

LONG ISLAND / TOWNS

2004 LI Valedictorians: 10 years later*Updated June 21, 2014 11:04 AM*

Newsday caught up with some of Long Island's high school valedictorians from 2004. From bungee-jumping the Corinth canal in pursuit of the Classics to helping a team make the women's NCAA Final Four in lacrosse, their experiences have been vast and interesting.

SHANI MALLOY**HIGH SCHOOL:** Bellport**COLLEGE:** Bachelor's in political science, Yale University, 2008**JOB:** Marketing communications specialist, ITG, Manhattan**LIVES IN:** Harlem

Shani Malloy graduated from Yale University in 2008 with a bachelor's in political science, but she knew as far back as her freshman year that she wouldn't dedicate herself to politics.

"I felt that I had a natural proclivity towards marketing," Malloy said. "I'm a big people person and I love writing."

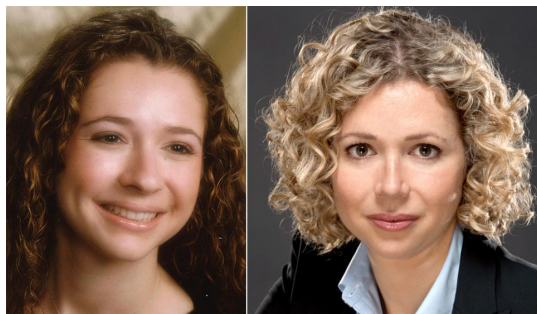
So Malloy went in that direction, and she has spent the last year as a marketing communications specialist at investment firm ITG.

Prior to that, she worked as an account coordinator at the public relations firm Thomas Collective.

Malloy, 28, has also had success outside the office. In 2006, she won \$50,000 as a contestant on the game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?"

Malloy lives in Harlem with her 2-year-old daughter, Stella.

-- MARLO JAPPEN

GAYLE DENMAN**HIGH SCHOOL:** John F. Kennedy High School**COLLEGE:** Bachelor's in literature, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Phi Beta Kappa), 2008; JD, Stanford Law School, 2011**LIVES IN:** Manhattan

Gayle Denman planned to pursue a life in science, but during her time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she decided that law "and all that it entails" would be a better fit.

After MIT, she headed to Stanford, from which she earned her law degree in 2011, then immediately got job at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom in Manhattan. She joined her current firm, Frankfurt,

Kurnit, Klein & Selz, where she does trademark and brand management work, in 2012.

"I really enjoy being a lawyer," she said. "I use a lot of the skills that I enjoyed using when doing science research." That includes problem solving to help clients -- largely in the media and entertainment industries, but also in other fields -- tackle a range of legal issues.

Her advice to graduates is to "keep your mind open and your options open. You might think you know exactly what you want to do, but there are a wide range of opportunities available to you."

For her, she said, "It's been a bit of a circuitous path, but I'm quite happy with where I ended up."

-- CARL CORRY

CHERYL MCEVOY MORRIS



Photo Credit: Newsday staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Oyster Bay

COLLEGE: Communications, Villanova University, 2008.

LIVES IN: Philadelphia

JOB: Communications associate, Villanova University

Cheryl McEvoy Morris went to Villanova University expecting to pursue a career in journalism.

In fact, she even wrote for the campus paper, The Villanovian, which she said helped her come out of her shell. "I was very shy. Learning to go up to anyone really helped me to put myself out there."

But after graduating summa cum laude with a communications degree in 2008, McEvoy Morris ventured into healthcare publishing, then served as director of communications for the National Foundation of Celiac Awareness.

In October, McEvoy Morris returned to Villanova, this time for a full-time job as a communications associate, managing communications and branding for various projects, including the school's current \$600 million fundraising campaign, the largest in its history.

"Look for a job that matches what you're interested in," she advises 2014 graduates. "But keep an open mind."

Morris, 28, was married last August to another Villanova alum and now plans to pursue an MBA at the school.

-- MARLO JAPPEN

CHELSEA KOCIS



Photo Credit: Newsday staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Huntington

COLLEGE: Bachelor's in economics, University of Pennsylvania, 2008

LIVES IN: Manhattan

JOB: Co-founder, chief operating officer, Swerve Fitness, Manhattan

Chelsea Kocis has certainly had an active life since graduating at the top of her class in 2004.

While studying economics at the University of Pennsylvania, Kocis was part of a turnaround women's lacrosse team that helped bring the school to the NCAA tournament Final Four not once, but twice, during her tenure. The school hadn't been to that level in more than two decades.

After school, she deferred an equity sales job offer with Bank of America for a year to travel. She spent six months in Australia with a group of 12 people from various universities in a town near Sydney, volunteered to build houses in Nicaragua, then backpacked through Europe, visiting France, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands.

Kocis then took the Bank of America offer and spent five years there.

"It was a great experience, very fast paced," she said. But she had always had dreams of someday becoming an entrepreneur. So last June, Kocis left BofA to co-found Swerve Fitness, a cycling studio in Manhattan, with two other Huntington natives — including her brother's best friend.

"It's going really well so far," Kocis said.

Her advice to current graduates is that they "spend time trying to figure out what that are passionate about in college and try to figure out how to bring that out in what they do in an everyday basis." -- CARL CORRY

JENNIFER MOLLOY

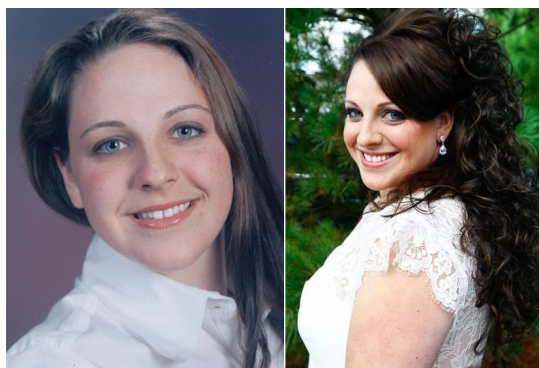


Photo Credit: Newsday staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Plainedge

COLLEGE: Bachelor's degree, applied economics and management, Cornell University, 2006; master's degree in industrial/organizational psychology, Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2012

LIVES IN: West Babylon

JOB: Project manager of pharmacy information technology, North Shore-LIJ Health System, Great Neck.

As a senior at Plainedge High School, Jennifer Molloy "had no idea" what she wanted to do with her life.

Then, she said, she discovered that there's an important place for people on the business side of health care through her experience in an externship at Cornell Medical Center in New York while going to Cornell.

After only five semesters, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in applied economics and management in 2006. Immediately afterward, she started working at North Shore-LIJ Health System in Great Neck as an administrative resident.

In 2010, she took online classes through the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, earning a master's degree in industrial/organizational psychology 2012.

Now, at 27, she is a project manager of pharmacy information technology at North Shore-LIJ.

Molloy lives in West Babylon with her husband of almost one year.

"Find something you love and work hard at it," she tells 2014 graduates. "You have to build relationships and show people how valuable you are, while valuing them as well."

-- MARLO JAPPEN

ELIZABETH BROOMFIELD

Photo Credit: Newsday Staff



HIGH SCHOOL: Commack

COLLEGE: Bachelor's degrees in ethics, politics and economics and electrical engineering from Yale University, 2008; law degree, Columbia University School of Law, 2011; master's in international business, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011

LIVES IN: Manhattan

JOB: Investment banker, Morgan Stanley, Manhattan

"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," were the final words of Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses" poem Elizabeth Broomfield recited in her valedictorian speech 10 years ago.

"There's always so much more in life to do, so keep going and see what else is out there," said Broomfield, 27, of Manhattan. "See how far you can go and embrace the challenges in front of you. That's what I said in my speech and that's what I believe."

Broomfield graduated from Yale University in 2008 with degrees in ethics, politics and economics and electrical engineering. In 2011, she got a law degree from Columbia University and a master's in international business from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Broomfield has worked as an investment banker at Morgan Stanley since May. Before that, she interned with the United Nations, the U.S. Department of State and was an associate at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP in Manhattan for almost three years.

Broomfield never had a grand plan, but is excited and feels lucky to be where she is now.

"It's more about the type of work I'm doing than being in a particular position," she said.

"I've always enjoyed quantitative analysis because I find it intellectually stimulating and I like working hard and pushing myself to see what else I can do, what more I can learn and accomplish. As long as I can be doing those things, I consider myself pretty lucky."

-- BRITTANY WAIT

ANDREW CLARE



Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Harborfields

COLLEGE: Bachelor's in aeronautical engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008; PhD, MIT, 2013

LIVES IN: San Francisco

JOB: Consultant, McKinsey & Co.

It's no surprise that Andrew Clare went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study aeronautical engineering. After all, he was an Intel semifinalist in 2003.

A decade later, after also earning an aeronautics Ph.D., Clare is out West, working as a consultant.

"I'm helping Fortune 500 companies solve problems they have with strategy or operations," Clare said. "I have a tech background, and this job is giving me a much broader range of expertise."

Clare, who is getting married in August, remains close to his parents and brother, who all still live in Huntington Station.

"I do enjoy coming back," he said. "I was there a few months ago and I try to come back a few times a year."

He advised new graduates to "find a group, activity, or club that you're passionate about and commit yourself to it. Some of the most important life skills are developed outside of the classroom."

--DAVID REICH-HALE

AMANDA ERICKSON



Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Academy of St. Joseph's

COLLEGE: Columbia University, urban studies, 2008

LIVES IN: Washington, D.C.

JOB: An assistant editor for The Washington Post's "Outlook" digital opinion section

When Amanda Erickson graduated high school, she wanted to do "everything."

"Everything appealed to me," she said.

But over the past decade, the 26-year-old Sayville native has learned to refine her goals by weeding out some possible career paths.

After graduating from Columbia University with a degree in urban studies, she took a job at The Washington Post, but left in 2010 to participate in a Fulbright Program in Azerbaijan.

While there, she spent some time teaching journalism at Baku Slavic University, where she learned that teaching was not her strong suit. "It requires patience and a sense of classroom management that I don't have," she said.

While overseas, she said she also gained a new appreciation for America's free press. After working for two years for CityLab.com, she is now back at The Washington Post, serving as an assistant editor for the "Outlook" digital opinion section.

She said she's happy with her new job, but may want to return to reporting again some time in the future, maybe local news, maybe a gig overseas.

She said she once thought that she needed to have a specific path mapped out for herself, but has since learned that's not the case.

"Peoples' trajectory to the jobs that make them most happy are complicated," she said.

Her advice to the Class of 2014: "Do things that make you happy and trust that will lead to other things that will make you happy:--"

-- TARA CONRY

ROBIN FUSCO

Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Malverne

COLLEGE: Muhlenberg College, bachelor's in theater, 2008

LIVES IN: Manhattan

JOB: Acting and screenwriting

When she was 12 years old, Robin Fusco shared the silver screen with actresses Julia Roberts and Jena Malone in the 1998 hit film, "Stepmom." At 28, Fusco is still acting, but she's also pursuing a new passion: scriptwriting.

In the fall, she will begin a two-year master's degree program at Point Park University in Pittsburgh in writing for the screen and stage.

"I never thought I'd be a writer, but I've learned that I really enjoy telling the stories," she said.

Fusco said she was exposed to different aspects of the performing arts industry while majoring in theater at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, including some of the behind-the-scenes responsibilities. It made her realize that she wanted to do other things in addition to acting.

"I still want to act, but I also really enjoy creating the stories that entertain people and reflect today's culture," she said.

She's acted in a few Web series and short films, and toured with a Shakespeare company, Shakesperience, and Nick Jr.'s "Yo Gabba Gabba! Live!" But she's also written a few plays and Web series that have been well-received and produced during the past two years, including "Quarter Life Crisis," a comedy about a group of college graduates struggling to adapt to life in the "real world."

Fusco is currently working on the screenplay for a feature-length romantic comedy about a married couple searching for other married couples to befriend. She plans to continue living and working in New York City while pursuing her master's since the program only requires her to spend a few weeks in Pittsburgh, she said.

Her advice to high school students graduating now: "You're the only person who knows what interests you, so find the career you want and do what you love."

-- TARA CONRY

TEAGAN HALLAHAN

Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: East Islip

COLLEGE: Bachelor's degree in accounting, Hofstra University, 2008

LIVES IN: East Islip

JOB: Senior accountant, Newsday, Melville

Teagan Hallahan has the same advice for this year's graduating seniors as she did a decade ago at her own graduation.

"Time. You only have so much of it. So make the most of it," said Hallahan, 28, of East Islip.

Hallahan, an avid runner who graduated from Hofstra University in 2008 with a degree in accounting, worked as an auditor at Melville accounting firm Marcum LLP in 2009 until beginning her job as senior accountant at Newsday in June 2013.

"I have always been good with numbers. It's the type of thing you either like or hate and you're either good at or you're not," Hallahan said. "And I like it and I'm good at it."

Appropriately, Hallahan advises current high school graduates to make the time they have in college count.

"College is the time to expand your horizons. When an opportunity presents itself, ask yourself, 'Why not?' You have 86,400 seconds available to you today – how will you use them?"

-- BRITTANY WAIT

JOHN MEZZINA HANNIGAN



Photo Credit: Newsday staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Baldwin

COLLEGE: Bachelor's in economics, New York University, 2008

LIVES IN: Brooklyn Heights

JOB: Vice president of sales and trading, Barclays Investment Bank, Manhattan

When John Mezzina Hannigan graduated from Baldwin High School in 2004, he headed to Cornell University with plans to pursue his passions for music and theatre.

But after one semester at Cornell, he transferred to New York University, where he then opted for a more "pragmatic" path and earned a bachelor's in economics.

The 27-year-old Brooklyn Heights resident is now the vice president of sales and trading for Barclays Investment Bank in Manhattan, but he hasn't given up his love of performing arts. It's just become a hobby rather than a profession.

Recently, he starred in a production of "West Side Story" in Brooklyn.

"I can work on Wall Street and still do theatre at the same time," he said. "It's really fulfilling, and the fact that it doesn't have to pay the bills is what makes it great."

While at NYU, Mezzina Hannigan landed an internship at Barclays the summer before his senior year, which led to a full-time position.

Mezzina Hannigan advises today's high school graduates, whether they think they know what they want to study in college or have no clue, to be open to exploring new possibilities and changing their mind.

"They don't know the first thing about the person they are going to be when they graduate from college," he said. "Give that person an opportunity to see everything and then, figure out the right path."

And even if they do pick a career doing something other than what they loved doing in high school, he said, "try doing it on the side."

-- TARA CONRY

JESSICA LAMONT

HIGH SCHOOL: Riverhead

COLLEGE: Bachelor's in Classics, College of William and Mary, 2008; pursuing a PhD in Classics, John Hopkins University

LIVES IN: Baltimore



Jessica Lamont has pursued the Classics, but not in the traditional head-in-the-books sort of way. She has bungee-jumped over the Corinth canal and traveled north of the Arctic Circle. Her latest adventure involves supervising an excavation in northern Greece this summer.

After earning a bachelor's degree in the Classics from the College of William and Mary, graduating summa cum laude in 2008, Lamont, 28, is finishing her PhD in Classical Art and Archaeology at John Hopkins University, where she has taught Latin and will teach a course on Athenian and Spartan history this fall.

Lamont hopes to become a university professor in the future.

Lamont advises recent graduates to study what they love.

"I chose to study and pursue that which I truly enjoyed the most -- what I was most passionate about -- regardless of how relevant or 'practical' it seemed," she said. "It's a far cry from a business or law degree, but in many ways it's far more rewarding."

-- MARLO JAPPEN

KAITLYN O'LEARY



HIGH SCHOOL: Sacred Heart Academy

COLLEGE: Bachelor's in English, Notre Dame, 2008

LIVES IN: Hoboken, N.J.

JOB: Starting in August, to become a curriculum and assessment development associate for the Archdiocese of New York

After graduating with a bachelor's in English from Notre Dame in 2008, Kaitlyn O'Leary continued her education through the school's Alliance for Catholic Education -- a program that allowed her to earn her master's in education while teaching at a middle school in Tuscan, Arizona.

She finished in 2010, then spent two months in a language-immersion program in Ecuador. From there, she moved to Santiago, Chile, where she taught at a Catholic School for nearly three years.

O'Leary, 27, lives in Hoboken, New Jersey, where she has taught writing at a charter school in Newark for the past year.

She's taking a new job in August to become a curriculum and assessment development associate for the Archdiocese of New York, where she will help implement Common Core standards in K-8 schools within the archdiocese, organize and analyze assessment results to help boost student achievement, and coordinate teacher professional development opportunities.

"Soak up all the wonderful experiences that college has to offer you," she advises recent graduates. "Trust that if you're pursuing what you're passionate about your future will fall into place."

-- MARLO JAPPEN

ANIKATZ

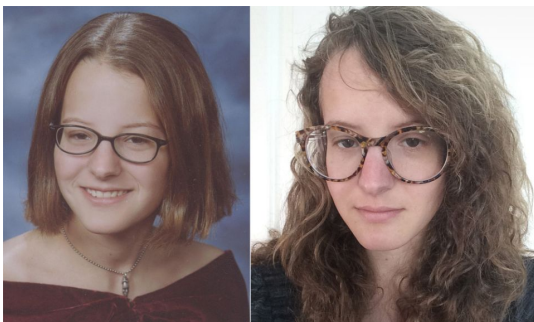


Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Bay Shore

COLLEGE: Yale, bachelor's in art, 2008; Columbia College Chicago, master's in photography, 2014

LIVES IN: Bay Shore

A decade after graduating from Bay Shore High School and heading off to Yale, Ani Katz is in the midst of another transitional period of her life.

Last month, she completed a graduate program at Columbia College Chicago, obtaining a master's degree in photography, and moved back to Long Island.

"It was fun to try living in a different city for a while for school, but I could never commit to the sort of Midwest culture," she said. "There's a lot more opportunities in the New York area and it's home."

Katz's parents still live in Bay Shore, where she will be staying until she finds a place of her own, most likely in Manhattan, she said.

Her new degree enables her to teach at the college level, she said, so she'd like to land a teaching position while also making a living as an artist by exhibiting and publishing her works.

On her website, anikatz.com, she tells stories by weaving together her photographs with creative writing, her other passion.

"I thought I was going to major in English," Katz said, adding that in high school it was her favorite subject and she belonged to the creative writing club.

At Yale, she developed her love of photography and decided to pursue an art major with a concentration in the subject.

She advises today's graduates to be "open to new and different paths," and not to be afraid to explore and make mistakes.

"You can't really predict where your life is going to lead you or what you might discover you end up loving," she said.

In high school, Katz said she put a lot of pressure on herself, but that's changed.

"As I've gotten older and had more varied and diverse experiences, I've become more zen about what my path is ... and what success is," she said. "Things are uncertain, and that's OK."

-- TARA CONRY

SEBASTIAN PIROG

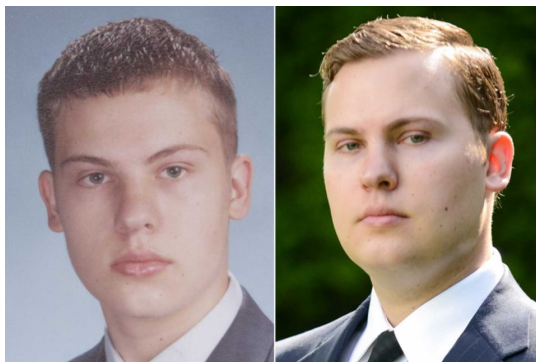


Photo Credit: Newsday Staff

HIGH SCHOOL: Centereach

COLLEGE: Bachelor's degrees in economics and psychology from Duke University, 2008; pursuing an MBA from New York University's Stern School of Business.

LIVES IN: Lake Grove

JOB: Director of operations, E&M ESR Inc., Ronkonkoma

Sebastian Pirog isn't surprised that he ended up where he is today.

"I didn't think I'd be anywhere else," said Pirog, 27, of Lake Grove. "Life's good. My style has always been to live my life and figure things out as I go. Coming out of high school, I didn't have a grand vision for myself, but I did think that I'd go into the family business."

That business is E&M ESR Inc. in Ronkonkoma, a 20-year-old wholesale distributor of professional haircare products.

Pirog started working for the company full-time after graduating from Duke University with bachelor's degrees in economics and psychology in 2008.

"I've gotten more and more actively involved in the company," Pirog said. "At least in the near future I don't have any plans of leaving. I went to business school to become more knowledgeable. And this is my dream job. It's satisfying and fulfilling to be able to contribute to the family name and help the business grow. There's a certain pride in my work that most people don't have."

Pirog now serves as director of operations of E&M ESR Inc., which first began out of his parents' garage and now employs 150. At the same time, he's attending New York University's Stern School of Business, from which he expects to earn an MBA in December.

Pirog relayed some advice to this year's graduating seniors.

"If you have a plan for what you want to do in life that's good, but if you don't, don't worry," he said. "Be sure to stay open and flexible to change, mix it up with new people and expose yourself to new experiences and ideas. You're young enough that if you make mistakes you'll recover."

-- BRITTANY WAIT

ERIC M. SCHWARTZ

HIGH SCHOOL: Herricks

COLLEGE: Double major in math and Spanish, University of Pennsylvania, 2008; Ph.D., marketing, The Wharton School, 2013

LIVES IN: Ann Arbor, Michigan

JOB: Assistant professor of marketing, University of Michigan Ross School of Business

When he set out for the University of Pennsylvania a decade ago, Eric M. Schwartz had many passions. He was on the soccer travel team, led the student government and had keen interests in math and Spanish. But he wasn't sure where all that would take him.

A class in quantitative research led by another Long Island native, Schwartz said, changed the course of his academic career.

At the time, he recalled, there were only eight schools on Facebook, including Penn. "Everything was interactive media, interactive commerce, viral videos before YouTube. Once I got to campus, I met a professor who was talking about exactly that stuff." That professor, Peter Fader, became his Ph.D. advisor at The Wharton School, after Schwartz graduated as a double major in math and Spanish from Penn in 2008.

After graduating, he backpacked through South America for three months, visiting Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Argentina and has visited Spain on a number of occasions following a study abroad stay there.

Schwartz, 27, who is still passionate about soccer -- playing in pickup games with Latin American players around Ann Arbor -- is now an assistant professor of marketing at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business, where he started last year. "One of my goals is to communicate with students is that it's not a soft field. That it's a hard discipline. That the more technical and analytical the better. You need quantitative tools to learn."

His advice to new graduates is to "really combine what you love into what makes you happy. It's hard to find, but it's incredibly rewarding."

--CARL CORRY

JESSE MICHAEL HATGIS

HIGH SCHOOL: Portledge

COLLEGE: Bachelor's degree, neuroscience, Lafayette College, 2008; D.O., New York College of Osteopathic Medicine, 2012

LIVES IN: South Miami

JOB: Resident physician, Larkin Community Hospital, South Miami

Jesse Hatgis knew he had an interest in natural sciences from an early age.

"I always found science to be congruent with my strengths as a problem solver," he said. "A scientific process, no matter how complex, can be understood if it is broken down into its basic elements."

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from Lafayette College in Easton, Pa., in 2008, Hatgis went on to earn a doctorate in osteopathic medicine in 2012 from the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Hatgis, 27, is now a resident physician at Larkin Community Hospital in South Miami and plans to stay in the area to practice physical medicine and rehabilitation after completing his residency in 2016.

He advises recent graduates to be at least one step ahead of where they're "supposed to be."

"Dedicate proper time and energy toward reaching your goals," he says. "Make connections and harvest them."

--MARLO JAPPEN



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