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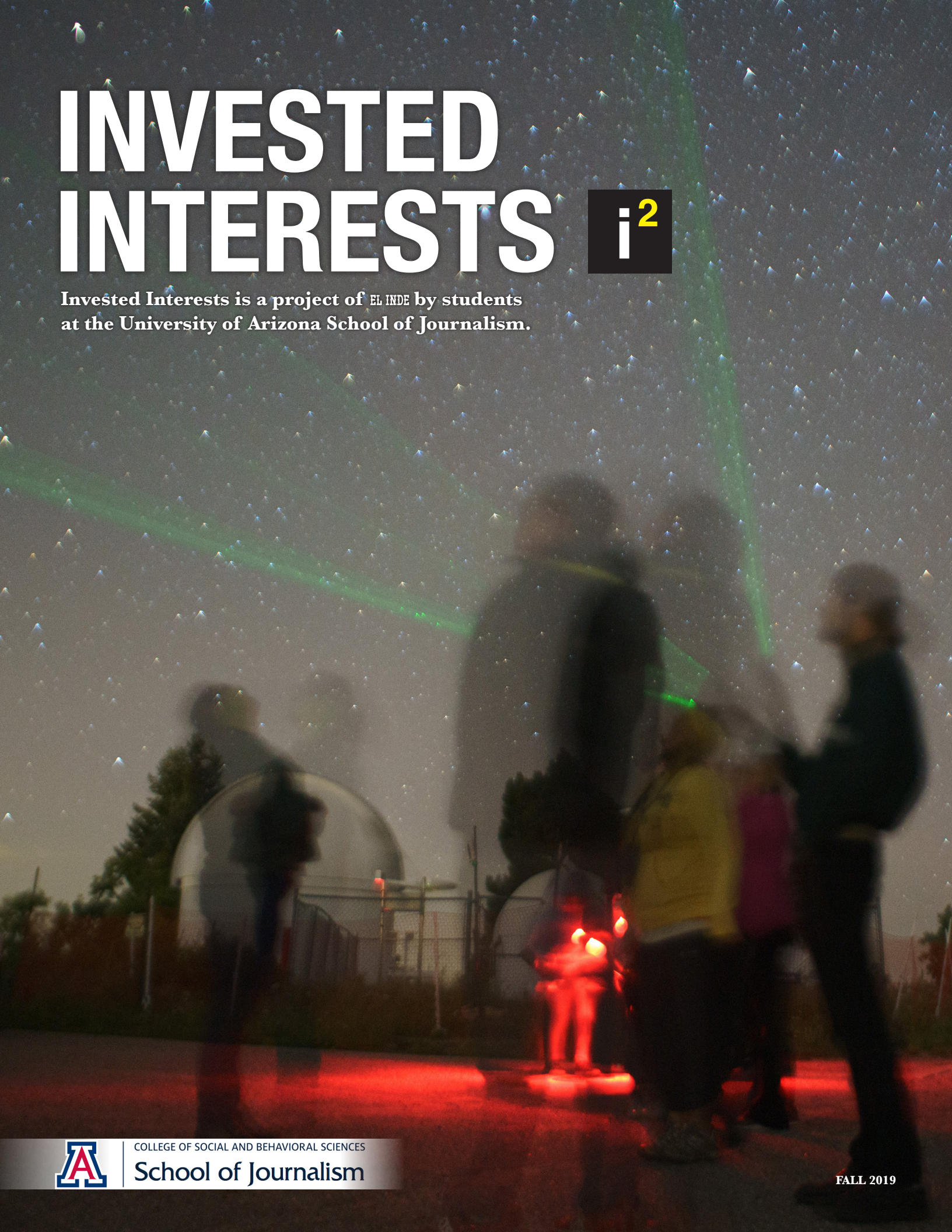

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Ruxandra Guidi

El Inde is a magazine reported, written, designed and produced by students at the University of Arizona School of Journalism. The theme and scope of El Inde changes from semester to semester and includes a wide variety of storytelling formats and approaches.

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Performing jazz for the old-timers

By Ella Ford

Two jet black speakers tower over the heads of the crowd; the floor beneath them shines underneath the blinding lights above. A long black cable snakes along the floor and grazes the side of the black polyester of a pair of dress slacks. It reaches its apex at the end of a black microphone. At the other end of the microphone is the evening's entertainment.

A pair of piercing blue eyes lies underneath a tattered black fedora. Clean-shaven and smelling of pine, the headliner moves his lips to the words of Elvis Presley's classic ballad "Can't Help Falling in Love." With a voice as rich as caramel, he sways from side to side as he serenades his silver-haired audience members.

Standing up from the table closest to him is an elderly Latina; her long silver hair flows as she steps closer to him. She reaches out her hands to him, letting the music carry her away. He wraps his free arm around her shoulders. She holds him by the waist, leaning her head against his shoulder. The two sway back and forth, gliding across the floor in a slow and tender dance. Tears of joy are streaming down her face, thankful to dance again after sitting in a stiff chair for so long.

"I love you so much," she says to her dance partner. "Thank you for singing for us. Thank you."

He smiles, his gentle eyes ensuring her that everything will be okay, that the moment will last for a lifetime.

"Thank you for listening," he says, finishing the song and smiling down at her, overjoyed to have such a warm reception.

This is Phillip Harvey, a 35-year-old local jazz musician and self-proclaimed crooner of Tucson. In the 10 years that Harvey has spent performing jazz music, he never thought he would reach the height of his small-time career not by performing in jazz clubs like FitzGerald's Nightclub in Berwyn, Illinois, but by performing to the largest forgotten audience: elders with Alzheimer's.

"It's something else," Harvey says, as he pauses to light a cigarette on the patio of his small apartment.

Pacing back and forth between the small apartment and the patio is Harvey's son, Dylan, 11. With an energetic smile on his face, he hurries back inside to play a video game. Sitting in a brown recliner next to Harvey is his auburn-haired fiancée, Elizabeth Stanton, 25, listening in as Harvey unveils the story of his journey from a mere jazz appreciator to a bona fide performer.

Harvey moved to Arizona from Chicago a little over a decade ago after the birth of his first child. It was unclear what Harvey would do for work, but he knew that it would have something to do with his passion for jazz music.

Harvey's love of jazz is one of a nostalgic upbringing. "I think back to when I was a kid in the '80s, there was a

Phillip Harvey is a self-taught musician who found meaning in singing for Alzheimer's patients. (Photos by Ella Ford/EL INDE)

lot of jazz around me and in entertainment too," Harvey says. He would sit for hours in front of the television, listening to the influences of jazz music in his favorite TV shows, from Looney Tunes to Seinfeld.

Yet no matter how much outside influence he had from his beloved television set, music was a fundamental part of his family as well. He'd spend hours listening to the music that his dad would play on the radio and to family friends who would rave about the great jazz artists like his idol Frank Sinatra.

Harvey's road to local fame was dotted with happy accidents and stumbling upon new opportunities for the first few years. "There was a karaoke event in Sunsites, Arizona, at this local bar called TJ's, and that's where I started singing ... like I sang a little Sinatra and a little Dean Martin ... and everybody enjoyed it," Harvey says. "And I got a real buzz off of performing for people, even though I was just singing to a backing track that I played off my phone."

Harvey eventually took over the event and began hosting TJ's karaoke nights, yet these were meager feats in his mind. While he enjoyed his new line of work, it wasn't bringing in enough finances to support both him and his family.

As fate would have it, Harvey moved to Tucson, and that was when his career began to fall into place. "I moved out here with my son, and we lived with my dad for a bit, and I was trying to just figure out what was next for me," Harvey says.

In time, Harvey became host to two major events in downtown Tucson—an open mic night and a live musician's jam session at a community maker space known as Maker House, where artists of all formats could gather and create their masterpieces.

"It scared the living bejesus out of me because I had never done anything like that before, and especially with other musicians, because I didn't know a lick about music, really," Harvey begins with a laugh. "Like I didn't know how to read music, how to play an instrument, how to do anything except for sing and try to hold a note, and everyone around me had this vast knowledge that I just didn't have."

It was at Maker House where Harvey felt he could truly start to branch out, pursue his love of performing and hopefully make a profit from it. "The great thing about the Maker House was that everyone was welcome," Harvey says, sipping his coffee with a twinkle in his pale blue eyes. "You had people playing arcade games in one room, ladies knitting at a table and drinking beer in another room, people doing blues dancing in another room, and it was just fantastic because people could just do whatever they wanted to."

Having found his community, Harvey threw himself into his new work, and he watched as both the jam sessions and the open mic nights grew larger and larger. "I took over the open mic night from a wonderful musician, Jessica, and by that point it was already pretty big. I think around 100 people came to this thing," Harvey says. "And so I took over and really just tried to keep it going, but I also wanted to open it to people who weren't necessarily just musicians, like if someone wanted to do stand-up or poetry slams or anything, they could come up to the mic and just do it."

Yet with all its joy and splendor, the community was short-lived: Maker House was forced to close in 2015. "From what I understand, it was just too expensive for the owners to keep going, you know?" Harvey says with a faint look of disappointment on his face.

After Harvey and his fellow musician friends lost their artistic haven, Harvey was left with the same question he had asked himself when he first moved to Tucson: What now? With the help of one of the founders of the maker space, Harvey landed his first few gigs, from performing outside an Italian bakery to clubs like Playground.

Yet despite having worked hard to get where he is now, Harvey hardly considers his own willpower and perseverance to be the source of his success. "I got lucky because my thing is pretty niche," Harvey says.

While Harvey cannot read or compose music himself, he manages to make his living by singing to instrumental backing tracks of the great jazz artists, including Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and even Bobby Darin.

A performance at the popular nightclub Playground in the summer of 2015 snowballed into a series of gigs for Harvey. Cocktail bars, speakeasies and festivals led way to the most interesting and most important performance venue of Harvey's career at an assisted living facility for the elderly. "The elderly, in particular, have been fascinating because a lot of these people are having trouble with their memory," Harvey says. "And a lot of the songs I sing are from a time when they grew up, when they were my age or younger.

"The elderly deserve our help and respect, and we don't really give them enough of it," Harvey begins as he elaborates on his first experiences. "A lot of these people are dealing with Alzheimer's, early-onset dementia—that kind of thing—

and for most people, you know, they don't have the willpower to deal with it."

There is a disconnect between the elderly and their families in Harvey's mind. "What I think it comes down to is a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding," Harvey says. "People don't really know what happens to the mind as it gets older and how diseases like Alzheimer's impact it. Even I didn't understand it when I first started out."

While Harvey is not a neurologist, his understanding of the brain in regard to music is something that he pays extra attention to. "From what I've read and heard from people who study the brain is that the brain isn't like a grid or a bunch of wires," Harvey says.

"It's like a series of different maps, and certain parts of the brain light up when doing certain things," Elizabeth Stanton adds as she pours water into three fresh glasses.

"Right, and so when music is added to the mix, a lot of the areas where memory exists kind of lights up and is activated in a way," Harvey says, smiling at his bride-to-be.

"Music is the last thing to go in regards to your mind as you age," Harvey begins. "There's something about it. I don't know if it's the patterns of rhythm or what, but it is one of the last things to disappear from your memory. It's really interesting, and that's part of why I love my work so much."

Watching the reactions of his elderly audience has caused Harvey to reflect honestly on his own life and the struggles with getting older. "I know I'm not in the best health that I could be, and Alzheimer's and dementia are things that I know I'm probably going to have to worry about," Harvey says. "I just hope that I can emulate the attitudes of the people I sing to because even though they're not working anymore, they still want to have fun."

"Or just a purpose, really," Stanton chimes in. "So many older people will complain about not having something to do, and it's not because they're annoyed. It's because they just need some kind of task to complete, which is what any human being would want, really."

"Exactly," Harvey replies. "What makes the brain deteriorate is just going through the motions of the day. Anything mundane isn't challenging enough to keep the mind active. It's no wonder that people are losing their memories when they're not doing things that keep their brains stimulated."

Harvey's love for his work at assisted living facilities has sparked ideas to expand his business as well as to seek information on how to become a music therapist. "I don't know if it's even possible," Harvey says, "but I'd love to do it if I could."

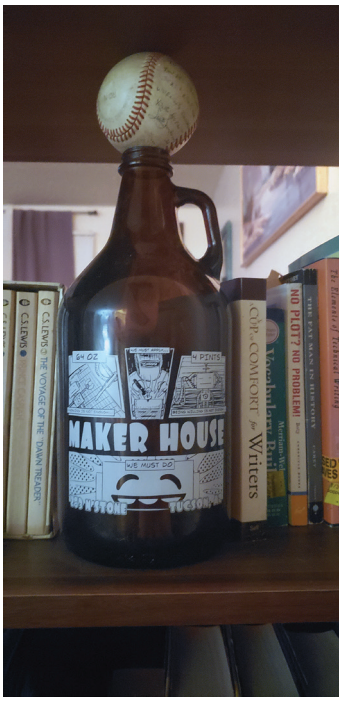
However, the road to being a licensed music therapist isn't a straightforward process. "It's good that people are starting to recognize it as being important," Harvey says. "But, even for me, there just doesn't seem to be enough information out there about what you have to do in order to become one. It still seems like pretty new stuff."

Even so, Harvey hopes to bring in other musicians to perform at assisted living facilities with him. "I know that not every person is going to like the music I perform," Harvey begins. "Some people like rock music more, or they want to listen to the Beatles. Heck, some people want to listen to like disco music, and that's just not my style. If I brought in other musicians who perform different genres, then we could reach more people."

With plans to move to the Scottsdale area, Harvey hopes that he can spread his joy of singing to the elderly and expand his business to cover more venues. "I want to get an actual band to perform with, and who knows, I might even get this one to think that I'm pretty cool," Harvey says jokingly as he jostles his son's shoulder.

"I already think you're cool," Dylan says somewhat begrudgingly.

"And I'm starting to learn how to play the piano," Harvey adds. "Just like with everything else I do, I'm diving right into it and hoping for the best because at the end of the day, that's all you can do." i²



*Phillip Harvey has memorbilia of what he cherishes most scattered around his home. (Photos by Ella Ford/*EL INDE*)*

Adriell Alvarado's sneaker collection takes up a lot of space in his closet. (Photo by Ahmaad Lomax/EL INDE)

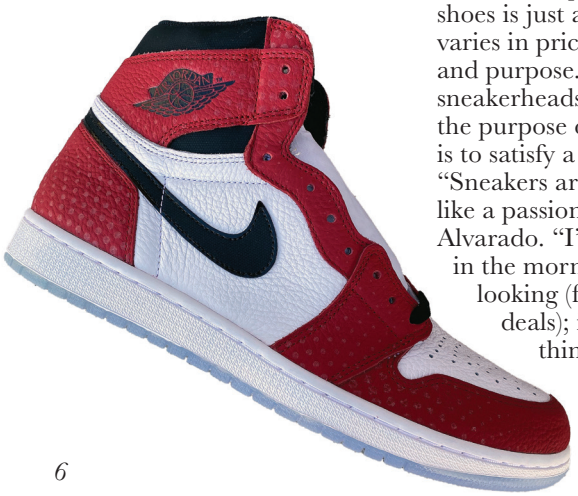
Sneakers are more than just footwear

Sneakerhead Adriell Alvarado has a hobby that differs from most. He collects shoes.

By Ahmaad Lomax

From floor to ceiling, filling Adriell Alvarado's entire closet, a rainbow array of protective clear shoe boxes are stacked, holding a total value of thousands of dollars

For some people, buying shoes is just a necessity that varies in price, utility, colors and purpose. But for so-called sneakerheads like Alvarado, the purpose of buying shoes is to satisfy a love for clothing. "Sneakers are life to me, like a passion of mine," says Alvarado. "I'll be in bed at 2 in the morning, I'll go just looking (for online sneaker deals); it's something I think about all the time."



A "sneakerhead" can mean a plethora of things, depending on whom you ask, but it's typically defined by the collection of exclusive shoes, buying and rocking the most sought-after shoes or even just admiring from afar, without ever owning or actually wearing the latest releases. Adriell Alvarado, a bashful red-haired Tucson native, fits all of the above and more. He has been collecting, purchasing and appreciating high-end sneakers for almost a decade.

His passion began as a youth, when he'd see his older brother and godfather always laced in the newest sneakers. Seeing their interest in fashion

sparked his own into what it has become today. His collection began with his parents' help; they purchased his favorite shoes for him before he was able to afford them himself.

"My parents couldn't get every sneaker. They would 'come in clutch' for me if I really wanted the sneakers," Alvarado says. "Retro 11s (Nike Jordans) were big during the time, so I would definitely try to get those during Christmas time." Whether they be Nike, Adidas, Jordan, Reebok, Converse or any other brand that might be buzzing in the sneakerhead world, Alvarado had to have them.

His collection includes about 150 pairs right now and varies from high-top Jordans to exclusive Nikes to low-top Adidas. A year and a half ago, Alvarado had around 300 pairs.

After being a collector for so long, he's turned his passion into a viable way to make money. Using popular sites like StockX and Goat, Alvarado took his collection of nearly 300 pairs of shoes and began reselling them, depending on the price and popularity of certain shoes—anything that really doesn't appeal to Alvarado's sense of fashion. What he isn't likely to wear is likely to get resold. "If I were to get a shoe at $160 and it resold for $1,000, I'm going to take the money," Alvarado says. With exclusive sneaker releases, there are a select amount of pairs made, and with such a finite number, these shoes get resold for ridiculously high amounts. For Alvarado, no matter how much he likes the shoes, he'll always take the economic profit over his own sneaker admiration.

Deals like this, where resellers make a large profit off of shoes, are made all the time through these resale sites as shoes become more and more exclusive and harder to find. Alvarado has caught on and capitalized on the opportunity to make substantial money, depending on the shoe, while also acquiring the funding to buy what he calls his "holy grails" of sneakers.

"One grail for most people are the Red October Yeezys (Kanye West's Nike sneakers, which were released in 2014 for $250 and currently cost $7,500 on StockX). The Off-White (Nike collaboration sneaker by famous designer Virgil Abloh) is a big thing, too. So basically, a grail is a sneaker that not everyone could get their hands on," Alvarado says.

Shoes like the Yeezys or the Abloh Off-Whites have taken the sneaker industry by storm with resale prices up to 10 times the original retail price. Kanye West's mega-stardom and Abloh's respected brilliance have created a must-have collection of high-end shoes seen anywhere from high school cafeterias to Hollywood red carpets. "But everybody has their own grail, you know? My grail might be different from someone else's, but it's a sneaker that's very hard to find. It's very hard to get, or just one that's too expensive for most people."

But for the majority of people, shoes aren't quite as significant in their day-to-day lives. In the case of Gabby Banales, Alvarado's girlfriend, shoes were just that, a practical pair of objects. Her eyes were opened once she began dating the self-proclaimed sneakerhead.

"Once we started dating, I learned so much more about all the history behind Jordans and everything that came with buying sneakers," said Banales. "His passion has made me appreciate shoes in a different way. There are for sure pros and cons of it, though: A pro would be that we always have the latest sneakers in our closet, but that comes with the con of literally not having any space in our closets left."

Alvarado lives in his childhood home with his parents while he attends Pima Community College, but he plans to enroll in online classes at Arizona State University in the spring. He hopes to register in the school's journalism program

and wants to pursue a career in social media and media relations.

Having turned his own personal accounts into a shopping center for fellow sneakerheads, he has already figured out the nuances of social media. On a weekly basis, sneaker enthusiasts from around the country find themselves on Alvarado's Instagram account as he shows his latest purchases and advertises them as well as other shoes he owns for sale.

"Somehow he always has the most recent 'drops,'" says fellow sneakerhead Chris Vizcarra, who has been buying shoes from Alvarado for years. "Sometimes they're all sold out before I can get to the website, but he's always got them."

Vizcarra has bought exclusive shoes from all the popular retail and resale sites, but he says it's convenient to have local guys in town who resell for more reasonable prices.

Recently, Alvarado found an even more efficient way to sell locally in Tucson. This past summer he started up an Instagram account devoted to buying and reselling sneakers and streetwear that he calls "Always Activated." The account has over 100 followers and is steadily growing.

"I don't have to worry about taking shoes to UPS and shipping them. Also Goat and StockX take fees, so you lose a bit of money selling with them," Alvarado says. He has crafted a logo featuring two capital A letters, mirroring his own name, and has high hopes for his startup one day evolving into a larger business.

Alvarado's passion for shoes has by now surpassed that of his brother and godfather, who have given up the sneakerhead lifestyle after having kids and taking on other financial responsibilities. But as far as Alvarado is concerned, he can keep up his ever-growing collection with no hesitation.

"Yeah, that's the plan. Shoes are my life," he says with a smile. i²

"Sneakers are life to me. It's literally all I think of all the time."

–Adriell Alvarado

Adriell Alvarado holds one of his favorite sneakers. (All photos by Ahmaad Lomax/EL INDE)

An American child of Punjabi immigrants:

Who am I?

By Hayat AlQattan

The kettle whistles on the stove in a small white kitchen with white tile floors to match. Sumanpreet Dosanjh rushes around the kitchen, trying to make her dirty chai, pack her book bag, submit her latest assignment and eat breakfast simultaneously. This perfectly sums up the life of any college student's morning. She runs frantically around, trying to beat rush hour after missing her alarm. In reality, she lives a block away from the University of Arizona campus and simply woke up too late.

She's pacing around in booty shorts and an oversized blue shirt with a big "A" emblazoned on her chest. The aroma of chai reminds her of home; she inhales the rich scent with a nostalgic look in her eyes. "No, it's not as good as my grandma makes it. I honestly don't do it justice at all. Mine just seems like a knock-off American version of chai," Dosanjh says, laughing. "But I try my best to get a little taste of home." She calls her apartment her "treehouse." When Dosanjh is asked whether it is home, she shrugs and says, "Home's here, home's Phoenix, home's Flagstaff and a small village in the 'burbs of Punjab."

Dosanjh is a 22-year-old girl who lives with one foot 8,033 miles away in northern India, hugging the border of Pakistan, and with the other in Arizona.

Her parents didn't have your ordinary love story. They met through an arranged marriage. Like many in different cultures, husband and wife met on their wedding day and were expected to start a life together from scratch.

Jatinder, Dosanjh's mother, was an eligible bachelorette looking to settle down. Upon whispers that circulated through her family and across the village, she was arranged to be married to a man with similar tastes: Davinder. They were not allowed to date. They could only see a picture of each other and rely on the kind words of whoever roamed in their respectiv inner circles. They had laid eyes on each other for the first time on their wedding day. Think of it like a blind date—but instead, a blind marriage.

On the other hand, Dosanjh adopted Westernized culture. Her perspective on life was shaped by her friends, pop culture and the media. In her youth, her path still malleable, she was molded every day by what she saw on the outside and was torn by what she was taught at home. Although dating will continue to remain a taboo topic in her household, she had an unspoken understanding that some traditions were better left in India.

"I personally don't ever see myself in an arranged marriage because I'm someone who really needs to get to know someone and know that there is love there for me to spend the rest of my life with (my husband)," says Dosanjh. "I want there to be not only love but romance and commitment to one another."

Dosanjh says her parents had mutual respect for each other, but "I don't think they were ever in love," she adds.

Mr. and Mrs. Dosanjh were very practical about their marriage; they wanted to start a family and be financially stable. They had big hopes for their children. Their hopes were the American Dream. They migrated to a new world so that their children would be raised with opportunities far beyond their own wildest dreams growing up in India, so they decided to leave their Third World nest and fly to the United States.

"I would say (it was) probably the hardest thing they've ever done," says Dosanjh.

After settling in Flagstaff in 1997, they welcomed little Sumanpreet—or "flower princess"—into the world. Her mom was overjoyed for a female addition to an all-boy family. In her early years, Dosanjh spent almost all of her time at home. Her house echoed of Punjabi Sikh channels that played on TV. It smelled of home-cooked food like aloo saag biryani and naan and roti, which brought the family together at the dinner table. Dosanjh spoke her native Punjabi with her parents and grandparents, who moved to America with them; they didn't know a lick of English. Her grandma woke up every morning and made her chai, swirling it with a mixture of spices with flavors so intense they reminded her of the markets in Punjab.

Kneeling on her bed, Dosanjh reached over her bed frame and traced over single square photos hung on her room wall—a random assembly of scattered memories amounting to more than a decade. Her photographs are a piece of home, a visual piece of identity, like her grandfather in his turban, her grandmother in a sari and a head scarf at her high school graduation, the first time she held her nephew.

Despite being born here, Dosanjh still has a lingering feeling of estrangement when it comes to culture and tradition. Starting a new life in a foreign land is difficult in its own right—new customs, new culture, new language, new ways of living. For people who look different, it would only get harder, especially after the attacks of September 11, 2001. In a nation shaken by a tragedy, prejudice against immigrants only grew. As a Sikh family, they have received their fair share of hate.

"What really bothered me was going to Safeway with my grandfather, who wears a turban,

and getting hateful words said to him in Englis," says Dosanjh. "He couldn't understand, but I did and that hurt me more than anything that could've been said to me. It broke my heart."

Dosanjh traced over a newspaper cutout of the headline "India Palace, a family restaurant." Her dad unfortunately passed shortly after Dosanjh was born. Jatinder and Davinder Dosanjh had successfully pursued the American Dream by migrating, raising their children in charter schools and opening their restaurant.

"I'm pretty sure they opened it around 1990. It was dad's greatest achievement; he was very proud," Dosanjh says.

She always made sure to go back to Phoenix as much as she

OWNERS DAVID DER DOSANJH AND JATINDER DOSANJH serve guests at the India Palace in the Bashas' shopping center. In addition to its regular menu items, the restaurant has a daily lunch buffet.

India Palace, a family restaurant

Customers who are tired of eating the same old burger and fries should come to India Palace for a taste of something more exotic. All the baked food is prepared in a clay oven over mesquite charcoal. The flour used in meals is made with yogurt, not yeast.

The menu offers a wide selection of entrées, all made with fresh ingredients. The entrées include seafood, beef, chicken, lamb and vegetarian dishes that can be prepared mild, medium or spicy.

Karahai lamb, one of the chef's specialties, is a boneless lamb cooked with herbs, onions, tomatoes and Indian spices and tossed in an Indian iron skillet. The chicken fraizee is an India Palace favorite. It consists of chicken cooked in special gravy with onions, tomatoes and bell pepper, all of which is tossed in an iron skillet. The menu also features appetizers, soups, rice dishes, tandoori breads, desserts and a full bar with Indian beer.

The lunch buffet changes daily and is available from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Seating in the dining area is available for smoking and non-smoking.

Large parties are encouraged to call 204-2300 for reservations.

India Palace is open seven days a week and serves lunch from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and dinner from 5 to 10 p.m. It is located in the Bashas' shopping center at 1910 W. Hwy. 89A, Suite No. 102.

"Home's here, home's Phoenix, home's Flagstaff and a small village in the 'burbs of Punjab."

—Sumanpreet Dosanjh

These old photos belong to the Dosanjhs. (Photos courtesy of the Dosanjh family).

could to help her mother out at the restaurant. Mrs. Dosanjh, now a widow and a single mother, has had an unfortunate twist to her story: What was once both of their dreams had turned into something she had to do on her own. No immigrants are without their struggles, and with two elderly grandparents to take care of, a business and three kids to put through college, Mrs. Dosanjh has perpetually been on her feet working for over a decade. Dosanjh saw her mom's work ethic, will power, determination and strength—qualities that she aspires to reach. Dosanjh is studying to be a doctor, but on weekends she spends her time working alongside her mother. To this day, the restaurant is still running with great success, and she couldn't be happier in preserving her father's legacy.

The pictures above her bed are a physical representation of her double life. Some pictures whisper tales in Punjabi, and others speak slurs of stories from college nights with friends. In some pictures she's Sumanpreet Kaur (as her family calls her), and in others she's Sumi (as her friends from college know her).

The double life hasn't always been there. When she was in her pre-teenage years, Dosanjh still carried her culture in her looks.

She was expected to have a certain appearance according to her Sikh religion: Women and boys must wear their hair up, and women must keep their clothes below their knees. Her brothers wore turbans that wrapped around their Rapunzel hair, which dropped to their lower backs. This was her normal. She never felt any different from others in the community she grew up in. Even though Flagstaff is a predominantly white community, she was too young to be aware of her appearance or the color of her skin: She was just the brown-skinned American girl with Indian parents.

As she grew up, she began to see her reality in a different picture. Her parents had decided to move to Phoenix, and she enrolled in a new school. Now part of a fairly diverse student body, Dosanjh suddenly became aware of a daunting reality: She was too brown for the white kids and too white for the brown kids. Despite being born on American soil, she still had moments of being an outcast. It's a lonely feeling when your identity is two halves of two wildly different worlds.

"There have been instances on the school bus in middle school when people would assume that 'Oh, you're Osama bin Laden's daughter,' and that would be said out loud in front of people," Dosanjh remembers.

She often wondered why she couldn't be both. Why did she need to choose? She couldn't bear abandoning the Punjabi roots that she held dear to her heart. She couldn't completely claim to be only American, because that would mean she would nullify her parents and her family's history. Dosanjh felt she didn't need to choose and shouldn't feel the need to choose between the two; instead, she's taken all the beautiful aspects from both cultures and shaped her life through them.

As U.S. President Harry Truman once said, "Two halves of the same walnut." Why not take both cultures and apply them in her life?

Dosanjh wants an Indian traditional wedding, but she wants it with the man she loves rather than through an arranged marriage. She learned English in school, and yet she has still held on to her Punjabi native language.

Dosanjh attends the University of Arizona, where she's currently a senior and has her fair share of fun away from home. Yet she still goes back to Phoenix and helps out in her temple. Maintaining a balance of those two worlds has shaped her into the person that she is today. And although the struggle remains, she has decided to make the best of it.

"I am who I am, and I am not going to apologize for it," Dosanjh says, seated in the middle of her treehouse. "Not to my family and to anyone out there who has a problem with it." i²

Jamaal Rhodes trains teen basketball players at the LEAD Athletics facility in Tucson. (All photos by Mark Lawson/EL INDE)

A b-ball tradition

By Mark Lawson

It's a Wednesday evening after school, and the echo of basketballs bouncing across the two courts that make up the LEAD Athletics facility about 15 minutes from Tucson International Airport can be heard long before you make your way into the gym. The same hardwood floors that Arizona Wildcat legends such as Mike Bibby, Jason Terry and Steve Kerr used to break a sweat on are now played on by a different generation of kids who could only hope to obtain the same level of success as the greats before them.

Among the group of 50 or so people—from those who have barely started playing basketball to teenagers getting ready to go back to school—sits the maestro. Although many of the players he trains are taller than his 5-foot-4 frame, they aren't able to match his intensity as he yells out drills and feedback.

Before basketballs are rolled out or jerseys are put on, he tells them to leave whatever problems they have outside the gym. It is time to work.

"Is that how you're going to play during a game? Why are you going half-ass?" he says to one player five minutes into a layup drill.

The players all respect him. He has trained former NBA, Division I and overseas players. He played four years of college basketball. After his playing days ended, he channeled his training and coaching skills into helping others get to where he once was.

The man all of these players are giving their undivided attention to is Jamaal Rhodes, a coach who wears many different hats around the Tucson basketball landscape.

Rhodes grew up in Warrenton, Georgia, born to a military family who constantly moved around the world after his dad enlisted when Rhodes was 7 years old. Being from a part of the South where football dominated the scene, Rhodes grew up envisioning himself playing something else because of his small size.

"My dad was a basketball coach," Rhodes says. "So about 7 or 8, we started moving around. I'm from Georgia, so everybody played football. Initially, I thought I was Herschel Walker coming up, so I had Herschel Walker kicking tee and all that. But once I moved to Germany, they wouldn't let me play football because there was a weight limit for your age group, so I started playing basketball a lot more. My dad was the coach of the base team, and he ended up coaching the best Army team in Europe. We ended up going to France, and I started seeing all the things

that basketball could kind of do for you, and I just fell in love with it."

The things Rhodes saw the sport doing for him were potentially a gateway out of Georgia and the chance to have his college paid for. He soon moved to Clarksville, Tennessee, where his high school career began. The battles on the court there were some of the best he had, going up against future NBA players such as Trenton Hassell and Shawn Marion, who had standout careers in the league during the late '90s and early 2000s. After his sophomore season, he moved back to Georgia, where he remembers the gym constantly being filled to capacity.

"Being in a small town in Georgia like Warner Robins, what you see in the movies and stuff is almost realistic, where the town shuts down for the rivalry games," he says. "I went back home a couple of weeks ago, and they had an alumni game between my school and our rival school. And it was guys 30, 40 years old. The gym probably had 2,500 people in it for one of those games."

Around his sophomore year was when Rhodes realized he could potentially use basketball to get an education. Although he was smaller than pretty much everyone on the court, he came around in an era where smaller point guards were nothing new to the sport, dominating at the highest levels.

"I ended up at a junior college first," he says. " A lot of the schools were afraid because I'm 5-4. But back then there were small point guards, so it wasn't unseen for a Division II or NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Atheletes) or JUCO (junior college) to have a smaller point guard. A lot of the schools that were kind of interested wanted me to come try out. I ended up playing junior college basketball at a school called Coastal Georgia Community College, which is now an NAIA four-year school."

After realizing Coastal Georgia wasn't the right fit on the court, Rhodes moved on to another school. Then another. He went to four different schools after high school, finally finding a home at Augusta State in Augusta, Georgia. The problem for Rhodes was that once his playing eligibility ran out, his time in the classroom didn't. Rhodes still had to complete close to two years of coursework to earn a degree.

"Some of the schools I transferred to didn't accept credits from another school," Rhodes says. "Then some didn't offer the same classes. It felt like I started over two or three times, even though I had been in college a lot longer."

For many players, once basketball is over, the drive to go back to school is gone. This put Rhodes at a crossroads.

"I took some time off to really get myself together," he says. "The end goal, trying to figure out what I wanted to do, all roads lead back to 'you got to finish school.'"

Rhodes ended up with a marketing degree, becoming a teacher through an alternative program. While he started off in the classroom and not the hardwood, being around kids as a mentor eventually brought Rhodes back to the sport he loved.

Tucson was never on the radar for Rhodes once he settled into life in Georgia after college. He became the varsity head coach at Warren County, his old high school. Taking the school from five wins his first season to 12 in his second and eventually 19 his third season, he began to open eyes. Candice Warthen was a star point guard for the coach but wasn't receiving much interest from schools. Rhodes' sister was stationed at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, not far from the University of Arizona. On a whim, he sent Warthen's film to the school.

Arizona women's basketball head coach and Georgia native Niya Butts saw the film and was interested, offering Warthen a scholarship. Butts had a spot on staff for someone with the playing and coaching background of Rhodes, so he followed Warthen to Arizona.

Rhodes (left) coaches a girls basketball team in Tucson. (Photos by Mark Lawson/EL INDE)

This sign hangs outside the LEAD Athletics facility in Tucson.

> *"We're out there trying to make sure the kids improve each week and get to play at the next level."*
>
> *—Jamaal Rhodes*

The landscape in Tucson compared to Georgia is different in many aspects. A 90-degree Tucson day is not the same as a 90-degree day under the sticky Georgia sun.

"Well, the heat was a big thing," Rhodes said. "I remember when I first got out here, the news people did an experiment where they cooked cookies in the car and melted some strawberry chocolates and strawberries in the car to show you how hot it was. But everyone outside of Tucson sees Tucson as this basketball mecca. I mean, it is 'Point Guard U.' I graduated high school in '97. I knew what Arizona basketball meant."

Also, 1997 happened to be the year of the biggest basketball achievement the city had ever seen, the year the University of Arizona men's basketball team captured its first and to this day only national championship.

"I remember watching those games. I remember watching Miles Simon, Mike Bibby, Damon Stoudamire. I remember those guys being on TV. So me getting an opportunity to come out here to do basketball, it was amazing."

When Rhodes first came to Tucson, he noticed just how different the sports landscape was. He said high schools in Georgia would hold women's varsity games before the men's, often leading to packed gyms with both bleachers down. Tucson splits the pair into home and away games, with games rarely having more than a few hundred people on any night.

"I would go to some of these high school games ... and there were like 100 people in the crowd," Rhodes said. "In Georgia, both bleachers would be down, a couple thousand on a really good night. It just kind of took me by surprise at first."

As he adjusted to the way basketball in the city worked and the people to know, Rhodes got in touch with the people who ran Leading Elite Athletic Development, or LEAD, a strictly basketball facility that opened around the time Rhodes came to Tucson.

"Well, once it opened, I think it was a foreign concept here, and I think part of that is why it didn't see the success early on," Rhodes says. "There weren't a lot of qualified skilled guys here, so when you say, 'Well, you're going to go see this trainer,' the average person is saying, 'Well, my coach can show me how to do certain things.'"

Rhodes looks on as young athletes practice under his watch. (Photo by Mark Lawson/EL INDE)

Through LEAD, Rhodes met his current training partner, Jeremy Daniels, forging a bond that has stretched beyond just training.

Daniels not only trains alongside Rhodes but also helps coach at Sabino High School, where the duo has developed the girls basketball team into one of the best in the state.

Like Rhodes, Daniels comes from a landscape far from Tucson. Growing up in Virginia, Daniels came up through high school during a time that featured two of the state's best athletes of all time: former NBA Most Valuable Player Allen Iverson and Ronald Curry, an All-American in high school in both football and basketball.

"I remember (Curry) was a year older than I was, and some of the stuff I saw him do was insane," Daniels says. "We went to the same high school, and the amount of attention he got was crazy. I haven't seen anything that has rivaled that out here. You knew the minute he walked into the gym, he was 'that' dude. He just had a different swagger to him, something I haven't seen since I've been out here."

The goal for Daniels and Rhodes goes far beyond winning a state championship or being the best trainers in the city. It's about instilling that level of confidence in their players as they prepare them to play at the next level.

As they end practice and stand in the gym they hope to hang a state championship banner in, the two speak about what drives them to coach, more about values than wins or losses.

"A lot of coaches in high school and club basketball coach for wins and trophies," Daniels says. "We don't. We're out there trying to make sure the kids improve each week and get to play at the next level."

"Of course we want to win, but too many coaches do it for themselves," Rhodes adds. "Trophies and all that look good on social media and things like that, but how many kids are you getting to play college? We want our girls to play against the best competition and learn what they need to get better at. I always tell them that basketball is a tool. Use it to open doors and do things like pay for college, provide a living for your family."

A unique task that Rhodes has had to balance out is coaching his daughter Kam'Ren, a sophomore at Sabino.

The point guard started last season as a freshman and is already attracting Division I attention while having to adjust to having dad around on and off the court.

"I've gotten used to it," she says. "Being able to handle the situation better and separate on the court and off the court."

During practice, things are all business. Rhodes treats his daughter no different than any other player, a little bit harder on her at times. She is with him at every training session, every practice or open gym. She works during training with the men, often one of only a few girls in the gym.

After the ball stops bouncing, the pair go into father-daughter mode, joking and laughing about what is for dinner or how she jokingly better score "40 points a game this season," according to Rhodes.

"At the end of the day, he's always dad first," she says. "I know he pushes me to be at my best, but I never feel the added pressure or anything. He wants what is best for me and wants me to be better than anyone in town. I know I can get there if I work hard enough."

The trio takes turns shooting from half court before they leave the gym, always competing no matter what they're doing.

Kam'Ren sinks it on her second try, coming out of her typical quiet shell to rub it in to Rhodes and Daniels.

"You both owe me a Bahama Bucks now," she says, referring to the dessert shop a few miles from the school.

They hope that isn't the only treat they enjoy this season. i²

To paint, or not to paint

By David Skinner

Paint is everywhere. It's on the sidewalk you're walking on, it's on the sign that's directing you and it's on the building you are walking into.

If you don't look, you won't notice, and that goes for the people applying it as well. There is always a story behind the paint, and an even deeper story behind the painter.

Steve Plaisted has lived in Tucson for most of his life and has painted most of his life as well. The 50-year-old graduated from Santa Rita High School in 1987, was a star running back during his time there and decided to settle in Tucson after his parents had moved here from Southern California in 1972. Plaisted met his wife in Tucson and raised his children in the Old Pueblo as well.

He knows Tucson like the back of his hand, which means he knows the best breakfast spots. His favorite? The Bread and Butter Cafe, an unassuming diner with a charm that comes from the regular customers and veteran staff rather than the decor.

"I consider myself a California boy, but I grew up in Tucson," says Plaisted as he settles into his seat and puts his black coffee to his lips. "I love it here though, man. The weather is awesome, it's cheap and it hasn't wronged me yet," says Plaisted at 7:30 on a cool fall morning. He wears a T-shirt and his customary white painter pants. Elsewhere around the country, other painters are wrapping themselves up in their thick Carhart jackets and heavy long johns.

Plaisted paints houses for a living and has been doing so since he was a teenager. He has seen Tucson grow as he has, and he has put down his roots along with the foundations while he carries out his craft.

He's painted probably every possible type of building you can imagine. Schools, airplane hangars, warehouses, barns, you name it—Plaisted has done it and done it well.

Plaisted gets some familial help as his sons work in the business. Paint is personal to Plaisted. It's what provides for his family, it's what he is great at and it also is a family trade.

"My dad was a painter and contractor," he says, "so I started working for him when I was 14. And I had Andre, my son, working for me when he was about 12 or 13."

Painting in Tucson, and in the Southwest in general, is something that can wear on a person's body. The five-month summers, the triple-digit heat and the unrelenting sun take a toll on the people in a profession in which many of the hours are spent outside without shade or cover.

Painters and contractors often have to wear long-sleeved clothing to protect from sunburns. When they catch a break from the unforgiving heat, they are working inside with no air conditioning so they don't damage the newly applied paint on the walls. This often leaves them in 110-plus-degree heat for hours at a time.

"I started out painting elementary schools in the summer, and we would have 90 days to finish the whole building," says Plaisted. "They had us working 10 hours a day for the first 50 days or so, Monday through Friday. Those were the longest summers of my life.

"People just think I come in, throw s*** on the wall and cash my check," says Plaisted. "If I did that, I would have been out of a job a long time ago."

Paint is also personal to people. Almost every room is painted. The hallway, too. The ceiling that you stare at when lying down after a hard day. The color, the tone, it all is unique in order to meet the specific needs for that room. Child care? It's going to be bright, durable and easy to wash. Business room? Toned down, duller and unnoticeable. Distracting business partners with your wall color isn't usually a sound strategy.

"The biggest thing that has changed since I started out almost 40 years ago is the quality," says Plaisted. "Back in the day, guys would only buy high-end stuff. They would take their time on jobs and have pride in their work," says Plaisted, who adds that people put extra time into their work because word of mouth is the main source of business for many painters.

If your product or work wasn't good, people would let other people know, and it would impact not only your business but also your reputation. In a tight-knit town like Tucson, your reputation could make you or break you. Plaisted, who maintains a crew of just two others, believes in the old-school method of quality painting over quantity.

"I just saw the quality go down, and it was hard to manage that many people who couldn't even manage themselves," he says. "It's just easier to have the couple guys you trust and show up at 6 in the morning on the other side of town and not leave you hanging."

The smaller crew limits Plaisted to painting mostly houses and industrial offices, but it keeps him in business, as the quality of his work keeps him going from job to job, no matter how small the task.

"Nowadays, almost all of my jobs are fixing whatever mess the painter before created before I got there," says Plaisted. "People are just looking to make a quick buck, and people don't want to pay for high-end work, and then you end up with me fixing pink cabinets when the homeowner specifically asked for red."

Plaisted takes the final bite of his breakfast and then shuffles over to the old clients of his who congregate every morning in the corner of the diner.

"I painted that guy's dealership 20-something years ago," says Plaisted with a smile that only comes with a sense of confidence from a job well done. "If you ever need a car, I'll get you in touch. Best car guy in Tucson right there."

When you've been working in and around Tucson as long as Plaisted, you know just about everybody, and everybody who is somebody knows you. i²

(Photo by David Skinner/EL INDE)

Hiking Hammonds

By Kacey Seeloff

The couple keep a home chock-full of character. On a hook beside the door, there's a pair of binoculars. Directly beneath, worn hiking poles lean into the corner of the room. They are curled up together on a soft gray couch across from me. Between us sits a dark wood coffee table adorned with a faded mountain hat, a sewing machine and other oddities.

A shelved wall carries the few heirlooms they have kept over the years: aged photographs, an intricately painted tea kettle, a carved wood sea turtle, a pair of glass bottles and a few other eclectic pieces. "We think it's all kind of clutter, but it has emotional value to it," Paul Hammond says. On the opposing wall hangs a decade-old photograph of the couple taken at Elk Meadows, Oregon. On each of their shoulders are heavy packs, hiking boots on their feet and a mountain of blues, purples and browns sprawled behind their smiling faces.

Megan McGowan is tall and lean, with smooth brown hair, a natural face and perhaps the most contagious laugh I have ever heard. Hammond stands slightly shorter, with tan skin, a dark head of hair and a scruffy, salt-and-pepper beard. I ask Hammond's co-worker, Tyler Schweigert, what his first impressions of Hammond were. "Dirtbag. Easy," he says with a chuckle. It's a highly regarded compliment in the outdoor industry. It means you're living off the land, living in the land, living the dream.

Perhaps the photograph at Elk Meadows was taken where they more honestly call home. Where their living room is adorned with pine needles for carpet and a crackling campfire serves as a coffee table. Where their walls hang views of towering treelines and ragged mountain ranges. Where their bedroom lies wherever they pitch their tent and unroll their sleeping bags for the night.

Perhaps where McGowan and Hammond feel most at home is far from any house at all, somewhere deep in the wilderness, following an outstretched trail.

I first learned of them when a friend recommended their blog to me. Typed across the top of the web page in a neat font: "Hiking

Hammonds: Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, Continental Divide Trail and Beyond."

With each long-distance trail stretching over a thousand miles, it is a feat to hike even a single one. Completion of all three trails, however, wins its own achievement: the Triple Crown. Those who have hiked the mind-boggling 7,900 miles it consists of, like the McGowan-Hammonds, are proudly referred to as Triple Crowners. As of 2018, only 396 people had registered as Triple Crown recipients, according to the American Long Distance Hiking Association.

I read through their blog, wide-eyed and desperate with curiosity. I wanted to know who they were. I was unsatisfied with what I had read on their blog, posted by McGowan. I know what they ate for breakfast on day 125 of the Continental Divide Trail, what the weather was like on the 84th day of the Pacific Crest Trail, and what their recipe for Trail Coconut Peanut Noodles is. I know they left 7,900 miles worth of footprints on the trails, but not how 7,900 miles worth of trails had left their own prints on them.

I ask McGowan why the posts were so empty of emotion. "The trail's kind of an emotional roller coaster. You just go through highs and lows, and it's difficult to convey," she responds with a shrug. I chuckle, looking at the Triple Crowners in front of me. Their whole lives must be riddled with highs and lows, hesitantly stuck between living on the trail and living away from it.

They met through a mutual friend on a Monday night in 2008 in Scottsdale, Arizona, over a half-priced bottle of wine. At the time, McGowan was preparing to move to Switzerland and Hammond to Portland, Oregon. Each of them grew up in families who moved regularly, their circumstances pulling them from state to state.

McGowan recalls her childhood home, placed in the mountains of New Mexico, just outside of Albuquerque. The home backed up against national forest. "There was a trail that started right outside of our backyard that went all the way up to like the ski lift and s***, like up on the top of the mountains," she reminisces. "That was probably my first experience with having that freedom outdoors."

Hammond thinks back to living near a river in Virginia, where he fished and swam and played on obstacle courses. When his family moved to Hawaii, he recognized that he could play outside 12 months out of the year. When the moving didn't stop, he discovered the one static in his dynamic childhood: being outside. "(That) was a place where I felt comfortable because it's the thing that didn't change everywhere I was going."

Each grew comfortable with change, new experiences, new places, dynamic lives—they found familiarity in the outdoors.

Months later, when McGowan came to visit Hammond in Portland, the two went on their first hike together in Forest Park. "We were like two desert people going to the Pacific Northwest. Everything's growing on top of other things, and there's moss everywhere," McGowan says in an epiphanous tone.

Half a decade and dozens of hikes later, McGowan and Hammond married in 2013 and honeymooned by backpacking in the Grand Canyon and exploring Canyonlands in Utah. Sometime later, one of them brought up a can of worms: the idea of hiking the Appalachian Trail.

"I kind of had the fear that we wouldn't like it and wouldn't do it, but I would never say that. And I think you were the same way," Hammond says, turning to his wife beside him on the couch. A lighthearted smile draws across his face. "Like maybe we're not going to like it. Maybe we're not going to succeed, but I'm going to make myself do it unless she gives in first. So I think a lot of it was being stubborn."

Hammond's father, Daniel, died of cancer at the age of 58. His passing relieved the couple of their ties and debt. His father's young age also inspired Hammond to enjoy life more and silence his worries. He quit his job as a chef and looked to the trail as a means of healing.

Thus, in 2016, the stubborn pair embarked on their 2,200-mile trek. On that journey, they adopted their trail names: McGowan as Sourstraws and Hammond as Sauerkraut. Another Triple Crown successor, and a friend of the couple who goes by the nickname Akuna, explains this phenomenon: "A simple

Hammond works at an outdoor retail store in Tucson. (Photo by Kacey Seeloff/EL INDE)

name for a simple life."

McGowan earned her trail name one day at Neels Gap on the Appalachian Trail. A few days earlier she had noted her envy of other thru-hikers. "I remember at night, after we ate dinner, I was watching everyone bust out M&M's," McGowan says. When she hit the first resupply point, being a fan of sour candy, she fetched herself five packs of Sour Punch Straws. The couple was hiking near another couple, whose trail names were Lewis and Clark, and took turns passing one another as the other couple took a break. After Lewis and Clark had leapfrogged by numerous times to the sight of McGowan chomping away at Sour Punch Straws, they jokingly remarked, "How the f*** many Sour Straws do you have in there?"

Hammond adopted his name after a trip with another set of hikers. The group had rented a hotel together for the night and decided to treat themselves to kielbasa sausages. McGowan admits, "We were all disgusting in that we would love to have sauerkraut, but who should carry it if no one wanted to carry it?" When Hammond volunteered to carry the 2 pounds of sauerkraut, he was appreciated, but when the bag broke in his pack and he spent the night cleaning out the smell of fermented cabbage, he was given Sauerkraut as his trail name.

The couple went by the name "The Sours" for over a year until Hammond was renamed Piñata. The new name was given after unloading enough gear from his pockets to elicit the comment, "Wow, you explode like a piñata!" Hammond's notorious habit of handing out Jolly Ranchers from pockets on his bright clothes helped to secure the new name.

After 182 days of walking together, on Sept. 28, 2016, at 10 a.m., they reached Baxter Peak on Mount Katahdin, the tallest mountain in Maine. They snapped a photograph together, each with a bright red jacket, a fist in the air and smiles on their faces. In front of them was a large wooden trail post, "Northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail." Behind them, the thick white fog they had spent their days living in.

McGowan posted to their blog that evening: "Got a hotel room, ate a bunch of food, got cleaned up, and are now relaxing in front of the TV with beer. What a luxury." Missing from the post were the grand reflections on their journey: What did they discover about themselves? How did the trail encapsulate them, and how did they encapsulate it? What did they find in that thick, chilling fog?

Whatever it was, they must have been drawn back. They decided together that there was more trail for them to hike. With the help of their families, some income from odd jobs and Hammond's encouraging words—"There's always something around the next bend"—the two set off on the Pacific Crest Trail on May 6, 2017. They reached the terminus 149 days later, snapping a photograph at the final trail post—each with cobalt blue shirts, two fingers in the air to signify their second trail completed and smiles on their faces.

On May 5, 2018, in the Big Hatchet Mountains Wilderness Study Area in southwestern New Mexico, windblown dust flew around them as they set off on the Continental Divide Trail. On day 125, Sept. 5, 2018, the two emerged from the trailhead and spotted the border monument located between the customs checkpoint of Canada and the United States—the end of their hike. The two ran through the cool wet breeze down to the stone monument carved with the words "International Boundary." The couple snapped a photograph, each with trekking poles in hand, a palm against the cold stone of the monument and smiles on their faces. They toasted with celebratory whiskey that McGowan's father had gifted them, raised their thumbs and hitched a ride home—wherever they chose to find it next.

Over a year later, that home is embodied inside an old adobe in Tucson, baking beneath the sun like pottery in a kiln.

McGowan returned to her former job at Whole Foods, working in the specialty department. Since then, she has picked up a few other jobs writing for Trek, an online magazine that hosts hike blogs, sharing gear reviews and customizing backpacking itineraries for others. As a hobby, she uses her sewing machine to craft gear of her own, including the ultralight backpacks she sported on the Pacific Crest and Continental Divide Trails. "She's definitely the breadwinner," Hammond admits.

Hammond works as a manager at Summit Hut, a locally owned outdoor sports store. Being detail-oriented and an experienced backpacker, he memorizes the ounce weight of gear, fits Tucsonans for packs, sizes feet for ideal hiking boots and thrives in an environment so passionate about the outdoors. His friend and coworker Schweigert balls up his fists and bobs them up and down to describe him: "When he walks, he walks like this," he says, gesturing, "and he's always carrying his trekking poles, whether they're in his hands or not."

With jobs inspired by the outdoors and a home in the vast Sonoran Desert, it seems as though they have it made for themselves. I ask them how they are liking it here one year in. "I feel like I don't get out enough," Hammond blurts out. "I feel like I'm kind of losing touch with that whole thru-hiker side of me a little bit."

In October, McGowan and Hammond took time off work to backpack the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail and attend the annual Triple Crown conference. They were awarded wooden plaques with their names carved into them, which I imagine will soon be added to the shelved wall beside the tea kettle, or perhaps hung beside the photograph at Elk Meadows, to remind them how far they've come from the "nubes" McGowan laughs that they used to be. At the conference, they met roughly 200 other individuals who had completed the Triple Crown. Hammond explains his excitement being around them. "Everybody was the same kind of dirtbag person you were," he says, as if the other Triple Crowners "speak the same language."

Life on the trail is a stark contrast from life in civilization. McGowan relishes the freedom she feels on long hikes. She compares

that to the confines of fashion and hygiene and all the "commercialist bull**** that's everyday life," she says. The two note the connection to nature they'd found, how in tune they became with the cycles of the day. They hadn't woken up to blaring alarms, but gently beneath the sun. In the evenings, Hammond says, "All the bugs went silent; they stopped flying. All the squirrels started running home. All birds landed." And when the trail got dark, they fell asleep.

"You just go and exist, and there's nothing else but getting to the next food source, getting to your next water source. As long as you could do that, you're OK," Hammond assures me.

McGowan and Hammond take turns sharing their reflections of living on the trail, both individually and together. They laugh as they share stories about fighting over pacing, mimicking each other. "You're going too fast. You're going too slow. We need to take a break. We just took one!" They blush at the moments on the trail when they truly began to know each another, especially that one time Hammond saw McGowan angrier than she had ever been and snap a trekking pole in half after a long day. They describe the days when Hammond wasn't feeling so good and McGowan took the initiative to set up camp and cook while he rested. They nod in agreement that the one delicacy they'll purchase in towns along the trail is a fancy bottle of olive oil, a staple ingredient for all their trips. They giggle as they describe intimacy on the trail, how after days without showering, they'd rather not zip their sleeping bags together,.

> *"You just go and exist, and there's nothing else but getting to the next food source, getting to the next water source. As long as you could do that, you're OK."*
>
> *—Paul Hammond*

Despite their individualistic streaks, McGowan says the trail really forced them to sacrifice their own personal goals to work together as a team. If they didn't quite perfect it on the first trail, or the second, they had it down by the third.

Today, the couple's goals seem to align: They hope to find a happy medium between their real and aspirational homes. "Hopefully in ten years we have a home base set up that we can rent out and then go travel and do that," Hammond says, smiling at McGowan.

I've met with them on multiple occasions, I've asked them a hundred questions, I've talked to them for hours. Yet I am still unsure as to what they found in that thick, chilling fog. Whatever it may have been, I think it's something they don't plan on losing or giving away the secrets to.

On Oct. 8, 2019, McGowan and Hammond had just returned from the 2019 Mountain Film Festival, where they had watched expedition after expedition of people backpacking, one-legged skiing, rock climbing uncharted territory, bikepacking and living their wildest dreams. Upon their return, I asked the couple how it felt to complete the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail. I asked how it felt to finish 7,900 miles worth of footsteps. McGowan, sitting on a dimly lit balcony with sounds of a trickling fountain in the back, looking unsure for a moment, says, "I think the end is almost the least exciting part of it." i²

The Hammonds display their Triple Crown plaques, given to hikers who have completed the three major U.S. long-distance hiking trails. (Photo by Kacey Seeloff/EL INDE)

Stargazing

Essay and photos by Griffin Riley

I've been shooting for about eight years now, since my freshman year of high school, and have truly fallen in love with it. So much of what I've done since my passion blossomed has been in the name of furthering my craft: learning more about the techniques, the math behind it, the physics of it, the mechanics of it, the art of it.

In the years that I've been shooting, and especially in the years that I've been shooting more professionally, I've noticed myself becoming a proverbial "nerd" in many ways. While most people find themselves window shopping for clothes or new shoes, I frequently find myself going to the nearest electronics store, looking at an SD card's data read and write speeds (my card is 300 megabytes per second, just for the record).

Nerdy as I've become, the question for me has always been: What's next? What's the better camera? What's the fastest aperture lens? What's the next, most challenging shoot I can go on?

Well, a fun fact about photography is that bigger is damn near always better in this field. If you have a camera with a bigger sensor, you're more capable of countless types of imaging. And paired with that massive sensor, you'd need an absolutely massive lens to go with it, too. Pair the idea of "bigger is better" with one of the most interesting, challenging and specialized forms of photography, and what do you get? Astronomy. A telescope. A massive CCD (charge coupled device) sensor. Processing power so immense—and so hot—that half of the lens' structure is dedicated just to cooling it down.

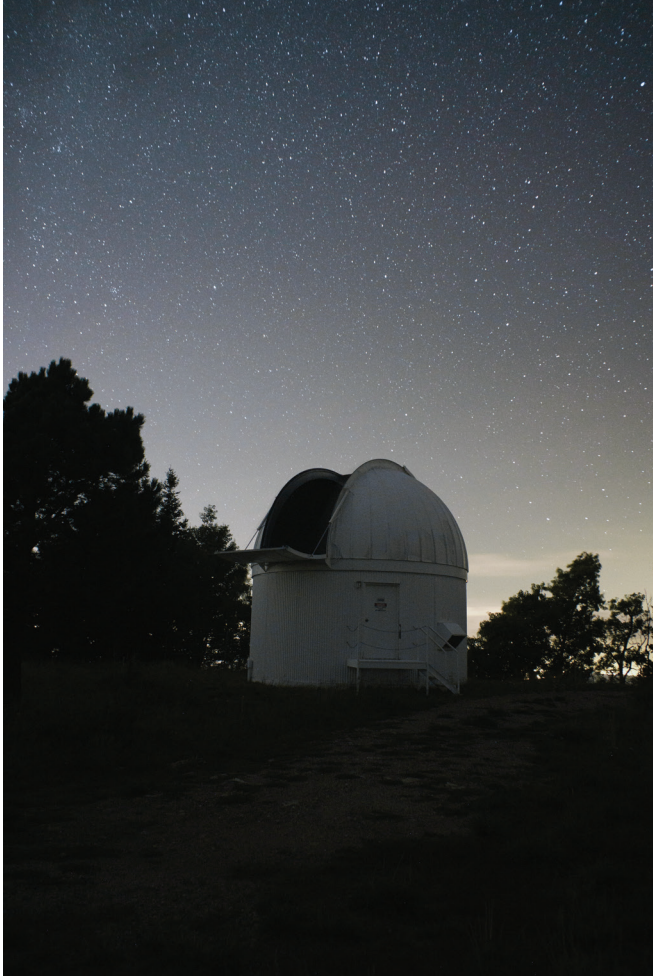
And behind it all is one person, watching every click of the shutter, combing through all the thousands of photos, finding what's interesting, what matters to us, what appeals to the human race. One of these people I found in Tucson is Carson Fuls, one of the senior research specialists for the Catalina Sky Survey.

Fuls and his team operate two telescopes on the summit of Mount Lemmon: a 60-inch and a 40-inch. Every night, one of the astronomers mans the 60-inch telescope and scans several blocked-out sectors of the Milky Way galaxy, trying to locate and track any near-Earth objects that may or may not be on a collision course with our planet.

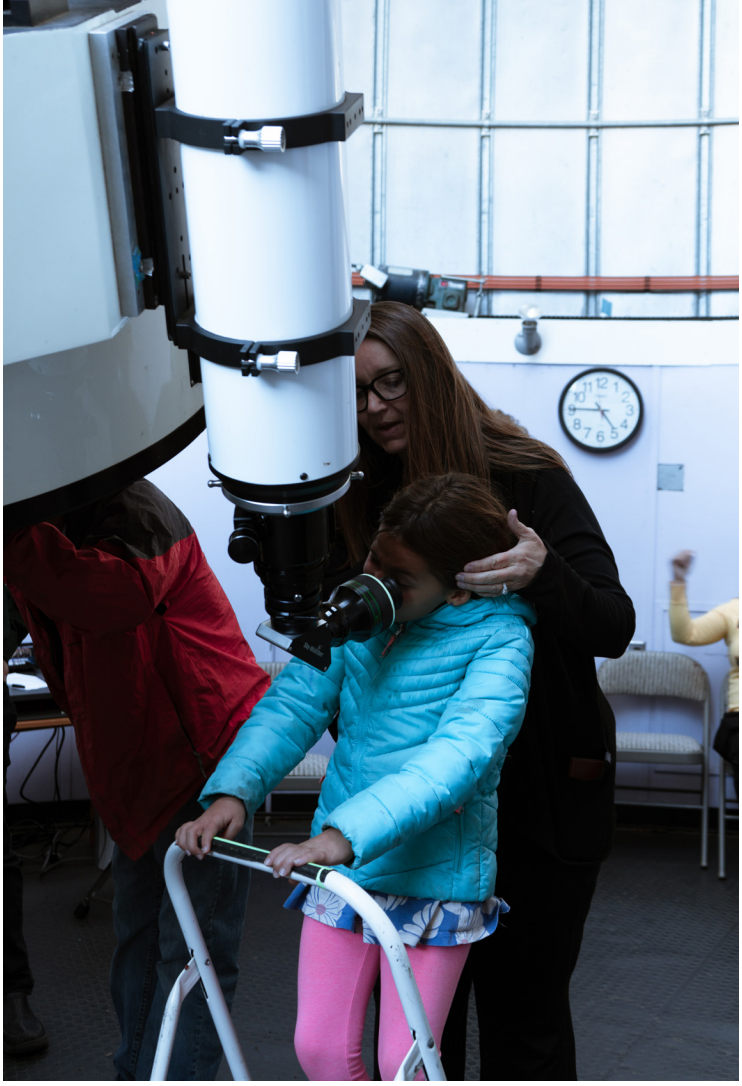
In early October, I spent six hours with Fuls up on the mountain to see what a day in the life was like for someone like him. Through the course of the night, we studied the stars and discussed everything about the history of the mountain, his background in physics, how he got into the astronomy field, the logistics of living on a mountain away from family for days at a time, and how he met his wife through the Sky Survey work.

He mentioned how there's an engineering component of his job for when he's not on the mountain observing speeding bullets in the sky. A few weeks later, Fuls and I met again, this time down the mountain, to check out the Sky Survey's offices that aren't atop the 9,000-foot rock megalith. I took photos of him at the University of Arizona's Lunar & Planetary Laboratory as he worked on a new microchip to regulate shutter actuations on a telescope that the Catalina Sky Survey team is modifying.

See more photos on the next page



Astronomer Carson Fuls opens up the dome shutter before the night's observations atop Mount Lemmon on Oct. 6, 2019. "This is what I would do if I didn't have to work, so why would I retire?" says Fuls. (All photos by Griffin Riley/EL INDE)

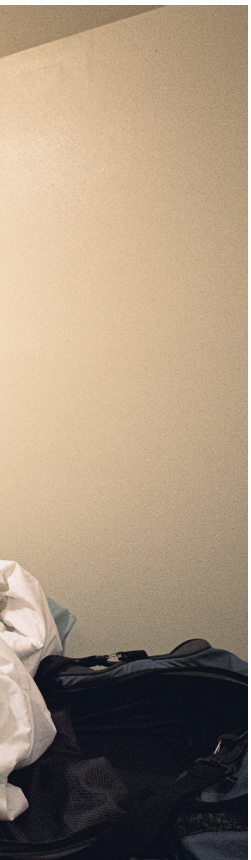


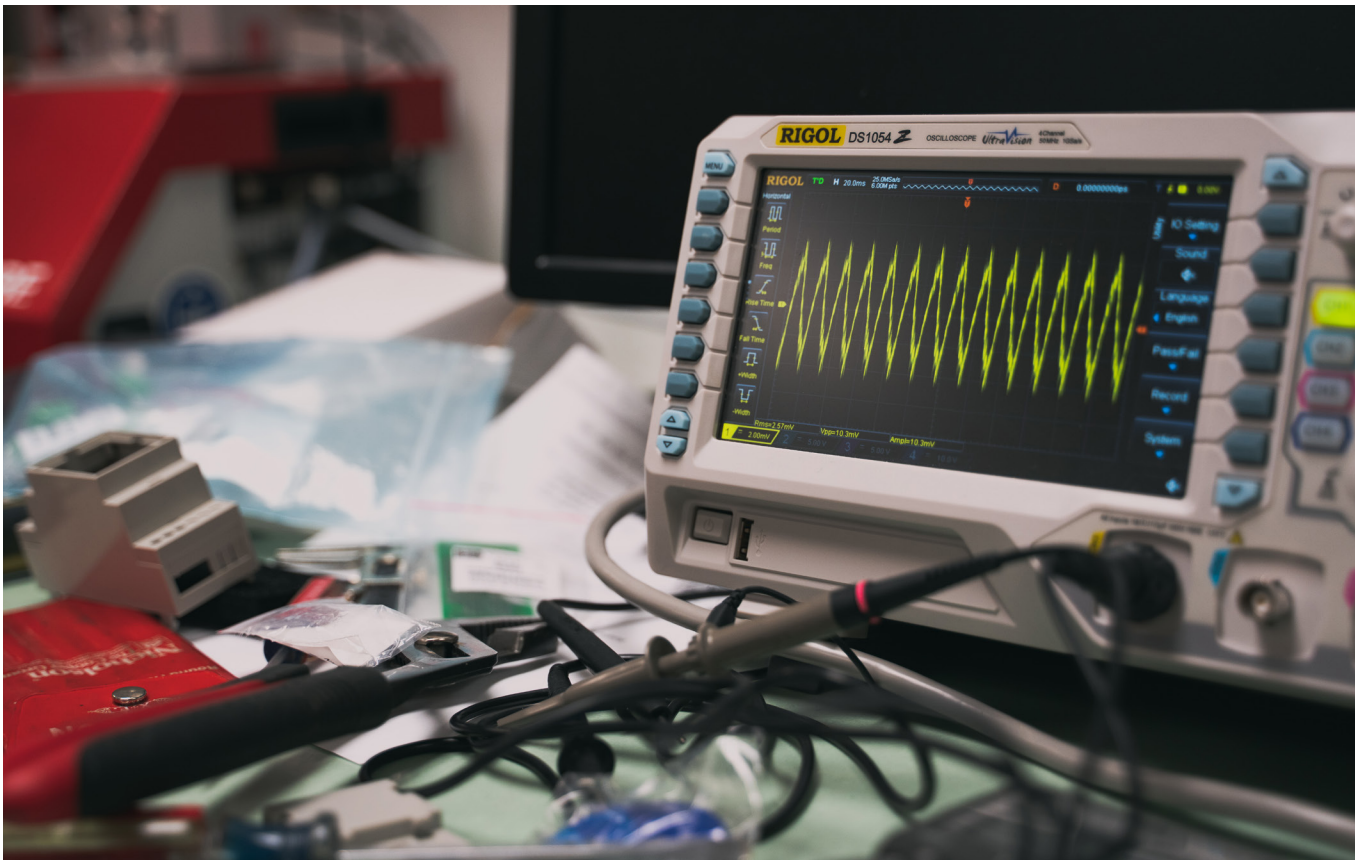
Also offered at the observatory are community outreach programs like stargazing that astronomers lead to educate the public on our galaxy and the universe. In this program, attendees spend the first half of the afternoon learning about the history of the mountain as well as the galaxy, while the second half sees attendees using the telescopes to stare into the sky.

Inside the telescope building, there's a room where astronomers like Fuls can sleep on their three-day stints. "It's kind of weird when you wake up, and the first thing you see is your desk," says Fuls.

Fuls points out different sectors that he'll be surveying through the night on Oct. 6, 2019.

In the basement of the Sky Survey's office is a work station covered in tools such as this oscilloscope, which measures different wavelenghts in the air.





Lauren Valenzuela used art to overcome addiction. Now she uses earrings to bring beauty and joy into everyday life. (Photo by Hayden Rae Gambee/EL INDE)

> *"I have to remember daily, I'm living my dream. And to walk in life with gratitude and humility and gratefulness because it could change tomorrow."*
>
> *– Lauren Valenzuela*

Making it, in her hometown

Valenzuela's earrings are statement pieces that scream "look at me" in a fun way

By Hayden Rae Gambee

Lauren Valenzuela sits across from me on a lime green velvet couch, in front of a forest green wall that makes a nice backdrop for her bright blonde hair and blue eyes. "Right now, I'm really into orange," Valenzuela mentions, smiling. This comes as a surprise because of the color scheme in her studio, but then, I immediately notice the orange shirt that she has paired with her '70s-inspired flare jeans.

The first thing people notice about Valenzuela could be her appearance: She's a blonde with a lot of tattoos (her husband is a tattoo artist). But many people notice the white geometric earrings that are dangling from her ears. These are a part of her everyday wear, easy to understand, considering she makes them herself. They are definitely a statement piece that scream "look at me" in a fun way. Sigfús Designs, Valenzuela's company inspired by her Icelandic heritage, specializes in these abstract-looking, bold earrings that look as if they could be straight from a high-fashion magazine. They're made from polymer clay and molded by Valenzuela by hand in her eclectic studio.

Based in Tucson, Valenzuela's hometown, Sigfús is growing daily. Going from small orders of one to two pairs of earrings, she now meets

orders of hundreds of pairs. She is basically "living her dream," creating products she loves, making enough money to travel around the world with her husband and her friends in her time off, and being her own boss of a successful company.

Today, Tucson feels like the ideal home base for an artist like her, who enjoys the art scene and the culture. But back when she started out, she wanted to be away from it all.

"I think I went through the whole 'not liking Tucson' thing when I was younger, and I moved to Phoenix, which is not super far," says Valenzuela. "But I think moving brought me back to understanding why I like it so much and gave me a different appreciation. Now I love Tucson."

Valenzuela mentions that part of the reason she appreciates Tucson so much now is because of the community and culture that the city has to offer.

As we sit across from each other in her studio, Valenzuela reflects on what influenced her as an artist. Both of her parents were artists: Her father was a musician, and she describes her mother, on her Etsy website, as a "hippy that I grew up always going to art shows and indian pow-wows with."

"So my whole life I've been exposed to art and painted and drawn and done those little cross-stitch collages," says Valenzuela. A cross-stitch collage is basically a collage of images made from thread. Cross-stitch is used a lot of the time for embroidery. "I always have done a ton of different things, and I knew that one day when I found something that I really was passionate about, I could, I would make it into a business," she says. "I think I've said that for years."

Valenzuela has always been artistic, growing up with creative parents and even doing marketing for a restaurant corporation for a few years that allowed her to express her own ideas. She eventually realized this was not her dream, though.

In her younger years, it was difficult for Valenzuela to identify the things that she was interested in and passionate about. She always got bored. This was obvious to her when she was in school. She did not feel passionate about learning, and therefore, jumped from high school to high school, was home-schooled and then eventually decided to get her GED at an alternative school.

"I ended up graduating, but I did drop out for a few years, and the only class that I was going to while I was going in to school was my art class," says Valenzuela. "It was just a joke, though, because I was definitely a troubled teen. I don't know how else to put it without sounding cliché."

Valenzuela's parents had gone through a divorce when she was younger, and her mom passed away in 2010. "So that's when I started getting into drugs and partying and like all of that."

She ended up going to a rehab center when she was 23, and up until that point, her life was, as she describes it, "kind of a mess." She had always been creative, but she didn't really have a plan for life. "And so when people said things like, "What do you want to be when you grow up?' Back then, I didn't really have a lot of hope for life, as dreary as that sounds, so I never thought of my future. I was just like, I don't even know that I want to live. That's kind of where I was at."

When Valenzuela got fired from one of her jobs, she decided that she wanted to turn her life around because she felt as if she had hit rock bottom. "I would say I was a functioning drug addict, I was like a drug addict slash alcoholic. I could still keep a job, but I would just like party and just go hard. And I think I like finally lost my job. You know, like that kind of stuff. Like you're like, OK, I'm like coming to the end."

Both of Valenzuela's parents struggled with addiction, too. "But even though like they had that, they were both very supportive of, this is what it is, like you need to get your life together."

During rehab, Valenzuela realized just how helpful art can be for someone who is fighting internal battles."I did like a 6-month program, and then I did this like transitional program. I even played with clay there and beads and making jewelry and like making dream catchers and just like, you know, cause they just give you like projects." This was one of the first moments she realized art is therapy.

"There was a lot of hard stuff, you know, counseling and group therapy," she says. "But there (were) a lot of moments to just process and create."

Valenzuela still uses art as therapy in her life today. "Sometimes I'm just doing production, and I'm doing my job," she explains. "But there's a lot of time to play with clay and process what you're feeling and just zone out in a good way."

Valenzuela's best friend, Breanna Flanagan, is in awe of Valenzuela and what she has accomplished. Flanagan sits across from me in a brightly colored sundress and, of course, a pair of Sigfús earrings. As Flanagan tells me about how she and Valenzuela met, her personality reflects her bold outfit choice for just another Wednesday, albeit a rainy Wednesday. She and Valenzuela met about 14 years ago in a a church group that Flanagan was attending to get to know people, since she was new to Tucson. This church group turned out to be a part of Valenzuela's 12-step recovery program after rehab. "We just have been friends ever since, so we've just gone through life together," says Flanagan.

The two friends have a trip planned to go to Spain this winter. "We go on trips together. We've done lots of fun things like that and have been friends through all of the ups and downs," Flanagan says.

"We do a lot of crazy things. So when we went to California, we just danced on the beach," remembers Flanagan. "We stayed as loud as we possibly could. Yeah. We just do fun."

The two friends and occasional co-workers have been through a lot together, which include living together, Valenzuela's getting married and Sigfús' evolution. Even though they've done all this together, they are always changing, both inside and out. "I'm trying to think because I don't even remember her original hair color, because I've known her through so many different colors," says Flanagan. "She's had every color hair I can even think of."

Flanagan was friends with Valenzuela when she started Sigfús, which has also changed drastically. Sigfús started as a fun idea for gifts to friends that then evolved into an Etsy website and now a retail and wholesale company. Valenzuela has just filled an order for hundreds of pairs of earrings for a clothing store in Utah.

Talking about the earrings Sigfús specializes in now, Flanagan mentions that out of all Valenzuela's creative endeavors—the collages, the drawings—this is the one that's really stuck. "It's really been amazing because it just keeps blowing up. Yeah, it's growing, and the designs keep changing and getting better," Flanagan says.

Right now, Valenzuela is just trying to genuinely enjoy what she has made out of her life thus far. "Now all my money just goes to travel. Like that's like the only thing that I really spend money on. I asked myself, 'What do you want to do with your life?' I want to make cool s***. I want to do art, and I want to travel. Done. So you have to look at that and be like, OK, you're doing what you want, you're living in your dream and don't get so caught up in what's down the road or what everybody else is doing. I have to remember daily, like I'm living my dream. That's beautiful. And to walk in life with gratitude and humility and gratefulness because it could change tomorrow." i²

Kids on TRAK

By Taylor Gleeson

Chelsea Menke holds her horse, Bravo. (Photo courtesy of TRAK)

Menke and one of TRAK's participants ride horses. (Photo courtesy of TRAK)

Chelsea Menke has always had a passion for two things: horses and kids. At Therapeutic Ranch for Animals and Kids, or TRAK, she is able to pursue both of her passions as the nonprofit's program director. With a slim build, dark brown hair that falls around her face, deep brown eyes, cowboy boots and jeans, Menke looks as though she belongs on a ranch.

Sitting at the large table in the kitchen of the office at TRAK, which is more like a small house with a bedroom converted into what looks like a home office, Menke describes how she came to TRAK and what led her to create an equine therapy program at the nonprofit.

Menke's parents were adamant that she and her siblings join a team sport to keep busy after school, but Menke was not a fan of team sports. Instead, she chose a different path. "So I was watching TV one day, and I saw horses and my dad was always really into the old Westerns," Menke says. "And I was like, 'Man I want to be a cowboy.'" Menke's mom signed her up for horseback riding lessons that weekend, when Menke was 5 years old.

Menke's first horse, Frenchie, came into Menke's life at an early age. "I got my first horse when I was 8 years old. He was kind of the family horse, but he was really my horse. I just credit him for a lot of my success in this field now because he was a difficult horse," Menke explains.

"He was not easy, and he taught me everything. I took lessons for a certain amount of time, and then everybody just kind of up and left that ranch, and so I was on my own with this horse, and I had to teach myself a lot, and I had a really good teacher, so I learned so much," she says. Menke and the horse had to develop a strong relationship so that she could teach herself the ways of riding.

Eventually Menke's family moved to Tucson, and she found herself at the University of Arizona, where she studied psychology. But she always knew that she wanted to incorporate horses into her everyday job because horseback riding is her passion.

"Even though I was studying to be a therapist, I always wanted to be able to integrate horses," she says. "And at that time equine therapy, even now, is still growing. Using the horse as a therapeutic modality is becoming really popular. So I just knew in the back of my mind, I always wanted to keep my foot in the door with horses."

Equine therapy has been studied more and more recently, and studies have shown that this type of therapy can help individuals with both mental and physical disabilities.

According to a dissertation by Erin J. Grimm, a doctoral student at Duquesne University, participants in her equine therapy study had increased skills all around, from physical to emotional. "Participants within this study revealed the enhanced development of social and emotional skills necessary for success in the community," wrote Grimm. Backed by research like this, Menke's idea of combining her degree in psychology with her passion for horses did not seem so far-fetched.

But she did not get to combine her two loves immediately after college. After graduating from UA, Menke worked for a behavioral health facility in Tucson as a counselor, never losing sight of her goal to work in the equine branch of therapy. "My husband found TRAK and came down and spoke with the executive director, Scott Tilley," Menke says. Although she did not get the job straight away because Tilley did not have the means to hire a new staff member, Menke remained optimistic about working with the TRAK program.

"What ended up happening is I really came in as just a substitute to teach kids horseback riding lessons while he [Tilley] was out of town. So that's how it started," she explains. "And then probably a year after that, maybe a little more, they decided to bring me on as their first full-time position as program director. And my goal was to really grow the programs they already had and then grow the therapeutic programs, because they really weren't doing much of anything as far as conducting therapy or skill building or anything."

TRAK sits in the middle of Tucson, off East River Road and North Alvernon Way, but feels a million miles away from the city. On the edge of the Catalina Foothills with the prominent smell of horses, dust and nature, TRAK is a place where people go to experience the healing powers that animals possess. Walking around the ranch, Menke beams as she introduces people to all the animals, including horses, pigs, bunnies, chickens, dogs and more. Menke even has her own horse at TRAK, where he is used for the various programs it offers.

Using her skills from working as a psychologist, Menke took on her role as program director with big ideas in mind. "What I started doing was putting together animal-assisted life skills. And we kind of worked really hard to figure out what we can do without having a therapist, like a licensed therapist, and what we can do to focus on skill building with certain kids," Menke says. "So that was working and was really successful for us, as well as growing the other programs. You know, we have probably double the amount of horseback riding students than we did when I started."

On a usual morning, Menke gets to TRAK at 6 and starts her day with some administrative work. "Back in the day when we weren't quite as busy and successful, I did use to do (more of that)," Menke says. "So I did everything: I taught lessons, I worked shift, I did administrative work. It was all encompassing. So I'm kind of able to do almost every job description that we have here at the ranch."

Menke's eyes light up as she starts to tell one of her favorite stories from her time working with TRAK. "There was this elderly gentleman named Bob, and we did a service visit," she recalls. A service visit involves the TRAK team taking some of the animals like bunnies and goats to schools or elderly care facilities around the community.

At first impression, Bob was not a very friendly man. "Bob

> *"It's great to be a part of such a caring and dedicated team. The passion and energy that the TRAK and Intermountain staff bring to the group is incredible."*
>
> *– Stephanie Hackett*

never would talk to the staff at the elderly care facility. He was not very engaging. But if he knew that TRAK was coming," Menke says, "he'd get up in his walker, and he'd scoot all the way downstairs, all the way out to the courtyard and be ready to engage with the kids and the animals. And I just think, it's amazing." Menke glows with pride as she talks about Bob and the way the animals could create such a positive experience for someone who did not normally seem to be enjoying life.

A couple years ago, Menke reached out to Intermountain Centers for Human Development, an organization that provides services for at-risk populations in Arizona. Intermountain has community, foster care and residential services that benefit local communities and has been around since 1973. With the help of Intermountain Centers, Menke created programs at TRAK to help children with disabilities.

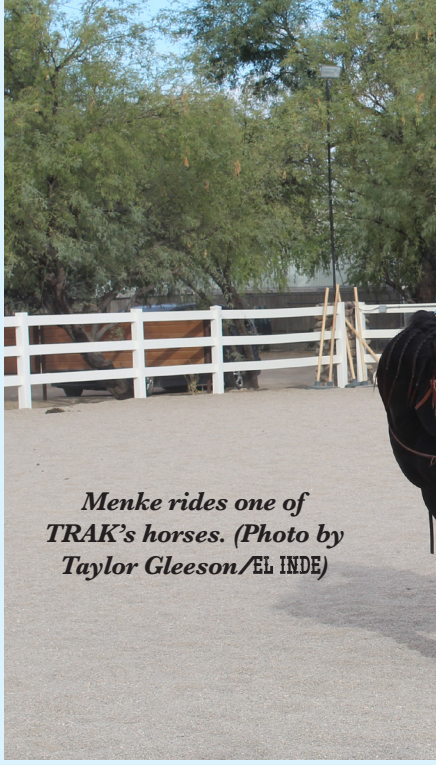
Stephanie Hackett, clinical supervisor at Intermountain Centers and a lover of horses herself, showed a clear admiration for Menke one evening after a group session. "I've known Menke for about a year and a half at this point. I would describe her as kind, driven and compassionate," Hackett says. "It's great to be part of such a caring and dedicated team. The passion and energy that the TRAK and Intermountain staff bring to the group is incredible."

Hackett participated in a group event walking Bravo the horse to demonstrate to the kids how a horse can sense a person's emotions. "Watching the kids go through all of the group sessions had been a privilege," Hackett says. "Many of them walk in on the first day and are quite anxious about being around and interacting with the horses. Over the course of the six weeks you really get to see them bloom and grow into themselves. My favorite, though, is seeing the confidence they have built in group used in an everyday situation."

Menke not only is the program director, but she also keeps one day a week in her schedule available so that she can give riding lessons and teach groups, which she says is her favorite thing to do at TRAK. One Wednesday night, working with Intermountain Centers, Menke led a weekly class in which kids with disabilities worked with the animals at TRAK. As the sun was setting over the ranch, casting a pink glow over the group, the kids practiced leading Bravo in circles, watching his body language and working on both verbal and nonverbal communication.

One student who suffered from high anxiety got Bravo to gallop instead of just cantering, which Menke said happened because the horse could sense the girl's emotions. As she walked the animal, timidly at first, her unease was evident. But slowly, as she saw the horse reacting to her body language and anxiety, she was able to calm her emotions, and the horse slowed to a walk. Menke watched from the side of the corral, with an evident look of pride in her eyes.

It's clear to see that Menke loves what she does, and the kids she works with love being at TRAK. At just a single session they grew more and more confident. Menke talked about how she felt incredibly lucky to have her job. She told about how two women at the dentist office saw her wearing a TRAK shirt one day and were impressed by Menke's



Menke rides one of TRAK's horses. (Photo by Taylor Gleeson/EL INDE)

One of the many horses at TRAK. (Photo by Taylor Gleeson/EL INDE)

career. Menke said moments like that reminded her of how lucky she was to be working with her horses for a living. Going to work isn't just work. It's what she loves to do. "I know how awesome this is, and I know how lucky I am. I really have a very, very unique and very cool position, and I'm very grateful for that," Menke said, explaining that even on bad days she can go to work and is reminded of how much she loves her job.

Menke holds one of the horses at TRAK. (Photo courtesy of TRAK)

Menke teaches a TRAK participant how to handle a horse. (Photo courtesy of TRAK)

"*I know how awesome this is, and I know how lucky I am.*"

– Chelsea Menke

Protecting his city

Photo and story by Johnny Maccaslin

University of Arizona police officer Jesus Aguilar is no stranger to the Tucson community. Every day, Aguilar shows up to work in the same uniform with a cup of coffee. Knowing there's a lot of pressure protecting the community, Aguilar keeps his same composure every day. He goes about his job with compassion and empathy. He is not out there to hand out parking or speeding tickets. Rather, he just wants to protect Tucson.

Aguilar grew up on the south side of Tucson, raised by a single mom with not a huge source of income as a working-class family. He would hear stories about drive-by shootings and fights by students at the elementary school he attended. Still, Aguilar would never get involved in that sort of stuff and feels as if he lived a standard childhood. He would hear about crime growing up but rarely would witness any. He would walk to school every day and would feel safe going out at night. Aguilar enjoyed growing up on the south side of Tucson and liked the tight-knit community. It wasn't until he became a police officer that he realized the amount of crime that existed not only around his neighborhood but also in many other areas in Tucson.

"For me, it seemed like a typical neighborhood. When I first became a police officer for Tucson Police (Department), I remember hearing, 'Oh, it's a high-crime area, there's gang issues and all that kind of stuff,'" said Aguilar. "I would witness crime on the south side as a police officer, which would surprise me, because as a kid growing up in that area, I didn't really witness that kind of stuff. I would just hear about it."

Aguilar carries himself the same way whether he's on or off duty. He is always aware of his surroundings.

"Even on my days off, I'll be really conscious of where I'm at. It's pretty standard for officers when they are in a building to be aware of where the door is at because if a threat comes in, they want to be able to address it," said Aguilar. "One thing my wife had pointed out is when we go to a restaurant, I am always sitting facing the door. For me it's just subconscious. I am just so used to it."

> *"I'm serving and protecting the community that I was once, and in some cases still, a part of."*
>
> *–Jesus Aguilar*

While growing up on the south side, Aguilar would notice police officers patrolling his neighborhood. This in a lot of ways inspired Aguilar to become a police officer. He loved the idea of wearing the uniform and protecting the community that shaped him.

"That's part of why I joined Tucson Police," said Aguilar. "If you were going to be a police officer, you wanted to be a part of Tucson Police. I felt really proud when I had that opportunity to actually work with them because I remember them patrolling my neighborhood. It was really cool to say, 'Hey, I remember that as a kid, and now I'm one of them. Now I'm wearing that uniform. Now I'm driving that car. It's like being in love with Batman, and then you get to become him.'"

Aguilar is serious when he brings up the comparison to Batman, the superhero who relies on fancy gadgets and a really fast car. Aguilar fantasized about the idea of driving a fast car while using cool gadgets to protect his city.

Aguilar graduated from the Eller College of Management at the University of Arizona with a bachelor's degree in public administration and policy. Right out of college, Aguilar accepted a job from Tucson Police in 2009. Four years later, he moved to Seattle, seeking out new opportunities. He served as an officer for just a year and a half. Aguilar felt as if he could find bigger opportunities outside of Tucson. When Aguilar moved away from Tucson, he soon realized how much he missed the community and how important it was to him.

"When I came back here, it was like a newfound respect for the city. I couldn't imagine myself living anywhere else, to be honest," said Aguilar. "Sure, there may be more opportunities in a bigger city, but I feel like you lose having the ability to have a connection with that community."

Aguilar accepted a job with the University of Arizona Police Department in February 2018. Now he was raising a family of his own in Tucson, recognizing how the community has changed over the years.

"We're seeing the city definitely diversify a lot more as it grows, which I think is a good thing," he said. "We want to have that melting pot. Right? What the U.S. represents is that (mix) of cultures and backgrounds."

Yet from his perspective as a police officer, this has presented the challenge of enforcing laws to all kinds of people who have different cultural backgrounds and are accustomed to different laws. And this is something that plays out whether you are a city cop or a university cop. For Aguilar, the biggest difference between the two is the amount and the kinds of calls either of them receives.

"If you look at (city police) calls versus our calls, the number of calls they respond to on a daily basis are a lot more than we will. They tend to respond to more extreme situations," said Aguilar. "So they'll have a lot of violent incidents, a lot of shootings, a lot of homicides. We have had some of those incidents happen on campus, but definitely not to the level that Tucson Police does. On a daily basis, having been a Tucson Police officer, it was not unusual for me as a TPD cop to be responding to those calls."

City police work tends to deal with more violent situations, while university police handle things such as bike thefts, property damage, underage drinking and the rare

instance of a school shooting. One of the unique challenges Aguilar faces as a UAPD officer is getting to know the population. "We have to be more aware of our population and have a better understanding of who they are because we deal a lot with students, right? Not only students, but generally students from other areas of the country and even international students," said Aguilar.

Knowing the population and establishing communication with fraternity and sorority houses is an important part of being a university cop. For Aguilar, protecting and serving in the community he calls home is very rewarding. Aguilar has served the neighborhoods he was raised in and the university he attended.

"I was a police officer in the neighborhoods that I grew up in when I was with Tucson Police, but I was a student here on campus too," said Aguilar. "I've had that kind of joy to be able to come back and say, 'Hey, I'm serving and protecting the community that I was once and, in some cases, am still a part of.' I know what it's like to be a student, so when I'm dealing with students, even if it's in sometimes negative situations. I can at least empathize with them and say, 'No. I get the stresses.' I can relate to them and say, 'Hey, I get what you're potentially going through because I was a student here too.'"

Officer Aguilar one day hopes to be in a position of power where he can establish policies. He would like to move into a supervisory or a command role. Aguilar believes if ever given the opportunity, he could implement policies that would make the south side, the city of Tucson and the University of Arizona safer. He wants people to come to Tucson and embrace it the way he has. i²

Bird conservation biologist Jennie MacFarland works at her desk at the Tucson Audubon Society headquarters. (Photos by Kelly Huang/EL INDE)

Bird lady

Jennie MacFarland is dedicated to making Tucson a better place for birds. And humans too.

By Kelly Huang

When you walk into the Tucson Audubon Society, you will notice a nature shop with numerous artifacts featuring a little creature—a bird. The nature shop sells bird-printed clothes, hats, decorations, toys and books. Next to the nature shop, you will walk into a tiny office. There is a huge, colorful poster with various kinds of bird species hanging on the right wall. On the left, there's a doozy bird calendar with more than 30 vivid pictures.

Other bird photos close to the calendar all belong to Jennie MacFarland, who likes to surround herself with birds.

A 35-year-old with straight, blonde short hair and a pair of black-rimmed glasses, she's wearing a red T-shirt with her name tag (she often interacts with visitors to the Audubon Society office). Most days, she's sitting in the middle of the office, in front of her computer, typing and concentrating on her bird-watching plans for the coming year.

But if it was up to her, she'd rather be outside, bird-watching. It is almost the only thing that MacFarland cares about in her life. She also

The proceeds at the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop benefit Audubon programs. (Photo by Kelly Huang/EL INDE)

spends time with her family and friends in her spare time, but birds are the friends she's obsessed with. MacFarland is a bird conservation biologist and the coordinator of the Tucson Bird Count, a local organization that aims to help people make informed decisions regarding the impact of human activities on wildlife. She is dedicated to making Tucson a better place for birds.

MacFarland grew up in Phoenix, a vast urban area not particularly known for bird-watching. "Our yard was also a pretty large yard, and it was right off the Phoenix canal system. We had to irrigate the yard like every month. We had to go out and turn the irrigation wheel and flood the yard," she said. "Our yard had some really large trees, very large sort of Aleppo trees, pine trees and some citrus trees. So, because of that, the yard did have a lot of birds in it." The birds, species such as house sparrows, pigeons and other non-native urban birds, would hang out in MacFarland's family backyard, but no one there knew how to feed them. She would see the baby birds when they were just fledging and learning how to fly down from the trees.

She did not know how to feed them or what to feed them, she acknowledged, so she tried to give birds bread. They ate the bread all of a sudden, which made MacFarland excited and eager to try more.

As a kid, MacFarland's passion was indulged through books such as the biography "Kingbird Highway" by Kenn Kaufman, "Birds of North America" by David Sibley, "The Big Year" by Mark Obmascik and "A Parrot Without a Name" by Don Stap. When she was little, she enjoyed watching the show "Nature" on PBS. MacFarland learned about birds through these programs, because they explained what was happening in the footage and why it was happening. "I was mostly watching educational public programs about birds and wildlife, and I really liked those," she said. "These TV programs and books brought birds to me in a way that allowed me to (observe birds) without traveling." The programs let her see birds from parts of the world she had never been to and learn bird diversity all over the world.

When she was 12, MacFarland's family moved to a smaller city because her father served in the Air Force and was based in Tucson.

In high school, she got binoculars and joined youth clubs for the environment—that's how she started hiking and birding. That's when she realized she would like to be a bird-watcher and a bird biologist. MacFarland took part in science-related competitions when she was in high school. The one that had the biggest impact on her was an environmental competition called NCF-Envirothon. It was a big competition where teams from different states would compete at one national location. The competition happened when she was a sophomore. Her team won the Arizona competition, and the members got the chance to go to nationals in Nova Scotia, Canada.

That was the first time MacFarland saw that there were people who had jobs related to birds. At the national competition she met people who worked for the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service or people who were biologists.

Throughout high school, MacFarland competed and won first place in the "For the Birds" ornithology event at a national-level Science Olympiad. At first, MacFarland had to learn about different birds and take a test with her teammates against other teams in Arizona. She learned how to identify many species of birds, both by sight and by sound, where they are found and natural history facts

about them. There were 15 students on the team. They had to break into small teams and work on different projects.

MacFarland was working on the bird event project with another girl. After they won in the state, they went on to the national competition and took first place. "It was so exciting. It was so amazing," MacFarland said. "They held it at a huge place. I got a local medal. I got an actual little gold medal to take home."

MacFarland received a B.A. degree in Wildlife Conservation and Management from the University of Arizona. At first, she considered the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology major, but a Wildlife Conservation and Management degree seemed more fun to her. "And to be honest, it had fewer math requirements and fewer chemistry requirements," she added. "That was part of my decision too. And it fit well with my abilities and also just the degree seemed closer to what I wanted."

One reason that MacFarland chose to study birds is because many people in a wildlife conservation program are interested in studying big animals like bears and wolves, which are quite scary to her, and they are also hard to find in urban areas. "Birds are great, because they come into urban settings, you can go anywhere ... and you can find different birds. Birds are abundant," MacFarland said.

She coordinates some survey projects, such as Arizona's Important Bird Areas. It is a statewide program and also an international effort to identify the sites that are most important for birds. For example, she has to find the best habitat for them to sustain their populations.

"So because we're a nonprofit that doesn't really have the capacity to hire a bunch of people to do professional surveys, we do volunteer surveys that are coordinated by someone like me," MacFarland explained. "I'll organize (the surveys). I'll map out all the routes, and then we get volunteers who donate their time to go out and do the surveys."

Another major project she is doing is the Tucson Bird Count, which needs 80 volunteers and is restricted to Tucson. The Tucson Bird Count is trying to see what kinds of birds live in urban Tucson and observe how their habitat changes.

"Some parts of the city, you get a lot of birds; other parts of the city, you get very few birds," MacFarland said. "So what is good about the parts of the city where you get lots of birds? What makes them good for birds? And can we make the parts where you get fewer birds look more like that? Does it need more trees? Do we need more bird feeders, more water?"

There are many common bird species in Tucson, such as the vermilion flycatcher, Anna's hummingbird, Cooper's hawk, Gambel's quail and Gila woodpecker. But there are also species that have declined due to the impacts of climate change and habitat loss, including chestnut-collared longspurs. "They look like a sparrow, and they are in the grasslands around Sonoita, southeast of Tucson," MacFarland said. The grassland habitat has been disappearing all over the United States. The birds are isolated in a few spots in southeastern Arizona now. And they have declined by 87 percent since 1966, according to a 2019 analysis published in the journal Science.

MacFarland's bird conservation normally depends on the seasons. Summer is the busiest season for her, because she does more outdoor work, especially in July and August. For example, she must plan citizen science, a program that allows birders to contribute to scientific efforts by helping scientists to build datasets—even though they are not trained scientists with an education degree. She also organizes bird surveys.

"We get up at 5 in the morning to go do a scheduled yellow-billed cuckoo bird survey or another bird survey," she said.

MacFarland is planning on coordinating winter grassland surveys for chestnut-collared longspurs next January and February. This species is of high conservation concern and is declining rapidly. The grasslands in southeastern Arizona, such as Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, are very important wintering habitat for them, so she will do regular surveys for this species.

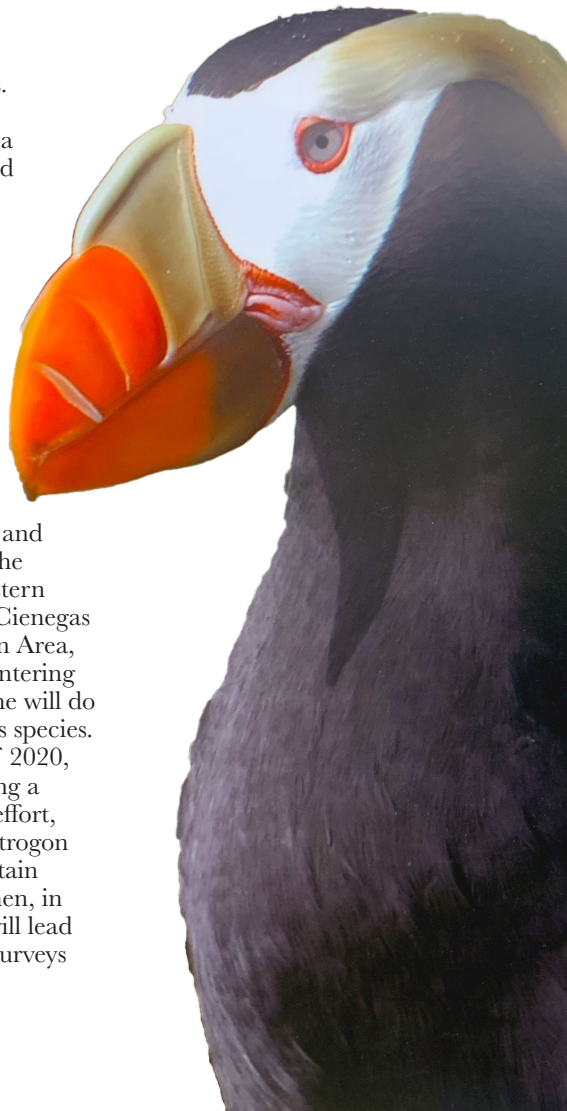
In May and June of 2020, she will be coordinating a large-scale volunteer effort, surveying the elegant trogon in five different mountain ranges in Arizona. Then, in July and August she will lead yellow-billed cuckoo surveys again in mountain ranges in southeastern Arizona. Throughout the year, she will do outreach events, public talks, fundraiser events and other regular business associated with working at a conservation nonprofit.

Even though she spends a lot of time in her office analyzing data and surveys, MacFarland still prefers to be outside with birds, observing them, making sure they thrive.

"Bird conservation science is very important," MacFarland said. "As humans continue to spread across the planet and create many environmental changes that negatively affect birds and other wildlife, we need to be monitoring and documenting these impacts as conservation biologists." i²

"Birds are great because they come into urban settings. They are abundant."

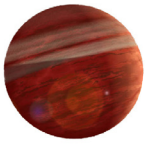
– Jennie MacFarland



ASTRONOMER, COLLEGE PROFESSOR AND SUPERHUMAN

By Nicole Gleason

"I do get this special feeling when I am at a telescope in the middle of the night, and it is as dark as it's ever going to get, and you just see the stars in the sky and you feel this connection and everything is wonderful." — Dennis Just. (Photo by Nicole Gleason/EL INDE)



A lot of astronomers start out as stargazing children whose curiosity for the cosmos was fueled by a key experience. For Carl Sagan, it was the 1939 New York World's Fair, where he saw a flashlight shining on a photoelectric cell. For Neil deGrasse Tyson, it happened after he visited the Space Theater at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City at the age of 9.

For Dennis Just, the Astronomy Department head and faculty instructor at Pima Community College, it was the time he spent in the Poconos Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania as a child that solidified — and propelled — his interest in astronomy. It all occurred after he witnessed the first — and last — meteor shower he had ever seen.

"I just remember, like that was the most amazing thing I had ever seen, because it was pitch black, you could see the Milky Way, and it was meteors coming left and right, left and right," Just recalls.

Just had been in the company of his uncle and a cousin. His uncle owned a timeshare in the Split Rock Resort.

Just is a native of Parsippany, New Jersey, a place known for its lush green landscapes, its low crime rate and some of the best public schools in the nation (an estimated 91 percent of high school students graduate, according to the National Center for Education Statistics).

Still, Just prefers the small-town feel of Tucson but is grateful for having been raised back East. "I'm happy I grew up there. I'm happy I got four seasons. I don't think I would not have liked living somewhere where I couldn't play in the snow every year as a kid," Just says.

Just is 6 feet tall, brown-eyed with bookish glasses and jet black hair combed to the side. His dress is business casual, and his tie is constellation-themed (although Just is unsure which constellation it depicts), a gift given to him by his partner of three years, Kyra Harris.

When it comes to Tucson, Just enjoys its laid-back, unpretentious culture, its proximity to Mexico and the natural beauty that abounds. "The Appalachian Mountains in the Northeast are absolutely nothing like the mountains out here I love how different it is (here). Instead of squirrels and chipmunks, I get to see lizards," Just muses.

Although the experience in the Poconos Mountains left an impression on Just, he didn't intend on becoming

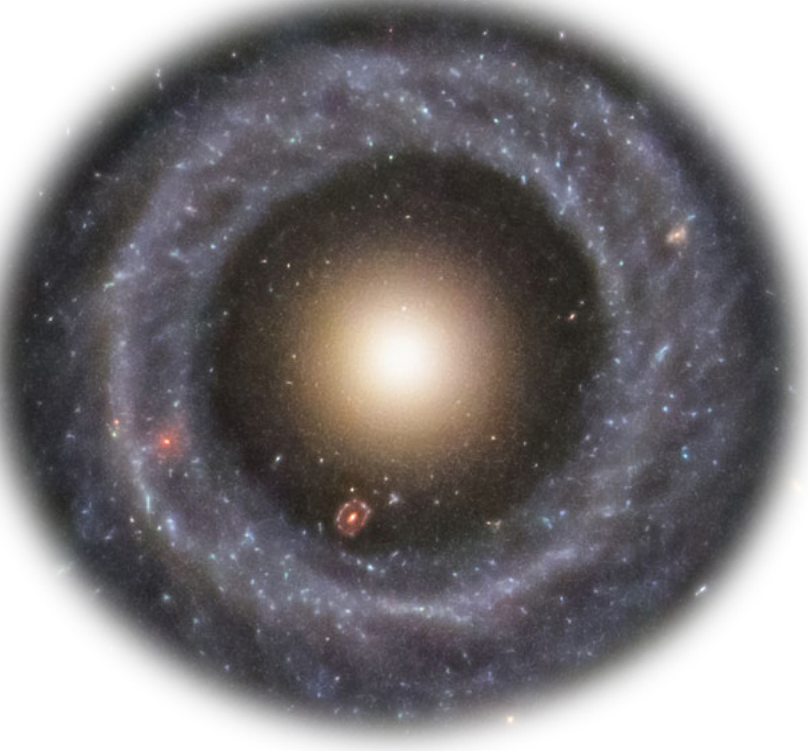


Image courtesy of NASA/JPL

an astronomer until he was already in college at Penn State during the height of the university's child sex abuse scandal controversy, in which assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was accused and later indicted.

Although Just was a student at Penn State during the scandal, he did not have an understanding of the accusations at the time.

"When you think about what really happened and the human cost of it, it's just indefensible, so I do not try to make excuses for the school. It was terrible and awful, and more people should have gotten in trouble."

Just initially enrolled as a business major, figuring he would follow in his father's footsteps. Over time, it became clear that he was beginning to love all of his astronomy general education courses (and increasingly disliking the required business courses). "So eventually I hated business enough and liked astronomy enough to make the switch, and I've never regretted it since," Just says.

This switch made Just enter a relatively small field, as there are only about 6,000 practicing astronomers in North America, according to the American Astronomical Society.

After his Ph. D., Just enrolled in a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. It is almost protocol for astronomers to do 3 to 5 years in a postdoctoral position that involves research work before they can begin teaching. After that, Just moved to Tucson in October 2015.

Once Just moved to Tucson, he met Harris, who creates African-American studies curricula for the Tucson Unified School District. Between the two of them, the couple shares five cats. Just came into the relationship with two cats; Harris already had three. "I can at least say she contributed the majority of them," Just jokes.

While Harris does not work in a field associated with studying the cosmos, Just's love of astronomy has played into their relationship. "When we first met, a lot of our love was shown through viewing the stars. On a short vacation to Sedona we looked at the moon through a mini-telescope, or we would drive out to lot G6 past Gates Pass, and together we saw Uranus for the first time," Harris says.

She also appreciates that Just has patience when it comes to explaining things that she does not have a background in. "Dennis has such an amazing appreciation of our universe, galaxy and solar system, and I appreciate so much that he has the patience to share it with me in my layman's understanding of the science," Harris says.

Shortly after moving to Tucson, Just was offered a position teaching at Pima Community College, where he has now been teaching astronomy and physics for four years. He also co-hosts the podcast "orbitalpodcast" and still participates in research projects and publications.

Just has an appreciation and fondness for community college students in particular. "Community college students are phenomenal students. There is not one iota of entitlement that I ever get from a community college student. The only quality a student could have that is a real problem for me is entitlement, when they act like I owe them a grade," Just says.

There are a couple of misconceptions Just wouldn't mind clarifying. "A joke is that Pluto is not a planet," Just says about the dwarf planet that has garnered a cult following since being ousted as an official planet. "But that doesn't mean it's not spectacular and amazing." On a more serious note, he does wish more people would recognize that there is value in the pursuit of learning about the world—and the cosmos.

Sitting in his empty classroom at the end of a day of teaching, Just finds it imperative to talk about the many misconceptions there are about astronomy. For example, federal funding for space exploration, as it pertains to NASA. "People think NASA's budget is a lot bigger. If you poll what people suspect NASA's budget is, they'll say 10, 20 percent of the federal budget, but in reality it's a fraction of a percent.

"We don't get that much money to explore the universe, so when we do get money, I don't like when I hear these complaints about how we should be spending that money somewhere else or why should we bother," says Just. "The point (of funding space research) is for the sake of knowledge itself, and if you don't think that's valuable at all, then I mean surely it should be worth some fraction of a percent of the budget of a nation that wants to consider itself a contributor to the knowledge of humankind," he says.

The last misconception that strikes Just as particularly unnecessary is the stereotype of the mad scientist bent on destroying the world. "It's just inaccurate. Most scientists aren't mad scientists. Most scientists are just people. We don't fit any particular mold," Just says.

Just also believes there are now more female scientists and astronomers, an advancement for women everywhere. "If you took a classroom of children (five years ago) and said, 'Everyone draw a picture of a scientist,' they would draw men, but half of scientists are women. … We are not all old white men with wiry hair," Just says.

Although Just does not like the stereotype of the mad scientist, he understands where ir comes from. "It is easy to find yourself in a bubble, and if you are in a bubble where you're surrounded by other technical-minded scientists, you can fall prey to becoming terrible at explaining things to the general public." The only way to solve this, according to Just, is "science communication"—in other words, the ability of scientists to effectively communicate their work to the public.

Examples of scientists who have mastered public communication include deGrasse Tyson, Sagan and Bill Nye, but his favorite astronomer is Jocelyn Bell Burnell, an astrophysicist

from Northern Ireland who co-discovered the first radio pulsars in 1967. Radio pulsars are, in essence, highly magnetized, rapidly rotating neutron stars that emit radiation that produces pulsed emission. In 1974, that achievement garnered a Nobel Prize, although Burnell was not a recipient of the award.

"Even though she discovered them, the Nobel Prize went to her adviser and another person. They could have split it three ways, but they decided to just kind of snub her," Just says.

Just admires Burnell's selflessness: At one point in her career, Burnell won a million-dollar prize for her work in physics and chose not to keep the money. "She just donated all of that money to basically a scholarship, a foundation to promote women who are minorities who want to be physicists," Just says.

Just also has a special talent, or superhuman ability. He can spot differences in two separate images in a matter of seconds because he can split his vision between two photos simultaneously, allowing him to notice discrepancies right away. This is sometimes known as eye-crossing. "After trying to teach my friends how to do it, I think it's something like being double-jointed, or can you stick your tongue out and touch your nose, like a random little genetic quirk," Just says.

He was able to use this skill to excel in Photo Hunt, a coin-operated touch screen game found in bars and arcades. After a friend wrote about Just's ability in the Arizona Daily Star, the CEO of the game company contacted Just via email and eventually put him in contact with a casting agent from Fox's "Superhuman," a show hosted by actor Kal Penn about regular people with remarkable abilities in areas such as memory, hearing, sight and taste.

In 2017, Just was flown to Hollywood, where filming took about a week. To his surprise, he won, although he couldn't share that information for a year because the episode had yet to be aired. The prize was $50,000. "I blew a lot of it on an expensive trip to Japan and an expensive week in Vegas, and the rest of it went to basically paying off debts and to a retirement fund."

Just says this prize money has given him peace of mind and allowed him to not live paycheck-to-paycheck.

Just has only ever met one other person with this ability, and it happened to be in Tucson. Just had been drinking with his brother and a few other friends at Frog & Firkin. They had been playing the arcade games when his brother overheard someone claiming his brother was the best at winning these games. His friends paired the two men, challenging them to compete. Just won.

When Just is not teaching or showcasing his superhuman ability on national television, he enjoys spending time with Harris and their cats. They are both avid video gamers. "I just got Borderlands 3 for me and my partner," Just says. They have two televisions in their living room, two playstations and two recliners.

As for movies, Just cites "Donnie Darko" and "Requiem for a Dream" as favorites. He is also a big fan of horror films, namely low-brow, straight-to-DVD lost-footage horror films. Just claims this fixation probably stems from his love of spooky things as a child.

He grew up exploring the State Asylum for the Insane in Morristown, New Jersey, a then-abandoned psychiatric hospital that has since been renamed. Just remembers the hallways being completely empty, with confidential patient files scattered all along the floors. He also played in the tunnels surrounding the property. "It was really old, really creepy but so much fun," Just remembers.

When he's not teaching, his ideal way to spend a day off involves not having a single obligation and getting to spend the entire day gaming with his partner at his side. "Me and my partner, gaming all day, ordering, don't move, just relaxing. I love what I do, but it is a lot of work, and so it is nice to be able to deprogram," Just says.

In his class curriculums, Just sometimes assigns students to read Sagan's articles, namely "The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark." Sagan was not only known for being an excellent astronomer and writer, but he was also extremely spiritual and profound in his contemplations about the meaning of the cosmos.

While Just would not call himself "spiritual" (maybe the word has too many connotations associated with sage-burning, superstitious hippies), his study of the cosmos has given him some insight when it comes to matters of spirituality and the meaning of life.

"I have ideas about the nature of reality, but I definitely went through a phase where I was a smug little hater about people that had their own beliefs, but that was stupid. I don't know everything," he says.

Some nights, while looking through his telescope, Just does experience what he calls the "numinous feeling." He gets this special feeling when he is at a telescope in the middle of the night, "and it is as dark as it's ever going to get, and you just see the stars in the sky and you feel this connection and everything is wonderful and great," he said.

Just believes that science and religion can be compatible, and one does not necessarily disavow the other.

"It's not like science disproves religion. They are different domains. Someone's morals are absolutely decoupled from what science says, but there can be talk between them. People do find meaning in the science that speaks to them," he says.

Although Just loves Tucson, he does not plan on spending the rest of his life there. "I am not going to die here," he says. As for a legacy to leave behind, Just only wants to be remembered as a good teacher, someone who "taught people (who hopefully) learned something and enjoyed it at the same time." i²

Image courtesy of NASA/JPL

"Once I started competing, I was obsessed with it. It is one of the only things that has made me feel good."

– Elizabeth McMullin

Elizabeth McMullin fights in an MMA match. (Photos courtesy of Elizabeth McMullin)

FIGHTING DEPRESSION

By Phillip Bramwell

A broad-shouldered woman stands 5 feet tall, wearing a black shirt and blue yoga pants. She locks her knees in a bent position and brings both fists to her face. A hair bun keeps her blonde hair out of her eyes. She rapidly alternates her hands as she punches the air in front of her nose, focusing on correct technique. Elizabeth McMullin, 29, has her eyes fixed on the posters of successful mixed martial arts (MMA) fighters on the wall in front of her.

McMullin begins her day working without a coach or a training partner and focuses on keeping a productive mindset. A full day of one-on-one training, group class participation and group class instruction is ahead as the clock approaches 9 a.m. inside APEX Mixed Martial Arts in Tucson.

Professional fighters train at McMullin's gym, but it also offers group classes for amateurs who want to socialize or exercise. The training area is a revolving door of arrivals and departures. McMullin prepares to participate in a class, for now only as a student. She steps onto blue padded mats and sits with straight knees for a warm-up stretch before joining a class run by Joey Rivera, owner of APEX and McMullin's head coach. Once the class starts, Rivera calls for shadow boxing. Then, people break into pairs and take turns holding pads for each other. McMullin partners with Nicole Rivera, her coach's wife. McMullin, the only professional participant, holds a size advantage over Nicole Rivera, but using her quickness, she holds her own.

McMullin is a professional mixed martial arts fighter, which means she gets paid by fight organizations and she has to approach businesses to ask for sponsorship opportunities to cover travel expenses. McMullin says the amounts vary. McMullin has no wins and one loss. She struggles to find fights and earn a livable wage because there are not as many women in the sport compared to men.

"I walk around between 165 to 170 pounds. As I train for a fight, I will healthily lose 10 pounds through caloric deficit until the week of the fight. The week of the fight I will lose 15 pounds of water weight with fireworks and silliness," McMullin says.

She receives a small stipend to enter the cage on fight night and earns a bonus for a victory. McMullin trains twice a day, leaving her little time to work a full-time job. She also has experience competing in Muay Thai boxing and grappling bouts.

McMullin says odd jobs help her earn about $1,000 a month.

"I would rather be stressed out about money than about work. I feel like it is

one or the other for the most part," she says.

McMullin is up by 6 a.m. each morning. She has a 9 a.m. practice until 10, then another starts at 10:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. She delivers food from restaurants to customers to make money until 4:30 p.m., when she takes one personal training client a day. McMullin teaches a one-hour grappling class from 5:30 until 6:30. She has a one-hour break in which she works at the front desk. Then, she teaches another group class at 7:30. McMullin usually closes down the gym and doesn't arrive home until 9 p.m. at the earliest.

But despite how little time she has to herself, McMullin is happy. Before she found her passion in MMA, McMullin was unhappy with her life from age 16, living in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she would coordinate and prepare a punk rock house she lived in with a group to host shows performed by traveling bands.

"I was really depressed and really miserable in Utah. I didn't have any reasoning. I just went to work at the dog kennel, came home, slept. I didn't have any reason or motivation or goals," McMullin says. "I didn't feel close to any of the people I was around. I just wanted my life to be different. And so I thought I needed to move somewhere different to make that happen."

She says in her childhood she was a softball player who routinely played on competitive teams with her sister. But as she got older, McMullin changed into a withdrawn "moody teenager (who) hung out all the time." McMullin was also struggling to find a community of other gay people, and that's around the time she says she decided to move to Tucson at age 21.

"I didn't see any way to get out of the traps that I kept landing in. The only way I could see was to be in a new environment and create new habits. Also, I wasn't around any gay people. My friend told me there were gay people here," she says. "I hopped on the train. So I didn't even have a plan for when I moved here, and I lived in the back of someone's truck until I figured it out."

She had connections to help her settle in faster. McMullin had a friend who planned to move by Friday, the same week, in 2013.

"My family was really mad at me and thought I was naive, dumb or silly to think I would be able to move like that without a plan," she says. "They were not wrong necessarily."

McMullin says sometimes people need to risk lifestyle stability to make positive changes. She has no regrets.

"It all went how it should have gone. I am happy it happened," she says.

McMullin had a sense of urgency to leave Utah. Not only did she want to leave the people and environment around her, but her thoughts became dangerous, and she decided she had to leave before she acted.

"I slept all the time. I definitely struggled with self-harm or suicidal thoughts when I was younger," McMullin says. "I was very introverted. I would have never gotten into a fight with anybody. I was an introvert idly full of rage."

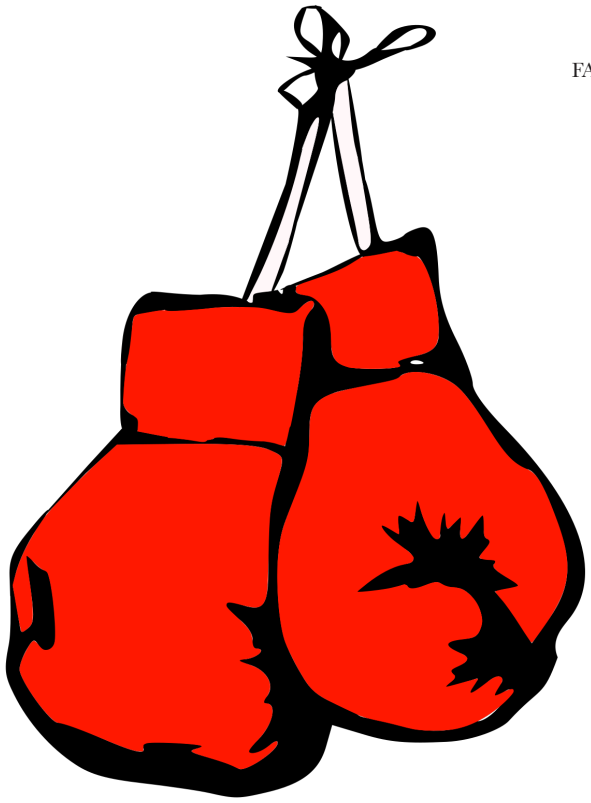
Once in Tucson, McMullin realized she needed an outlet to express herself. She says her friend had coupons for self-defense Muay Thai classes at a punk rock community center. She enjoyed the physical activity so much and decided to practice independently. She obtained a Groupon for APEX classes six years ago and never left. McMullin says her journey began with an email to the business that stated she was shy and nervous. The APEX team accepted her anyway.

According to MMA Sucka, women's MMA began in the late '90s. Strikeforce was the first major organization to promote WMMA. The Ultimate Fighting Championship purchased Strikeforce in 2011 and signed Ronda Rousey, the first female champion in the UFC. Rousey is a 2008 judo Olympic bronze medalist. Her "nobody-deserves-to-beat-me" attitude caught the attention of UFC President Dana White, who said previously that women would "never" fight in the UFC.

After the move to Tucson, McMullin says it took her about a year to improve her mindset, but her mental strength gets tested when it is time to fight. "I have to believe in myself, not hate myself and just lay there and get hit. On a grander societal scale, I think about people accepting themselves and caring about themselves," she says. "Not letting other people's bulls*** or labels affect them. They can be who they are and thrive without other people's limiting beliefs of them."

She adds that her mindset is positive when she does MMA because "failure is OK. Everything is about

McMullin during training.
(Photo by Phillip Bramwell/EL INDE)



training. When I am not training, I feel like I am going to fall into a hole."

After class, she reveals how she went from a casual class attendee to a professional. She sits on the third step of a boxing ring preparing to lift a gallon jug of water to her lips.

"Once I started competing, I was like, 'This is super fun.' I was obsessed with it. It is one of the only things that has made me feel good. I feel I am supposed to be doing it, and so I keep doing it. I want to test myself all of the time, at the highest level possible. That leads to you being a professional."

Sacrifice is—and will continue to be—a habit as her career continues to develop. Yet her fighting career leaves her with less time to socialize.

"You can no longer be friends with people who don't support your vision. I sacrifice a lot of money. You can't do fun things or visit your mom because all your money goes toward fighting," McMullin says. "The only thing I don't sacrifice is eating. I eat clean, real food, but I like candy. My only vice is Snickers bars."

McMullin's attitude is to compete until physically she no longer can. She says she will stop fighting before she turns 40. But until then, McMullin would never want her coaches to "throw in the towel" as an admission of defeat.

"The fighter is always going to want to fight forever. Sometimes coaches do that to keep their fighter safe. I don't think my coach would ever do that, which I appreciate about him. He would let you go down fighting."

Her coach, Joey Rivera, sits behind a front desk displaying merchandise available for purchase. Rivera agrees with his fighter's philosophy.

"No, the fighter fights, lives and will die by the sword. Most of the time, a fighter would rather go down in a fight than have their corner throw in the towel," he says.

Rivera explains the requirements a professional fighter must uphold compared to amateurs.

"What's going to be the difference between one and the other is the commitment they are going to have to make," Rivera says. "If they want to take it to another level, there is going to have to be double commitment that coincides with that. You sacrifice who you are today for who you want to be tomorrow."

Rivera says successful fighters have a combination of habits: "Physicality, technicality, mentality—put those three things together, and you got yourself a champion," he says.

McMullin leaves the building as Dorian Ramos, a 25-year-old fighter, arrives. He was one of McMullin's first training partners. While stretching on a blue grappling mat, Ramos says he is empathetic toward new fighters and used positive reinforcement to develop McMullin's fighter mentality. He adds that she had difficulty using the treadmill because she was overweight.

"I remember the first time we rolled (grappled), and she didn't want to roll. She was like, 'Do I have to touch you? Do I have to do this?' And I'm like, 'Yes, you have to wrestle, you have to do this, you have to do that,'" Ramos says. "She was weirded out at first. Little by little, she started getting used to it. Look where she is at now."

He says her conditioning has improved since he began training with her. "Usually when I roll with women, I could feel the difference in strength and conditioning. She does not get tired. She just goes forward and doesn't stop," Ramos says.

McMullin hopes to fight in a high-level promotion someday and has her sights on the Invicta Fighting Championship, an all-women's organization. To do this, she will have to fight often and have a winning record. Even though a recent fight fell through, she continues to train to keep a healthy mindset.

Sometimes, McMullin steps into a back office and food preparation area in the back of the gym to gather her thoughts. On this day, she sits on a folding chair and stretches out her right arm, revealing a tattoo—a family crest with an "A" in the center that stands for anarchy, evidence of her time at the Utah punk rock house.

"We were an anarchist collective. We would have local punk shows. ... I was a 'green anarchist,' a type of anarchist who believes in the environment," she says. "I would hop on trains and hitchhike. There is a bike chain (on the tattoo) because I rode bikes all the time, until recently." These days, McMullin gets around on a scooter rather than a car in order to save money and pay for fight-related expenses. The tattoo reflects a past that McMullin has been eager to leave behind. But since it's stuck on her, she's decided its meaning has changed over time.

"I have a complicated relationship with it. In some ways, punk rock was the first thing I found that brought me a sense of community. Sometimes, I actually hate it a lot. But then, a lot of times I feel it is very reflective of my growth," McMullin says.