



ON THE VINE

THE IVY CLUB NEWSLETTER

Spring 2019

A “Free Solo” Approach to Life: Interview with Oscar-Winning Filmmaker Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi '00



[above] Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi '00 [center] with with Ivy members Amanda Morrison '19 [left] and Janette Lu '20 [right]

On February 24th, Ivy alumna and award-winning filmmaker Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi won the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Elizabeth accepted the award, alongside her husband and co-director Jimmy Chin, for *Free Solo*, a breathtaking documentary that follows rock-climber Alex Hannold on his quest to climb El Capitan—a 900-meter rock face in Yosemite National Park—without any ropes. She kindly agreed to an interview with fellow Ivy member and film enthusiast, Amanda Morrison '19.

How did you develop an interest in documentary filmmaking and how did Princeton contribute to your budding passion?

I came to Princeton as a pre-med student but switched to comparative literature. Journalism was very appealing to me, and it was increasingly clear the role that political documentaries could play. The idea of representation was something I became very interested in, and capturing images seemed critical to this. My junior year I began making a film on the Kosovo War with a classmate named Hugo Berkeley. The Comparative Literature department graciously allowed me to include a twenty-minute film in my

thesis on representation in text. That type of support—nurturing both creative and analytical thought—was very special.

What I learned at Princeton is still very present in my work. I still have my original copies of *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* with my notes from Robert Fagles' seminar; I still go back to those stories and forms. The classics are a very big creative influence on my work. If not comparative literature, I would have majored in classics. The only production class I ever took was with Su Friedrich, but when I wanted to direct a play, I received funding to put on a production

in the Woody Woo fountain. Princeton is a very special place.

What do you look for when you're starting a project, and what are your favorite stories to tell?

To make a film you have to be moved by the subject. Films take a long time. If you're going to live and breathe something, and pledge yourself to honorable representation, you better care about it. My favorite types of stories to tell are those that move me, that make the world a little bit better, and that I feel uniquely positioned to look at it in a different way. I most respect my peers who create films that advance the genre, like the film *The Act of Killing*. I think *Free Solo* was a new visceral experience for the documentary film genre.

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Ivy hosts Top Master Chef—and Ivy Dad—Jonathan Waxman



Ever since I joined Ivy my sophomore year, I wanted my father, Jonathan Waxman, to come to the Club. As a child, I used to tag along to his cooking demonstrations at The Culinary Institute of America or food magazines like *Food and Wine*, but hadn't done so in years. So, it was a great pleasure to have him come speak and give a demonstration at the Club this semester. I was so grateful to the entire Ivy staff and membership for giving him such a warm welcome.

Situated at the front of the Great Hall, Chef Waxman demonstrated a range of basic cooking skills and techniques while cooking a three-course meal of kale salad, gnocchi with shaved Brussels sprouts, and saffron rice with scallops and blood orange. My dad is what you might call a colorful character and kept the audience entertained as he revealed everything

from the proper way to hold a knife and sauté to the secret behind perfect gnocchi. The members were incredibly engaged, asking my dad questions about his career path, his favorite foods to cook, and his perspective on the culinary industry.

My father came away so impressed by the intellectual curiosity of Ivy members and grateful for the connections he forged with the Ivy family. He now says he wants to hire Ivy alumni at his restaurant. We are very grateful to Betty, Chef Jean, Amanda Morrison, Matthew Merrigan, and everyone who made this possible! My favorite thing about being a member at Ivy is the community fostered by sharing meals together, something I think Ivy, in particular, understands the value of. Being able to share my father with the Club over food, and vice versa, will be one of my fondest memories of senior year.



Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi '00

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You've described your process as "backing up" into projects. Can you explain what that means?

Besides my first film, which I dove into head first, my approach to new projects has been one of "backing up into [them]" because I know the commitment and responsibility involved. The film *Jimmy and I* we are working on now is about Kristine Tompkins and Tompkins Conservation. We have known Kristine and her late husband Doug for years; they are two of Jimmy's most important mentors. After *Meru* (Vasarhelyi and Chin's 2015 award-winning documentary), they approached us about making a film. At that time, I wasn't ready for the responsibility and uncertainty of telling their story. But now it feels like an urgent story: Kris is 70, Doug passed away three years ago, and our world is crumbling beneath us. We need to find an emotional and entertaining way to care about conservation. Making this film now about the greatest conservationists of our time is a responsibility I feel I must carry out.

After graduation, your films took you from Kosovo to West Africa. How did your projects connect and evolve over these early years?

The most defining event for the majority of my career was 9/11. I was class of 2000. My best friend from grade school through high school to Princeton and Ivy was Cat MacRae (Ivy '00), and she died in 9/11 working in the Twin Towers. I had been working in a war zone in Kosovo, and it didn't make sense to me. For my whole generation, something changed quite profoundly. Fear was brokered and manipulated. My focus shifted from conflict in Kosovo to images of Islam and fundamentalism on the news. Representations of Africa were dire.

The Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour had just composed an album celebrating nonviolent Islam. As I began making a film on how his music would affect the West, Youssou was accused of blasphemy in his home country. It turned into a totally different film. It took about five years to make and was definitely a young person's film. I don't know how I ever had enough energy to make this movie! My next film, *Touba*, continued exploration of Sufi Islam and nonviolent resistance to colonialism. I



[above] Elizabeth addresses students at a screening of *Free Solo* on campus.

then left Africa. However, when the President of Senegal attempted to change the constitution to allow for a third term, and the country erupted in violence, I felt called to return and make a third film embedded in that community (*Incorruptible*, 2015).

You are soon directing a fiction heist film starring Jake Gyllenhaal. How do you feel about the transition from nonfiction to narrative?

I'm curious if playing with form will improve my effectiveness in telling the kinds of stories I'm interested in. I think nonfiction is really hard to do in an entertaining way. I'm excited to work with actors who can have emotional connections on command! I'm joking; I do think it's going to be very difficult, but I'm excited for the challenge.

You say everyone has a "free solo." What's yours?

Alex's free solo is an extraordinary human achievement that will never be replicated. But when I refer to other people's "free solos," I mean there are things we dream about and things that stand between us and our dreams: hard work, fear, baggage, etc. Most of my fear now revolves around my children—the kind of world they are going to live in—and my creativity, specifically how to continue making movies that move people. You have a finite number of films to make in your life, and they should be worthwhile. To "free solo" something means you relentlessly dedicate yourself, with diligence and determination, to pursuing a dream. I try to approach most things this way.

Meet Ivy's New Officers



David Babikian
President

David is a junior in the Economics Department. He is from Belmont, MA and grew up in the Greater Boston Armenian community. He is an oarsman on Princeton's Heavyweight Rowing team and enjoys cognitive science and creative writing. In his free time, David can be found at Hoagie Haven or watching films with his friends.



Natasha MacManus
Undergraduate Governor

Tasha is from Dublin, Ireland. Her concentration is Psychology, and she is pursuing a certificate in History and the Practice of Diplomacy. She is a springboard diver on Princeton's Swimming and Diving team. In her spare time, she loves relaxing with friends in Ivy, listening to music, and going on runs on the tow-path.



Couty Fall
Social Chair

Couty is a junior in the Woodrow Wilson School, focusing on foreign policy Middle East, and is pursuing a certificate in Spanish. Originally from Maryland, she recently moved to Dakar, Senegal with her family. Couty is on the WWS Advisory Committee and loves attending student dance performances.



Nate Levit
Treasurer

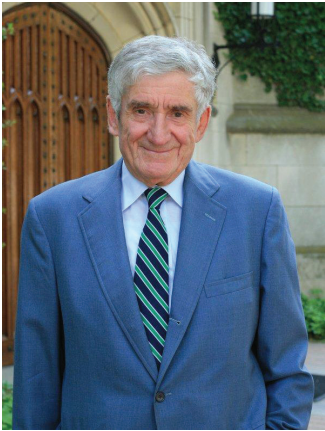
Nate is a junior in the Woodrow Wilson School from Tulsa, Oklahoma. He is pursuing certificates in American Studies, Journalism, and History and the Practice of Diplomacy. He is very involved in Jewish life on campus and runs the Princeton Perspective Project, a committee dedicated to combating the myth of effortless perfection.



Shehab Thabet
House Manager/Bicker Chair

Shehab is a junior hailing from Cairo, Egypt. He is majoring in Operations Research and Financial Engineering and pursuing a certificate in Finance. Outside of the classroom, Shehab is an avid sports fan and film buff as well as a member of Princeton's Varsity Squash team.

In Memoriam



[above] Theodore Rabb



[above] André Maman

Ivy's Honorary Members have always been eminent scholars as well as gifted teachers. The current roster includes Professors Robert George, Bernard Haykel, John Wilmerding, and John V. Fleming '63, who writes below about two confreres we recently lost.

In the last year Princeton lost two of its legendary humanists, and Ivy two of its very select cohort of honorary members. André Maman, the living embodiment of the French Civilization he taught in a famous course known by that name, died at the age of ninety on April 13, 2018. Theodore Rabb, Renaissance historian, Renaissance man, and chief architect of the undergraduate Humanities Sequence, died on January 7, 2019. He was eighty-one. Both men had been my personal friends for half a century. I had watched with admiration as, between them, they touched the lives of hundreds of Princetonians over a period of five decades.

My last dinner with André, which was technically a lunch in that it at least began in the afternoon, took place perhaps ten years ago. Joan and I were living in Paris, not far from the Mamans, in what André relished as the “Unfashionable Fifteenth”; and he invited us to dine with him at the Senate, bestowing upon us instant and probably unexpiring name-dropping rights. Nor shall I ever forget his enthusiastic service as mace-bearer at University ceremonies. He was the only

colleague I knew in all my years who could wear a floppy Renaissance academic cap without looking even slightly ridiculous. In it he looked rather like Rabelais, actually, radiating equal measures of erudite gravitas and penetrating wit. And he carried the ceremonial mace as though it were a sub-machine gun.

I saw a good deal of Ted Rabb in his retirement, as we were near neighbors as well as emeriti-denizens of Firestone Library—“toiling away at, and in, our antiquity,” as he once put it. Ted was always an “ideas man,” and the ideas were generally big ones relating to broad conceptions of humanistic study. His deep respect for the western cultural tradition, which was based in an unusually broad and synoptic command of historical data, artistic monuments, and philosophical and literary texts, animated his numerous practical initiatives in the teaching of the humanities at the undergraduate level—initiatives that have enriched the lives of so many young Princetonians and continue still as a living institutional legacy.



Alexander Perry Morgan

Alexander Perry Morgan '46, architect and grandson of Junius Morgan '88, President of Ivy from 1906 to 1909, died peacefully on January 4th in his home after a Christmas full of family. He was 94 years old. Perry will be remembered

as a man of great integrity, with a warm sense of humor who loved his work as an architect and was always helping others. His firm oversaw several significant projects for Ivy. He loved reading to his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, as well as sailing, tennis and golf, painting, and classical music. He was a loving father and devoted husband.

Moyin Opeyemi '19 wins the Spirit of Princeton Award

We are thrilled to announce that Moyin Opeyemi, undergraduate treasurer and newly elected graduate board member, is a recipient of the 2019 Spirit of Princeton award. This award honors students who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to enhancing the undergraduate experience. In addition to his leadership role at Ivy, Moyin has served as a steering committee member for the Men's Allied Voices for a Respectful & Inclusive Community (MAVRIC) Project, mentorship chair on the board of Princeton African Student Association (PASA), and as a Student-Athlete Wellness Leader (SAWL). He is also a member of the varsity men's soccer team, Athletes in Action, and Princeton Faith and Action. Congratulations, Moyin!



Ivy Club 2019 Reunion Schedule

Friday, May 31, 2019—The Club will be open until midnight for members and accompanied guests. There will be no food service, but beer and soft drinks will be available.

A cocktail reception for the women of Ivy will be held in the Lower Library from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 1, 2019—Brunch for members and their guests will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$15 per person; there is no charge for children under 10.

Following the P-rade, food and beverages will be available from approximately 4 to 6 p.m. Beer and soft drinks will be available throughout the evening. The Club closes at midnight.

Sunday, June 2, 2019—No events are scheduled at the Club on this day.

If you have not paid your annual dues, please do so promptly. Dues can be paid online at theivyclub.net/dues or by calling the Steward at (609) 924-2236. **It is expected that graduate members attending Club events will be in good standing.**

Parking at the Club is restricted to Ivy members in good standing only.



New Director of Member Services

Please join us in welcoming Alanna Boudreau as Ivy's new Director of Member Services. We are very sorry to lose her predecessor, Julia Wilson, but wish her much success in her new position as Director of College Guidance at The Wilberforce School. All future graduate member inquiries and correspondence should be directed to Alanna at alanna.boudreau@theivyclub.net.



Members in the News

Multiple time *Jeopardy!* Winner **Larissa Kelly '02** “clinched the victory” in this season’s final round of *Jeopardy! All-Star Games*, securing the \$1 million grand prize for her team. Congratulations, Larissa!

J. Gavin Muir '91 was awarded the Stephen A. Tzianabos, MD Award for Physician Excellence, an award that recognizes “the physician who throughout their career has been devoted to the growth and development of the Elliot Health System and who has performed outstanding deeds requiring great intellect, refined skill, medical expertise, and collegial collaboration.”

Ivy Leadership Committee co-chair **Amanda Morrison '19** was awarded Princeton’s Schwartzman Scholarship, which will cover the cost of a one-year master’s program at Tsinghua University in Beijing next year. Assistant Professor Rory Truex of the Woodrow Wilson School said of Amanda, “If I had to bet, I would say that [she] will become a leader through the use of media, focusing on issues of human rights and society in contemporary China. She is already making significant contributions in this area.”

Betsy Williams '98 was named Tiger of the Week for her work supporting the next generation of leaders in Africa. Williams founded Emerging Public Leaders, an organization dedicated to placing young local leaders in government positions through two-year fellowships, prioritizing several African countries such as Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, and Guinea.

Critically-acclaimed stage actor **Matthew Rauch '91**, whose Broadway credits include *Junk*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Prelude to a Kiss*, returned to the Shakespeare Theatre Company this year in the lead role of *Richard the Third*. When asked what advice he would give to a graduating MFA student, he said, “The real education happens when you start working. . . . It’s a long road, it can be a tough business, and it’s easy to be distracted – stay focused and keep learning. Oh, and don’t forget to have fun. Because if it isn’t fun you should be doing something else.”

John Cook '63, hockey legend and former president of the Ivy 1879 Foundation, was celebrated for his 56-year record of all-time goals when, in February, he “passed the puck” to Ryan Kuffner, the first Princeton student to surpass his scoring record.

Greetings from Ivy’s New President

Dearest Graduate Members,

My name is David Babikian. I was elected Undergraduate President of the Club in late February, and since have enjoyed my new responsibilities. I am immensely excited to show my gratitude for all the friendships I have established here by improving the Club for my fellow members and for members to come!

A little about myself: I am from Belmont, Massachusetts and grew up within the Greater Boston Armenian community. Here at Princeton, I study economics and am an oarsman on the men’s heavyweight rowing team. Princeton has been a remarkable experience thus far, and The Ivy Club has been its highlight.

I am extremely appreciative for the officer corps that served before me. Mimi, Christian, Moyin, Jack and Helen devoted countless hours to the Club’s upkeep and improvement, and I cannot imagine Ivy without them. They have shaped my experience of the Club greatly and still serve as caring mentors. With that said, the officer corps in the Class of 2020 is an all-star cast: Tasha Macmanus is Undergraduate Governor, Nate Levit is the Treasurer, Couty Fall is our Social Chair, and Shehab Thabet is House Manager/Bicker Chair. Each of them has a vibrant, warm personality and has already shown an incredible devotion to Ivy. I am beyond enthusiastic to lead with them this coming year and, of course, to have them as housemates.

The Club continues to be a home to students socializing, working, learning, and enjoying themselves. From chatting on the foyer couch to reading in the Great Hall, homework in the library to games of pool, I’m pleased to say that members can be found in all corners of the Club. Suffice it to say, the building is buzzing with life.

In February, we admitted our new sophomore class, each of whom will make a strong addition to the Club. The group is comprised of diverse and passionate individuals who have already begun to integrate well into life at Ivy.

Ivy is a precious place, and I am grateful to be a member of this institution. Our club continues to be the high point of its members’ Princeton experience, and we hope that you soon come back and chat with us about your own experiences. I hope to see you around the Club soon.

Sincerely,
David Babikian

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The Ivy 1879 Foundation supports the preservation of Ivy's historic Clubhouse, educational initiatives including Leadership and Roundtable programs, and financial aid to help Ivy students maintain their membership in the Club.

Tax-deductible donations to the Foundation can be made by check, online, or by phone.

Thank you!

