



# ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT

PRESENTED BY THE PROFESSIONAL ALUMNAE COMMUNITY

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***Can you share a bit about your journey from college to where you are today? How does what you studied in school inform your work today?***

After leaving Sacred Heart, I went to Harvard (now Harvard), where I got my bachelor's degree in Linguistics with Slavic. I spent the following several months as a researcher-writer for [Let's Go](#), a budget travel guidebook, in Albania and Ukraine; I'd spent the previous summer researching and writing about Poland and Slovakia. In late 1994 I went to Vietnam with my boyfriend, Sam, since the US embargo had just been lifted. There, I worked at a local hotel for several months and then taught English before ending up at a small public relations firm. Around the time of the Asian financial crisis, a Vietnamese colleague and I broke off from that company to start our own PR firm, and operated it for several years before I moved to Hong Kong when I got married to Sam.

In Hong Kong, I worked for an international PR firm for two years, where I launched its Corporate Social Responsibility and internal communications practices. I was fired from that role as the dot-com bust took hold in 2002, and left to start up the Hong Kong branch of my Vietnam PR firm (All Rivers PR), which ultimately became part of another [international PR firm](#) as the market was recovering from the [SARS](#) downturn.

During that time, I had my two sons, leaving me somewhat relieved - if I'd had a daughter, I would have had to decide whether or not to send her to a Sacred Heart school, like the last nine generations of women in my family! Instead, they attended local Chinese schools in Hong Kong.

In late 2007, seeing the cloud of a US housing bubble on the horizon and dreading the inevitable economic downturn that would follow (after all, I'd been through three already), I started looking for an in-house job. I eventually landed with [BASF](#), the chemical company, as a senior manager of their Asia Pacific public relations team - just in time for the global financial crisis. There, I expanded my role internally to take up responsibility for crisis and disaster readiness as well as corporate citizenship. I spent 11 years at BASF. In 2018 based on some good advice from a peer, I started to look for a new role. In spring 2019, I received an offer as a Director at [Lenovo](#), the technology company, where I was responsible for communications and ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) strategy for Asia Pacific. It was good timing, since I got the job just a few days after I was informed that my department at BASF was going to be dissolved.

I spent three exhausting and successful years at Lenovo, but in 2022, with my sons off to college at the University of Toronto and my financial and professional goals mostly met, I took a step back from my corporate career. I felt that I'd spent the past two decades staring at a rectangle - my laptop screen - and I wanted to focus on something else. I chose creative writing and sustainability activism.

I now act as a senior advisor for several charities and non-governmental organizations, including [The Green Earth](#), [Plastic Free Seas](#), and [Academy for Women Entrepreneurs](#), and I write and publish science fiction and climate fiction short stories and poetry. I launched a literary magazine, [The Apostrophe](#), now on its 8th issue, and together with my co-author, a British engineer based in Malaysia, I published my first novel in 2024: [Fairhaven - A Novel of Climate Optimism](#), under my pen name Jan Lee. I'm also the book reviewer for [Earth.org](#) magazine. (I still spend a lot of time staring at a rectangle.)

2025 is a transitional year for me. I'm in the process of relocating to Lisbon after more than 25 years in Hong Kong, due to the deteriorating political situation there. I'm publishing my second book, [Defying Futility - The Fairhaven Stories](#), which is a companion volume to the previous book, and am in the process of writing a sequel.

The common thread during my entire career that I can trace directly to Sacred Heart is a focus on writing. The three English teachers I had in high school - Mrs. Mullins, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Robinson - each expected and exacted excellence in writing. Beyond this, I recall having to write essays about history, papers in French, and even a piece about hyperbolic geometry for math class. This skill has been central to my career success, long before I took up the full-time pursuit of creative writing.

On a personal level, I've also maintained a long-term interest in choral music. The time I spent at SHA in Choir, Honor Choir, and the Delaware Valley Youth Chorale were a highlight of my high school years. I've been composing music, singing, and conducting choirs ever since; you can hear some of my a cappella group, [Eight Five Tunes](#), [on YouTube](#).

***What inspired you to pursue your current career path in sustainability and writing?***

Many of my moves towards the sustainability space appeared coincidental at the time. For example, I only started writing environmental fiction with my co-author because he happened to contact me on LinkedIn. But in retrospect, it's easy to see that there were signs all along: when I was still at Sacred Heart I wrote a one-act play called "Pond Life", where animals argued fruitlessly with each other as the bulldozers for a new housing development loomed nearby. (With Mrs. Mullins' encouragement, I submitted it to a contest at Immaculata College, where - if I recall correctly - it won an Honorable Mention.)

***Were there any pivotal moments or challenges that shaped your professional journey?***

I've been through multiple rounds of layoffs, economic downturns, and corporate restructuring. Over the years I've learned that these are inevitable, meaning that it's necessary to prepare for them. The good news is that they can be navigated, and you can come out more successful on the other side.

***What professional achievement are you most proud of?***

I built a world-class communications and corporate citizenship function at each of the two companies where I worked in-house (BASF and Lenovo). The first time it took me 11 years, and the second time it took me three.

***How do you measure success in your career and personal life?***

I ask the question: did you build something? Did it help?

***What advice would you give to women aspiring to follow a similar path in either communications or activism?***

Everyone has a role to play in sustainability, no matter what career you're in. (In fact, that's the key message of [my novel!](#)) Therefore, even if you are in a role that doesn't appear related, find a way to incorporate the key principles of responsibility and sustainability into your role, your department, and your organization.

***How did the foundational beliefs and strengths that you learned and developed at SHA help you find your professional voice?***

SHA is something of a small pond - a protected place. Girls are free in such an environment to take on projects and responsibilities that wouldn't be available to them at a larger school, while having direct access to faculty who get to know each student very well. Yes, we sometimes ignored the official curriculum in favor of pursuing some wild idea or exploring the implications of a particular aspect of the lesson; but that experience provided a foundation of confidence that has served me very well.

