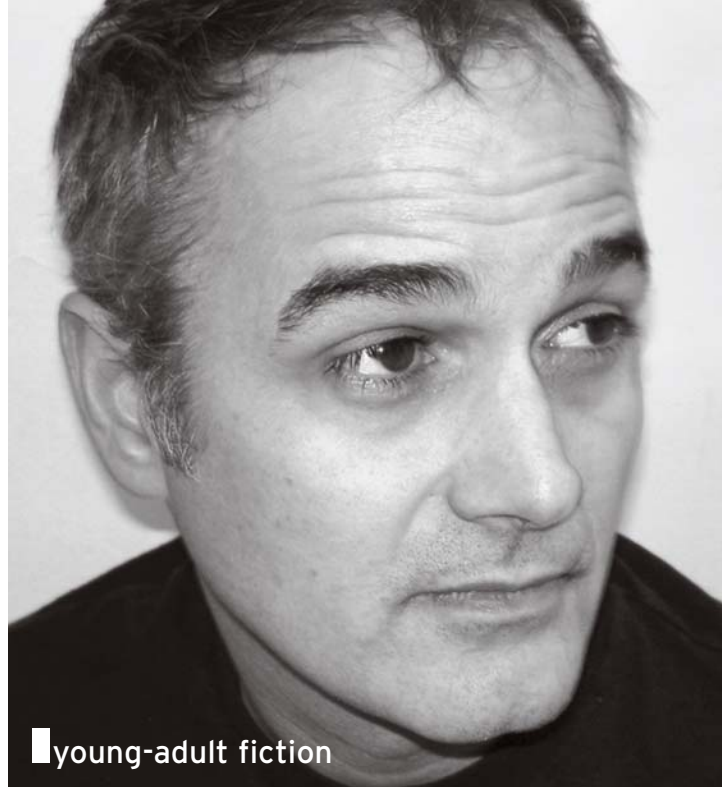


NYU

IN PRINT



young-adult fiction

PHOTO © BETH ROSENBERG

NELSON WAS ATTRACTED TO YOUNG-ADULT FICTION FOR ITS LIMITLESS STORY POSSIBILITIES.

home at the bottom of the ocean when a nuclear missile is mistakenly fired from a U.S. Navy submarine. In *Paranoid Park* (Viking), set in Nelson's native Portland, Oregon, an unnamed protagonist with skater-dude aspirations accidentally, without witnesses, kills a security guard and must choose between turning himself in or living with guilt and anxiety. The movie version, directed by Gus Van Sant, was an official selection at this year's Cannes Film Festival ahead of its worldwide release in September.

"I have never accidentally killed anyone," Nelson says, laughing, "and I've never run into aliens on the beach." Nevertheless, after years of writing about everyday issues, he felt it was time to branch out. "*Prom Anonymous* was a study of social worlds," he explains. "After you write something like that, you have to do stuff that radically shifts your brain."

Even in his more conventional tales, Nelson manages to dig beneath his characters' seemingly superficial concerns to explore the ways in which adolescents learn real-life lessons, such as navigating peer groups and moral ambiguity. These themes first appeared in his 1994 debut novel, *Girl*, a coming-of-age tale about the fearful—and sometimes joyful—high school realities of sex, self-confidence, and peer pressure. Erotic scenes and imagery, however, relegated it to an adult-only market. Praised by reviewers, the book was made into a film and, this October, Simon Pulse is re-launching it—as a young-adult novel.

"When I was first getting pub-

WEIRD, DUDE

BLAKE NELSON MAKES THE TEEN YEARS EVEN MORE COMPLICATED

by Amy Rosenberg

Novelist Blake Nelson (WSUC '84) remembers high school: curfews, cliques, zits, prom dates, virginity—and the loss thereof. For years, the award-winning young-adult author has garnered critical praise for his humorous representations of ordinary, middle-class teenagers, from Max, protagonist of *The New Rules of High School*,

who has it all—the grades, the friends, the girl—until he's not sure he wants it, to Chloe in *Prom Anonymous* (both Viking), a Sylvia Plath–idolizing outsider who, surprising even herself, decides to go to the prom.

But recently, Nelson has forced his typical adolescent characters into rather atypical scenarios—ranging from life-threatening to just plain bizarre. In *They Came From Below* (Tor), his most recent book, two friends summering with their families on Cape Cod meet a couple of cute boys—who turn out to be aliens displaced from their

Nelson forces typical adolescent characters into rather atypical scenarios—ranging from life-threatening to just plain bizarre.



lished, I didn't want to be a young-adult writer," says Nelson, who got his start in the underground New York arts scene, performing short stories, manifestos, and poetry on open-mike nights at the renowned art collective ABC No Rio after he graduated from NYU with a degree in European history. "At the time, young-adult fiction was a ghetto. But then it became a good avenue for storytelling, and that's what I wanted to do, write about every possible

thing that could happen to people. And I've always known I was good with kids."

This talent has also been noted in many a starred review by the arbiters of young-adult fiction: *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *School Library Journal*. With nine published books under his belt, Nelson is hard at work on the next one. About? A boy who returns from a camping trip to find himself the last person on Earth—of course. ■

book club

WHAT I'M READING: PHILLIP MARGOLIN

He never intended to be a writer. But in 1978, while a successful criminal defense attorney practicing in

Portland, Oregon, Phillip Margolin (LAW '70) penned the mystery novel *Heartstone*—just for fun. It became a *New York Times* best-seller, as have all 12 of his books, including his latest, *Proof Positive* (HarperCollins).



DO YOU INEVITABLY COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHER MYSTERY WRITERS LIKE BURKE?

The thing I do great is plotlines. My plotlines are really compelling.

But no one is ever going to read me for the literary quality of my work. I'm a problem-solver. I love the puzzle aspect. I like to write books where, hopefully, you don't know who did it until the end. I'm not as into developing the characters.

WHAT MAKES YOU SO ADDICTED TO READING?

I like escaping. I used to handle a lot of death-penalty cases, and it was nice to go home and read about others who had it worse. So my method of writing is to help people escape. My goal is for someone to get on a plane in Portland and fly to New York without realizing the flight took place.

—Jason Hollander

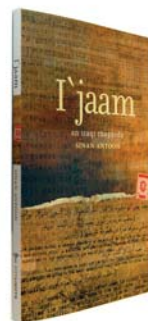
WHAT ARE YOU READING RIGHT NOW?

The last book I read was *Pegasus Descending* (Simon & Schuster) by James Lee Burke, who's a terrific writer and an interesting guy. It took him nearly 10 years to get his first crime book published, and then it was nominated for a Pulitzer prize. It goes to show you how screwy the publishing industry is. He's probably the best mystery writer there is right now. I also just finished Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* (Knopf). I'd been meaning to read that one for a while.

bibliofile

I'JAAM: AN IRAQI RHAPSODY (CITY LIGHTS)

SINAN ANTOON
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
GALLATIN SCHOOL OF
INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY



Amidst the flurry of nonfiction about contemporary Iraq comes the English translation of poet and essayist Sinan Antoon's novella-length meditation on autocracy during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war. Baghdad native Antoon presents his tale through the unearthed, written recollections of an imprisoned student. The titular "I'jaam," which means "elucidating" and refers to the accent-like marks that dot written Arabic, serves as the plot's metaphorical center—alluding both to the student's attempts to make sense of a bleak world and, quite literally, a government official's marking up of the mysterious manuscript with dots and notes. Evoking both Elie Wiesel and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in its exposition of political oppression, *I'jaam* was praised by the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat* as "[o]ne of the most important Iraqi and Arab novels to be published in recent times."

—Andrew Flynn

SING MY WHOLE LIFE LONG: JENNY VINCENT'S LIFE IN FOLK MUSIC AND ACTIVISM (UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS)

CRAIG SMITH
GSAS '86



Playing her trademark accordion, Jenny Vincent has shared the stage with legends such as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Paul Robeson through the years, using folk music to communicate the struggles of the powerless. The former Midwestern child of privilege and Vassar College graduate began performing for local unions and human-rights groups in her adopted home of New Mexico, eventually building a national following—and an FBI file due to her brief membership in the Communist party—as a champion for Native American and Hispanic cultures. First-time author Craig Smith traveled the West conducting dozens of interviews and digging through government documents to piece together Vincent's 94-year (so far!) music and social justice journey.

—Jason Hollander

Terror in the Aisles

WORKS OF HORROR NOVELIST PETER STRAUB TO HAUNT FALES COLLECTION

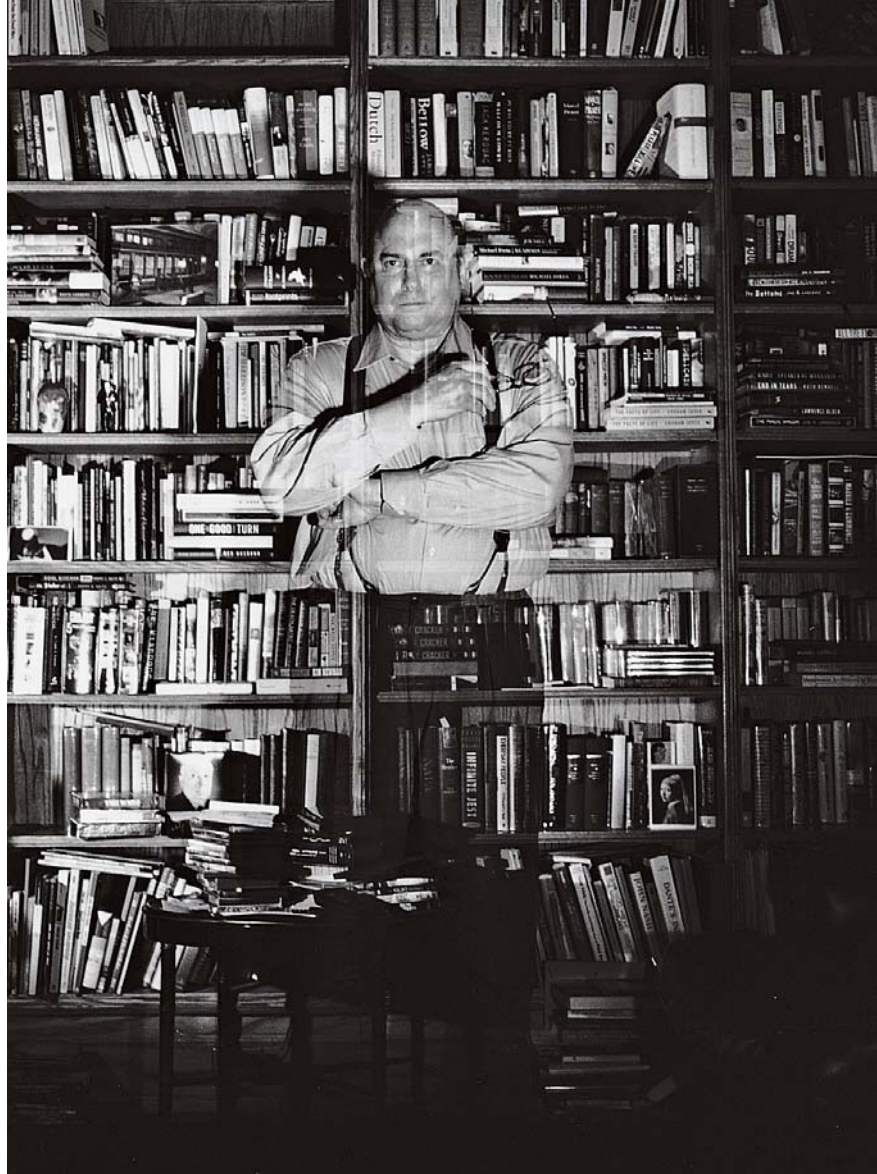
by Jason Hollander / GAL '07

On his first tour of NYU's Fales Collection, best-selling novelist Peter Straub shuffled through the narrow stacks, marveling at the obscure, vintage pulp fiction on the shelves, alongside materials from H.P. Lovecraft and James Beard. The eclectic library, complete with a graffiti mural on the wall, assured him this wasn't a place that snubbed its nose at popular culture—an important personal point for Straub. Despite numerous writing awards, he still finds that scholars and critics tag him as a genre writer because of his success with horror novels such as *Ghost Story* (1979), which a *Chicago Sun-Times* critic once

called "the scariest book I've ever read," and later became a film starring Fred Astaire.

So when the time came for Straub to choose among the universities in line to purchase his archives, Fales appeared a logical choice. "Peter liked our collecting style and our attitude because we're not precious about it," explains Mike Kelly, curator of books for Fales and a friend who often talks comic books and indie rock with the author. "We're not just Dickens—we cast a really wide net." Last winter, a moving truck pulled away from Straub's ivy-covered Upper West Side brownstone, heading for Bobst Library with more than 65,000 pages of his manuscripts, 4,500 of his letters, and numerous other diaries, notebooks, drawings, and personal memorabilia, including a series of collages fashioned by Straub for the covers of the ledger books he uses to write in longhand.

The archive reveals both the dedication and evolution of a writer who battled the depression of watching his early works fail to resonate. After publishing some poetry and an unheralded mainstream novel by 1974, Straub took the advice of his agent, who championed the newly popular Gothic genre and "suggested I try to write something that would actually make money." The Milwaukee na-



ABOVE: AN ETHEREAL PETER STRAUB IN THE STUDY OF HIS UPPER WEST SIDE BROWNSTONE. **LEFT:** STRAUB PASTED EERIE IMAGES ON THIS TABLET, IN WHICH HE HANDWROTE THE AWARD-WINNING NOVEL *KOKO* (1988).

PHOTO © DUDLEY REED

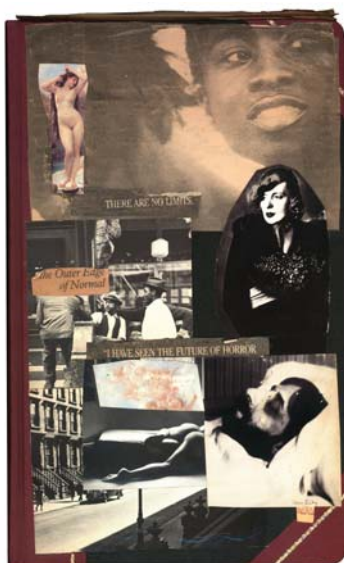
tive was nearing the end of the grace period in which his wife, Susan (SSW '87), would support him so he could concentrate on his work, and decided to take a chance. After some early struggles, Straub finally came up with an idea that

new child's evil streak. The creepy tone proved a perfect fit. "Right away I saw that I was writing as well as I ever had, or better," explains Straub, who happily watched *Julia* (1975) become a hit in the United States and Great Britain.

After some early struggles, the fledgling writer finally came up with an idea that scared even himself.

scared even himself: A young woman moves alone into a house on a spooky London street and meets a little ghost-like girl who reminds her of her recently deceased daughter—except for the

Straub has since made a literary mark with his intricate plots and experimental styles, which sometimes reveal unreliable narrators and shifting realities. The author collaborated with good friend



Stephen King on the supernatural works *The Talisman* (1984) and *Black House* (2001), which follow protagonist Jack Sawyer into a parallel universe. He received World Fantasy Awards for his 1988 post-Vietnam War thriller *Koko* and for his 1993 novella *The Ghost Village*, owns seven Bram Stoker Awards, and recently received a lifetime achievement award from the Horror Writers Association. In fall 2008, Fales will host an exhibition of Straub's archives—including many letters from King, complete with corny jokes—as well as a symposium on his 17 novels and other works.

Though comfortable now with the label of horror or fantasy writer, it still bothers Straub—whose favorite author is Henry James—that most serious critics and English professors don't include these genres more in conversation. Horror novels, he says, can be of the highest literary merit, and also contain a subtle philosophy of existence just by nature of their magical inventions. "If you invoke the supernatural, you are instantly moving toward a religious viewpoint," Straub says. "Once you start suspending the laws of physics, you are getting near to Jesus raising Lazarus from the tomb."

But do the slippery and twisted realities he forges in his works tend to affect his real-life perceptions? Perhaps a little when he first steps away from the typewriter, he says, but Straub always returns to the common ground he shares with readers. "I sort of want to think that there is another realm, and sometimes I think that there almost has to be," the author muses. "But that is for exploration and pleasure in books. You can't spend your life trying to look for it in the world." ■



PHOTO © STEVE DECANIO/GETTY IMAGES

poetry

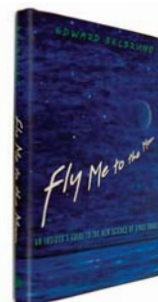
WINTRY MIX

The 6 A.M. January
encaustic clouds
are built
in a waxy gray putty
whizzing by with spots
of luminous silvery
crack-o'-the-world light
coming through, an eerie
end-o'-the-world feeling
yet reassuring
like an old movie.
Do I really have to go out there?
Now a hint of muted
salmon tones breaking
a warmish band
of welcoming pinkish light.
Is it like this every morning?
My head still in the dark.
Worry, eck! But the brightening
russet tipped cloud ballet
reminds me of something
in Pliny, yea, Pliny.
Can't imagine opening
the door today in a toga.
Work and more,
yes, work
sends us into the draft.

—PETER GIZZI (GAL '86)
FROM *THE OUTERNATIONALE*
(WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
PRESS)

bibliofile

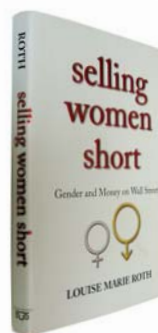
FLY ME TO THE MOON:
AN INSIDER'S GUIDE
TO THE NEW SCIENCE
OF SPACE TRAVEL
(PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRESS)
EDWARD BELBRUNO
ARTS '73, GSAS '75, CIMS '79



Will spaceships someday glide to the moon the way a surfer rides a wave to shore? In *Fly Me to the Moon*, mathematician, NASA consultant, and painter Edward Belbruno explains how to harness the laws of chaos to travel to Earth's only satellite. He proposes that spacecraft use "the subtle intermingling of gravity's pulls and tugs" to surf on balanced gravitational fields, rather than relying on fuel-hogging rocket engines. The only downside is that the journey can take months, instead of days. But Belbruno suggests that this method, once used to rescue an errant lunar mission from Japan, may be ideal for transporting supplies or even knocking an asteroid off a dangerous course. For science-challenged readers, Belbruno spices up the discourse with anecdotes, everyday analogies, and scores of illustrations and photographs.

—Sabine Heinlein

SELLING WOMEN SHORT:
GENDER AND MONEY
ON WALL STREET
(PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PRESS)
LOUISE MARIE ROTH
GSAS '99, '00



The infamous "boom-boom rooms" may be gone, but University of Arizona sociologist Louise Marie Roth reveals that a culture of discrimination against women lingers in the financial world. In her debut book, Roth examines a group of elite men and women who rode the 1990s bull market, when opportunities should have been at their most optimal—and equal. Despite corporate practices and market forces that generally reward high performers regardless of sex, Roth found that women remained at a disadvantage because of the "unconscious and invisible assumptions about gender" that play out in annual reviews and other subjective career measures. Still, almost one-third of the women she interviewed managed to prove-through sky-high bonuses and promotions—that gender is not always destiny, even if it continues to tug.

—Nicole Pezold

A Tale of Two Sisters

AN INTIMATE PROJECT HELPS TWINS BRIDGE DECADES OF SEPARATION

by Courtney E. Martin / GAL '04

On an ordinary April morning in 2004, Paula Bernstein's (TSOA '92) past and future collided in a phone call from Louise Wise Services, the agency that arranged her adoption in 1969. A freelance writer, she had published an essay in *Redbook* in 2000 titled, "Why I Don't Want to Find My Birth Mother"—and had long ago made that clear to the agency, suspecting that to discover another family might end in heartbreak. But it wasn't her birth mother they were calling about. "I hate to dump this on you," a woman told her over the phone, "but you've got a twin!"

After recovering from the shock,

Bernstein and her sister, Paris-based filmmaker Elyse Schein, who had contacted the agency in search of her birth mother, reunited at Café Mogador, an East Village haunt Bernstein frequented as a graduate student in cinema studies. They reveled in a love-at-first-sight euphoria, comparing knees, noses, and what once seemed anomalous quirks. "Even when I'm not in front of a keyboard, I find myself mock typing while I speak," Bernstein admitted. "I do that too!" Schein exclaimed. They shared childhood histories—Bernstein's idyllic upbringing in Westchester and Schein's early loss of her adoptive mother in Oklahoma. Both were editor-in-chief of their high school

AFTER DISCOVERING EACH OTHER IN THEIR THIRTIES, TWINS ELYSE SCHEIN (LEFT) AND PAULA BERNSTEIN HAD TO LEARN HOW TO BE SISTERS.

newspapers and passionate about avant-garde film.

The twins soon decided to document their discovery in writing, agreeing it would be an ideal way to get to know each other and make sense of their newfound sisterhood; *Identical Strangers: A Memoir of Twins Separated and Reunited* (Random House) was published in October 2007. The book reads like a mystery as it follows the sisters in their quest to understand who their mother was, why they were separated, and how this information has changed them. To find these answers, they interview twin experts, dig through birth records, and analyze the science and cultural lore of identical twins, including director Stanley Kubrick's study of duality and identity in *The Shining* (1980) and Diane Arbus's 1967 photograph of identical girl

twins—dressed the same and yet still so individual.

What they uncover is a tale of a mentally ill mother of twin baby girls, separated because of an ethically questionable study on nature versus nurture, so controversial it has been sealed until 2066. The sisters interrogate the lead scientist of the secret study and, with the help of a private investigator, discover the truth about their mother's fate.

Yet even as they worked together, they had to confront the fact that, DNA aside, they were still virtual strangers. While Schein described Bernstein, a married mother of two in Brooklyn, as "'the we of me' that I had been unconsciously searching for all my life," Bernstein, worried that her new sister—unmarried and unmoored—would want too much from her. "Writing about some of the difficult aspects of our relationship wasn't easy," Bernstein concedes. "I was definitely afraid of hurting her feelings." Schein adds: "Communication is always difficult, but in this case, it was sometimes like speaking a foreign language. You're not sure if the other person really understands you."

It's a strange dilemma for identical twins, known for sometimes inventing their own language when raised together, but Bernstein's hesitancy melted away as the journalist in her took over. The honesty and intensity they both bring make the book—structured chronologically, with each sister's take on various significant moments—gripping

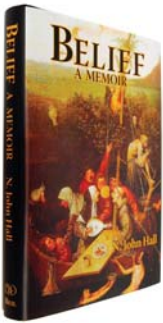
as the twins negotiate and eventually embrace their bond. These days they see each other about once a week (Schein has relocated to Brooklyn), take walks in Prospect Park, and delight in the antics of Bernstein's two young daughters—who have the great fortune to grow up side by side. ■



bibliofile

BELIEF: A MEMOIR
(FREDERIC C. BEIL)

N. JOHN HALL
GSAS '70

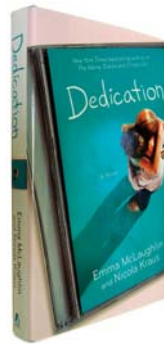


For N. John Hall, nagging doubts about the existence of God started as a divinity student in 1951 and continued throughout his nearly two decades in service to the Catholic church. Eventually, a crisis of faith—and newfound love—forced Hall to leave the priesthood behind for marriage and a different calling: English literature. Now a noted Anthony Trollope and Max Beerbohm scholar at the City University of New York, Hall recounts his spiritual evolution in precise detail—from a childhood enchantment with Catholicism to intellectual frustrations with seminary life to the fulfillment of working in tight-knit parish communities—culminating with the unexpected romance that drove him to choose between his religious commitment and emerging personal desires.

—A.F.

DEDICATION
(ATRIA-SIMON & SCHUSTER)

EMMA MCLAUGHLIN
GAL '96
AND NICOLA KRAUS
GAL '95



After Kate Hollis's high school sweetheart left for California without even a goodbye, she tried to focus on college and forget about him—until he became a huge rock star and she discovered that all his songs were about *her*. Now 13 years later, she finally gets the chance to confront him when he returns home to tape a Christmas special but loses her steam once she realizes that they might still be in love. *The New York Times* calls this latest novel by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus, authors of the 2002 best-seller *The Nanny Diaries*, "diabolically funny." Narrated alternately by 30-year-old Kate and Katie, her alter ego from elementary and high school, *Dedication* transports readers back to the early 1990s, giving the book an innocence and nostalgia that make it stand out from other chick lit.

—Renée Alfuso



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NYU Alumni