all employees are induced to take part in such work on a regular and cyclical basis.

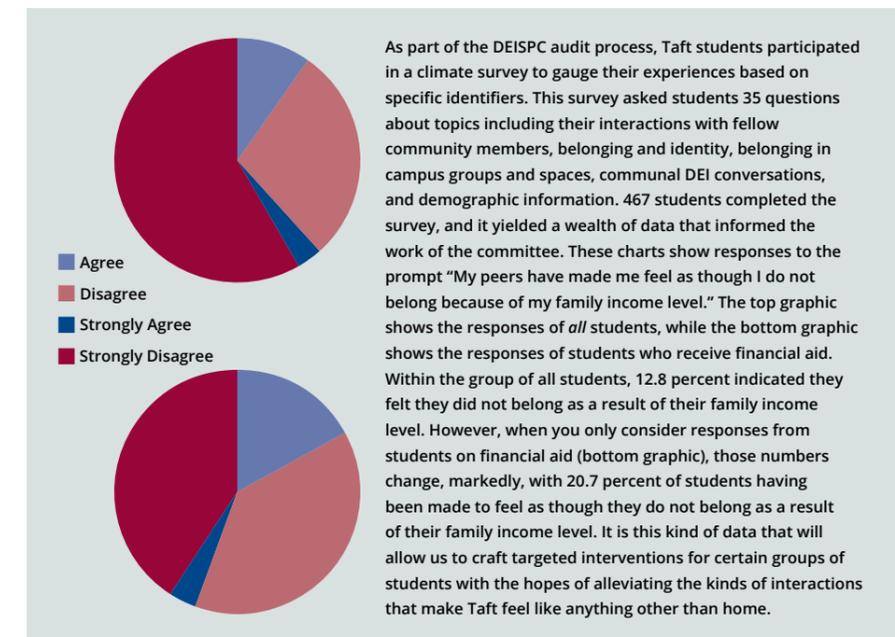
## Student Life

- **Affirmation:** Advisory Meeting Time, new this year, has provided students and faculty members the time and space to continue discussions around DEI themes that have taken place in other community settings and, in the majority of cases, enhanced the DEI messaging of the school in a consistent fashion
- **Area for Improvement:** Not all faculty members feel comfortable in their role as leaders in conversations about

DEI work which likely leads to inconsistencies in DEI programming. In response to these findings and more, the committee is working on recommendations for the school community. These recommendations will be grounded in more collaboration with key stakeholders, research into best practices, consideration of the work underway at peer schools, and the needs of the Taft Community. These recommendations will be accompanied by accountability metrics as we must measure and evaluate our progress in order to ensure that it continues.

On an unrelated note, I'd like to take this moment to say goodbye as I will be departing Taft at the end of this school year. It has been my great honor to serve this community, and I can only hope that I have helped in the continuing growth and evolution of this school. Change in general, and change in leadership especially, can lead to some trepidation. However, DEI work that is done well is done by everyone. Knowing the dedication and capacity of the members of this community, I am filled with hope and optimism for the future of Taft's DEI practices. ■

To learn more about Taft's ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work, visit [www.taftschool.org/dei](http://www.taftschool.org/dei)



“In the last decade or so, we’ve seen incredible drought in South Africa, as well as wildfires in southern Australia and Patagonia. As you move the winds further south, they stop these major storm systems from delivering precipitation to all these regions.”



Left: Paleoclimatologist Bianca Perren '93 on a research trip monitoring climate on the Greenland Ice Sheet. JASON VAN BRUGGEN

Right: Perren teaching Arctic oceanography in Greenland. Each summer she works with Students on Ice, which brings about 150 high school students from around the world—half of them indigenous to Greenland and the Canadian Arctic—to various communities to teach about climate change, ecology, and more. MARTIN LIPMAN

Below: Swiss Camp (67°N) on the Greenland Ice Sheet. In this photo taken in 2017, Perren is at upper right. This research station (with work tent on the left and kitchen tent on the right) monitoring the Greenland Ice Sheet was at the site since 1990. Because of ice melt, the station collapsed last year. JASON VAN BRUGGEN



## Working (Very) Remotely

**DR. BIANCA PERREN '93** KNEW a little something about “remote work” long before the pandemic.

As a Quaternary paleoecologist for the famed British Antarctic Survey, Perren’s fieldwork routinely involves visiting some of the most inhospitable locations on earth. Her last trip to the Southern Ocean left her ears throbbing from the constant pounding of gale-force winds. It was supposedly summer in the hemisphere, but it didn’t feel like it.

The winds aren’t exactly pleasant, though they are integral to Perren’s research. In particular, she has been studying the westerlies, the prevailing winds from left to right on a map, which have been making an alarming march southward in recent decades. Perren is trying to understand whether their behavior is a cyclical phenomenon or something more recent, resulting from a kind of stratospheric depletion: the ozone hole.

“We haven’t really known what the natural behavior of the westerly winds is like outside

of this ozone period,” Perren says. “What should they be doing normally? And what can we anticipate in the decades to come?”

Quaternary, by the way, refers to the most recent period in the geologic time scale up to our present day. It historically encompasses two epochs, the Pleistocene (from roughly 2.5 million years ago until about 11,000 years ago) and the Holocene. Recently, however, scientists have proposed that we’ve already transitioned into a new age, the Anthropocene, with humans being the



## Alumni SPOTLIGHT

central cause of this epochal inflection point.

Perren, whose work appeared in Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Sequel*, has helped advance this thinking. In fact, she and her team recently published a record of the 700-year of history of the winds from sub-Antarctic Marion Island and confirmed that their strength and latitude are indeed linked closely to temperature—and over a much shorter timescale than climate modelers had previously thought.

What's the big deal? The winds drive warmer water to Antarctica, breaking up ice shelves and pulling carbon dioxide and heat out of the atmosphere. They also have an impact closer to home.

Below: Perren doing fieldwork on Marion Island in the sub-Antarctic region. FRANÇOIS BERNARD

Opposite page: Perren, far right in Zodiac, explaining glacier retreat and Arctic climate change to the Canada C3 expedition participants in Baffin Island on the 2017 circumnavigation of Canada on the *Polar Prince*, a small Canadian icebreaker. MICHELLE MUNKITTRICK

Instruments to monitor temperature, wind speed, humidity, surface reflection, and energy balance all need maintenance. Perren is on top of the 10-meter tower at Swiss Camp fixing a wind sensor. JASON VAN BRUGGEN



"In the last decade or so, we've seen incredible drought in South Africa, as well as wildfires in southern Australia and Patagonia," Perren says. "As you move the winds further south, they stop these major storm systems from delivering precipitation to all these regions."

Perren establishes ecological records through a process called lake coring, or drilling holes into the muddy bottom of lakes and retrieving samples from below the surface. What might look like a blackish filth stew is filled with sediment that, over time, can stratigraphically form a record of environmental changes. Some cores stretch back tens of thousands of years.

Under a microscope, Perren examines the sediment for diatoms, or unicellular algae. Certain diatoms have a strong affinity for salty environments, and if enough are present in a sample, researchers can make the connection that the westerlies blew salt

onto the lakes during that time period.

Perren is currently examining samples from cores she gathered from the southernmost lake in the Americas, on a peninsula jutting out into the Drake Passage.

"These are pretty interesting places on the planet," says Perren. "On the island near Cape Horn, the last person working here doing any real research there was part of the *Beagle* expedition [which included Charles Darwin]. They're really out of the way, so you find really interesting things."

Getting to these locations isn't exactly easy. Getting out can be even trickier.

Perren recalled one particularly harrowing helicopter ride off Marion Island in the middle of a dangerous windstorm.

"The pilot said, 'There's a shear zone between the water and the air that has less wind so I'm going to cruise that,'" Perren says. "We were probably 2 meters above the sea surface. It was scary." She adds, "I think

most of my family thinks I'm pretty crazy."

Nonetheless, Perren is planning her next trip to northern Greenland, where she can continue coring lakes in the Northern Hemisphere to gather an environmental record in relation to human migration. In addition to her research, Perren leads tours of the Arctic as an expedition educator for the Students on Ice Foundation.

Since she first visited the Arctic in 1998, she has witnessed dramatic changes. Understanding the driving forces behind them are what compels her to keep revisiting these harsh and forbidding landscapes.

"I worked on a lake during my Ph.D., a little island of rock surrounded by a sea of ice in the Greenland Ice Sheet," Perren says. "Then I flew over two years ago, and it's now just part of the land. There's no ice around it anymore." ■

—Zach Schonbrun '05

# Hail to the Chief

Below: Dave Kirkpatrick '89 with former President Jimmy Carter, the subject of the film *Kirkpatrick coproduced, Jimmy Carter: Rock & Roll President*.



**A LIFELONG MUSIC LOVER, DAVE** Kirkpatrick '89, never imagined that one day he'd be a part of a major documentary featuring the likes of Willie Nelson, Gregg Allman, Jimmy Buffett, and Bob Dylan—let alone that he would befriend the film's star, the 39th president of the United States. But after four years on the project, the rookie film producer helped create the critically acclaimed *Jimmy Carter: Rock & Roll President*, which sheds light on Carter's close ties to popular Southern rock musicians, both during the 1976 presidential campaign and well into his time in the White House.

"I've always been a music junkie. I read all sorts of rock biographies and watch a lot of documentaries, but that was never my area of expertise," says Kirkpatrick, whose Taft connection also includes having served as chair of the Annual Fund, serving as a board member, and being father

to Mary Elizabeth '23. Within a few years of graduating from Denison University, he moved to Atlanta hoping to work in sports. He landed at the Collegiate Licensing Co., where he has remained for the past 26 years and is currently vice president, non-apparel, overseeing partnerships with more than 800 colleges and universities.

His foray into filmmaking began in June 2016, when a close friend with experience in the Carter administration invited him to dinner with the former president and first lady. "I prepared for it like I was writing a term paper," Kirkpatrick chuckles. "For 45 days, I was laser focused on really taking full advantage of the opportunity. I read a number of books and visited the Carter Center, so I could become as knowledgeable as possible."

A few weeks later, he received another dinner invitation, this time from his former Denison roommate. "He was having dinner

with two filmmakers who wanted to do a documentary about the Allman Brothers, but when that fell through, he told them how President Carter had this close relationship with music and musicians," Kirkpatrick says. "Knowing my interest in music and Carter, he called me and asked if I'd like to meet them." Right away, Kirkpatrick's interest was piqued, and he wanted to help get the film off the ground however he could.

They sent a tentative script to the Carter Center and offered to donate some of the profits to the organization, and within a month, the project had Carter's approval. From there, the film's director, Mary Wharton, and producer Chris Farrell began conducting interviews—not only with rock luminaries, but also with prominent diplomats like Andrew Young and Madeleine Albright.

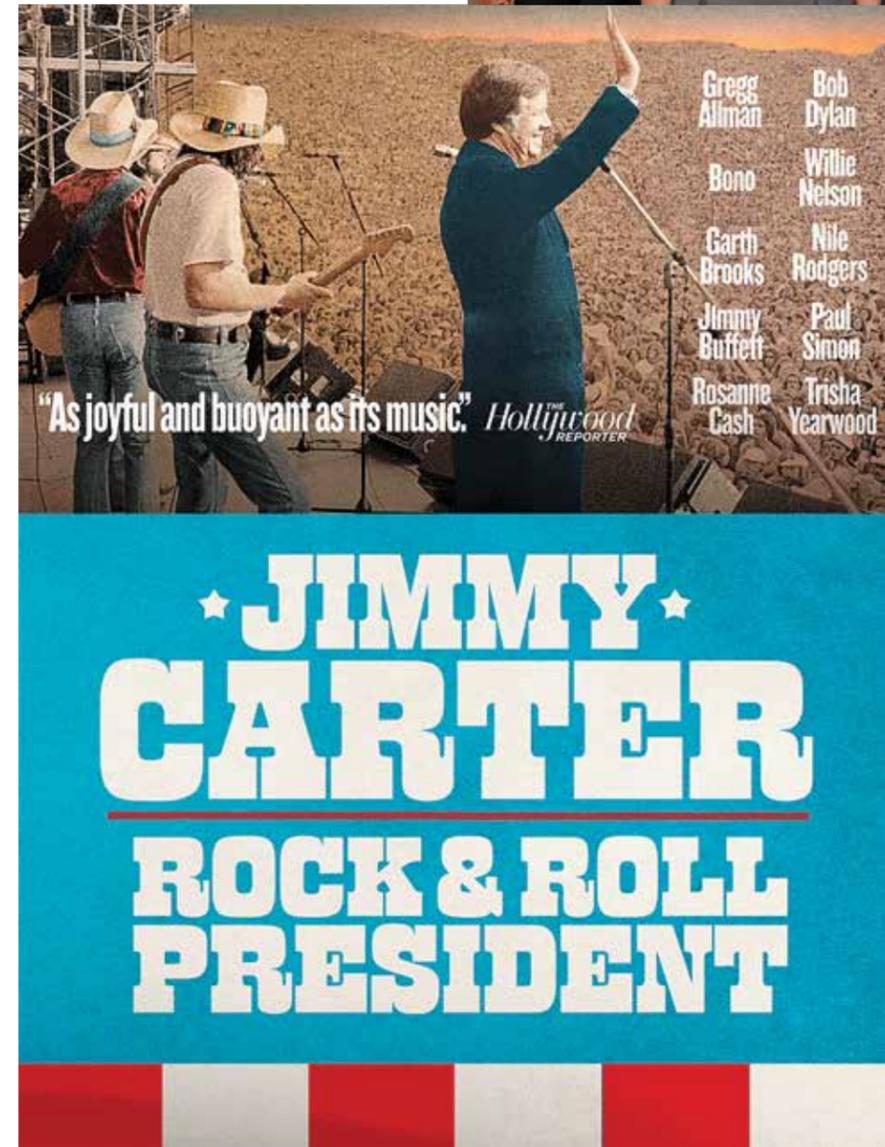
"At first, I was something of a bystander.

I raised some money and kept the Atlanta team connected," Kirkpatrick says. "The interviews were really going well, but the piece that wasn't falling into place was the financial component. When it came to actually building the movie, the editing process, securing rights to the 42 songs in the film, we didn't have enough to make it happen."

That's when Kirkpatrick found a way to become much more involved. "I stepped up and became the primary financier of the project, establishing my own small production company, Thunder Moccasin Pictures," he says. "And in return for



Kirkpatrick (at right) and his family with former President Carter in 2018; from left, Dave's wife, Mary Jane, daughter Mary Elizabeth (Taft '23), and daughter Sarah (now in sixth grade).



making that commitment, the team agreed to educate me about the entire process, including the financial model, the sales process, film festivals, all of it."

"I was also able to get to know the Carter family and President Carter," Kirkpatrick says. "Growing up, I didn't have a real intimate knowledge of his presidency. But when you learn more about his diverse interest and what he's done for civil rights, for conservation, for peace—it's amazing."

As the film finds its audience—released first in a limited 80-cinema run in fall 2020 before being shown on CNN and now available on streaming services like HBO Max and Amazon Prime—Kirkpatrick hopes that it will provide viewers much-needed inspiration. "It's coming out at a time when the country's going through some hard times, and we need reassurance that there is good, genuine leadership out there," Kirkpatrick says. "It's been so gratifying to hear from friends who told me that they started watching and couldn't stop, and that the film is educational and inspiring—with great tunes to boot!"

And rock lovers and film buffs alike may have more chances to enjoy a Thunder Moccasin picture. "I've learned a lot and really had a lot of fun building a movie and telling a good story," Kirkpatrick adds. "As a result of this project, I have been approached by some interesting people. If the right project were to come along, I'd certainly entertain it." ■

—Christopher Browner '12

# Guarding NHL Players' Health, Safety & Rights

IF YOU WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO watch Maria Dennis '84 on the ice, you would have seen her blazing passion for the game of hockey. That Dennis is female has never been an obstacle in her hockey career. She holds the record for most goals at her alma mater, Yale University, for both women and men, with 96 goals in her four years in New Haven.

"I love everything about hockey—the skating, the speed, the creativity of the game," she says. "It's like a chess board: there are three potential moves, all in the blink of an eye. Plus I love the camaraderie and being part of the team on and off the ice."

"When I stepped on the ice, everything went away, all those fears, insecurities. I was having so much fun and hopefully it carried over off the ice. I really appreciate hockey for what it did for me," she says. "I still play—I won't give it up. It's great exercise, and it's great for my mental state. I've made a lot of good friends through hockey."

These days, Dennis continues her love affair with hockey, now as director of player health and safety at the National Hockey League Players' Association. An attorney, she also acts as associate counsel for the NHLPA. Dennis is responsible for ensuring that players are protected and as safe as possible in a game of sudden crashes and falls. She is also called upon to represent players facing discipline.

"The NHLPA is in a unique position of representing both the player who was hit and the player facing suspension. My job is to make sure that the player facing discipline gets a fair hearing under the terms

Right: Maria Dennis '84, director of player health and safety and associate counsel for the National Hockey League Players' Association, in her office in Toronto.



Above: Dennis with NHL officials after playing a pickup game last September while inside the Edmonton Bubble for the NHL Playoffs.

of the collective bargaining agreement."

Dennis sits on a number of committees overseeing the general health of players, ensuring that each team has adequate medical staffing during games, and reviewing safety concerns about rinks. For example, after a player was injured crashing into a stanchion, she was on the team that helped redesign and reinforce padding and made other changes to make the rink safer for players and fans alike.

What is really exciting for Dennis is her work improving options for women and girls to play hockey. She is the chair of the NHL/NHLPA Female Hockey Advisory Committee, where she is hoping to make sure young girls and women with "goals" in mind can experience all the opportunities and benefits the sport provides, according to an article about her in the *Yale Alumni Magazine*.

"There are three pillars we are working on. One, we need to highlight female role models," she says. "If little girls see

very successful hockey player women, they will think, I could grow up and be that too. Second, how do we attract, develop, and keep girls in the sport? Learn to Skate programs are great. Now what do we do to keep them in? And third, how does the NHL market to girls and women?"

The league has made grants available to entities seeking to encourage girls to pick up a stick and step on the ice, as well as increasing the representation of women in off-ice positions with the league. Several female hockey Olympians now serve in the front offices and behind the scenes with the NHL.

"That program has been hugely successful," she says, as have fan promotions to get women in the rink. "Hockey is for everyone... and we're trying to make sure that it is."

Because Dennis was a member of the 1990 World Championships hockey team, she qualified under federal law to sit on the board of USA Hockey, and then she had the "good fortune" to join the U.S. Olympic Committee board of directors from 1991 to 2001, as well serving on as the board of USA Hockey during that same time.

The pandemic has meant new challenges for both players and teams, she says.

Dennis was named by *Sportsnet* as

one of the "25 most powerful women in hockey" for her work on how hockey could safely return during the pandemic.

"It always comes down to money. It's a constant struggle for owners, who are responsible for putting up the operation costs, and the players who do all the work. They have to be compensated appropriately," she says.

The solution? "Players and owners split revenue 50-50. As a sport we are collectively working to grow the industry, which is obviously good for both the players as well as the owners. Hockey is played internationally, so there are certainly opportunities to grow the game here in North America and globally as well. During the pandemic we knew we all were going to struggle, but we worked together to get the games back on the ice successfully. We're still working together on health and safety protocols as the situation with COVID changes, with the ultimate hope that things will eventually get back to normal."

What the future of hockey post-pandemic will be, she's not sure. But one thing's for certain: "I love my job. It's my calling and my passion." ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84

“Connecticut is a...different animal than more rural states. It’s much more densely populated, and farming isn’t a big identity of the state the way it is in northern New England. It’s a real challenge to find farmland that’s affordable and available here.”

Will O’Meara ’12, owner of Hungry Reaper Farm in Morris, Connecticut, with partner Jill Verzino in a field of winter squash.



believes in and strives to improve. He’s a field agent for Land For Good, a nonprofit assisting farmers and land-owners in farmland access. He’s also the sitting board president of the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance (NCTFA), a chapter of the National Young Farmer Coalition. The NCTFA’s mission is to connect emerging farmers across the state to network, exchange resources, and identity common challenges and opportunities in the agricultural community. “Connecticut is a bit of a different



O’Meara picks a fresh head of lettuce.

animal than more rural states,” O’Meara says. “It’s much more densely populated, and farming isn’t a big identity of the state the way it is in northern New England. It’s a real challenge to find farmland that’s affordable and available here.”

O’Meara emphasizes that this has become an even greater hurdle during the pandemic.

“COVID has absolutely made land in the area more expensive,” he says. “There’s also a constant risk of development in Connecticut. Farmers and developers are typically attracted to the same type of land: flat, not rocky.”

Another difficulty has been building his business during an unprecedented year of uncertainty.

“When COVID entered the picture, Hungry Reaper Farm was still in its infancy,” O’Meara says. “There hasn’t been nearly as much of an opportunity to do wholesale through restaurants, but luckily we’ve been able to pivot and meet a need in local grocery stores, plus increased demand for local food through farmers’ markets.”

O’Meara and his high school sweetheart turned fiancée, Jill Verzino, have had an excellent first year with Hungry Reaper, despite an anxious start. As business partners, they share a passion for providing fresh, nourishing, sustainably grown vegetables to their customers, as well as an interest in equity.

“Historically, obtaining local, organic foods hasn’t been attainable for working-class people with poorer backgrounds,” O’Meara explains. “At Hungry Reaper we’ve incorporated a sliding scale providing CSA shares so that more customers can afford to buy from us. We’ve been overwhelmed by the popular response.”

Going forward, O’Meara and Verzino hope to find a permanent home for their farm, which currently operates on leased land.

“We’d like to expand and feed as many people as possible,” he says. “And until local food evolves from its status as a luxury item, we hope to become more diverse in our offerings and include staple products like grains and beans.” ■

—Carola Lovering Crane ’07

# Digging In Locally

**WILL O’MEARA ’12 IS THE PROUD** owner of Hungry Reaper Farm in Morris, Connecticut, just a few miles up the road from Taft. He cofounded the small-scale vegetable farm with his fiancée in 2020, after nine years of experience farming in New England.

O’Meara got his start in the agricultural industry in 2011, when he was 17. His biology teacher at Taft, Carly Borken, noticed how well O’Meara responded to hands-on work and suggested he spend the summer as a farmhand at Waldingfield Farm in Washington, Connecticut, where

her husband Jed, is farm manager.

“It was the ideal summer job, one where I could be around young people and work outside every day,” O’Meara says.

O’Meara, who attended Taft as a day student, spent each summer through college at Waldingfield. Halfway through his degree, he transferred from the University of Southern California to the University of Massachusetts’ Stockbridge School of Agriculture, in Amherst.

“My program at USC focused mainly on marine ecology,” he explains. “And the fall of my junior year, when I was

back east for Thanksgiving break, I realized that this program at Stockbridge would be a much better fit for my interests and that I’d benefit from transferring schools even at that stage.”

O’Meara managed the UMass Student Farm, and went on to graduate with a B.S. in sustainable food and farming in 2017. He then happily returned to Waldingfield to fill the assistant farm manager position, until leaving to start Hungry Reaper.

O’Meara’s work in farming is clearly much more than a job. It’s his passion, his calling, and an industry he wholeheartedly



Above: O’Meara in the hothouse with Hungry Reaper’s celery seedlings.

Right: Hungry Reaper Farm’s tomato sauce made with their heirloom tomatoes.



# Teaching the Universal Language

“THE ONLY PLACE THAT I HAVEN’T worked is Antarctica, and that’s just because those darn penguins don’t take Venmo,” jokes Bob Anderson ’82, who has spent the past 20 years crisscrossing the globe teaching the power of emotional intelligence. Along with his wife, Heather, Anderson runs Leading Challenges, which helps organizations and individuals grow and succeed. “To put it simply,” he says, “we’re here for anybody whose current level of social-emotional functioning gets in the way of them being all they were meant to be.”

When he arrived at Taft, Anderson never anticipated the impact the school would have on him. “I don’t want to know my life without Taft,” he says. “The idea of service wasn’t just a Latin motto, it was harnessed and demonstrated every day.” He carried the spirit of *Non ut sibi* with him to Norwich University, the nation’s oldest private military college, and then into the United States Army between 1986 and 1991.

“People say that I lived a lifetime in five years in the military. I stuck my hand up for every deployment,” he continues. “I was stationed in South Korea in the Demilitarized Zone, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Israel, Germany, Canada, and in Iraq and Kuwait during the Gulf War. I met so many people who were different than I was, and it made me so interested in the world.”

After being discharged from the Army, he pursued a career in education, attending Harvard’s Graduate School of Education and teaching in private schools on both coasts. But as he and Heather prepared

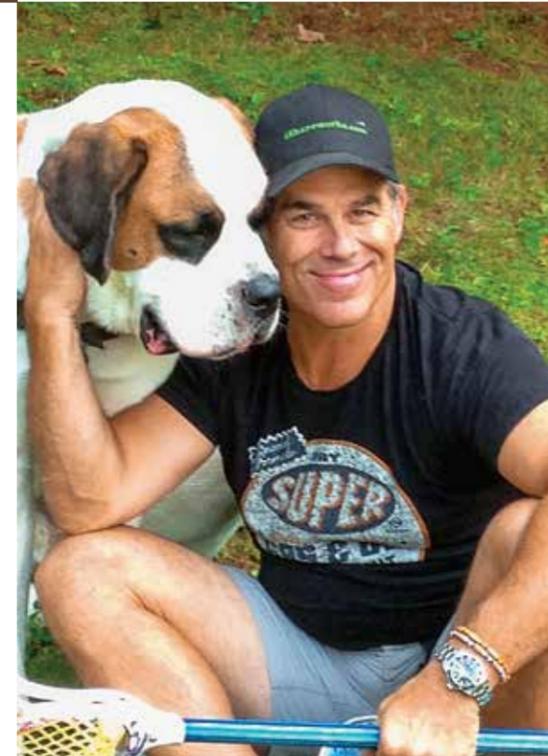
Right: Bob Anderson ’82, cofounder of Leading Challenges and 1Hero Sports, which help clients grow and succeed through the power of emotional intelligence.



“I don’t want to know my life without Taft. The idea of service wasn’t just a Latin motto, it was harnessed and demonstrated every day.”

Left: Anderson coaching girls’ lacrosse at Stowe High School in Vermont.

Below: Anderson with a friend.



to welcome their first child, they were also ready to realize another dream. “We wanted to start our own company and use emotional intelligence to guide people,” he recalls, “so in 1999, we founded Leading Challenges.” Anderson approached this new endeavor as he does everything else—with a hunger for knowledge. “Anytime we wanted to learn anything, we pounded the doors of the scientists and authors—at Yale, MIT, you name it.”

Anderson considers himself an “applied researcher,” taking what he learns from academics and translating it into useful tools for his clients. “When something isn’t working at an organization, be that leadership struggles or problems within the team, we get brought in like an orthopedist. We set the leg and get them back to health,” he explains. “The language of emotional intelligence is universal. Whether I’m with Maasai warriors or in Vancouver with the Canucks [hockey team], or working with a coffee-roasting company out of Brunswick, Maine, it’s the same language.”

Over the past two decades, Leading Challenges has become a leader in the field, training more than 60,000 people each year. And as the company continued to grow, Anderson saw an opportunity to expand their reach. “I was working with a three-time Super Bowl champion whose life was in a shambles. His self-regard

was crumbling every day,” Anderson remembers. “He needed a hero—one hero. Somebody to be that light for him. But it wasn’t about reaching out and trying to emulate somebody; it was about finding that hero within himself.”

Anderson combined his passion for fitness—he has nearly two dozen marathons and ultramarathons under his belt—with the skills that he had honed at Leading Challenges to create 1Hero Sports, which is targeted specifically toward athletes, coaches, and their support systems. “The language is universal, but for some groups, 1Hero serves as a better can opener,” he points out. “For instance, if I work at a school, I do it under 1Hero because they like to learn what athletes are learning.”

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented Anderson with a new set of challenges. “Typically, I would travel two and a half weeks every month, but now, so much of my work has to be done virtually, which just isn’t the same. There’s nothing like learning in person,” he says. Ever the optimist, though, he has found the positives of working remotely. “I’m actually able to have more of an influence. In four days, I can give different presentations for groups in four distinct locations. Under normal circumstances, that would have taken two weeks. I once even woke up at 2 a.m. to fit in an 8 a.m. meeting in Stockholm!”

“I’m grateful that I can keep helping people,” he says. “We’ve been isolated, which is one of the worst things for human beings. We all feel this despair, and for our emotional health, our emotional fitness, this is the exact language that we need right now.” ■

—Christopher Browner ’12

In PRINT



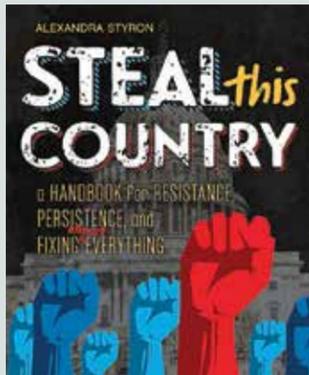
**Do Not Erase: Mathematicians and Their Chalkboards**  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
**Jessica Wynne '90**

“A mathematician, like a painter or poet, is a maker of patterns,” wrote the British mathematician G.H. Hardy. In *Do Not Erase*, photographer Jessica Wynne presents examples of this idea through images of mathematicians’ chalkboards. While other fields have replaced chalkboards with whiteboards and digital presentations, mathematicians remain loyal to chalk for puzzling out their ideas and communicating their research.

Wynne offers more than 100 stunning photographs of these chalkboards, gathered from a diverse group of mathematicians around the world, accompanied by essays from each mathematician, reflecting on their work and processes.

*Do Not Erase* is a testament to the myriad ways that mathematicians use their chalkboards to reveal the conceptual and visual beauty of their discipline—shapes, figures, formulas, and conjectures created through imagination, argument, and speculation.

Wynne is associate professor of photography at the Fashion Institute of Technology. Her photographs are in collections at the Morgan Library & Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *The New Yorker*, and *Fortune*. Wynne is represented by Edwynn Houk Gallery, and she lives in New York City.



**Steal This Country: A Handbook for Resistance, Persistence, and Fixing Almost Everything**  
VIKING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN  
**Alexandra Styron '83**

Inspired by Abbie Hoffman’s classic, *Steal This Book*, Alexandra Styron has created a valuable companion for a generation now becoming aware of the power of citizen activism. Both a practical manual and a call to action, *Steal This Country* speaks to any young person with a passion for social justice and the spirit to make change happen.

Organized into three sections—The Why, The What, and The How—Styron’s book is a primer on what it takes to make a difference in America. The book opens with a personal essay and a look at both civil disobedience and teenage activism through a historic lens. That’s followed by a discussion of several key issues—climate

change, racial justice, women’s rights, immigration, LGBTQIA rights, religious understanding, and intersectionality—complemented by interviews with experts and celebrities, first-person accounts from youth activists, cartoons by award-winning artists, and spotlights on progressive organizations. Knowledge translates to action in the book’s final section with ideas for ways to engage and information on how to do it.

This is a perfect book for older middle-schoolers and teens who care about the planet, the people with whom they share it, and the future.

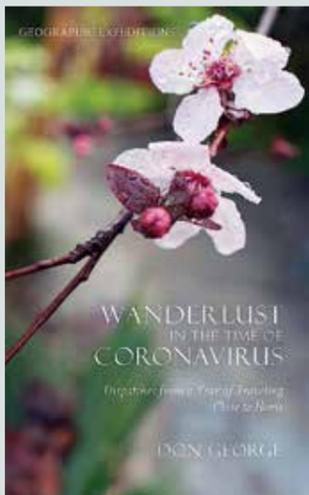
Styron is the author of *Reading My Father* and a novel, *All the Finest Girls*. A graduate of Barnard College and the MFA program at Columbia University, her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, the *Financial Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. She currently teaches memoir writing in the MFA program at Hunter College. She lives with her husband and two children in Brooklyn, New York.

**Wanderlust in the Time of Coronavirus: Dispatches from a Year of Traveling Close to Home**  
GEOGRAPHIC EXPEDITIONS (E-BOOK)  
**Don George '71**

After shelter-in-place orders were announced in March 2020, lifelong travel writer and editor Don George had to cancel 18 scheduled weeks of travel to eight countries. In their place, he began to write about what he was doing in his daily life to keep his wanderlust alive and how the pandemic was affecting his beloved travel industry. Later, as restrictions eased, his writings expanded to include accounts of day-trip adventures to the Bay Area’s iconic attractions and the lessons he was learning by traveling close to home.

Published on the *Geographic Expeditions* blog, these columns elicited such an enthusiastic response that the adventure travel company decided to create an e-book showcasing 16 of the pieces. In George’s words, “This collection presents one travel writer’s attempt to make sense of a year that took us places we never expected to go and taught us lessons we never expected to learn. It’s a heartfelt homage to this unexpected adventure that made us stronger, and closer, along the way.”

George is the author of *The Way of Wanderlust: The Best Travel Writing of Don George* and of *How to Be a Travel Writer*. Currently editor at large for National Geographic Travel, he has been travel editor at the *San Francisco Examiner-Chronicle*, *Salon*, and *Lonely Planet*. In addition to writing and editing, he teaches workshops and leads tours around the world.



# A Conversation Between Mother-Daughter Coauthors

**By Dr. Nikko Peterson Da Paz '83 and Olabisi Thompson '09**

Dr. Nikko Da Paz '83 and her daughter, Olabisi Thompson '09, sat down for a cross-coastal Zoom talk about their new children’s book, *Mommy, What Is Autism?* The book was written by Da Paz and cowritten and illustrated by Thompson. The story being told is based on Da Paz’s two youngest children, Evilasio (Papi in the book) and Emilio (Meely) Da Paz, who are both on the autism spectrum and display different characteristics of autism.

Da Paz is a graduate of Stanford University, has a Ph.D. in health psychology, and is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA). She has worked as an education professional for children with autism both in the classroom and in the home. Da Paz’s private practice, CARES Consulting, exclusively serves families of children with autism in Los Banos, California. Olabisi Thompson is a writer and visual artist as well as marketing director for CARES Consulting.

Above: Dr. Nikko Da Paz '83 and Olabisi Thompson '09, mother and daughter coauthors, with their book, *Mommy, What Is Autism?*  
OLABISI THOMPSON



Da Paz's granddaughters enjoying her book. At left, Symonne Singleton (daughter of her eldest, Nomathemba), and at right, Soleil Lloyd (coauthor Thompson's daughter).  
OLABISI THOMPSON

*Olabisi Thompson:*

**When you came to me about creating this book, you told me it was inspired by a conversation you had with Emilio. How did that conversation start?**

*Dr. Nikko Da Paz:*

Well, it started after Evilasio had a “meltdown.” In the autism world, a meltdown is when an individual on the spectrum is extremely upset and inconsolable. In this state, they might resort to aggressive behavior like hitting others or throwing things, or, if they’re verbal, they might scream insults and/or use foul language. On this day, Evilasio had one of those meltdowns and it was a bit frightening for Emilio. It wasn’t the first time he had witnessed his brother behaving in this way and he really wanted to understand why.

**What did you tell him?**

I explained, as I did in the book, about his brother’s brain. “Inside the brain, there are millions and millions of tiny wires that send messages to the rest of your body. In a brain with autism, sometimes these messages can get mixed up.” In your brother’s brain, when he gets overwhelmed, self-control can be difficult. I let him know that his brother was not doing these things because he was upset with him. He was simply frustrated about something and was having a hard time trying to communicate.

**How has Emilio embraced or been able to process understanding autism since that conversation?**

He has learned to expect that a meltdown might happen. When it does, he usually stays closer to me and his dad until his brother is calm again. He embraces his brother by making a point to include him in family activities. For example, we make gingerbread houses every year around Christmastime. When we start to pull out the supplies and decorations, Emilio automatically says, “Hey, let me go get my brother!” Sometimes, his brother might say, “I don’t want to come,” but then he’ll show up later. That has been Emilio’s way of, one, trying to include his brother and, two, acknowledging that Evilasio sometimes needs a gentle push.

**As his big sister away from home, it’s good to hear that Emilio is responsive to those conversations, and that you are able to find balance with the dynamics at home. And recently, Emilio asked you if he has autism. Tell me more about how that went.**

It was right before his 13th birthday, and his brother had a meltdown. He said, “I know my brother has autism because we’ve talked about that before, but do all people with autism behave this way?” I had to pause because now, he was asking a bigger question about autism. This time, we talked about the main components of autism: difficulties with social interactions, communication, and displaying

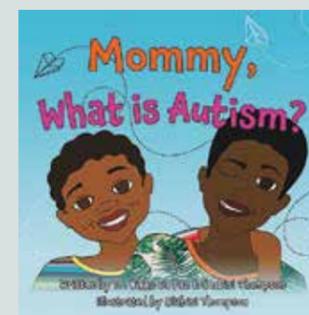
repetitive behaviors. I also talked about the wide spectrum of autism, explaining that there are different variations and combinations of abilities and challenges. He then asked, “Do I have autism?” He had never asked me that before. I immediately said, “Yes.” We talked about his unique challenges in social situations. We also talked about the wonderful gifts and talents that I see in both of my boys. Evilasio is a gifted violinist and a self-taught computer coder. Emilio plays piano and enjoys video animation (that was self-taught as well). He is also very gifted with drawing like you, Olabisi. He has been able to embrace and understand what we now call his unique *style*.

**What were their reactions to Mommy, What Is Autism? and how did they feel about having their story told?**

Evilasio chuckled a bit, especially the part where I talked about him having a meltdown in the store (after Daddy said no, he could not get the toy he wanted). He even said he remembered when he was 4 and he didn’t talk. “Yeah, I was tantruming a lot.” Emilio really liked the illustration you drew of the brain. He also liked seeing the conversation between us played out in the pictures. The way that you captured the moment really stopped time.

**Can you talk a little bit about some impressions of the book from other families and its impact?**

A lot of our CARES families have purchased the book. They have shared that this book was so useful for them because of the child with autism’s siblings. Sometimes, the siblings feel left out and believe their parents give preferential treatment to the child with autism. Being able to read this book to siblings has really helped families explain this to their children. I even had a client who read it to her granddaughter with autism. Her granddaughter was super excited and said, “That’s how my brain works!” Grandma was so happy, she burst into tears. Others have said they benefited from the parent section in the back of the book: “This is a story of a sweet family living with autism. At the end of the story, Dr. Da Paz gives her expert advice about autism, calming down, ideas and intervention, and I really enjoyed it!” Overall, I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback. I am especially appreciative of the outpouring of



**Mommy, What Is Autism?**  
CARES CONSULTING  
**Dr. Nikko Peterson Da Paz '83 and Olabisi Thompson '09**

Papi and Meely are the best of brothers! They enjoy a lot of the same things but they are different too. Meely notices that sometimes, his big brother does things that he does not understand. Meely and Mommy have a heart-to-heart and she explains, “Your brother has autism.” Nikko Da Paz offers a simple way to explain autism to young children while also providing parents with behavior management tips and tools.

A graduate of Stanford University, Da Paz

support and genuine gratitude for providing a simple way to explain autism, not only to the child with autism, but also to their siblings.

**How is this book a representation of CARES Consulting?**

As you know, I began working with individuals with autism in 1984, while a sophomore at Stanford University. Autism has been a part of our lives, even before your brothers were born. With the perspective of an autism professional and parent, I am creating opportunities for our families to receive quality services and support. To be honest, these families sometimes have an uphill battle getting help for their children. So CARES allows me to be the voice for these parents, working with school districts, psychologists, nurses, and administrators. When I attend the child’s IEPs, my main goal is to help the school understand the parents’ perspective and their true desire for their child to be happy. On our T-shirts it says “Who cares? We do.” CARES stands for Committed to Autism Research and Education Solutions—that’s what CARES is about, offering caring solutions and perspectives to these parents on their journey with autism. And I know what I speak of, because autism *is* my life.

**I just love to see how you can help families break down those barriers and form these bonds and connections. And I really love being a part of that! For my last question, can you comment on what has been your favorite part working with me on this project?**

My favorite part has been sharing creative space with you while providing something meaningful for your brothers. Because you went away to Taft, you weren’t here when we were going through the diagnosis process. And when you would come back for breaks, you were still somewhat unaware of all the challenges and the difficulties we experienced daily. You learned about it, really, from afar. So the most rewarding part of this project, for me, was to share these experiences with you and have deep conversations about our challenges and triumphs with your brothers. I also believe that writing this book with me has brought you closer to your brothers. This has definitely been a labor of love. ■

has worked as an education professional for children with autism both in the classroom and in the home. In addition to holding a Ph.D. in health psychology, Da Paz is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA). From the perspective of a parent of children with autism, Da Paz deeply understands the challenges that caregivers and family members face on a daily basis, and shares her knowledge and experiences with families to help make their paths just a little bit easier.

Thompson is a writer and visual artist with a passion for exploring old narratives and transforming them with love. She is also marketing director for CARES Consulting. Thompson and her daughter, Soleil, live in Atlanta with their dog, Nova. ■



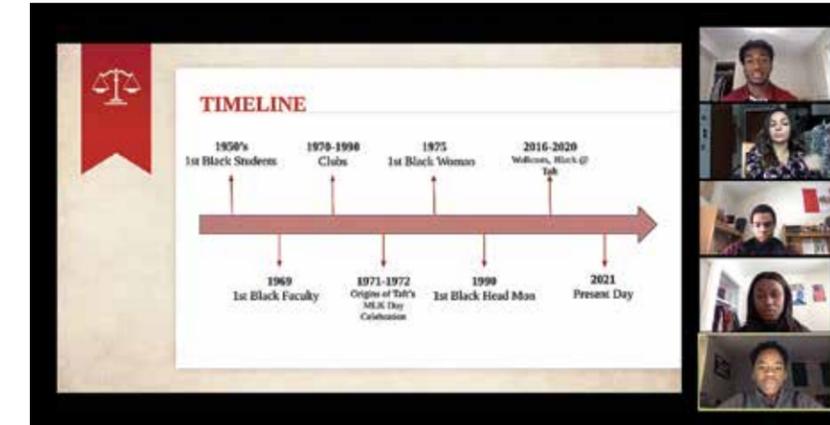
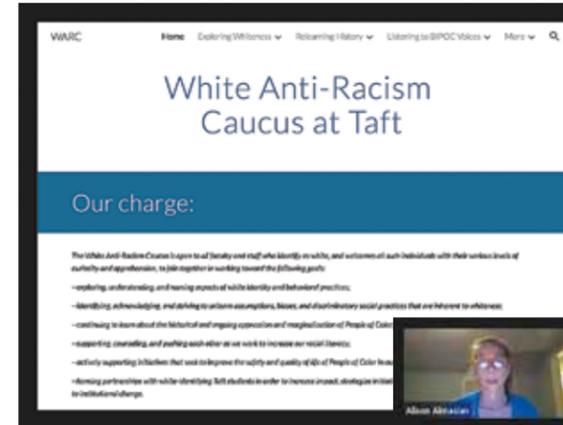
# Building Context, Finding Understanding, Celebrating Joy

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of convenience and comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



MONSTER STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Above left: Members of Taft's White Anti-Racism Caucus (WARC) were among the Black History Month presenters. They spent time defining their role and mission on campus, helping define anti-racism, and leading activities to explore anti-racist concepts.

Above right: Student leaders from Taft's Shades and Mosaic affinity groups studied Taft's own Black history, identifying key events in the school's history and their impact on the community, and on campus life today.

## MLK Day and Black History Month

MLK DAY 2021 MARKED THE START OF A SERIES OF ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS AT TAFT THAT RAN THROUGH FEBRUARY IN RECOGNITION OF BOTH THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

The inaugural program, "Civil Disobedience: Peaceful Protest, Violent Reprisal, and the Ongoing Battle for Racial Justice," was led by Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince, and provided an academic and historical review of elements of the civil rights movement, public acts of civil disobedience, and violence within them, both in the more distant and recent past. Prince helped define civil disobedience and revisited historical events, including Project C desegregation activities in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963; the March on Washington in the summer of 1963, where Dr. King delivered his famous (and partially improvised) "I Have a Dream" speech; and the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965.

"I hope this will be helpful as you think about acts of civil disobedience you see moving forward," Prince told the Taft community, whose members gathered in their advisory groups to view the session. "And that you will be able to use this information to contextualize and make sense of acts of civil disobedience."

For the remainder of January throughout February, students gathered in advisory

groups, primarily during Community Time (formerly Morning Meeting), to hear from speakers and panels, and to explore and process a wide range of topics.

### WARC

Last summer, white faculty and staff at Taft came together to form the White Anti-Racism Caucus (WARC).

"We are here because we're invested in working against bigotry and oppression in all forms and to correct disparities in public life," explained WARC member and Director of College Counseling Alison Almasian '87. "We do this because we know all people benefit from living in a free, fair, and equitable society."

WARC worked with advisors to lead students through a series of activities that allowed the community to reflect on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work Taft has engaged in this year, including implicit bias training and activities, consideration of racist and volatile language, intersectionality, and privilege. The group also worked to identify "concrete actions each member of our

community can take to make our campus safer and more welcoming," with an emphasis on interrupting microaggressions.

### Shades and Mosaic

The leaders of Shades and Mosaic, Taft's Black and Latinx male and female affinity groups respectively, kicked off Black History Month with a well-researched and informative presentation on Taft's Black history, from Taft's first Black faculty member and student, to the first Black female student and monitors. The review covered events through the present, including recent student sit-ins and walkouts intended to bring attention to both national events and what it means to be Black at Taft.

"Ultimately, we want not only to celebrate all of the accomplishments of Black people and those of color at Taft, and Taft's steps to make our campus a more inclusive environment, but also to shed light on the room we have for improvement," said Mosaic leader Loren Lacruz '21. "As a student body, we can do much more to support marginalized communities academically and beyond."



Top left: Dr. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. during his virtual Community Time talk with the Taft community.

Top middle and right: Admissions Officer Shavar Bernier and student Jada Dawkins '23 were among those sharing personal reflections during the month's culminating program, Celebrations of Black Joy.

Above left: Ronald Ceesay '23 is one of the leaders of Taft's Black Alliance Club, which held a Music and Poetry Night in recognition of Black History Month. The event showcased the talents of Taft students and faculty while celebrating Black composers through a range of exceptional performances.

Above right: Taft's Black Alliance Club hosted a creative session during which students made educational posters featuring important African American figures and concepts. The posters hung in Main Hall and around campus to amplify awareness and learning during Black History Month.

Opposite page: Students in John O'Reilly's Intermediate Painting and Drawing class created grisaille portraits of civil rights leaders. Jonah Mehler '23 selected Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., noting that "he is really core in the history of the civil rights movement, a powerful voice in the call for Black equality and justice," and "an inspiration to us all."

### Dr. Eddie S. Glaude Jr.

Author and thought leader Dr. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., who is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and Chair of the Department of African American Studies at Princeton University, returned to Taft in February to continue the Black History Month conversation. In his talk, titled "Race & Democracy: America Is Always Changing, But America Never Changes," Glaude examined "where we've been, what we've done, and who we might aspire to be as a country today, and how all this is bound up with the vexing history of race and democracy in America," with the goal of understanding "what we need to do to imagine a new America."

"In so many ways America faces a moral reckoning," Glaude told the Taft community, "a fundamental challenge to

what we mean by 'we the people.' And it begs the question, How might we think about Black history in this context?"

### Celebrations of Black Joy

Black History Month closed with the Taft community coming together for a two-part celebration of Black Joy. "The opportunity to talk about Blackness. The opportunity to talk about Black history—to talk about the current Black context in a way that was centered around joy, and happiness, and love, and laughter just sounded so great to me," Prince told the community. He defined Black Joy as "the audacious action of creating happiness, love, laughter, and more in conditions that have always made it difficult to do so." The first part of the celebration looked at broad

and scholarly descriptions and examples of Black Joy in history and in society. That afternoon, Taft celebrated moments of Black Joy within our own community, from the recollection of joyful childhood memories and family and cultural traditions and reflections, to moments of athletic achievement and celebrations of pure joy through movement. Students and faculty members submitted video stories and performances, which were compiled into a celebratory collection, which can be viewed at [bit.ly/BlackJoyTaft](https://bit.ly/BlackJoyTaft).

Taft's celebration of Black History Month permeated all aspects of community life, extending beyond the formal Community Time programs. The Black Alliance Club

held a Music and Poetry Night coffeehouse event, honoring Black composers through a range of exceptional performances. They also hosted an art event, where students gathered to create educational posters featuring important Black figures in history and exploring educational concepts, and welcomed motivational speaker and author Cedric Thorbes for a virtual community conversation.

Activities continued in the classrooms, as well: John O'Reilly's art class created large black and white portraits of civil rights leaders to display in Taft's halls, while the English Department welcomed Black contemporary poets Teri Ellen Cross Davis and Hayes Davis, who connected with students through virtual in-class writing workshops and an evening reading. Multi-award-winning

poets and spouses Teri and Hayes Davis often explore issues of inequality and racial injustice in American society through their vast body of work. During their time with Taft students, they also examined works from Black poets Cornelius Eady and Patricia Smith.

"Our efforts to amplify the voices and experiences of Black people cannot end with our formal celebration of Black History Month," noted Prince. "If we are to be the school we aspire to be, if we are to live up to our DEI statement, if we are to serve others in the way that we hope to per our school motto, if we are to be leaders in our school and in the world, this work must be ongoing—it cannot be confined to 28 days over the course of a year. We must be advocating for social justice anywhere and everywhere that we can." ■

# Beyond Taft

## Giving Voice to Global Issues

IN ADDITION TO THE BLACK HISTORY MONTH COMMUNITY TIME (FORMERLY MORNING MEETING) EVENTS AND SPEAKERS, TAFT STUDENTS CONSIDERED A RANGE OF GLOBAL ISSUES DURING SESSIONS WITH INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST AND PARTNERS IN HEALTH FOUNDER DR. PAUL FARMER, PHOTOGRAPHER ALISON WRIGHT, AND THE INTERFAITH PANEL KNOWN AS "THE THREE AMIGOS."

↓ **Dr. Paul Farmer** is a world-renowned infectious disease specialist, medical anthropologist, and chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. He is also a cofounder of Partners in Health, a

nonprofit organization built on the belief that quality health care is a universal human right, and dedicated to fighting injustice by providing care first to those across the globe who need it most. The organization's story is told in the film *Bending the Arc*. Farmer's

February talk focused on COVID-19.

"If there's ever been a clarion call for massive change, it's now," said Farmer. "As of this week, countries with 13 percent of the world's population have bought about half of all available vaccine stock. And that will



PH.ORG



remain true at least until the summer. How can we address such terrible disparities in the world? In 2003, George Bush launched a worldwide AIDS relief program. Pediatric HIV in Rwanda was wiped out in a decade, financed by an aid program, then by a government program, showing us that one's relative financial standing does not determine whether you have access to a treatment.... It is up to us as citizens to put pressure on manufacturers, governments, and international bodies to say our goal is the equitable distribution of the COVID vaccine. Even if we don't do that out of generosity, we need to remember what happens when a patch of the world is not vaccinated for something."

↑ **Alison Wright** is an inspirational speaker, author, *National Geographic* photographer, and *National Geographic* Traveler of the Year who visits Taft each year. In March she talked about her latest book, *Human Tribe*, which reflects her lifelong quest, she says, "for finding this thread

of our universal human connection.

"After being to about 160 countries," Wright said, "I find that no matter how different we look, we're really the same the world over in that we all want to love and be loved; we all want a little bit of money in our pockets—enough to get by; we want safety and education for ourselves, our friends, our family, health for our children."

### → **The Three Amigos**

are an interfaith trio of local religious leaders who join together to engage in public conversation around spiritual and moral matters. Monsignor Joseph Donnelly of Sacred Heart Church in Southbury, Imam Gazmend Aga of the Albanian American Muslim Community in Waterbury, and Rabbi Eric Polokoff of B'nai Israel in Southbury joined the Taft community in March for a virtual consideration of the meanings and rituals connected with Passover, Easter, and Ramadan.

Said Imam Aga, "This period of time—this extraordinarily different

year—reminds us of two things: One is that we need each other, regardless of who we are or how strong we are, we need each other. The second is a reminder that there will be times in our lives when we won't have the people we need around us. In those times we need to utilize our inner power, what we have in ourselves." ■



Imam Aga



Red Rhino Fund Grants Chair Savannah Love '21 recently announced—via video—the 2021 Red Rhino Fund grant recipients.



Waterbury Reads Co-Director Stephanie Cummings thanked the Red Rhino Fund for ensuring that “even in a pandemic, children have access to books.”

# Non ut Sibi

## Red Rhino Fund Grants Awarded

TAFT'S RED RHINO FUND is an endowed, charitable fund led by a nine-member student board with two faculty advisors. Every year, the board awards grants to nonprofit organizations serving youth in Greater Waterbury.

“Each board member’s passion for social change and philanthropic work is evident in their dedication to the Red Rhino Fund,” notes Fund Chair Annie Segalas '21. “Every year we work together as a team to plan events and raise money to reach our goal of awarding grants to education, literacy, and art programs.”

Operating during a pandemic not only presented challenges for area nonprofits, it made the Red Rhino Fund’s work complicated, as well. Spring Fling, the organization’s largest fundraiser could not happen, and direct work with grant applicants was not possible.

“This year was unlike any other,” says Savannah Love '21, chair of the Red Rhino Fund Grants Committee. “There were many nuances that have not been seen in the Red Rhino Fund’s 13-year existence. Never before have we held virtual site visits, met as a board over Zoom, and not

held our annual Spring Fling. As a board we stepped up to the plate and faced the challenges that 2020 brought. This year we were able to donate \$9,500 to five deserving programs. These organizations promote our mission and provide opportunities for many underserved students in the Greater Waterbury community.”

The grants fund a variety of truly meaningful community programs. Bravo Waterbury!, an intensive music education program under the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra umbrella, is an El Sistema-inspired program that addresses the social, mental, and physical challenges that underserved children face while teaching perseverance. The program has choir, bucket band, instrumental exploratory classes, academic enrichment, nutrition, and movement components. In a video thanking the Red Rhino Fund for the \$2,000 grant, a five-year Bravo member noted that the program offered “a safe environment for kids to come after school and build strong connections with teachers.” The Children’s Community School will start their first community garden with their \$2,000 grant; the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Waterbury will

apply their \$1,500 to help students create works of art in clay; and Waterbury Reads will use their \$2,000 to purchase books.

“The Red Rhino Fund is doing an incredible job ensuring that children have access to books and keep going with literacy,” says Waterbury Reads Co-Director Stephanie Cummings. “Waterbury Reads has been going out into our community and providing free books to the children who want and need them the most. We go into places like PAL, The Gathering parade in downtown Waterbury, the Stay Well health centers, and food distributions to make sure that we can get books to Waterbury children. Your donation is going to ensure that even in a pandemic, children have access to books.”

The Mattatuck Museum also received a \$2,000 Red Rhino Fund grant, which it will use to help fund a large-scale project in partnership with the Waterbury Public Schools. Working with area art and English teachers, the museum will lead virtual tours for students, focusing on their exhibit *A Face Like Mine*. The show features 70 works by Black and African American artists. Students will then create reaction art, to be exhibited at the museum in June. ■

# Continuing Our Work

## Community Safety and Belonging

AS A COMMUNITY, Taft is committed to ensuring that each member has a voice and feels a sense of belonging and security. One of the ways we do that is through our clearly articulated Code of Conduct—our Expectations of Behavior and standards of ethics, integrity, and community norms. Sometimes the words or actions of a community member may fall short of our expectations. In those times, it is especially important that there are options for reporting concerns through channels that feel safe and comfortable. While we hope that every student will feel a degree of comfort in approaching school leaders when they believe violations of policies or standards have occurred, we also offer a system of anonymous reporting: EthicsPoint.

EthicsPoint is a reporting hotline

hosted by a third-party provider. The information provided to EthicsPoint is forwarded to Taft anonymously, with no identifying information of any kind. This is not a 911-type of emergency service; it is a reporting system that allows us to collect and investigate information about conduct violations at our school.

There are posters around campus featuring the EthicsPoint QR code, giving students and other community members immediate access to the EthicsPoint reporting system. Reports can also be made by calling 844-916-2767 or by visiting [tafts.school.ethicspoint.com](https://tafts.school.ethicspoint.com).

Scan the code with your phone to file a report, or call 844-916-2767. More at [tafts.school.ethicspoint.com](https://tafts.school.ethicspoint.com)



## Taft Traditions

# When Potter’s Pond freezes, the fun begins!

FOR A VERY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME IN LATE FEBRUARY AND EARLY MARCH, TAFTIES WERE ABLE TO ENJOY LONG DAYS OF SKATING ON THE POND.





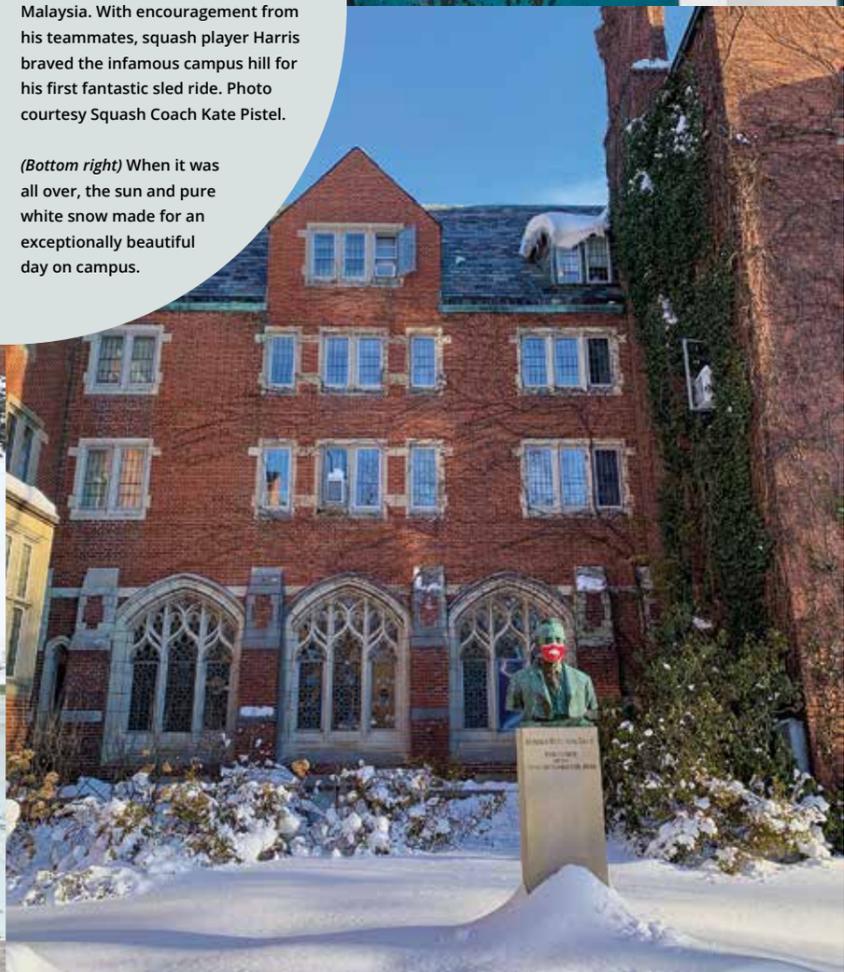
**Snow!**  
 A MAJOR WINTER storm greeted Tafties in early February, bringing beauty, fun “firsts,” and opportunities to live the Taft motto.

*(Top left)* The storm made its way into Watertown and lasted in one form or another for 24 hours. At the end of the day, Head of School Willy MacMullen captured this shot of the storm raging over the Odden Arch.

*(Bottom left)* The heavy snow left many faculty members snowed in. Members of the wrestling team were quick to grab shovels to lend a hand digging out. Not to be served but to serve...

*(Top right)* When the storm passed, the Taft campus was blanketed in more than a foot of snow—a first for Harris Ramlee, a senior from Malaysia. With encouragement from his teammates, squash player Harris braved the infamous campus hill for his first fantastic sled ride. Photo courtesy Squash Coach Kate Pistel.

*(Bottom right)* When it was all over, the sun and pure white snow made for an exceptionally beautiful day on campus.



←

**A Flag on the Play!**  
 STUDENTS IN IVAN SALCEDO'S ADVANCED VIDEO CLASS found a creative way to remind Tafties about the rules for keeping campus safe during a pandemic. You can watch the final product at [bit.ly/TaftRules](https://bit.ly/TaftRules).

**Be Mine?**  
 TIFT'S MONS (AND TIFT DINING) WORKED HARD TO MAKE VALENTINE'S DAY FUN AND SPECIAL for everyone, with festive decorations around campus, a semiformal sit-down Valentine's Day dinner in East and Laube, and delicious cupcakes from Hardcore Sweet Bakery. But their “asking contest” (that saw even Lincoln himself and Potter Gallery's favorite couple sporting asking hearts) awarded winners the opportunity for a more intimate (but safely socially distanced) dinner in Prentice. After dinner? Peter Karasyov '23 brought *The Newlywed Game*—that classic TV game show—to life in Bingham, followed by a Valentine's Day movie. →





### Building Our Community

TAFT ADMISSIONS OFFICERS read more than 1,800 applications from 55 countries and 48 states. Each application—filled with fascinating stories of passion, achievement, and dreams—was reviewed by five individual admissions officers. Applicants received their decisions on March 10.

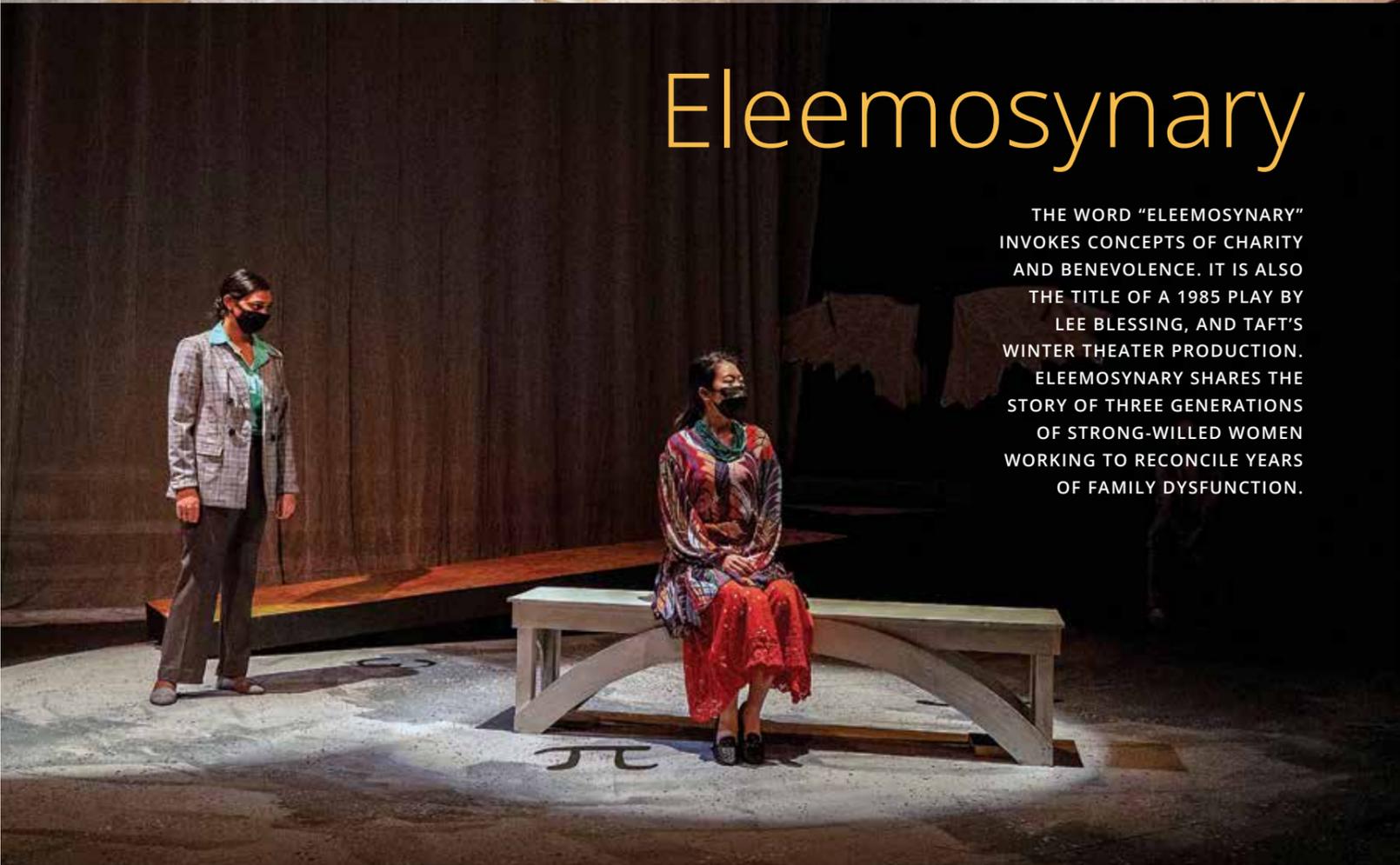
### A Concert to Connect

PANDEMIC PROTOCOLS CALLED FOR CREATIVITY THIS YEAR, and Taft rose to the challenge. With an in-person Winter Family Weekend off the table, the Events and Communications teams built a program filled with live Zoom events and video visits with department and program heads. The live programming included a talk with adolescent psychology expert Dr. Lisa Damour, chats with student groups including the Mons and Red Rhino Fund members, and a gathering for families of color. The week culminated with a Concert to Connect, featuring performances by faculty, students, and alumni. Meghan Spangenberg '20 (in photo) was among the performers. Pre-recorded portions of the concert are available at [bit.ly/CTCTaft21](https://bit.ly/CTCTaft21).



# Eleemosynary

THE WORD "ELEEMOSYNARY" INVOKES CONCEPTS OF CHARITY AND BENEVOLENCE. IT IS ALSO THE TITLE OF A 1985 PLAY BY LEE BLESSING, AND TAFT'S WINTER THEATER PRODUCTION. ELEEMOSYNARY SHARES THE STORY OF THREE GENERATIONS OF STRONG-WILLED WOMEN WORKING TO RECONCILE YEARS OF FAMILY DYSFUNCTION.





# Let the Games Begin!

A COMMITMENT TO COVID-19 PROTOCOLS KEPT BOTH THE TAFT AND LOOMIS-CHAFFEE CAMPUSES HEALTHY ENOUGH TO ALLOW FOR SOME LATE SEASON ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS. IT WAS AN EXCITING WEEKEND FOR OUR ATHLETES, AND FOR FANS, WHO CHEERED ON THE TEAMS FROM A DISTANCE, VIA LIVESTREAM.



# Berghüsli

TAFT'S REMOTE STUDENT GROUP (RSG) IS A STUDENT-LED COLLABORATIVE CONNECTING STUDENTS ENGAGED IN REMOTE LEARNING ACROSS THE GLOBE. THEY ORGANIZE ACTIVITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING ONLINE MOVIES, GAMES, AND, MOST RECENTLY, A PHOTO CONTEST AROUND THE THEME "HOME!" A PANEL OF JUDGES—MUFFIN PRAKITTIPHOOM '21, KEVYN GUNAWAN '23, AND PHOTOGRAPHY TEACHER YEE-FUN YIN—RECOGNIZED A JUDGE'S CHOICE WINNER AND TWO HONORABLE MENTIONS, WHILE THE TAFT COMMUNITY SELECTED A PEOPLE'S CHOICE WINNER. ALICIA MAAG '21 TOOK BOTH OF THE TOP HONORS. *BERGHÜSLI*, HERE, WAS THE JUDGES' TOP SELECTION.



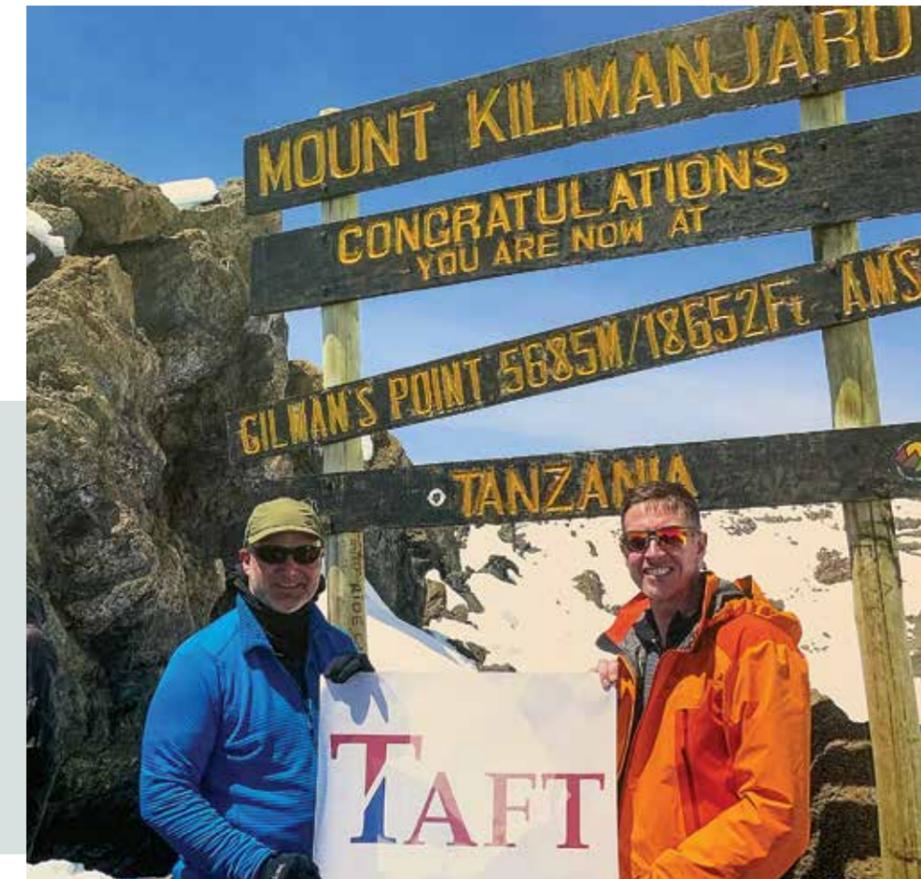
## Local Support

IN FEBRUARY, LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS Lt. Timothy Gavallas and Chief Josh Bernegger joined a dozen officers and civilians from across the state of Connecticut in traveling to Tanzania to scale Mount Kilimanjaro. The Watertown officers did so with support from generous sponsors, including The Taft School. Each officer committed to raising \$10,000 in support of Special Olympics Connecticut, and the "brave Special Olympics athletes who climb their own mountains every day." The group raised more \$162,000.



## Community Health Is a Community Cause

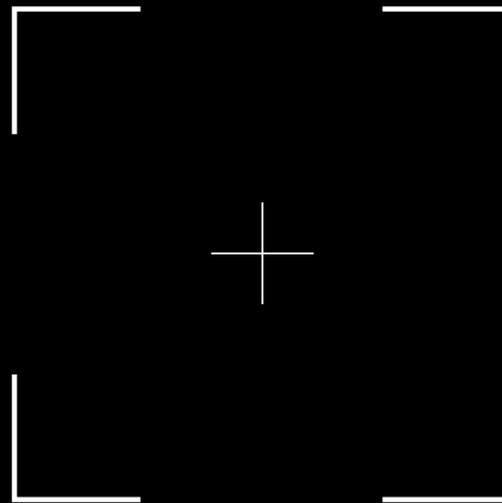
TAFT FACULTY AND STAFF have been doing their part to keep our community safe by rolling up their sleeves for the COVID-19 vaccine. Connecticut educators became eligible to receive the shot on March 1.



HD

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UNSCRIPTED



**How filmmakers Peter Berg '80 and Jason Blum '87 evolved during a year of COVID-19**

*by Neil Vigdor '95*

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# PETER BERG '80



## Few people are less inclined to reach for the pause button than Peter Berg '80.

Even as the global pandemic preempted the regularly scheduled programming of Hollywood, shuttering theaters, delaying premieres, and canceling awards shows, the acclaimed director dove into an array of movie projects, documentaries, and commercial productions with the same bullish energy that has become his calling card.

He directed Super Bowl ads, wrapped up an Amazon documentary on Rihanna, and even wrote a screenplay for Netflix, all while much of the world was coping with isolation from loved ones, friends, and colleagues.

"I certainly have not felt idle or bored in the past year," Berg says.

That's not to say that there haven't been appreciable concessions to COVID-19, public health, and science, from strict testing protocols, to sequestering those on sets in bubbles, to moving preproduction meetings online.

"I, obviously, respect the seriousness of this virus," Berg says. "I do believe that that doesn't mean a complete shutdown."

Not a single cast or crew member involved in the spots that he directed for the Super Bowl tested positive for

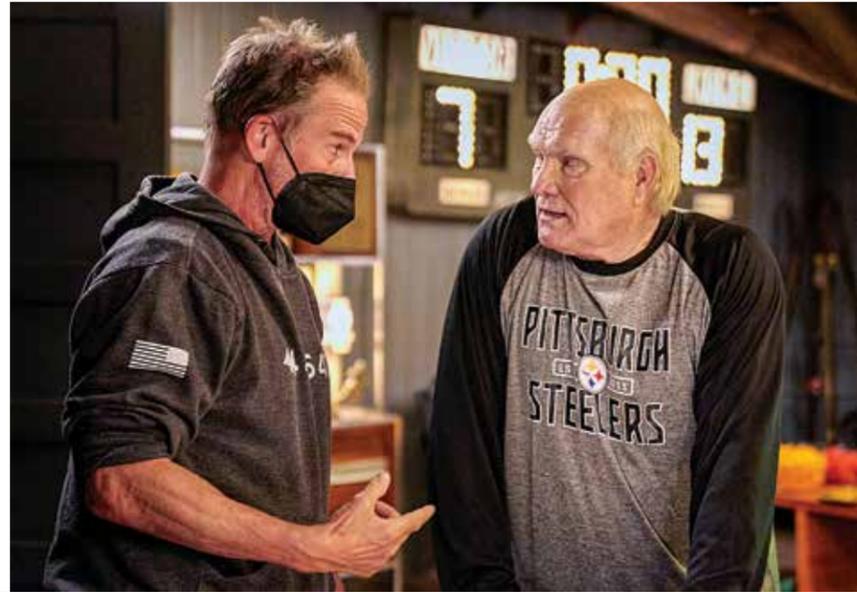
**"[The pandemic] provided me the opportunity to sort of take a moment and think about what I truly wanted to do creatively, and that was to write a script."**

Left: Peter Berg '80 with NFL player Marshawn Lynch (aka "Beast Mode") during the filming of a commercial for Frito-Lay, *'Twas the Night Before Super Bowl*.

# PETER BERG '80

the coronavirus, according to Berg, who orchestrated one of the game's most talked-about commercials for Frito-Lay. The nearly two-minute ad, "Twas the Night Before Super Bowl, was narrated by Marshawn Lynch and featured the Mannings (Peyton, Eli, and Archie), Joe Montana, Jerry Rice, Troy Aikman, Jerome Bettis, Terry Bradshaw, and Deion Sanders. The fun is amped up with the NFL stars dressed in patterned flannel pajamas during a rowdy snack fest. It took three days to film.

It was not the first time that the football-obsessed Berg, who directed the movie *Friday Night Lights* and developed its television series spin-off,



**"There was an immediate need for companies to try to communicate with the world during the pandemic."**

collaborated with NFL stars. He previously directed the *NFL 100* commercial in 2019 for football's centennial.

"Obviously, I love the NFL and getting to spend time with these legends," Berg says.

But Berg can tell you that some of the most compelling narratives intertwining sports and the human condition don't just play out in NFL stadiums in front of tens of millions of spectators watching on television and in the stands.

After George Floyd was killed while in police custody last year, Berg was drawn to Minneapolis North, a public high school where many of the students are Black. The football team there is coached by police officers, a number of whom worked with Derek Chauvin, the former officer who placed his knee on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes and was convicted of murder.

Berg planned to follow the team's

next season at the outset of Chauvin's murder trial. He is also working on a separate documentary project that will focus on police reform and civil rights.

"I felt compelled to try and create something that felt like a response to what I was feeling," says Berg, who graduated from Macalester College in Minnesota. "I felt like I wanted to explore contempt, policing in America, the issues facing police officers, and look at some of these systemic issues facing people and dealing with cops in America."

Telling difficult stories has become a hallmark of Berg's multifaceted career, which has spanned more than three decades as an actor and director.

Early in the pandemic, Berg began reassessing which projects he wanted to pursue, devoting three hours a day to writing a screenplay for Netflix called *The Colonel's Wife*. It was an exercise in discipline for

Berg, who has gained a reputation as a self-starter and intense motivator.

"It provided me the opportunity to sort of take a moment and think about what I truly wanted to do creatively, and that was to write a script," Berg says.

The plot follows the ordeal of U.S. Army Col. James C. Hiett, who once oversaw the government's anti-drug program in Colombia, and his wife, Laurie Anne Hiett, who became a drug smuggler and laundered the profits from her illegal scheme.

Opposite page, top: Berg working with the legendary Terry Bradshaw.

Opposite page, bottom: Berg with actors and his dog, Eso, during the filming of a commercial for Truist Bank.

Above: Berg with Eli, Archie, and Peyton Manning.

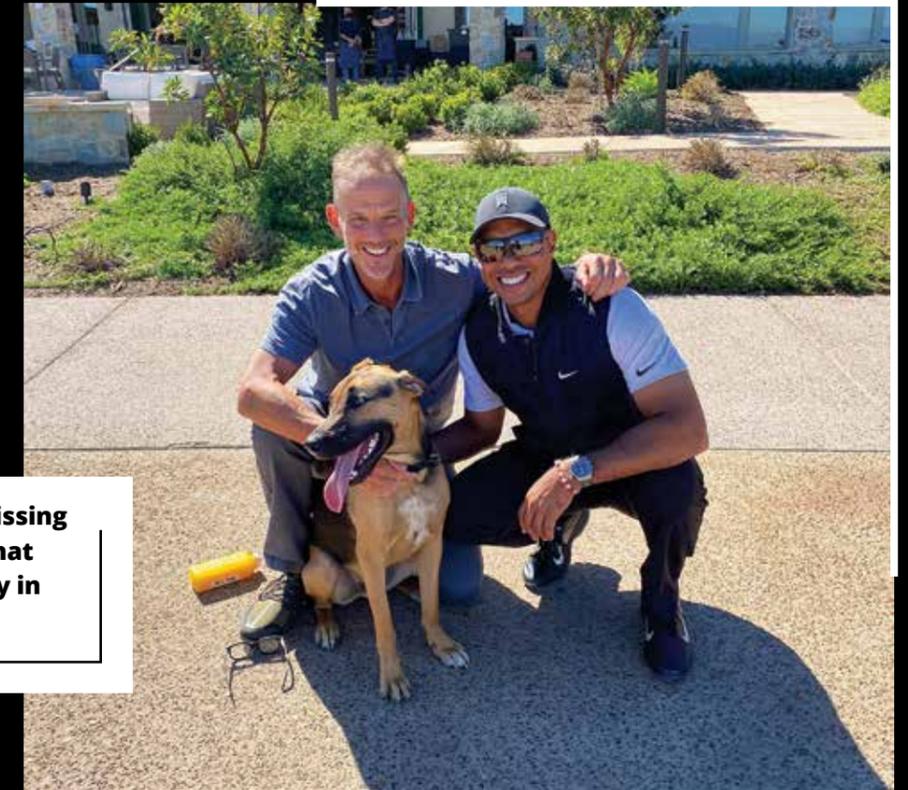
# PETER BERG '80



Opposite page: Berg with actors during the filming of a commercial for Truist Bank.

Right: Berg with his dog, Eso, and Tiger Woods.

**“I think we’re all definitely missing in my business the contact that you normally get, particularly in the prep stage of a project.”**



“He didn’t realize it, but his wife had a cocaine problem,” Berg says. “While he was fighting the war on drugs, she started smuggling drugs back into the U.S.”

The couple’s tribulations were the subject of a *60 Minutes* report. The colonel was sentenced to five months in prison and fired by the Army for failing to report that his wife was smuggling heroin through diplomatic mail. She received a five-year sentence. “They’ve had their lives wiped out, but they still love each other,” Berg says.

Berg’s ability to weave narratives is not lost on the leading brands or streaming services, especially during the pandemic. The companies that have enlisted him to direct commercials have included Ford, Verizon, Walmart, and Amazon, for which he created 20 spots.

“There was an immediate need for companies to try to communicate with

the world during the pandemic,” he says.

As Berg just wrapped up a documentary project for Amazon on Rihanna in late winter, he was set to begin work on a documentary series about the rise and fall of Victoria’s Secret that was picked up by Hulu.

“We were starting to see this distribution before COVID,” Berg says of streaming services. “As these platforms got more prominent, as people started realizing, ‘Wow, I can watch this where I want and when I want—I don’t have to go to a movie theater,’ that was sort of turbocharged.”

Berg has also been directing a series for Discovery Golf featuring Tiger Woods, who spent each episode playing a round of golf with celebrities. Berg was with the golf legend the day before he was injured in a car accident.

“Rough day,” says Berg, who posted

a photo of himself and Woods on Instagram, declaring that the golfer would overcome his injuries.

As the pandemic approached the one-year mark, Berg was admittedly restless—and hardly alone in that sentiment. Hollywood, he says, functions better when it’s together.

“I almost would rather talk on the phone now than Zoom,” he says. “I think we’re all definitely missing in my business the contact that you normally get, particularly in the prep stage of a project.”

So does he envision moviegoers filing into theaters any time soon?

“I think people are probably sick of watching movies in their house,” Berg says. “I know I miss the movie theaters. How much it comes back is hard to say. I don’t think movie theaters are dead. They will always be here.”



Left: Berg (second from left) with Eli, Archie, and Peyton Manning during the filming of a Super Bowl commercial.

# JASON BLUM '87



**Even Hollywood, synonymous with special effects, computer-generated imagery, and matte backdrops, can only take so much WFH—working from home.**

Just ask Jason Blum '87, the Emmy-winning producer and three-time Oscar nominee, for *Whiplash*, *Get Out*, and *BlackKkKlansman*.

There's no substitute for the in-person interactions that are the key ingredients to a successful movie venture, says Blum, the chief executive officer of Blumhouse Productions. The film and television production company, that Blum founded in 2000 which specializes in the genre of horror, helped bring the *Paranormal Activity* franchise and the 2010 movie *Insidious* to theaters.

"I think when you shoot during this time, the quality, it suffers," Blum says, "especially on a movie set. It's all about being close to people. It's very intimate."

From auditions to casting decisions, much of the preproduction process has

**Blum estimates that production has been scaled back by 20 to 40 percent during the pandemic, with the pendulum swinging toward lower-budget projects.**

Left: Producer Jason Blum '87 on the set of *Sinister 2*. ELIZABETH SISSONS/FOCUS FEATURES

# JASON BLUM '87



gone remote during the pandemic. And when the cameras finally did start rolling, the need to conduct frequent testing of cast and crew members drove up costs and production times. Blum estimates that following strict safety protocols can account for 10 to 20 percent of a project's cost.

"The process is just slower," he says. "Time on a movie is very expensive."

In February, filming began in North Carolina on *The Black Phone*, a horror thriller coproduced by Blum that stars Ethan Hawke. The screenplay was adapted from a novella by *New York Times* best-selling author Joe Hill and tells the story of a young boy who is kidnapped and locked in a soundproof basement, where an antique telephone that has long been disconnected starts ringing with calls from the dead.

The movie, a joint project between



**"When the world is back and theaters are open, we'll see an enormous amount of movies, a very crowded marketplace in the first six months,"**



**"A movie set...is all about being close to people. It's very intimate."**

Blumhouse Productions and Universal Pictures, marks the latest collaboration between Blum and director Scott Derrickson. They had previously worked together on the *Sinister* franchise, along with Hawke.

"It's one of the first movies where I'll never go to the set," Blum says. "We don't want to take any chances."

Blum can attest to the relentless

Opposite page, top: Producer Jason Blum and director Leigh Whannel on the set of *The Invisible Man*. MARK ROGERS/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Opposite page, bottom: Film director David Gordon Green, horror icon John Carpenter, Miramax executive Bill Block, and producer Jason Blum on the set of *Halloween*. RYAN GREEN/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Above: Producer Jason Blum, star Betty Gilpin, and director Craig Zobel on the set of *The Hunt*. PATTI PERRET/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

nature of the coronavirus. In November, he contracted the virus, though he says his symptoms were mild. "I was lucky," he says.

Many people in the motion picture and television industry have made the calculated decision to try to wait out the pandemic for projects that they had been planning. That was evident during Hollywood's awards season, when some marquee events like the Golden Globes were downsized with a combination of in-person and virtual festivities.

"I think it's weird," Blum says. "Some movies that might have come out and been eligible were held. I definitely think it's muted. It's definitely not the same."

The awards season did not lose its luster, though.

Blum was an executive producer of the Showtime miniseries *The Good Lord Bird*, for which Hawke was nominated for best performance by an actor in a limited series. Hawke played the abolitionist John

Brown in the historical drama, which was based on the James McBride novel of the same name that won a National Book Award for Fiction. The plot follows the travails of Henry Shackleford, an enslaved boy whom Brown mistakes for a girl and bestows the nickname Onion as he joins Brown's army for its raid on Harpers Ferry.

The collaboration between Blum and Hawke, who are close friends, has been a fruitful one. In 2013, the actor starred in *The Purge*, a micro-budget dystopian thriller that grossed nearly \$90 million worldwide. Hawke reprised his role of a security system salesman in the final episode of the television spin-off series on USA Network in 2019. *The Forever Purge*, the fifth and final installment of the film franchise, is expected to be released in theaters this summer, when Blum is cautiously optimistic moviegoers will return to the cinema.

# JASON BLUM '87

Blum estimates that production has been scaled back by 20 to 40 percent during the pandemic, with the pendulum swinging toward lower budget projects.

"There's a lot of unscripted television being shot," he said. "Theatrical movies are almost nonexistent."

Although streaming services have become a dominant platform for many notable projects, Blum says it is impossible to fill the void of traditional box-office bonanzas. "You can't replicate the monetizing of a theatrical movie on streaming," he says. "You can't even get close."

Blum says getting to spend more time with his two children has been one of the upsides of the pandemic. Before the global health crisis, "I did a ton of travel," he says, describing the life of a movie producer.

Blum is expecting a frenzy for Hollywood as countries vaccinate more and more of the world's population.

"When the world is back and theaters are open, we'll see an enormous amount of movies, a very crowded marketplace in the first six months," he says. ■

—Neil Vigdor '95 is a reporter for The New York Times.



**"You can't replicate the monetizing of a theatrical movie on streaming. You can't even get close."**



Above: Producer Jason Blum on the set of *The Invisible Man*, talking with star Elisabeth Moss.  
MARK ROGERS/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Right: Director M. Night Shyamalan and producer Jason Blum on the set of their film *Glass*.  
JESSICA KOURKOUNIS/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Opposite page: Executive producer Xavier Marchand and producer Jason Blum on the set of *Sinister 2*.  
ELIZABETH MORRIS/FOCUS FEATURES





# Dr. Paul Ehrlich '62 and his work as a New York City allergist-immunologist

*by Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84*

Above: Dr. Paul Ehrlich '62 at work at NYU's Bellevue Hospital.

Left: Bellevue Hospital, the oldest city hospital in the U.S. and where Ehrlich did his training and now works; pictured is the original entrance that was preserved during renovations to the buildings.

The COVID pandemic has impacted Dr. Paul Ehrlich '62 in many ways. As an allergist practicing in New York City, he recognized that the virus could affect the patients he treated in particularly terrible ways.

What he didn't know when the pandemic began was that the virus would infect him and take the life of his wife, Avis Alexander, in December 2020. He and his four adult children are still dealing with the grief of the loss of his wife.

*"I definitely think the vaccine is doing what it should be doing. We've had a lot of success at NYU."*

# Confronting

# the Pandemic



Ehrlich, who occasionally suffers from “brain fog” since getting COVID-19 last fall, has otherwise recovered, and he continues, at 77 years old, to teach interns and medical residents as clinical assistant professor of pediatrics at New York University School of Medicine and to treat patients at Bellevue Hospital. “I will say that my health issues have helped me to be a better physician, albeit at a reduced pace,” he says.

Ehrlich received his bachelor’s degree from Columbia University and earned his medical degree at New York University. He did his post-graduate training at Bellevue Hospital at NYU in pediatrics and at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in allergy and immunology, and is board certified in pediatrics and allergy and immunology.

He is a fellow in the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, and the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. In addition to NYU, Ehrlich has been on the staff of Beth Israel Medical Center and New York Eye and Ear Infirmary. He is medical advisor and founder of the Parents of Asthmatic and Allergic Children Support Group in New York.

He is coauthor of many scientific articles as well as the book *Asthma Allergies Children: A Parent’s Guide* and the website with the same name.

A Navy veteran, Ehrlich was a colleague of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease

expert. He said he appreciates the job Fauci is doing leading the nation’s COVID efforts.

“The approach to COVID at the present time has finally gotten on track here in New York City,” he adds. Ehrlich said the early days of the pandemic, when the city was the virus’s epicenter in the spring of 2020, were challenging. But now that the vaccines have begun to roll out across the country, he’s pleased with what he’s seeing in term of compliance—at least in New York City. He cautioned, however, against the premature reopening of states since the nation has not reached “herd immunity” yet and may never do so.

“The governor in Texas is absolutely [foolish],” Ehrlich says of the leader of the first state to completely open in March. “I’m very annoyed by him. Here in New York City, people are very, very good. I take the subway, and it’s not loaded with people but everybody’s masked. People are very good. If they’re willing to do it in New York City, then other people should [be willing to] do it too.”

He says that the nation could go back into lockdown if the vaccines aren’t able to protect people from the virus variants. But he’s optimistic, based on what he’s seen so far.

“I definitely think the vaccine is doing what it should be doing. We’ve had a lot of success at NYU. Here in New York City, we’ve been OK. The problem is the variations of the virus, and New York, being what it is, people are coming in from every place,” he says. “Hopefully as things move on, we will start to get coverage for these variants.”

Also concerning is the question of whether fully vaccinated people can continue to spread the virus or whether the vaccine will mean the virus can’t find a host in a vaccinated person. He urges people to continue to wear masks.

“People may cough and have it in their throat and pass it on,” he says. “It could still cause the problem.”

A bright spot in the epidemic is the relatively lower number of children who have become seriously ill with the virus. Ehrlich specializes in treating pediatric asthma and allergy patients, and he said he’s been pleased that fewer of the stricken are children.

He has been chosen by *New York Magazine* as the top practicing pediatric allergist in Manhattan every year over the last 12 years.

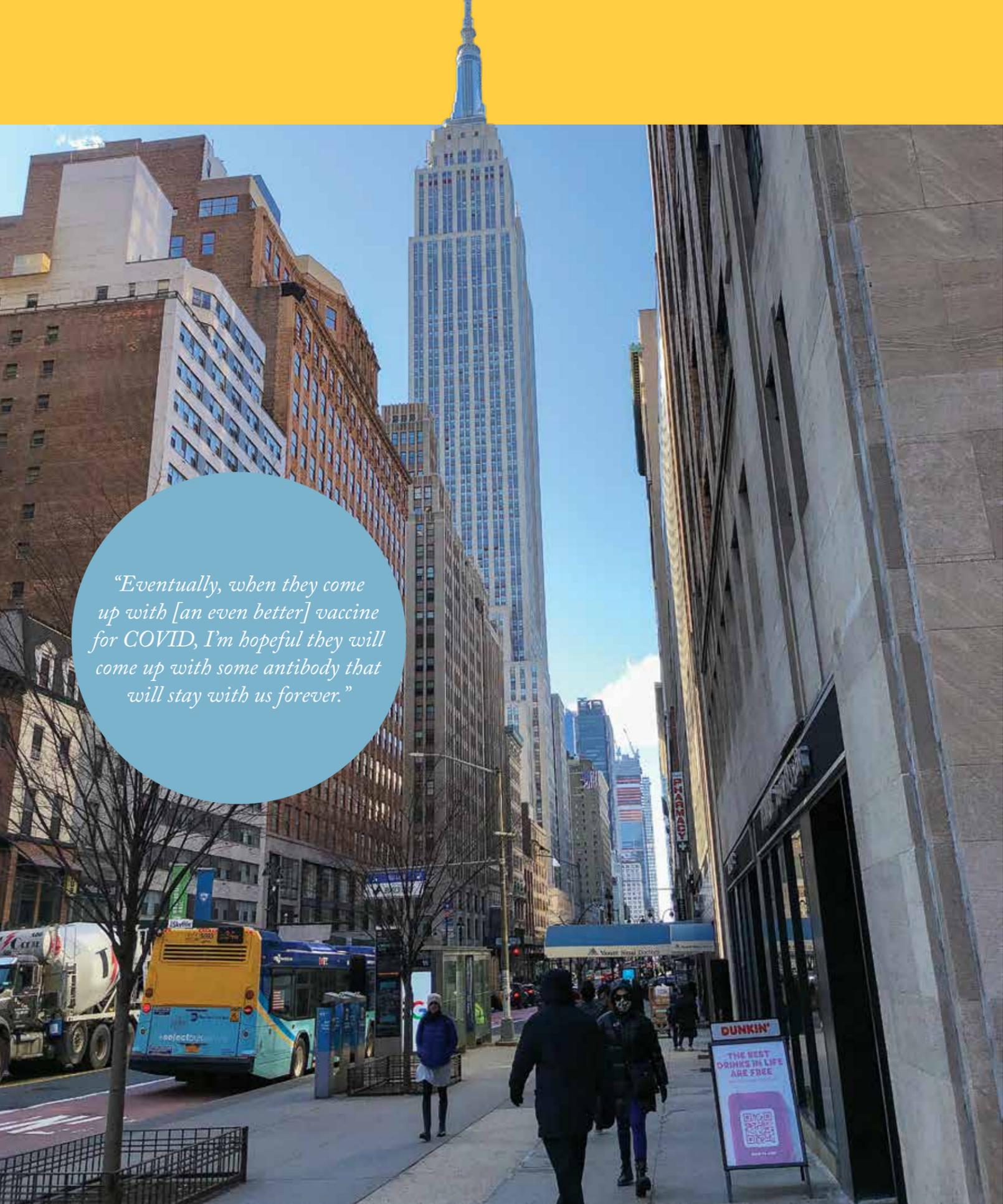
“Allergists are now taking care of a lot more patients with acute bronchial asthma, allergic rhinitis, eczema, and immune deficiencies,” he says. “We do

Left: Avis Alexander (when younger), Paul Ehrlich’s wife, who passed away in December 2020 due to a COVID-related condition.

Right: The very vacant Times Square subway at 9:15 a.m. in March 2020, at the start of the pandemic.



*“People have to really understand this is not some sort of easy thing and you take a medication and it goes away. People have to understand and not think, Oh I got the virus and it will go away.”*



*“Eventually, when they come up with [an even better] vaccine for COVID, I’m hopeful they will come up with some antibody that will stay with us forever.”*

Left: A view of the Empire State Building from 35th Street, where Ehrlich has his office.

Above: A group of Ehrlich’s friends from Taft Class of ‘62 (nicknamed the Gang of Four) often get together for dinner in NYC (as in this past photo): from left, David Forster, Ehrlich, James Jacobson, and Geoff Mayo.



have a lot of things with which to treat the patients and care has been a lot easier. Bronchial asthma used to require the use of a lot of cortisone, but over the last four years, they’ve come up with a variety of medications that work...so that cortisone is not necessary.

“I’m very pleased that very few of these patients, before COVID, were hospitalized, and so I did have a lot of free time on my hands,” he says. “I really have a need to go to the hospital and see patients [there], but once [the pandemic] started a year ago we had a lot more COVID patients whom I saw on an outpatient basis.”

The coronavirus has thrown his medical specialty into high relief as scientists study how the body reacts to the virus that’s invaded it. Serious immune reactions can cause long-term damage to the lungs and the heart, which is what happened to Ehrlich’s wife, who died of a COVID-related heart condition.

“People have to really understand this is not some sort of easy thing and you take a medication and it goes away,” he says. “People have to understand and not think, Oh I got the virus and it will go away. Look at Avis and me. Hers involved a cardiac issue. This is a bug that can take on a look that makes it difficult to get rid of. Steroids cut down [on symptoms] and make them not as hard on your system. But your lungs look like hell after a while.”

Ehrlich says he’s pleased that the country has begun vaccinating adults against the virus.

“When I was born there were no vaccinations,” he says. Ehrlich’s father, who was a friend of Dr. Jonas Salk, the vaccine researcher who developed the polio vaccine, was a pediatrician. His children lived for a time in a space that also served as the older Ehrlich’s office. “When I was a kid, my crib was in the corner of the examination room—all day long kids would come in with measles,” Ehrlich says. “When they finally got the measles vaccinations, my younger brothers got them, but my father said you don’t need those shots because you’ve had the exposure with all the kids who came in. Last spring, we were hoping to go to India for our nephew’s wedding. I checked my antibody levels—I had held those measles antibodies for 75 years.

“Eventually, when they come up with [an even better] vaccine for COVID, I’m hopeful they will come up with some antibody that will stay with us forever,” he says. “When they have something really good, we’ll give it to children. We’re right now in the very beginning. They will come up with something that will stay with them for a good long time. We hope.”

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84 is a freelance writer living in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Looking  
**BACK**

# In It for the Long Run

There are several sports that have been played here on campus for more than 100 years: football, baseball, golf, hockey, and track. Taft's first track team ran in the spring of 1905, 116 years ago. I imagine those 13 young men had no idea how the size of the team (and the school) would grow.

By spring 1965, there were 61 athletes between the varsity and JV teams. The spring of 1972 at Taft saw its first three girls run in exhibition races. The track teams continued to grow, and the 2005 girls' and boys' teams combined for a total of 77 athletes.

And this year, despite the hurdles of the past year, track athletes are at it again, doing what they love to do on Taft's Weaver Track.

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

1. Four 1965 runners ready to go.
2. A May 2018 girls' meet at Taft's Weaver Track.
3. Taft's first track team on the stairs of Warren House in 1905.
4. The 49 members and coaches of the 2005 boys' track team.
5. The 28 athletes and coaches of the 2005 girls' track team.



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# Then & Now

**Classes in Laube Auditorium**

