BALANCE (noun) — An even distribution; a condition in which different elements are in the correct proportions.
I often describe ourselves and our family as tumbleweeds—we’ve lived quite a few places and intend to live in quite a few more. When people hear the litany of cities we’ve called home, their first assumption is usually that we’re military. We’re not. We’re just aware that the world is big and life is short and our impulse is to go.

I know it’s not for everyone. And I won’t deny there are plenty of times I look at families who’ve spent generations under one roof and I feel a tinge of envy for the familiar. But it’s a wanderer’s heart that beats in my chest. One of my favorite aspects of travel is an effect I call the Humility of Strangers. While social media emboldens all our worst impulses, and clubs and local hangouts have a tendency to entrench our opinions rather than challenge them, travel, as Mark Twain famously noted, “is fatal to narrow-mindedness.” There’s no entitlement when you know you’re the outsider and, frankly, that makes us better people. We listen more closely, speak more softly, choose our words carefully. How much better would the world be if we listened more and spoke less, and knew that when we did speak, we were being heard?

So we go. And when we go, we attempt to follow the same advice I give my students: “When you travel, don’t do it from behind a double-glazed tour bus window. Get dirt under your fingernails. Drink tea made with questionable water. Find out how other people live.”

We’ve done our best to do that here. Nico Galette’s life is a balance of books and basketball, practice and practicality, and we know this because we followed him straight through a day in the life of a student-athlete (cover story, Beating the Buzzer, All Day Long, page 32). Meanwhile, a conversation with Provost Robin Cautin illuminates the challenges of leading an ever-growing University into an uncertain future (“Everyone Works Hard,” page 26). Alexandra Guibitsa Anderson’s story of leaving the familiar to help her family—and some 300 others—Escape the war in Ukraine is told in The City I Love Is Called Odessa (page 38) while, closer to home, senior Grace Curley invites you to consider the unexpected implications of being polite in our first piece of student writing (po-lite-ness, page 44). Finally, Charlie Gillespie’s essay, The Pioneering Heart (page 22), reassures me that perhaps my wanderlust isn’t just a part of who I am, it’s a part of all of us.

And if that’s the case, it’s time we get going.

M

THE CALL OF OTHER LIVES

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It’s nothing earth-shattering to say our natural world gives us everything we need to survive, from the oxygen we breathe and the clean water we drink to that apple you are enjoying with your lunch today. We all know this. However, we sometimes fail to appreciate and act on the converse—if we fail to maintain a well-functioning and resilient natural world, our future is literally at risk.

**OUR NATURAL WORLD**

Time and again, nature is there for us to recharge body, mind and soul. It’s time we return the favor.

**BY JENNIFER MATTEI, PH.D.**

**THE ORIGINAL CONNECTICUT BLUE BLOODS.** The horseshoe crab is one of the oldest species on the planet, but its declining numbers warn of an imbalance in nature—one that will affect us all.

*I CANNOT DO ALL THE GOOD THE WORLD NEEDS. BUT THE WORLD NEEDS ALL THE GOOD THAT I CAN DO.*

**JANA STANFIELD**
“The commitment of our students in the program… proves the level of impact individuals and local communities can have when we act with intentionality.”

numbering in the millions, like the monarch butterfly and the tri-spine horseshoe crab of Asia, are now listed as endangered.

When these common, formerly abundant species (think of tree species or marsh grasses) are found in decline, biodiversity plummetts and the important ecological roles they play, simply by the very nature of being abundant, become blatantly obvious. The connection between abundantly spawning American horseshoe crabs and millions of migrating shorebirds is well documented. In the spring, shorebirds rely on consuming horseshoe crab eggs to fuel their migratory trip to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. But as horseshoe crabs decline from overharvest and habitat degradation, the eastern red knot population (as just one example) has declined from over 94,000 in the late ’80s to fewer than 14,000 this past spring, and is now federally listed as threatened. The eastern oyster, once numbering in the billions along our shores and growing to the size of dinner plates, is now rate along the Eastern Seaboard.

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But it’s not just about the birds or the oysters. This is a point we cannot stress enough. Oysters, if unharvested, build reefs to protect our shorelines from erosion and storm damage with the added benefit of filtering and cleansing the water in our estuaries, increasing habitat biodiversity and healthy fish populations. The health of red knot populations likewise reflects the health of our estuaries in the Americas. These migratory shorebirds are intricately connected, both as prey for Arctic fox and snowy owls and as predator to millions of insects and other invertebrate species. With the decline of either species, entire food webs collapse—including, ultimately, our own. But there is hope.

Here at SHU, our research on the restoration of coastal habitats has demonstrated two key points. First, we can bring back these important abundant species and their ecosystem services. SHU’s restoration work at Stratford Point, using state-of-the-art techniques in building coastal resiliency through nature-based design, is now a model for New England states and is currently being applied along shorelines in RI, NY, and the East River of New York City. Second, the commitment of our students in the program, working both in the classroom and during summer research opportunities, proves the level of impact individuals and local communities can have when we act with intentionality.

We can all participate in the restoration of nature. Everyone reading this article should commit to planting a tree this coming spring. It is easy to find out what tree species are native in your area—as well as which ones not to plant—with online resources. If you prefer flowers, plant a native pollinator garden! The visiting hummingbirds and butterflies will brighten your view during morning coffee. Planting beautiful, orange-flowered butterfly milkweed may just save a few monarchs migrating through Connecticut in the fall, and native flowering perennials and daisies will feed pollinators with their flowers and migratory songbirds with their fruits. Did you garden alone? There are numerous initiatives to support, such as the Nature Conservancy’s “Plant a Billion Trees” program. Or start a “No Mow May” campaign in your neighborhood. By not mowing your yard until June, you can double the number of pollinators that survive in the spring.

Living in a temperate climate is glorious. Connecticut native and famed landscape architect F.L. Olmsted (who designed, amongst countless other projects, Central Park) said it best: “The enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it, tranquillizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.” This year, let us celebrate the bicentennial of his birth by committing ourselves to the preservation of the natural world that has always been so graciously committed to the preservation of us. • • •

**PROFESSOR MATTEI currently teaches Coastal Management, Ecology and Restoration; her most recent publication is entitled The Power of Citizen Science: 20 years of horseshoe crab community research merging conservation, education and management.**
Building Bridges among Pioneers

Alumni Engagement offers a virtual community with real heart.

What if there was a social network that only connected you with people affiliated with Sacred Heart? No ads, political memes or people complaining about the latest news. Instead, it’s a place to find commonality and support from fellow Sacred Heart alumni, students, faculty and staff.

Welcome to Pioneers Connect, a digital destination available only to people within the SHU network. Paul J. Sutera, senior vice president of University advancement, envisions Pioneers Connect as “a vehicle for people to come together, connect and reengage with Sacred Heart and their peers. We see this as a living and breathing virtual community without geographic limitations.” The goal is to bring SHU constituencies together, providing opportunities for everything from peer-to-peer mentorship and career opportunities to hosting reunions, making social connections and getting updates on University and SHU Alumni Association happenings.

The platform has similarities to LinkedIn, so why would you need a profile here, too, if you are already on that other site?

With popular features similar to other social media platforms, Todd Gibbs, SHU’s executive director for alumni engagement & events, explains what will make Pioneers Connect unique:

“Say you graduated from SHU five years ago and now you’ve landed your dream job. But you’re in an unfamiliar city. You don’t know a lot of people; you feel alone and isolated. You hop onto Pioneers Connect. You search for alums in your area. But better yet, you search for people who not only were in band, but also were in the Jack Welch College of Business & Technology like you. Lo and behold, you find a few people, and you agree to meet up for dinner one night after work.”

Once people set up their profiles, they can work with the Office of Alumni Engagement to join or create affinity groups based on almost anything, from sports to academic programs to performing arts. They can get as specific as they want. Gibbs explains, “Did you live in a certain residence hall, on a specific floor and during a certain SHU era? You can create and sustain that group.”

As groups are established, people can push out messaging about reunions and events, seek mentoring support or offer advice. It’s all the things that make SHU such a close-knit and supportive community, extended beyond campus and out into the world.

Gibbs offers another scenario: “Maybe you haven’t landed that dream job yet and you’ve hit a career plateau. Getting some direction and positive affirmation would be great. You are active on Pioneers Connect, so you follow a few simple steps to seek mentorship. The site then matches you with a fellow alum willing to assist and helps you both get in touch.”

An exclusive benefit as a member of the SHU community, Pioneers Connect isn’t just another social media fad. It allows for authentic relationship building across generations of SHU alumni, students, faculty and staff, says Gibbs—a platform bridging the divide between life on campus and the broader world, where Pioneers can connect and help each other.

The site matches you with a fellow alum willing to assist and helps you both get in touch.

https://sacredheart.peoplegrove.com
Local journalism is alive and well in Easton, thanks to the intervention of the School of Communication, Media & the Arts.

Few miles down the road from Sacred Heart is a small, quaint town named Easton. Nearly 8,000 people live in the town that most folks merely drive through on their way to somewhere else. Passersby take note of the farmland, idyllic scenery and historical attractions. What many may not know is that SHU and its communication students are keeping local journalism alive by reporting on the hotbed of issues that occur in this not-so-sleepy town.

In 2018, Easton lost its local print newspaper. The Easton Courier had provided news to the town since 1978 but could no longer make a profit in the current economy. Faculty in SHU’s School of Communication, Media & the Arts (SCMA) caught wind of the closure, while they were saddened by the loss of the newspaper, they knew it wasn’t all doom and gloom. They realized this could be a chance not only to save the outlet, but also to provide mentorship and experience to rising journalists.

“The venues for local journalism have changed radically,” says Richard Falco, an SCMA professor. “Newspapers throughout the country are experiencing serious financial difficulties, and many media outlets have been forced to close. This issue has had a particular impact on local towns’ newspapers. Our goal was to establish a collaboration between the University and the town.”

In February 2020, after many discussions led by SCMA’s associate dean Jim Castonguay, SHU partnered with Nancy Doniger, the former editor of the print version of the Easton Courier, to
launch the new, rebranded, online-only edition of the local paper. The paper is operated by its editorial board members: Castonguay, Falco, Ann Marie Somma and Jane Paley.

"This was born out of a need," says Paley, an SCMA professor who also resides in Easton. "The University is equipped to meet the need; it’s a perfect marriage.

Now, at the beginning of each semester, students in Somma’s profession- al journalism production class gather around a large conference room table to discuss the town meetings, police reports, school functions and commu- nity events they will be covering in the weeks and months to come. Somma, a former Hartford Courant reporter, mentors the young journalists, hearing their frustrations (one student can’t track down the fire chief) and honing their investigative instincts (another has a list of sources who can talk about the mysterious disappearance of a granite Japanese garden lantern in the 1970s). One by one, Somma peppers them with tips on how to take better notes and ask the appropriate questions, encour- aging them to be patient yet persistent when waiting for sources to respond to inquiries.

Isabella Giardina, 20, of New Jersey is a broadcast journalism and public relations and advertising double major who enrolled in the course to perfect her newswriting skills. “I want to get a better handle on AP style and develop my writing,” she says. Giardina’s goal is to get experience working for every type of medium—radio, TV, newspaper—to see how a town operates—as giving her the experience that is useful in her current role working for the Bergen Record in New Jersey.

It’s been just two short years since the relaunch of the Easton Courier, and already the publication has won 20 awards from the Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) for excellence, with first- and second-place wins in the hyperlocal category and specific recognitions including news photo, column, video storytelling, local reporting and more. In addition to Paley, Somma, Falco and Doniger, student journalist Tomas Koecz ’22 was also recognized with an SPJ award.

"The Courier team is grateful to our readers and contributors from Easton who have made this community journalism project such a successful partner- ship," Castonguay says, noting that the variety of accolades the publication has received “is a testament to the breadth and depth of the Courier’s coverage.” During a time when news is deemed fake and intellectualism is attacked, faculty believe the Easton Courier helps restore democracy and demonstrates what journalism is all about. “They start to understand the importance of local news and local people,” Somma says of her students. “They feel connected and become more engaged.”

"How else do people learn about their community?” Castonguay asks. Luckily for Easton, they have the Courier.

Georges Bernard Shaw
I know. I was one of them,” says Michelle Loris ’70, associate dean of the College of Arts & Sciences as well as Catholic studies department chair. “Sacred Heart University was informed by the spirit of Vatican II. It was incredibly innovative. It was alive.”

So it’s no wonder that—60 years later—that same dynamism inspired “Vatican II & Catholic Higher Education: Leading Forward,” a three-day October conference bringing thinkers, writers, artists, leaders and teachers to campus for deep, creative reflection on the Council’s impact on higher education and the challenges they face today.

The conference schedule featured keynote speaker Massimo Faggioli, a leading Vatican II scholar from Villanova University, as well as discussions of the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic higher education’s mission from speakers Grant Kaplan, professor of theology at St. Louis University; Susan Reynolds, assistant professor of Catholic studies at Emory University; and Patricia McGuire, president of Trinity Washington University.

The first 150 students at SHU found a “commuter school,” but one largely influenced by a handful of leading educators enlisted from top-ranked Catholic universities. Opened during the turbulent 1960s, SHU proved fertile ground for young minds hungry for knowledge, opinions and the space to debate their own burgeoning convictions, Loris says.

She remembers attending debates and discussions on hot political issues at the University, joining Habitat for Humanity-like community improvement projects in the South Bronx, attending a lecture by the Black Panthers in the Edgerton Center and attending Mass with faculty and students in Hawley Lounge. Groups of animated students regularly gathered around potluck dinners of simple chicken and rice in professors’ homes.

“It was incredibly inspiring and dynamic,” she recalls. “The professors were active and engaged people. There was intellectual richness happening, and it was designed to make you someone ready to take your place in the world. It was an education of the whole student—intellectual, spiritual and social.”

Flash forward 60 years and Loris sees a student body rocked by the stresses of the economy and the pandemic’s sudden and stark effects on their mental and physical health. “Our students are under a lot of pressure now. There’s more vocationality about their education as a path to a career among some, has influenced the ethos of Catholic higher education, says Daniel Rober, assistant director of the Thomas More Honors Program and associate professor of Catholic studies. “Catholic education right now is at a pivotal point,” he says. “We need to be thinking clearly about ourselves and our mission.”

Declining membership in religious orders and some church regions, as well as a marginalization of the liberal arts as a path to a career among some, has influenced the ethos of Catholic higher education, says Daniel Rober, assistant director of the Thomas More Honors Program and associate professor of Catholic studies. “Catholic education right now is at a pivotal point,” he says. “We need to be thinking clearly about ourselves and our mission.”

With 60 years between Vatican II and now, many Catholics today have no memory of the faith prior to the Council. “We’re coming to the end of the post-Vatican II phase,” Rober says, “and institutions are having to think about how to define ourselves going forward.”
As an Emmy-winning broadcast producer for NBC News for 30 years, School of Communication, Media & the Arts (SCMA) professor Joe Alicastro frequently found himself at the center of history as it unfolded.

**THE JOE ALICASTRO-NESS OF IT ALL**

As an undergrad at Boston University, Alicastro thought he wanted to make movies. “But I discovered I didn’t like the pace,” he recalls. “It was so slow.”

What he did like was history and research, and he soon discovered a love of creating documentaries. “You do all your research, and you plan everything out, and when you go out into the field to do your story—it isn’t always what you researched,” he says. “I liked having to think on my feet and having to do things not exactly according to plan.”

Upon graduation, Alicastro rented an apartment in New York City for a month of, as he describes it, “30 interviews, one suit, 30 days and no job.” He returned to Boston and taught the latest technology—videotape—to school media specialists until he got a call from one of his former professors. “An alum was looking for prospective hires at NBC News and [the professor] recommended me,” he says.

That’s where he found his home for the next 30 years until, in 2009, Alicastro came to Sacred Heart as an adjunct instructor, drawn to the school’s mission statement. “There was a part that jumped out at me and made me want to be here,” he says. “It was the part about ‘embracing a vision for social justice that educates students in mind, body and spirit to prepare them personally and professionally to make a difference in the global community.’ These values were those I tried my best to achieve in my work as a producer at NBC News. These values were passed on to me by my mentors, and as an educator I knew it was my time to pass these values on to the next generation of journalists.”

In 2012, NBC asked Alicastro to come back as senior producer for a series called Education Nation. For the next two years, he balanced teaching full time at Sacred Heart with producing the show. “After that, I was done,” he says. “It had done everything I wanted to do in the professional field. All I wanted to do now was pass it on.”

Alicastro teaches his students that democracy is not just reporting the news headlines of the day. It’s about finding and telling the stories that benefit people within the community.

“It’s so gratifying,” he says. “I can look out and see producers and reporters who, only a short time ago, were sitting in my classroom. Now his students are at stations all over the country. Yet even that seemingly natural progression has its own touch of Alicastro-ness. When stations reach out to Alicastro as a reference for his students, the journalist-professor flips the script, asking the stations why they are worthy of his students. “I tell them I’m looking for a station where my students can grow—where they’ll have good mentorship from the news director and a place that’s not going to hold them back when it’s time to move on.”

David Bradley, Tom Brokaw, John Chancellor and all those great reporters of that era,” Alicastro says, “they were the generation who passed it on to me. Now it’s my turn to train the next generation.”

**DE ALICASTRO** has been there. And there. There, too. And done that. Alicastro was on the ground during the Romanian Revolution in 1989. He has covered the deaths and funerals of presidents, popes and princesses. When John Paul II made his historic visit to Cuba in 1998, Alicastro was there, and when the wall between East and West Berlin came down, Tom Brokaw—Joe Alicastro as one of his field producers—provided exclusive live coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to the end of the Cold War.

“The Berlin Wall was an amazing place to be on that evening,” Alicastro says of November 9, 1989. “We grew up with the Cold War and the constant communist threat. To see that wall coming down—it’s something I never thought I would see in my lifetime. We knew we were sitting on the biggest story of the second half of the 20th century. “Being a witness to history is a privilege,” he recalls. “It was so slow.”

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**WITNESS TO HISTORY. WHETHER FROM THE FIELD, THE PRODUCER’S CHAIR OR THE PODIUM, JOE ALICASTRO’S PASSION FOR BROADCASTING AND JOURNALISM MAKES HIM AT HOME IN EVERY ELEMENT.**
Deanna Swanson admits she grows restless coaxing a finished image from the layers upon layers it takes to find the vibrant hues and angles she envisions.

“I get pretty frustrated,” the 2023 art & design major says, rolling her eyes. “The longer I spend on something, the more my motivation goes down. But my professors would rather I’m satisfied a piece is finished than have me rush to meet a deadline. They tell me speed will come with experience and time.”

And while at 21, she’s got plenty of time ahead of her to hone her craft, Swanson is already making a splash with her striking, color-drenched work. In 2022 alone, she had three pieces chosen for the New York-based Society of Illustrators Annual Student Scholarship Competition, winning the Jerry Pinkney Legacy Scholarship for her arresting Oh Nooo! illustration.

Across the country, she had four pieces accepted for the juried 2022 Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles Illustration West 60 competition, winning both a bronze award and the Bill Tara Scholarship for her Street Warrior illustration.

For context, past winners of these competitions include established artists such as Kadir Nelson, a two-time Caldecott Honor Award winner who has created covers for The New Yorker and albums by Michael Jackson and Drake. Former winner James Jean is a cover artist for both DC and Marvel comics.

Having even a single work accepted to either juried competition is considered a great honor. Swanson had seven.

And she wasn’t alone. SHU’s accepted entries included pieces by Madison Larstanna ’22, Lucas Matt ’23 and Jill Montano ’23. In fact, SHU students have had 75 acceptances to juried shows since 2004, with 51 coming in the last eight years alone. Their success is a testament to the department, as well as to the caliber of students SHU attracts, according to Swanson’s mentor and illustration

Deep

Her work may tell the story of uncertain times, but Deanna Swanson’s future is on solid ground.
instructor Jack de Graffenried, associate professor of art & design. “These acceptances and awards are fantastic résumé builders,” says de Graffenried, himself a professional illustrator for 20-plus years and former education member of the Society of Illustrators of New York. “To be selected nationally among thousands of students throughout the country by a board of judges comprising professional illustrators and art directors is an incredible achievement and professional stepping stone. To accomplish it multiple times is phenomenal.”

Growing up in Morris Plains, NJ, Swanson had always been surrounded by art. Her aunt is an art teacher, and her grandfather always enjoyed doodling. “He used to draw for me when I was little,” she says. “As a kid I liked comics, and I grew up drawing and doodling. It’s where my heart is.”

Looking for a college, she gravitated toward SHU because it was near her grandmother’s Monroe home and she could join the active color guard, one of her favorite extracurriculars in high school. She loved the campus and the school’s smaller size and personal nature. “It’s easy to ask for help and guidance on anything,” she says.

At SHU, she’s been able to delve into artistic dilemmas, such as the distorted reflections in Oh Nooo! that were achieved in watercolor and colored pencil.

“I held up a dinner glass in front of my face and thought it was funny how it distorted me to look like an alien,” Swanson says. “The process of doing the artwork was then a test of observation of reference, drawing something where you don’t know what it looks like already in real life.”

Her other award-winning piece, Street Warrior, also in watercolor and pencils, is technically not finished—but that didn’t bother the judges, who picked up on Swanson’s youthful mastery, de Graffenried says.

“From day one as a freshman, she exhibited an obvious passion and tireless desire toward excellence,” he says. “These traits fueled her determination to master any medium that has come her way—graphite, colored pencils, watercolor, oil and digital painting.”

Now a senior, Swanson is working on her digital portfolio and a website where she can display her work from SHU and is the first-ever summer intern in graphic design at regional electric company Eversource.

Looking ahead, she hopes to work in graphic design and do freelance illustration on the side, striving toward a career as a concept artist designing the look of environments and characters for Marvel or Lucasfilm.

“That’s my dream job,” she says. “But we have to get there first.”

**AWARD WINNING.**

_OH NOOO! (ABOVE) AND STREET WARRIOR (PREVIOUS PAGE) BOTH WON SWANSON ACCOLADES IN TOP JURIED COMPETITIONS ON BOTH COASTS._

**ATTENTION TO DETAIL.**

_FANG EXHIBITS THE METICULOUS PRECISION GUIDING SWANSON’S WORK._

**“AS A KID I LIKED COMICS, AND I GREW UP DRAWING AND DOODLING. IT’S WHERE MY HEART IS.”**
THE PIONEERING HEART

If the only thing constant in the world is change, who better to forge a path forward than someone for whom change is the only constant?

BY CHARLES A. GILLESPIE
I just love looking up the origins of words. It feels almost magical—like cracking open a book of ancient spells—to discover how words have gone on their own journey over centuries. Words sometimes carry these almost secret meanings that shine new light on the world once I learn them. Here’s a great example: despite years of reading and watching and loving The Wizard of Oz (and I’m a Broadway nerd, so Wicked, too), I never realized the connection between courage and heart beyond the wishes of a cowardly lion and a tin man. The word courage, however, derives from the Latin word for heart, cor. Courage relates directly to our heart, and language remembers (if it only has a brain).

I’m not entirely sure that Dorothy counts as a pioneer, which is what we’re really here to discuss, but if a cheerful kid can be allowed one more Wizard reference, anyone walking around the SHU campus can see ‘we’re not in Kansas anymore.’ There is, of course, the amazing growth of the originally ranked university that only 60 years ago started out as little more than a commuter college. But it’s more than that. Sacred Heart University was founded during the Second Vatican Council, both events directly addressing the challenges of our time. It can be easy to overlook the literal pioneers of the present. How scary must it be for any migrant to make the impossible decision to leave home for an unknown land of rumored promise? Pioneer journeys are not for the faint of heart.

Luckily, when it comes to courage—that cor-age, that fullness of heart—we have a few examples. In the Catholic tradition, the Sacred Heart most often refers to Jesus, though in some older traditions it refers to Mary, as well. In either case, it always calls to mind a divine love rushing outward, overflowing beyond human imagining. Believe it or not, some translations of a line in the New Testament (Hebrews 12:2) even call Jesus “the pioneer.” Personally, I find it hard to think of a better word for the exemplar of the love story between Cor and the world.

But pioneering means more than just a reference to a single journey, however arduous, of the past or present, even or scriptural allusion to make sense of a name. I think being a pioneer, in many respects, means committing to a life of questioning and countering both the powers of our past and present. They find a way of staying true to their roots without being bound by them. Something else: while we often use the word pioneer to describe an independent thinker, pioneering was and is a team sport. No matter what image comes to mind—a gamer dodging dentistry while playing The Oregon Trail,—a chemist examining a sample in her laboratory, an astronaut taking a giant leap onto the lunar surface—pioneers need to work together. They need to be willing to listen during disagreements, to struggle through difficult conversations, to keep an open mind, especially when the going gets rough and problems seem insurmountable.

It’s far too easy to romanticize the great pioneers of history; those folks brave enough to set off for a new life in a foreign place. It can be easy to overlook the literal pioneers of the present. How scary must it be for any migrant to make the impossible decision to leave home for an unknown land of rumored promise? Pioneer journeys are not for the faint of heart.

We are all still longings has become both incredibly easy and remarkably mind-bending. Openness to the distance, talking to another person in 3D can be utterly terrifying. All the more frightening when we are asked to share something personal, in-person—when we try to talk from our heart. The cascading and unprecedented crises of the present prove a desperate need for better conversation. They demand bravery. Pioneers might be the ones who can teach us how to be courageous enough that, as St. John Henry Newman said, cor ad cor Inquisitor—“heart speaks to heart.”

A 19th-century English convert to Catholicism who became a cardinal, Newman pioneered ways of thinking about the liturgy, about language, about national identity and about the way church teachings develop across history. He also wrote a deeply influential book sharing his ideas about universities where he called higher education “the great and ordinary means to an extraordinary end.” By granting Marvel-worthy superpowers. Yet there is something great about what a university can teach and research and do for the common good of our society and the planet we share. Universities can still be, if we let them, communities where heart speaks to heart about those truths that matter most, those questions that burn brightest, those ideas—ancient and new—that will transform how we live in the world and seek to make it better.

And again, as I asked earlier, isn’t that exactly what pioneering is? To pioneer, in any sense of the word, is to stand at the edge of what we know and courageously venture off into what we don’t.

And isn’t that exactly what we hope education can be? Indeed, some say that the word education itself relates to the words for “leading out.” If that’s the case, education shouldn’t be anything like installing an iOS update. It should be more than more completing a series of obligations to earn a piece of paper, and it should never be considered a destination in itself—there is no point or place where an education is complete. It is the beginning of the journey, not the journey’s end.

Hearts speaking to hearts embraces the unknown as no longer a barrier or a boundary, but an invitation. It turns the restlessness of inquiry into wind for our sails.

Education, in its fullest and truest sense, can be a pioneer’s journey—if only we have the heart and courage to let it be.
Q+A

ROBIN CAUTIN

“EVERYONE WORKS HARD.”
SHU Provost Robin Cautin ends our conversation with a story I’ll use as a beginning. It’s of a time when she was a kid, a teenager, and she and her brother wanted a taste of independence. They wanted to go to a restaurant without their parents but were reliant upon their father to shuttle them to and fro as neither of them were yet blessed with a driver’s license.

“Dad drove us to the restaurant. We had lunch. A little while later he came and picked us up,” she recalls. “We were in the car heading home when he asked, ‘Did you tip the waitress?’

“Dad drove us to the restaurant. We had lunch. A little while later he came and picked us up,” she recalls. “We were in the car heading home when he asked, ‘Did you tip the waitress?’

“The thing was that lunch was more expensive than we expected. And we were kids. And, frankly, we just didn’t know any better. So we had to admit that we hadn’t. He was horrified.” She remembers her father turning the car around and sending the kids back inside to face their waitress. “She was so relieved.”

“Everyone works hard,” her father told them when they were back in the car—and it’s at this point in the retelling that Cautin chokes up slightly at the memory.

In addition to a daughter’s love for her father, Cautin very obviously has a deep respect for her dad. The son of a Brooklyn laborer, he had grown up poor in the city but was a voracious reader and possessed an unbridled work ethic. Indeed, upon his retirement from Bell Labs, five people were hired to replace him.

So it is that a simple admonishment, “Everyone works hard,” lives in Cautin’s memory as so much more than simple advice to always tip your waitress. They are three words packed to the brim with life lessons, saying as much about the way you carry yourself as about the respect you show for others. It’s a softly spoken declaration that doing less than one’s best is doing less than what’s right, and it perfectly stated, in that moment and ever since, that there is no paradox in the relationship between humility and dignity.

Robin Cautin is her father’s daughter, through and through. Immediately evident is that intellectual curiosity and indefatigable work ethic. But there’s more. Most significantly, Cautin seems guided still by that humble dignity—ever certain that humanity is better for each human’s best contribution, ever aware of one’s own role in that dynamic.

So it’s no wonder that Robin Cautin has been such a good fit for Sacred Heart—and vice versa—since the University hired her to serve as dean of the College of Arts & Sciences eight years ago. In the time since, she has overseen the steady expansion of the College, the creation of new graduate and undergraduate programs, new schools and countless new faculty positions. Then, in May of last year, she took on the duties of acting provost. Five months later she was formally named the University’s new provost, making her the school’s chief academic officer and, after the president, the senior member of the University’s executive leadership team.

It’s a role she seems almost designed to assume. That distinctive blend of academic rigor and human empathy Cautin has cultivated from a young age reveals itself in a unique ability to weigh the complexity of, it would seem, everything. A conversation about the cost of education factors in not only line items on the spreadsheet but the tricky balance between an education’s value to humanity and the moral imperative to ensure humans of all means are able to access it. Then there is the double-helix bond of the Catholic mission that founded this school and the catholic mission that drives it—heart and soul, inextricably linked, undeniably singular. Also, with a coming “demographic cliff” resulting from a significant drop in the national birthrate, there is the practical challenge of adjusting the business model for viability without compromising its compass. And then, of course, there is the heady excitement of this University’s meteoric growth coupled with the reality check of growing pains.

“We started as a small commuter school with no residential students, no graduate degrees, a limited number of undergrad degrees and only club sports,” she says. “Today we have more than 30 Division I teams, scores of both undergrad and postgraduate offerings, and more than 3,000 students living on campus every semester.” And still, as Cautin points out, the school remains committed to community in a way that feels new and adventurous—a fundamental part of its ethos.

One contributing factor is the significant number of students whose parents are first-generation Americans. For an uncommonly high percentage of families connected to the University, SHU is the embodiment of that dream wherein hard work and scrappy determination lead to opportunity.

And that’s exactly as it is supposed to be. The school’s founding mission was to provide access to quality higher education for (then predominantly Catholic) families whose immigrant and/or socioeconomic status would have otherwise kept them on the outskirts of such opportunity. Which is why, Cautin insists, focusing solely on the costs of higher ed fails both to recognize the reasons for those costs and to see the ultimate value of the product. Coming from anyone else, this could sound like either political equivocating or an outright sales pitch. But Cautin brings the receipts.

“Prior to, and even well into, the 1990s,
accrediting bodies hadn’t really developed the metrics of accountability that are now in place,” she points out. This, of course, a positive development—a school must now prove its mastery of a subject if it is going to promote and charge tuition for it—but a development with a cost. As accrediting metrics vary significantly from discipline to discipline, “responding to those expectations requires a lot of administrative infrastructure.”

So how do you make higher ed more affordable without cheapening the degree? “If we can make what we do more attractive, if we can make access to the value and benefits of higher education more efficient—through dual degrees, fast-tracking graduate programs, expanding programs appealing to adult learners, those sorts of things—then we are finding a way to innovate in education while serving our students and our community, and still keeping our moral compass,” Cautin says, all of which reflect the mission that founded the school in the first place.

And all of which reflect why Robin Cautin, in her own words, “can’t decouple” her own mission from that of the school. “I feel it. I love the work,” she says in a rush as the conversation shifts from higher ed in general to SHU specifically, and her passion for her role, its challenges and the community she gets to serve is immediately evident. For Cautin, as for SHU, the trials presented by individual and institutional expectations are vastly more thrilling than they are daunting.

“We’re not risk averse here,” she says. “As a person, I can be bored easily. But you can never be bored in a place like this. We’re not clinging to some status quo.”

Indeed not—her own journey serving as some degree of proof of that. When touching upon the movement in every industry to advance diversity, equity and inclusion, and the rarity of women in positions such as hers, she grins, having known the question would be coming. “Being a woman means being asked what it means to be a woman,” she says, recognizing the need to recognize a thing that should in truth be invisibly normal.

“When I started, I thought I was just a dean,” she says. “But that was naïve. I didn’t appreciate the extent to which others saw me. I was just focused on the work. “I focused on the work,” she corrects herself as way of explaining momentary blindness but, in the process, once again revealing the spirit that makes her so at home here—something only underscored by the empathy in her very next breath. She doesn’t begrudge the work she put in to get where she is or the fact that, having arrived there, she is seen by many as a role model. Instead, quite simply, “It’s part and parcel of being human,” she says.

“We like the familiar. There are biases we all have by virtue of our humanity. The greatest safeguard we have against them is to call them out—to make them visible—and a University is the perfect place to do that. “We’re at a critical juncture at the moment,” she says, speaking now of the broader landscape the University must navigate, and it’s surely the greatest understatement of the whole conversation. Sacred Heart’s current point of growth might best be compared to that exciting moment of transition from adolescence to adulthood, when vitality courses through your veins and you’ve finally got the agency to act on it. It’s no wonder her thoughts go back to a moment her father was shepherding his family through the same sort of transition the University faces now. That this moment arrives at a time when the world itself is in undeniable flux only adds to its immediacy.

And that’s alright. Because once again the characters of the University and its provost seem inextricably linked. Both are fully aware that the way forward requires more than seeing the best in people, and even more than expecting the best from them. It requires modelling the humble dignity we want and expect to see. If higher ed is where Robin Cautin gets to do what she was put on earth to do, then Sacred Heart is where she gets to be who she was put here to be.

“We’re not resting on our laurels here,” says the granddaughter of a Brooklyn laborer, the daughter of a Bell Labs engineer, the provost of the University.

“You can never be bored in a place like this,” says SHU provost Robin Cautin. “We’re not clinging to some status quo.”
All SHU students juggle their courses with clubs, hobbies, friends, family and a host of other passions and stressors. But a day in the life of a typical Division I student-athlete like Nico Galette shows just what it takes to stay on top of your game in both worlds.

BEATING THE BUZZER,

ALL DAY LONG

NICO GALETTE

by meredith guinness

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK F. CONRAD
It’s important to note that Galette equates working hard with getting better, with the journey of improvement, but that success and winning are never assumed. That’s just as likely to be the athlete speaking as it is to be the junior engineer coming through. There are always variabilities beyond his control. Therefore, the training, the practice, the study is all about bettering his own abilities to meet them—to not back down, no matter who or what challenges he faces.

The buzzer on Galette’s alarm clock sounds at 8:30 a.m. on Thursdays. He wastes little time scrambling into clothes and choosing from the rack of sneakers stacked next to a full-sized Haitian flag hanging in his off-campus bedroom. The flag, like the talisman on his backpack, is more than decoration. But whereas Luffy is a reminder of where Galette is going and what it takes to get there, the flag is a reminder of where he is from and what it has taken to get here.

His dad, Saulus Galette, was 25 when he left the village of Fon Pais En, Haiti, for the United States, settling in Rahway, NJ, with a solid job as a carpenter (“a union carpenter,” the younger Galette is quick to clarify, with obvious pride in his father’s commitment to providing stability for his family). Here he met his wife, Colette Lamothe, who had a career with the New Jersey State Department of Health before moving to the Nicholson Foundation. Together, they made a home for Nico and his sisters, Valerie, now 22, and Jessica, 16, filled with love, faith, a deep belief in education and a fondness for the basketball hoop in the family backyard where, as a boy, Galette first dreamed of a life on the court.

SHU was the first school to make an offer to the senior basketball standout and, at just 17, he took a leap of faith and committed to the Pioneers, sight unseen. And now, three years later, the engineering student-athlete has his bed made and bag packed for a standard day of studies and practice—and practice and studies. He heads for the kitchen to fry up two eggs to go with his morning protein bar. Is he a good cook? “I like to think so,” he says with a grin.

Within an hour of opening his eyes, he’s arrived on campus and is warming up in the gym at the Valentine Health & Recreation Center with the first of many coaches Galette encounters in a typical day. This hour of shooting practice with Director of Basketball Operations Donte Gittens isn’t required. Galette just takes advantage of the opportunity to work one on one with Gittens, who played in Europe and coached at prep schools before joining the SHU squad this fall.

“Got a little cold streak … get hot, get two, get three more … stick with it, stick with it,” Gittens nudges, letting out a little whoop as Galette swishes a trio of three-pointers in a row. “Yeah! That’s it!”

The celebration is short-lived, however, and for a couple of reasons—both having to do with why Galette is here in the first place. One: as a student-athlete, nailing that three-pointer is part of the job. Two: the other part of the job is being a student. And it’s time for class.

Grabbing a couple of apples, a water, some juice and two peanut butter and jelly Uncrustables® from the bottomless snack supply in the basketball suite, Galette hops the shuttle to West Campus and Digital Analog Systems with Assistant Professor Kevin Bowlyn at 11 a.m. For the next hour, Bowlyn helps the class review for an upcoming exam, multiplying and subtracting binary numbers on a whiteboard under a cartoon clock that reads, “People think it’s magic. We call it Engineering.”

SHU’s engineering program was one of the things that cemented Galette’s enthusiasm for his future alma mater. Inspired by the professional engineers in his extended family, along with his own talent for math and science, Nico Galette had talked of engineering since middle

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A plastic cartoon pirate with a bare chest and a straw hat hangs from the zipper on Nico Galette’s backpack. Monkey D. Luffy, star of 1,000+ episodes of the anime series One Piece, is revered for many traits, among them strength, durability, agility and endurance. It’s no wonder he’s found a place in Galette’s life. “I definitely try and use Luffy as life motivation in the sense that he doesn’t back down and pursues his goal no matter what and no matter who is in front of him,” Galette says when asked about the tiny talisman. “In my opinion, I think the same way.

If I work hard, it’ll just be a matter of time before I am better.”

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NOT-SO-STILL LIFE.
FOR SHU STUDENT-ATHLETES, A MOMENT OF PAUSE IS A RARE THING.
So it is that Galette, an A student in engineering, considering a minor in math, banquet over a legal pad full of test notes while he rolls his sore right heel over a stress ball. It's as if he's channelling both his parents at once. This son of a union laborer and an esteemed public health leader, always putting in the work now for what lies ahead, always training the mind and the body at the same time. Always multitasking.

By 1 p.m., he and the team have convened at the Pitt Center, warming up with Strength Coach Todd Riedel. "Nico's "Welcome to My House" thumps through the weight room where the hoopers share a long row of 12 weight stations with the women's softball squad. Riedel coaches eight players at a time through an explosive movement, deadlifting 90 pounds up to standing, then dropping the barbell to the ground once their backs are straight. Players tease each other and joke around, some singing along with the music or letting out very real yelps of pain at the end of a core-crunching series of Sorinex leg curls.

"Nico, squeeze your glutes! Stand tall—good!" Riedel yells out over the cacophony. Next up is Galette's favorite part of the day. The team gathers in the chilly Pitt Center gym for the day's 2.5-hour practice, which includes reviewing practice tapes and endless drills to perfect their moves for the season ahead.

A half hour in, Galette completes a sweet blind pass to forward Bryce Johnson, who easily takes it to the hoop. The pair smile at each other and exchange a high-five.

Galette is close to many of his teammates, sharing a home on nearby Ruth Street with three—guards Joey Reilly, Brendan McGuire and Mike Sixsmith. "Nico's great. He's very clean," says McGuire, joking about Galette's housekeeping prowess. "He's a lot of fun and, on the court, he's very talented and he's got a lot of energy. He's definitely one of the leaders."

An all-around player, Galette credits his organizational skills (this week he's finished all his homework for the week by Wednesday night) for staying on top of his game and his course load of four classes and an evening lab. Also, "it's good to build a good relationship with your professors," he says.

Latinia agrees, saying Galette possesses an outstanding work ethic and social skills well beyond his years. "He's easy to root for." And there will be no shortage of fans doing just that—none louder than his dad and sisters who will be at most home and nearby away games, as well as a cadre of his proud aunts.

While some get butterflies thinking about games—between two and four a week during the regular season—Galette says he's excited for real competition. Having started in all but one game last season, he's confident and ready for what lies ahead, always training the mind and the body at the same time.

Before that, however, there's the rest of the day to win. Aside from his breakfast egg, Galette has precious little time for home-cooked meals. After a 7:30 p.m. lab and maybe a quick pickup game with teammates, he'll likely stop off for a 9 p.m. dinner at Linda's, where he's known for his usual—a grilled chicken sandwich with lettuce, tomato, cheddar cheese and barbecue sauce—with a Gatorade and maybe a cookie. It's become such standard fare for Galette that "they should call it the Nico," Coach Gittens jokes.

Sometime around 10 p.m., he'll head back home to catch an action film, listen to Bob Marley on original vinyl or study before lights out to rest up for another day. Like any SHU student-athlete, the schedule Galette keeps is unwavering. Sure, it's a mix of work and play, but even the play is purposeful—from morning technique practice to afternoon strength training, practice, drills and tapes, and even into the evening with a "casual" game of pickup that lets all the day's work sift and find its way into his muscle memory. And yet Galette, like so many of his student-athlete colleagues, makes it look easy.

For him, it's all about the preparation. Being prepared for what comes next so that he can focus on what's happening now helps the day's many transitions move smoothly. "It's like having a switch," he says.

So what does come next? Unsurprisingly, Galette has his eye on the pros—in his case, a coveted spot in the NBA. But he won't turn his nose up at playing professionally in Europe or elsewhere if he gets that chance. If that doesn't happen, his perseverance off the court will assure him a solid career in engineering.

"My goal is to be as versatile as I can be," he says. "I'm trying to go as far as I can."
With war bearing down on her family in Ukraine, Alexandra Gizhitsa Anderson gave them a pathway to hope. The experience changed her as well.
The Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, after months of troop buildup along the Ukrainian border with Russia and Belarus. At the time, U.S. intelligence officials believed Russia intended to “decapitate” Ukraine’s government and install its own and predicted the Ukrainian capital city of Kyiv would fall within 96 hours.

The current conflict goes back at least to 2014 when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea. Expert consensus, however, seems to be that Russian President Vladimir Putin has been fixated on reclaiming some semblance of the empire that was lost with the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, with Ukraine central to that vision.

The worst Russian aggressions to date came during March of 2022 when the port city of Mariupol was leveled in what the Red Cross called an “apocalyptic” scene. “I think they decided to make an example out of Mariupol because it was supposed to be captured by Russia in 2014,” Anderson says. “But even though it’s full of Russian speakers, the people in Mariupol consider themselves Ukrainian.”

While atrocities were happening in Mariupol, the situation started getting precarious in Odessa, too. “I was texting with my mom and sister every single day,” Anderson says. “One time they were sitting in their living room with our little brother when the siren went off.”

Anderson is referring to an app that she and other Ukrainians could download on their phones that serves as a mobile air raid warning. “The siren means that bombs and rockets are flying right at my family,” Anderson says, “and that means they have 30 seconds to get from upstairs into the basement.”

Despite the shock of the initial invasion, Anderson’s mother, Iryna, was reluctant to leave her beloved city. She only made the final decision to evacuate when a Russian bomb landed near her home in Odessa Oblast.

The only way to get out of Odessa at the time was either by evacuation bus route or railway, because Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had declared martial law, and no cars were allowed on the main roads. So Iryna packed up her daughter, Yevheniia, and son, Misho—and the two family dogs, Monya and Zhasya—and headed for the train station in Odessa. Along the way, she collected two neighboring families, bringing the grand total of evacuees to four adults and 14 children. When they finally made it to the train station, all 18 people, as well as the two little dogs, packed into a tiny private car for the 22-hour ride to the Polish border.

“They just sat together with the kids on their laps,” Anderson says, “and that’s how they left Odessa.”

Meanwhile, Anderson was making plans for a flight to Poland to meet her family, but while on her way to JFK Airport, she learned from her mother that a Russian bomb took out the railway line her evacuation train was on, causing it to be rerouted.

“No I’m not going to Poland anymore; I’m going to Romania,” Anderson says, “and then I’m taking a car to drive for five hours through Romania, Hungary and then finally Slovakia.”

When Anderson landed in Romania, she immediately found a volunteer center and secured two drivers willing to make the trek with her through three countries to pick up her family. “What I remember from that night is that gradually the suburbs turned into countryside, then the countryside turned into a wooded area, then all I can see is thick woods around us and this tiny trail,” Anderson says.

And then, suddenly, a checkpoint, with a mass of barricades surrounded by armed military forces and a helicopter with spotlights flying overhead. At first Anderson thought they might have driven too far, but there was no place for the drivers to turn the cars around at that point. “These soldiers are pretty scary looking.”

“IN THIS CHAOS, WE ENDED UP EVACUATING CLOSE TO 360 PEOPLE IN TOTAL.”

“The city I love is called Odessa,” Alexandra Anderson said, “and tomorrow is the 100th day of the war.”

That was Alexandra Gizhitsa Anderson, a Ukrainian-American who immigrated to the United States in 2005 and lives in Southington, speaking back in June at the Slava Ukraini telethon in support of the people of Ukraine, hosted by the School of Communication, Media & the Arts at Sacred Heart University.

A former graduate student at SHU, Anderson recounted the nerve-racking story of how she traveled back to Ukraine during the 2022 Russian invasion to rescue her mother, sister and brother as the fighting spread to their home city of Odessa. In the process, Anderson and the people she marshaled to help her ended up evacuating over 300 Ukrainian refugees.
One soldier came forward and asked what they were doing there, and Anderson replied that they were just looking to pick up her family.

“Then the other guy who was holding this massive machine gun says, ‘Oh, welcome! Your families are down there to the right, in the parking lot.’ The military had fires going and hot food, and then there was my mom and everyone wearing these super warm military fleece jackets, since it was negative 10 at the time.”

After an emotional reunion, everyone prepared to drive back to Hungary to stay at an Airbnb and begin the process of eventually coming to America. However, on the way to their temporary housing, some of Anderson’s other Ukrainian contacts began calling her, asking if she could help them find drivers, evacuate their families and secure housing.

“It was a complete mess,” Anderson says, “but in this chaos, we ended up evacuating close to 360 people in total.”

Reflecting on what led the Russian people in general to support their country’s invasion of their neighbor, Anderson has no definitive answer—but she has an educated guess, and it’s related to the evolution of Russian media since her childhood in Ukraine when it was part of the Soviet Union.

Anderson was young when Putin first became president. She doesn’t have much memory of him from those days. What she does recall is that many Russians, including some close family and friends, considered him at the time to be a strong leader who would restore faith in the government.

Growing up, Anderson remembers friends from Russia who would come as tourists to visit her fair city by the sea. Families came for entire summers, with all the kids—both Russian and Ukrainian—mingling at the beach from morning to night.

When the current invasion began, Anderson had a talk with Russian friend Viktoria Vagapova, who is also an American citizen and one of her neighbors in Southington. “She told me she wanted nothing to do with Putin,” Anderson says. “She said she doesn’t know anything about Russian politics, but that people for over 20 years have been worked on by the state media there so much.”

“Now there’s a view of President Putin as a God-ordained figure. It’s a very weird situation.”

Whatever the reason for the Russian population’s support for the invasion of Ukraine, one thing is certain: the war has changed Anderson’s perspective on the current nature of civil discourse.

“Today, Americans jump on each other with such hatred,” Anderson says. “I don’t think I’ve done it to an extreme extent ever, but I do remember being very comfortable taking a side; now I don’t even want to engage in an argument.”

Not that she has the time to argue anyway.

Since she returned home in March, she’s been working nonstop to provide what support she can to the people of her home nation for as long as the war drags on, including becoming an expert in the processes of Uniting for Ukraine, the U.S. government program that enables Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to come to the United States and stay temporarily for a two-year period.

“Ninety-nine percent of everything I do now is in the United States,” Anderson says. “What we can do for people here revolves around housing assistance, learning English and getting kids in schools.”

Thankfully, her own small town of Southington has been more than willing to experiment with various solutions.

“They want to see what kind of aid they can offer the refugees,” she says, “what our school districts can do, how we can waive certain requirements and how we all can collaborate together in a strongly bipartisan way.”

For Anderson, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a “time is a flat circle” aspect to it. Both sides of her family have experienced the death, suffering and displacement of invasions in Europe before. Though no one on her father’s side of the family has been in Ukraine for years, Anderson says that side of the family was quite large before World War II, when they lost close to 75% of their family.

“My great-grandparents fought against the communist army in Odessa. My grandparents fought against the Nazis in Odessa,” Anderson says. “In the 1980s, Solohenitsyn wrote about the horrors of the world wars and the Soviet Union invasions. And now, 40 years later, we’re back at it. Like we forgot it all. But my hope is that we continue supporting Ukraine as a country,” she adds. “I am probably more American now than I am Ukrainian, but my heart has always been in Odessa.”
“That’s a bottle of rosé,” he calls over to us.

There’s a moment before I even think of responding. Not to dismiss him, but because I need to process what he said. Without a hint of sarcasm or any awareness of the conversation I’ve been having about this very bottle of rosé, my male coworker has taken it upon himself to inform me that the bottle I am holding, reading, discussing is exactly what it says on the label. I think to myself, There is no way he said that. But he did.

“Thank you!”

I say it with a smile and a wave to let him know that he’s been heard and helpful so that he can feel good. And then I share a separate smile with my older female coworker.

“Well thank God he said something. I had forgotten how to read,” my coworker quips. Together we laugh. We know we have to laugh.

I often think about that moment—how it perfectly embodies a major dilemma that comes with being a woman. Do we defend our intelligence and independence by explaining that we are perfectly capable of reading a bottle’s label and assessing its contents, thereby risking offense and appearing ungrateful for help we never needed or even wanted in the first place, or do we simply say thank you and move on? It all comes down to picking your battles. A woman knows that if she confronted every man who thought he knew better, she would never find peace. Sometimes it’s easier to just be polite.

Politeness avoids conflict, which should at the very least save us some time—and also, we hope, our lives.

Jenny Kutner of MIC reported that in 2016, 14 women were murdered because they rejected advances from men encroaching on their personal space. And then there are those times when polite isn’t enough. In June 2022, CBS News reported that a 17-year-old girl in Colorado was murdered by her 28-year-old coworker in their workplace for rejecting his advances.

Though she had sought a polite and nonconfrontational resolution to the situation—the young woman spoke to management about her coworker, how uncomfortable he made her feel, and asked to be put on separate shifts from him—management did not listen to the young woman. It resulted in the end of her life.

Women hear stories like this all the time and quickly learn the dangers of rejecting a man, and so, yes, avoiding confrontation in the interest of safety is a real thing for women. Instead, rather than rejecting men, we softly—politely—disappoint them. We conjure up boyfriends and partners who are waiting for us at home or on the other side of the restaurant. We say we can’t have another drink; our boyfriend is waiting. Sadly, we already belong to someone else, we say. Men will accept this. Somehow woman-as-property sits well and is acceptable, whereas woman-not-into-me is deviant and dangerous and punishable, even by death.

This kind of politeness is not the same as perfunctorily saying “please” and “thank you.” It is a skill and survival strategy, and it’s learned out of necessity from an early age. Stop Street Harassment conducted a study that showed that 81% of women have dealt with catcalling in their lifetime, 70% of whom said the first time was when they were at most 13 years old. Many were even younger. When asked how the age of the catcaller compared this first time, the vast majority were men who were not just older, but significantly older—with 55% being 30 years old or older. There isn’t much an adolescent woman can do to physically defend herself against a fully grown man. She must find another way to protect herself. She must be strategic. She must be polite.

But make no mistake. This kind of passivity is not a weakness. It is the product of strength. It is the practice of self-control with an acute awareness of one’s surroundings. It is a learned skill—part instinct and part intellect—allowing women to navigate and maneuver out of and through situations they do not wish to be in. It is playing at being small, lest the predator feel threatened.

Of course, politeness as a strategy has its costs. When propriety becomes an act of self-preservation, victim shaming polices adherence to the rules. There are dresses not to be worn, drinks not to be left unattended, ground floor apartments not to be considered and even
times of day not to be found walking alone—or any consequences will be the woman’s own to face. All of this tells a woman she is not welcome in the only world she knows. It tells her that the liberties and experiences open to others (namely men) are not accessible to her or, at least, not without real threat. Think about all the wonderful discoveries and lessons she misses because she wants to explore is stifled at a very young age, all the inspiration and opportunity that pass her by because society expects more social and situational awareness from a 13-year-old girl than from a 30+-year-old man.

When it takes this much effort and attention to merely survive, the notion of thriving may seem the stuff of dreams. And all too often, it is. According to the Pew Research Center, the gender pay gap continued in 2020, with women making only 84% of what their male counterparts were making. Meanwhile, MIT Sloan reported that among most U.S. retail chains, female employees are 14% less likely to be promoted than their male coworkers. This may be because, as the Center for Creative Leadership found, when women lead, they are twice as likely as their male counterparts to be labeled as “bossy.” Furthermore, the same study found that when women are labeled as “bossy,” they are less likely to be promoted. What’s a woman to do when showing leadership potential ironically hinders the chances of her rising to a leadership role, but staying put means getting 84 cents for every man’s dollar?

Yet despite these frustrations, women remain polite. We keep these coveted lessons and pass them from one woman to the next, one generation to the next, and in so doing we find ways to navigate a society built against us. When I look out into the world for future opportunities and see a world that appears bleak and grim, I also see a world of remarkable women forging paths forward for me and for all others. We do not know what will come to us in the future, but we trust that we can take whatever it may be in stride and turn it into something of use. Like using politeness’ passive appearance to mask the acute awareness a woman has of her own situation.

Women will always be polite, but not always in the way you may think.

GRACE CURLEY ’23 is a senior at Sacred Heart University double majoring in English and Theatre Arts. Her play, What It Means to Be Polite, was accepted to The Mid-America Theatre Conference’s Ten-Minute Playwriting Symposium in March of 2022.

Sacred Heart Athletics continue to rise in stature as more and more players transition from college sport to the pros.

EYES ON THE PRIZE.

JULIUS CHESTNUT ’22 ON THE SHIFT FROM DIVISION I TO THE NFL: “THESE ARE GROWN MEN. YOU HAVE TO COME TO THE FIELD EVERY DAY WITH THE MENTALITY OF NOT LETTING SOMEONE ELSE TAKE YOUR JOB.”

“SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE” | FALL 2022
Chestnut and Sokol both signed with their NFL teams as unrestricted free agents. Both were invited to training camp among 90 potential teammates, but each still had to survive the cut to a 53-man roster by August 31.

May and June saw the former Pioneers taking part in rookie camps and organized team activities, getting to know their new teams in Minnesota and Tennessee, including learning new plays and working out with team members.

“It’s been a lot of fun, honestly,” says Sokol of his Vikings experience. “Everybody is here either to win a job or to win football games, so it’s more intense than Division I.”

“I am extremely happy for both Josh and Julius,” says Pioneer Football Coach Mark Nofri. “Their success reflects who they are—tough, hardworking people who love the game of football. Not only are they great players, but they were outstanding student-athletes for SHU, and it was no surprise they both made the NFL. I couldn’t be prouder of them and am happy for all their success. Well deserved.”

As for the players themselves, “It’s been such a tremendous honor just to actually call myself an NFL player,” says Chestnut. “These are grown men who are fighting for a job. You have to come to the field every day with the mentality of not letting someone else take your job.”

“It doesn’t matter at this stage where you come from or what your title is,” says Sokol. “Everyone has a fair shot to make the team, and that’s my goal. I’m focused on being the best Viking I can to be successful here.”

“Getting adjusted to a new team is always a challenge,” says Chestnut. “They have a great culture at Tennessee, so it did not take long to feel like part of the family.”

“The Titans’ running back, Derrick Henry, has been mentoring Chestnut through early training sessions. “We watch films together and he’s been teaching me on the sidelines,” says Chestnut. Sokol likewise found that the Vikings’ offensive line took the rookies in as their own.

“They have a great culture at Tennessee, so it did not take long to feel like part of the family.”

August 31 saw victories for both former Pioneers. Chestnut made the 53-man roster for the Tennessee Titans, while Sokol joined the Minnesota Vikings’ 16-man practice team.

“Every day you wake up and get to walk into an NFL facility,” says Sokol. “I’ll probably never get used to walking in the door.”
Justin Danforth’s journey to the Columbus Blue Jackets, like that of so many others who’ve made it to the National Hockey League, began even before his youth league days in Canada. The Oshawa native has been skating practically since his toddler years.

Once in the junior leagues, he played hockey in the winter and, like his father and older brother, displayed his athleticism in lacrosse over the summer, though stick work may be the only thing the two games have in common, Danforth confides.

Playing in the Ontario Junior Hockey League as a teenager, when it didn’t look like he would ever stand much taller than 5 feet 8 inches, Danforth only heard discouragement about his chances for making the NHL. This made him work that much harder. Determined to prove his worth, he walked away from lacrosse, albeit reluctantly, to focus on hockey before college.

Recruited to Sacred Heart by Assistant Coach Scott MacDougal, Danforth left Canada for Connecticut and Coach C.J. Marottolo’s program, where he made an immediate impact with the Pioneers. He was named Atlantic Hockey Association Rookie of the Year as a freshman and continuously improved his game. From his sophomore to junior season, he nearly doubled his points on the ice—from 22 to 41. As an assistant captain his senior year, he led the team in points and earned First Team All-Conference honors.

Danforth also took that competitive drive to the classroom, earning conference academic honors. “I had to find a way to do it,” he said. “College pushes you to grow up quick. You can’t just play hockey and put in 20 percent on the academic work. I had a lot of teammates who were very detail-oriented, very competitive. I didn’t want to be that guy getting Cs and Ds.”

Graduating in 2017 with a double degree in economics and finance, Danforth wasn’t done with hockey. He continued playing professionally in leagues from Reading, PA, to Moscow, Russia. Ironically, it was his time in Europe, where he played alongside former NHL players who acknowledged and encouraged his top-level talent, that helped pave his way back to the States.

“Finland is a huge hockey country,” Danforth says of his two wonderful years there. In Rauma, a city of less than 40,000 residents, Danforth says they would routinely see 3,000 to 4,000 fans show up for games. “The people were also very easygoing and laid back. I made a lot of friends there.”

Then a single season in Russia, in what Danforth calls “an entirely different beast and more cutthroat kind of world,” allowed him to play in what may be the second-best league in the world, forcing him to raise his game yet again.

Fast forward to November 19, 2021. The puck seemed magnetically drawn to Danforth on the night he scored his first NHL goal in just his second game. An Arizona Coyote goalie gloved his early slapshot, then another bounced off the post. But the Blue Jacket rookie whacked one into the net off a faceoff in his team’s 5-4 victory. “So unexpected,” Danforth recalls, he hardly knew how to celebrate. Good fortune is often a byproduct of hard work. The puck that kept finding Danforth against the Coyotes followed years of putting himself in position to be there. As Sacred Heart’s first NHL player, he hopes he’s setting a trailblazing path for Pioneers to follow.

And he’s only just begun. After signing a one-year contract in 2021, the Blue Jackets extended it to a two-year deal worth $1.95 million. For the Canadian once told that he lacked the stature for the NHL, Danforth seems to be standing tall in Columbus.

After graduation, Justin Danforth put his career plans on ice. It was the right call. BY WILLIAM MEINERS

ICE SURPRISE. DANFORTH KEEPING THE RED WINGS ON THE WRONG SKATE.
ARGOT ROUQUETE ’24 didn’t start out as a golfer. In fact, she was on the ice hockey team at her Lake Placid, NY, boarding school when her headmaster offered a golf outing for interested students. Rouquette was hooked.

“I like the competitiveness of the sport,” says Rouquette, who came to SHU from her hometown of Montiron, France. “It’s a sport where you can never be perfect. You can always do better.”

That endless drive for a flawless game shared with her teammates led to a banner 2021–22 season for SHU men’s and women’s golf, both of which won the Northeast Conference (NEC) and earned berths to the NCAA Regionals – men’s in New Haven and women’s at Stanford, CA.

“It was a pretty special year,” says Head Coach Matt McGreevy, who has led the men’s team since 2010 and the women’s squad since 2007. “I knew we had talent coming in, but you can never predict how that’s going to play out.”

This year it played out very well, indeed.

In addition to winning the NEC for the first time in five years, five Pioneers on the women’s team were named to the Women’s Golf Coaches Association All-America Scholar Team, having maintained GPAs of 3.5 or higher. Not only is that the most recipients in program history; it’s the most in the conference.

Perhaps the best news of all? Five of the men and all six of the women have returned for the 2022–23 campaign. SHU’s steady growth, capped by a standout year like 2021–22, helps elevate recruiting. And the challenging course is likely one of the reasons the teams fared so well.

“Maybe when I’ve finished my studies, she says, “Maybe when I’ve been playing on it for four years, it will start to be easier.”

McGreevy says he has high hopes for the coming season. As of press time, the women had finished 10th in their first outing, the Yale Invitational, and the men won the Ryan T. Lee Memorial at Shurtle Meadow Country Club in Kensington.

The decorated coach believes SHU’s recent successes bode well for the years ahead.

“The only thing we can’t give them is sunny and 70 every day,” he says with a laugh. “We’ve got everything else right here.”

And McGreevy, himself a former two-sport athlete at SHU, was named NEC Coach of the Year—the first-ever four-time winner in league history—for his 17th season with the women’s squad. He also won top honors for the second time with the men’s team.

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On the men’s side, three Pioneers finished in the top 15 at the NEC Championships, with Marcus Lim ’24 named Player of the Year. The Malaysia native had a breakout sophomore year. Following in the footsteps of former Pioneer Saptak Talwar ’21, he won a spot on the PING Golf Coaches Association of America All-Northeast Region Team. Lim also made the First Team All-NEC, and the Golf Coaches Association of America named him a Striker/Cleveland Golf All-American Scholar for his 3.74 sophomore GPA.

He also helped Malaysia win golfing gold at the Southeast Asia Games.

Lim, a health sciences major, says he was simply looking for a good school where he could continue building his golf skills when he chose SHU. He’s decided he’d like to launch a pro career once he finishes his studies. “Golf builds characters,” he says. “You have good days and bad days.”

Lim says he especially enjoyed the 2021–22 season because the SHU squad wasn’t a sho-in. “We were the favorites in our heads,” he says, “but we weren’t on paper.”

Rouquette, who is also eying a pro career, is majoring in sports management. Like Lim, she says she was looking for a good fit with a golf program and wasn’t as concerned about the Northeast’s shorter season. In fact, in addition to golf and her studies, she plays club hockey at SHU. “I personally like to be busy, but I don’t always have to play golf all the time,” she says of New England winters. “I like having a little time.”

Owning Great River Golf Course is definitely a plus when it comes to recruiting. And the challenging course is likely one of the reasons the teams fared so well.

“It’s probably one of the hardest courses—if not the hardest—we play all year,” Rouquette says. “Maybe when I’ve been playing on it for four years, it will start to be easier.”

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

ON THE LINKS

It’s one thing to read a magazine. It’s another to walk the campus, visit the chapel, take in a game or a show, maybe catch up with a former professor or an old friend. Or just marvel at how we’ve grown.

Come back to SHU. We’d love to see you.

Plan your visit to campus by contacting Todd Gibbs, executive director of development & alumni engagement, at 203.365.4526 or emailing gibbst@sacredheart.edu.

SEE YOU ON THE ICE!

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