

I FEEL LIKE I HAVE COME HOME

Joyce Gonzales '78

As a teenager growing up on the east side of Bridgeport, I wasn't interested in going to college; it was not a goal of mine. The idea of attending college after high school was never brought up in my house. My parents were not college graduates; I was expected to find a job after high school and start earning a living. Like many other teenagers I have spoken to since, my first work experience was at Dunkin Donuts. It was fun for a while, earning a paycheck, having the freedom to spend and do what I wanted with my time. I did not have any direction as far as a career plan went and still did not consider college. At the same time, my older sister, Pat, was enrolling at Housatonic Community College, which was located at that time on Barnum Avenue in the old Singer building. I decided to check it out and enroll with my sister. That was in 1976. Two years later, I received my Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education and was employed immediately after graduation.

My educational experience at HCC was a good one. The teachers were excellent and I felt that they cared. This was the beginning of my higher educational journey which continued over the next 20 years. I was able to transfer all my credits earned at Housatonic to Sacred Heart University and graduated with a Bachelor's in Science Degree in 1986. I continued to grow and develop professionally. I left the early childhood field and entered the corporate world. I held positions in data processing, customer service and purchasing at a large manufacturing



Joyce Gonzales' 78

company in Bridgeport.

After my daughter was born in 1986, I made the decision to put my career on hold and be a full-time mom (not an easy decision to make). However, I am glad that I made that decision because it brought me to my next career transition into adult and higher education, which is where my passion truly is. I returned to work as a substitute teacher, and also returned to school to complete my Master's Degree in Education at the University of Bridgeport. My previous professional business experience came in handy, because I was able to apply my business skills in UB's Department of Education office while attending classes, and they in turn paid for my education. I received my Master's Degree in Education from the University of Bridgeport in 1998, and having that degree has really helped me to obtain the professional positions I have held since that time.

Since obtaining my Masters Degree, I have held positions in workforce development and in higher education. Working in the greater Bridgeport community and partnering with community, educational and business organizations, always with the mission of assisting individuals obtain self-sufficiency through education and training in order to compete in the workforce. This field of work is what I find most rewarding and will continue to keep this mission in mind in any job I do.

I wanted to be a part of Housatonic Community College for a long time because of my long relationship with the college, as a student and through my professional work within the community. This January, I was hired as the Bridges High School Program Coordinator. This program is part of Housatonic's Achieving the Dream National Initiative grant. The Coordinator position is a perfect fit for my strengths, experience and my desire to help others. Being a part of Housatonic Community College again - now as a staff member - I feel like I have come home... back to where my professional journey really began! I live in Shelton with my husband and daughter.

To learn more about the Bridges High School Outreach Program, contact Joyce Gonzales, Bridges High School Program Coordinator at 203-332-5066 or e-mail jgonzales@hcc.commnet.edu. •



HOUSATONIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOMEN'S CENTER

February 11

Reiki Therapy Sue Ratanavong, Assistant Director of Admissions, will conduct a workshop on therapeutic touch. Time and location: TBA.

February 21

The Culture of Imagination Jeanette Harris who has written plays, most recently about body image, will lead a discussion on becoming a playwright. This will take place at 2:00 pm in A103. Ms. Harris will also do a reading at 7:00 pm in A103.

February 28

An Author's Perspective Author and Former HCC Professor, Prill Boyle, will discuss her book, *Defying Gravity: a Celebration of Late Blooming Women*. This presentation is at 11:00 am in A101.

March 6

Entrepreneur Panel Discussion A panel of local business owners will discuss their experiences in starting their own business. This will take place in A103 at 9:30 am. A light breakfast will be available. This is co-sponsored with American Association of University Women (AAUW).

March 27

Eastern Healing Methods Wanda Simmons, Acupuncturist, will talk about the benefits of alternative medicine.

April 3

Why Women Should Run For Political Office Award Ceremony Winners of the essay contest will receive their prizes. Keynote speaker and time to be announced. Refreshments available.

April 10

Career Information for People with Disabilities Co-sponsored with the Disabilities Support Services, 6:30 pm, location TBA.

April 22

Green Day (Earth Day) A fair of environmentally concerned organizations. Refreshments available.

Earth Day Activities at HCC

April 14 to April 19 and the Finale on April 22, Earth Day:

- April 14 & 15 - Teach in
- April 16 – Showing of “King Corn,” about the pervasiveness of corn in our food. The producer of the film, Ian Cheney, will discuss the film - both its making and the environmental aspects of the food industry.
- April 17 – Mini Conference- from 2:00 – 5:30 pm, various environmental issues, such as: the business cost of going green, Long Island Sound, the effect of pollution, especially diesel pollution, on children; ways to lower energy consumption and costs.
- April 19 – HCC day at Ansonia Nature Center, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Students, faculty, and staff will volunteer at the Nature Center to help with the maintenance/repair of facilities to get it ready for their own Earth Day celebrations April 26.

Continuing Education Department Spring 2008 Semester

Continuing Education is a fast track, high-quality, low-cost, credit free program developed to offer you the quality educational courses with experienced instructors you have been asking for. Take these courses to enhance your professional skills, improve your job performance, get a job promotion improve your resume, or just for your enjoyment.

- **Arts:**
Acting, Hip – Hop, Salsa, Guitar, Digital Photography
- **Computers:**
AutoCad, SQL, Intro to Personal Computers, MS Office
- **Education:**
G.E.D., Refresher Math, Refresher Algebra
- **ESL:** Level 1, 2, 3
- **Real Estate:** Principal & Practice, USPAP, Current Issues in Real Estate I & II
- **Languages:** Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, Sign Language
- **Sports & Fitness:** Personal Trainer National Certification, Capoeira
- **Recreation:** Safe Boating/PWC, CT Basic Boating, Chess
- **Medical:** Medical Billing, Medical Coding, Medical Terminology

Call (203) 332 – 5057

or e-mail emelendez@hcc.commnet.edu,
for additional information

Keep in Touch!

Got a new job? Finished your degree? Got married? Had a baby? Do you want to keep in touch with other Housatonic alumni? We want to know what's happening with you – and your Housatonic friends want to know too. Please take a few moments to tell us your name, year of graduation, email address, current job, and what you have been up to since graduation.

Linda Bayusik

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In Search of an Invincible Summer

Alberto Cifuentes '04
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Upon entering Housatonic Community College in the summer of 2002, I felt excited at the prospect of starting my college career over again but nervous concerning my ability to adjust to a new environment and set of expectations. Even though I had finished high school a mere year ago and ranked third in my class, I had also just flunked out of a private four-year college in New York due to intense depression. I felt so scarred by my experiences at this college that I had no intention to go back. I landed a job at Wal-Mart two months after I came back home, but I knew wholeheartedly that I needed to go back to school. Yet what school would accept me after achieving a fatal 0.7 GPA at my previous college?

With the support of my understanding and loving parents, I decided that Housatonic was my best option for making sure I wouldn't be working as a cashier at Wal-Mart my entire life. However, I remembered hearing negative things about Housatonic from the students in my Senior Honors classes, who would often deride the school by stating, "I got a 'D-' on this test. That means I'll probably be going to Housatonic!" Thus, I was ingrained with the notion that Housatonic was for "rejects" or "dumb" people and figured that the "right" plan was to get into a prestigious and competitive four-year college. Little did I dream that Housatonic would serve as the vehicle for renewing my faith and self-confidence.

My first class at Housatonic was Composition, where I was able to hone my writing skills and engage in critical thinking. I was supported both academically and emotionally by my fantastic professor, Mary Ann Valovcin, who convinced me that I should pursue a career in creative and professional writing. She helped restore my self-esteem and passion for writing more than any other person I had known, and for the next two years, I had instructors who were nothing but incredibly brilliant and compassionate. Indeed, my professors simply loved their jobs and emanated this awesome energy to

the rest of their students. My most demanding yet memorable and rewarding class was my Honors Seminar in Fairy Tale and Folklore, which was taught by the endearing and magnetic Amy Carratini. She not only treated her students with indelible kindness and open-mindedness but was also willing to learn from them and appreciate everything they had to offer the classroom.



Alberto Cifuentes '04

Perhaps my most significant experience from Housatonic was surprisingly not a class but reinstating and leading the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), which had been on hiatus for more than a year. The GSA was established to promote awareness and advocacy of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and ally (LGBTQA) students and issues on campus and throughout the nation. With the inauguration of a movie night honoring the memory and legacy of Matthew Shepherd, a young Wyoming college student who was attacked and murdered for being gay, I was able to develop strong friendships; forge connections with diverse students on campus; and gain a better sense of security with my own sexuality. In addition to the

invaluable self-knowledge I gathered from being the president of what gradually became one of the most active and respected organizations on campus, I realized that I had an undeniable passion for helping the community-at-large and fighting for LGBT rights and equality. The members and advisors of the GSA, specifically Linda Wolfson, Mickey Reed, and Henry Schissler, were all kind, resourceful, and empowering, and I continue to talk and work with some of them, as they have made my life fuller and richer.

After graduating from Housatonic in May of 2004 with High Honors, I transferred to Southern Connecticut State University in the Fall of that year. I am a Media Studies and English major and plan on graduating in May 2009. I work part-time at the Buley Library at Southern as a Circulation Desk clerk and tutor privately. More importantly, I'm still involved with social justice and activist causes, serving as Treasurer of PRISM, the GSA at Southern; Co-chair of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network of CT (GLSEN CT); and member of the New Haven Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Ally (LGBTQIA) Task Force, a committee dedicated to improving the quality of life for queer youths in New Haven.

Writer and philosopher Albert Camus eloquently said, "In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." Before entering Housatonic, I was trapped in a brutal and self-sabotaging depression that froze my mind and heart and threatened my process of self-actualization. Even though I continued to struggle with emotional issues throughout my enrollment at Housatonic, the winter that had threatened to destroy my spirits was soothed by the glorious brilliance and warmth of a summer reflected through the glowing faces of my friends and professors at Housatonic. I'll always remember them as the true inspiration for finding that unconquerable and beautiful summer within me. •

Mona Mitri - Class of 2007

I was born in Beirut, Lebanon and moved to Montreal, Canada in 1989 because of the Lebanese Civil War. In 1997, I moved to the United States and was unable to understand or to speak the English language. I got a job in a customer service company as a French speaking representative. While working there I pushed myself hard to learn to speak English.

After working four years at this company, my husband and I decided to start a family. After having our son, Anthony, I realized that I needed to go back to school to take a computer class to strengthen my Microsoft Office skills before going back to work. I enjoyed that class with Mr. Allan Weaver. I learned so much, worked so hard and earned a good grade. After taking that summer computer course, I decided to stay in school and earn a degree.

In September 2004, I enrolled at Housatonic Community College with a Business Administration major. I focused on my education, worked hard, and struggled with the language but maintained a perfect GPA. In my international business class, I remember when Professor Michael Mandel told me that I should transfer to the University of Connecticut and obtain a bachelor's degree. I thank him for believing in me and supporting me every day that I have been there.

While attending HCC, I was hired as a tutor in the Academic Support Center. I also taught French and Math in HCC's Continuing Education Department. I still work at Housatonic.

In spring 2007, I graduated from Housatonic in Business Administration: General with a 4.0 GPA. I was awarded the UCONN Partnership Scholarship, the HCC Foundation Dale Ward Endowed Scholarship Award, the Dale Ward Scholarship Award, the Academic Achievement in Business Administration: General Award and the Flint Prize. I was elected for Who's Who Among Students in American Junior Colleges. At commencement, I received the Board of Trustees Medallion for Academic Excellence.

During these first two years of going to college, I wanted to give up many times. Attending school while working and caring for a small child was extremely difficult; but I am grateful for my husband, who never let me give up and always encouraged me to continue my education.

After graduating from Housatonic, I transferred to UCONN, Stamford campus where I am currently a full-time student majoring in Business and Technology. My anticipated graduation date is December 2009. I was able to transfer all my credits. After graduating from UCONN, I plan to

go for an MBA while working for a large corporation in my field. Going back to school was the best decision that I have made. With affordable tuition, flexible hours and outstanding teachers, Housatonic helped me accomplish my goal - an associate degree - and to continue my education.

I am grateful to all the teachers who challenged me. They have opened so many doors for me. Thank you for being a limitless source of inspiration to all the students at Housatonic Community College - myself included. It has been my privilege to be your student! •



Mona Mitri '07



Housatonic Community College's

Health Services Department, along with the Bridgeport Public Health Department, will be holding our annual Health Fair on Monday, April 7, 2007, from 10 am to 4 pm at Housatonic Community College. The theme this year is "LIVING GREEN"

in support of "National Public Health

Week" and Mayor Finch's theme "Let's all do our part to make Bridgeport the cleanest, greenest, safest, and most affordable city in 2008!" Over seventy vendors are expected offering a wide array of health information and services.

ILLUSTRATING



CONNECTICUT

PEOPLE • PLACES • THINGS

OPENING RECEPTION
FEBRUARY 7 • 5:30 • 7:00 PM

FEBRUARY 7 - APRIL 4, 2008



Housatonic Museum of Art
www.HousatonicMuseum.org

3rd Thursday Cultural Celebrations Upcoming Performances 2008

- 2/21/08 Jeanette Harris
Culture of Imagination
- 3/27/08 Giovanni Ciarlo
Latin American Culture
- 4/17/08 Mistizo Manta
Andean Culture
with Armando Zarazu

Each event includes:

- 2:00 - 3:15 pm: A workshop with HCC Theater Arts students and the featured artist. It is open for public viewing and will be held in the Performing Arts Center.
- 7:00 - 8:00 pm: A performance that includes the presentation of the piece developed in the workshop; theatrical pieces prepared by HCC Theater Arts students, and solo material of the evenings featured artist. All performances are in the Performing Arts Center at 7:00 pm and are free and open to the public.

CONNECTIONS STAFF

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