

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

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Mental health in the age of COVID-19: an interview with mental health care professionals at Rockefeller

ANNA AMELIANCHIK

COVID-19 has affected public health in a myriad of ways. In particular, it has negatively affected the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of many people, highlighting the importance of mental healthcare and the urgent need for mental healthcare professionals to continue to provide services to their patients. Dr. Nisha Mehta-Naik, and Lauren Rosenblum, LCSW, provide confidential counseling and medical services to all Rockefeller University employees and students. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Nisha and Lauren about mental health in the age of COVID-19.

Thank you for taking your time to speak with me today! To start, can you please briefly overview mental health resources available to Rockefeller employees and students? In addition, what is the difference between the work that Lauren does vs. Nisha?

Nisha: I am Nisha, I am a psychiatrist on faculty at Weill Cornell Medicine. Lauren will speak more to her role, but Lauren is a clinical social worker. For the past few years Rockefeller has partnered with Weill Cornell Medicine to provide confidential mental health services. Those services usually are on-campus, but of course because of the pandemic, they are now being offered virtually. All Rockefeller em-

ployees from graduate students to faculty to staff are able to utilize the Rockefeller mental health services. We recognize that the mental health system is not easy to navigate and that affordable care can be very difficult to find. We see our role as providing psychiatric evaluations and connecting people to the appropriate provider. And oftentimes we are able to provide all the necessary mental health services in-house, although there is no one-size-fits-all model in mental health care. So after an initial evaluation, we take different factors into consideration, including recommended treatment plan, insurance, access, availability, and come up with a shared decision about the next steps. Regardless we make sure that everyone gets set up with the right resources.

Lauren, can you speak as to what your new appointment adds to mental health care at Rockefeller?

Lauren: Sure! I came on with the focus to provide evidence-based psychotherapy in a short-term capacity. We know that short-term psychotherapy is incredibly effective, especially for targeting singular issues like exacerbated anxiety, depression, life adjustment concerns, or external stress, like one finds in graduate school. So I use a wide variety of modalities—a pretty eclectic approach—and cognitive be-

havioral therapy is certainly one that I resort to often and have used with the student population thus far. Beyond it being effective, it's also then very helpful just to be able to graduate people out. The idea is that once you obtain these skills and have gone through some modules together, you might not need long-term therapy. As Dr. Mehta mentioned, for those who are interested in continual weekly therapy or more intensive therapy, we really do our best and are pretty successful in referring immediately out. And even following up and making sure it's a good fit with the next provider.

You mentioned issues like anxiety. Is it one of the more common issues people struggle with?

Lauren: Anxiety is incredibly common! It's a common aspect of multiple disorders, like depression. Both Dr. Mehta and I see a lot of anxiety right now. I will let Dr. Mehta speak for herself, but short-term evidence-based therapy is incredibly helpful, at least for people coming with anxiety.

Nisha: Exactly! I think what we know is that in society at large, rates of depression and anxiety disorders are quite high, and they are probably under-recognized. What we also know is that

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DR. NISHA MEHTA-NAIK



LAUREN ROSENBLUM

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there have been numerous studies done in the past few years suggesting that in the graduate school population (especially science graduate students), there are even higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to the rest of the population. I think that's consistent, and I think that the good news is that treating depression and anxiety helps and people get better and have a better overall experience.

Have the rates of depression and anxiety gone up recently because people are able to better recognize these issues and seek treatment or just because the prevalence is higher?

Nisha: There was a study done recently that highlighted that depression and anxiety levels in the graduate school student population did go up during the pandemic for multiple reasons. I don't think there is any silver lining in the pandemic, I don't subscribe to that belief. It's a tragedy on multiple levels, but I think it has raised awareness of taking care of your mental health and, as a result, I think there is an awareness to reach out for help because mental health has become more of a societal conversation. I also like to think that with the service being available on campus, there will be a positive buzz about it, the word will spread and it will decrease the stigma related to mental health difficulties.

Lauren: And that, in turn, will hopefully help us answer that question. With decreased stigma related to engaging in psychotherapy or psychopharmacology, maybe we can better assess whether we see a larger number of people or if indeed the rates are getting higher.

For people who are not quite there yet, for people who are dealing with stress, but don't necessarily want to seek treatment for anxiety or depression, are there any tips and tricks you

can recommend for dealing with stress during these very stressful times?

Lauren: Both Nisha and I would offer that if there is ever a recurring idea to seek support, please call us. We can certainly offer more structured therapy or a more casual supportive level. But there are tips that are pandemic-specific. We see a lot of people that lose structure, which causes a lot of deconditioning. Aerobic exercise, getting out of your environment is so important—there is a relationship between physical and mental health. So being cognizant of the daily rituals, like hygiene, sleep cycle, getting out, and feeling socially connected, whether it's in some safe capacity outside or getting on a Zoom call with friends and family.

Nisha: I would echo that. I think maintaining a flexible structure is key, knowing that circumstances may change, that weather changes, and things that you can do in July may not be possible in December. But keeping some level of physical activity up, having some socialization, and some focus on productivity is important. Staying productive also leads to feeling fulfilled. Productivity may look different at different points of your career development or circumstance.

It definitely worked really well for me! I am a fitness freak, and when I lost access to the gym, I felt the psychological effects. But coming up with a structure, like running every day, really helped in the beginning of the pandemic.

Nisha: Well that's the thing, too. Researchers have a really unique job that includes a lot of thinking, but at the same time a lot of physical activity. And with things like lab closures, people can easily lose their physical activity in their day-to-day lives, like standing at a bench, or quick social interactions, like seeing some-

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one when you walk into the lab. So much has been lost and then regained in this time, and it highlights the importance of having flexibility, and recognizing what is gained and lost.

Do you think anything goes when it comes to coping with stress or are there some counter-productive ways to deal with it and something you should avoid?

Lauren: It would just be the reverse of what I said. So really paying attention to isolation. We've seen so many people who just don't feel safe leaving their homes. If you go a few days without having any social connection, it's something to pay attention to.

Nisha: A couple come to mind. There is so much going on right now, but, in addition to that, there is still normal life stress of professional and personal development. I think it's really important for people to focus on what they can control. Counterproductive coping strategies would be focusing on things we

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can't control. I try to encourage everyone to stay ambitious and passionate and use that to focus on what they can control. Focusing on things that you absolutely can't control can lead to a lot of undue anxiety and frustration. I also encourage people to avoid putting all their eggs in one basket. Sometimes in professional development, it can be tempting to derive all of your satisfaction and self-esteem from career success. I tend to encourage people to think about success and productivity in different ways. Some people put all of their eggs in one basket and think work is the only way they are going to feel good about themselves. For other people it can be other areas, like a relationship or weight. Focusing on just one area can be maladaptive, and I think it is important to derive satisfaction from multiple arenas of life.

Lauren: And also sitting still and isolating with rumination. So you need to be really cognizant that you are not socially isolating and sitting alone with negative thoughts.

I think I know what you mean. I think for me, in the beginning, the most counterproductive thing was getting addicted to the news cycle. I thought that if I stayed informed, it would give me some level of control, but then I couldn't put my phone down. I was unable to stop reading the news. I had to stop that eventually.

Nisha: I think it was all of us! Looking at the numbers every day and then trying to analyze the data. It was so tempting.

It wasn't very productive though! I had to limit it to once a day, maybe. We briefly talked about it, and you mentioned that if someone frequently thinks about how much they need support, they need to come talk to you. What are some signs that your stress is beyond the normal levels? What are some of the signs that you actually need help with mental health care?

Lauren: I imagine, it's pretty specific to the individual. We all have different thresholds and different levels of coping. So if it got to a point of severity and someone is getting to the clinically depressed level or feeling hopeless, having a hard time getting out of that mood state, before it gets to the emergent level, absolutely utilize us. I think what we are trying to develop is something that can be more inviting at earlier stages so it doesn't actually have to get an acute place. If it gets more acute and people are feeling hopeless, they are not feeling like themselves, they are behaviorally isolating

and their sleep and appetite might be compromised, panic symptoms, suicidal ideation, those are some not-so-early warning signs.

Nisha: I agree with Lauren. Don't hesitate to reach out and reach out early because things will get better and treatment can be really helpful. Different people get better in different ways, but we try to have some flexibility in approach. That is part of the benefit of having Lauren on board—she offers a whole different skillset to make sure that people get the support they need. We are also able to get people connected to the right care. Don't hesitate to reach out! I'd say if you are asking that question, it doesn't hurt to meet with us even once to just check in. It's a really challenging time, and grad school is really challenging. If you are wondering, "Is this a normal response?" we can help keep an eye on things the same way you would with a primary care doctor or an endocrinologist if you have diabetes. I'd say if the way you are feeling is impacting your functioning, whether it be not being able to focus on work, not maintaining the same relationships that you usually do, things aren't as interesting to you—these are all early signs to reach out.

This will definitely be helpful for a lot of people. Especially now that the days are getting shorter and there are less opportunities to socialize outdoors. So for people who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorders, for people who tend to get different when it's fall and winter, how do they make sure that their issues are not exacerbated with COVID and seasonal changes?

Lauren: There are some behavioral approaches. I will use you as an example. You mentioned that during the initial stage of the pandemic, your focus was on constant stressors and news. And also you, being an athlete to some extent, really felt the impact of not being able to go to the gym. So just as you adapted and created your own schedule, I would suggest something very similar. There will be more isolation when it gets colder. Restructure your day to get some sunlight. That means taking a walk for thirty minutes, even if it's a little cold, and getting some natural sunlight. Doing something like you did, and developing an aerobic exercise plan indoors. Doing enjoyable, pleasurable activities, and coping ahead—being able to come up with some creative ways to be together, to cook together, to socially connect.

Nisha: I agree with everyone Lauren said—exercise and getting sunlight during daytime hours are really important. I would also say,

season changes affect some people more severely. Seasonal affective disorder is real, and there are some things that help with the treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder, including using a sun lamp exercising regularly. There is some evidence to suggest that Vitamin D supplementation can help with Seasonal Affective Disorder, though the evidence base is mixed. There are also some psychiatric medications that can help with Seasonal Affective Disorder, but before using a sunlamp, vitamin D or a prescribed medication, I would consult with a doctor to make sure there are no contraindications.

Do you think the culprit of seasonal affective disorder is the change in how much vitamin D you are getting, or is it just one of the components?

Nisha: The studies on seasonal affective disorder and vitamin D show a correlation between the disorder and vitamin D deficiency. There is some evidence to suggest that Vitamin D supplementation may help with symptoms, though the studies have shown mixed results.

How do you think mental health care is going to change after we are done isolating?

Lauren: It's already changed so immediately and abruptly. In the beginning, there was obviously a sense of urgency to get on remote platforms. In some ways, it's been met with a lot of positivity and ease. I wonder if, because we are able to access more people, and because there is a little more flexibility, it'll become the standard of care. It's something that the field is certainly thinking about as an add-on. Of course, there is tremendous value in seeing your clinician in person. We are both excited to get back on campus. But, in our perspective, it has not affected clinical care, which is another positive outcome.

Nisha: I think it may be too soon to tell in the grand scheme of things how much video visits will be part of the future of treatment. But it's hard to imagine us going completely back to normal. I think this will be part of the new normal, but it may be too soon to tell exactly how much. Part of that will depend on policy, both institutional, national, and state-wide. I agree with Lauren—I think we realized that the quality of care has not been negatively impacted by transitioning to video. That's been great!

To schedule a confidential appointment with Dr. Nisha Mehta-Naik or Lauren Rosenblum, LCSW, please call 212-327-7257. ■

Cyber Security Works From Home

AUDREY GOLDFARB

Despite research ramping down for most since March, Marty Leidner and his team have been working harder than ever. As Rockefeller University's Chief Information Security Officer, Leidner is responsible for protecting precious data and blocking malicious traffic from invading our campus network.

Leidner defends the Rockefeller community against phishing and other attacks using constantly evolving strategies and security appliances. In the age of widespread Zoom and VPN usage at home, malware can breach Rockefeller's network from hundreds of entry points in New York City and around the country. "It's a cat and mouse game with the bad attackers," Leidner said. "Some of the bad things that are happening we couldn't have even conceived of six months ago."

In response to the shutdown, Leidner and his team more than tripled Rockefeller's VPN capacity, from around 200 to 700 users. This project required accurate and efficient scaling in order to hastily accommodate a heightened average of 500 VPN users simultaneously.

Tripling the number of remote devices connected to Rockefeller's network also triples the potential entry points for malware. "It's much harder to protect everyone when they're spread all over the place," Leidner said. "It's a whole different paradigm."

Most students and employees are familiar with the concept of phishing, but multiple other threats are on Leidner's radar. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) is a type of cyber attack that floods a network with malicious traffic. This can be achieved by connecting a collection of infected devices, called a "botnet," and using them to send traffic through Rockefeller's network. This clogs the network, making services unavailable to other users. Rockefeller has been under DDoS attack since last September. "We do not know the motivation for this attack," Leidner said. "Routinely we have smaller DDoS attacks, but we have not had this magnitude in the fifteen years I've been here."

Should Rockefeller be flooded by a DDoS attack, the consequences would be severe. Luckily, Leidner's team is on it. "We mitigated the problem with a detection appliance that can figure out these

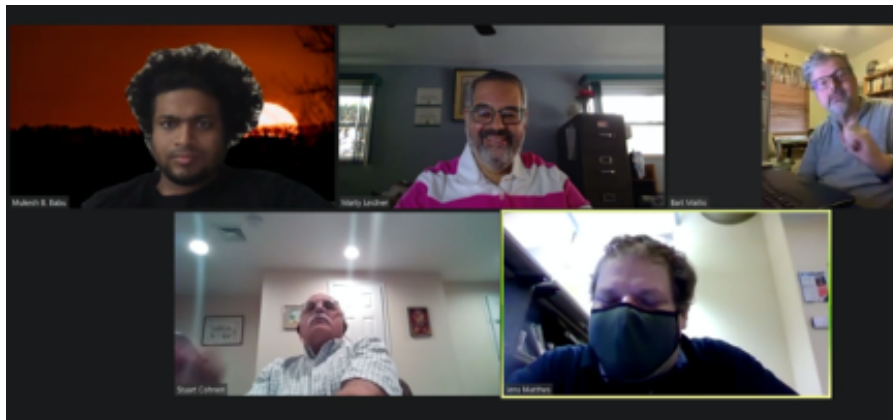


Photo Courtesy of MARTY LEIDNER

Marty Leidner meets with his team via Zoom.

traffic patterns and protect the campus network from these attacks," he said.

However, more personalized attacks, especially via e-mail, are our biggest threat. "Phishing is the number one attack vector that we're dealing with," Leidner said.

Phishing attacks take advantage of emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic in order to acquire victims' credentials. For example, an e-mail might ask someone to enter their Rockefeller username and password in order to access their test results or view updates about lockdown policies. "We try to protect the e-mail system tremendously," Leidner said. "We do a lot of spam protection, but there's no way we can catch everything."

"If people would be cognizant of potential bad e-mails, that would make everyone's life easier," Leidner said. "We wouldn't have to invest so much time testing and remediating. We rely on the campus community's alertness and awareness. We periodically test users by simulating phishing e-mails with safe ones that we send out. In the most recent internal phishing test 25% of those tested gave out their Rockefeller passwords."

As some labs continue to do well publicized COVID research, they have become targets of phishing.

Leidner remotely checks in with his team at 10 a.m. most days, but the rest of the day is unpredictable. The team must respond to a multitude of emergencies precipitated by the pandemic, whether it be e-mail malfunctions or security threats. "Every day is very different," he said. "Information tech in general is a very

dynamic field. Cybersecurity is an order of magnitude more dynamic."

Though the situation has increased his workload, working from home has been great for Leidner's productivity. "I feel that the work at home has been excellent," he said. "For me, it has been effective, efficient, and productive and while I miss on-campus interactions I really appreciate the benefits of working from home. My team, of which some also have very long commutes, also likes it, as do more than a few of my friends."

Previously, Leidner spent nearly four hours commuting to and from campus every day on some days—50% of the time he actually spent on campus. This major inconvenience is unrelatable to those of us who live minutes from campus. "It's physically grueling," he said.

Soon after the campus shut down, Leidner realized that he didn't need to leave Rockland County to complete the vast majority of his responsibilities, including attending online conferences and University meetings. He was also saving several hours of his day by working from his home office. "Morning work for me is very productive," he said. "I'm up and running in five minutes."

Further, Leidner is in a healthier place mentally and physically. Biking through Harriman State Park has been a favorite pastime of his throughout the spring and summer.

As New York City and Rockefeller work to establish a "new normal," it may be worth considering that some quarantine practices need not be temporary. If,

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for example, our Information Security team works better to keep our data and network safe from home, why not keep it that way? “If anything, I think we may work too hard and don’t know how to shut it off at the end of the day,” Leidner said. “There’s always something more to do.”

On Friday, September 25, the Research Restart Committee chaired by Professors Tim O’Connor and Mike Rout announced that Phase III+ operations were a go. The following is stated in these guidelines: “Employees who need to be on-campus to work effectively are required to come to campus unless they are granted an exemption provided by existing Rockefeller employment policies, including but not limited to leave policies under Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), NYS Paid Family Leave (NYPFL) and NYS Disability.” This seems to encourage nearly all employees to return to campus, but perhaps we are missing an opportunity to embrace remote work as a strategy for increasing productivity and sustaining the mental health of Rockefeller employees.

Leidner’s team continues to work effectively from home, ensuring the cyber safety of our data and community. “We are blessed that the majority of our work can be done remotely, but this is only possible because of the dedicated and appreciated work of our colleagues on campus,” Leidner said. ■

New York Rhymes

KONSTANTINA THEOFANOPOULOU

MOTHER

Mother, I see you turn off the lights and I remember
all those nights you tucked the covers under my feet.
I remember playing with your ears and singing a song
about a goat and lentils.

It was my first ever song when I could barely speak.

I still love your lentils, mother.

Mother, your love could be counted on the times you said
you’ve had enough food, just for the rest of us to have more.

You’ve chewed food into our mouth, mother.

I see you turn off the lights and I think

Behold my ancestry.

by Konstantina

Poetry: Dr. Konstantina Theofanopoulou
(Instagram: [@newyork_rhymes](#))
One line art: Mikaella Theofanopoulou
(Instagram: [@m_theta_art](#))



Natural Expressions

Digital

Bernie Langs of The Rockefeller University Development Office and his daughter, Jordan Langs, announce the release of their new music video “Different Drum.” Bernie Langs performs the music in “Different Drum,” originally written by Michael Nesmith in 1964 and famously performed by Linda Ronstadt and The Stone Poneys. Film from Jordan Langs’ international travels provide the video component of this father-daughter collaboration. “Different Drum” can be viewed on [Bernie Langs’ YouTube page](#).

E-mail Megan E. Kelley at mkelley@rockefeller.edu to submit your art/music/performance/sporting/other event for next month’s “Natural Expressions” and follow [@NatSelections](#) on Twitter for more events. Digital and online events/releases are welcome!

Top Shelf: A Look at Books in a Personal Library

Underworld by Don DeLillo: The novels of Don DeLillo (b. 1936) are filled with uniquely interesting characters often caught in a mysterious web of intellectual deceit, intrigue, and danger. *The Names*, my personal favorite, has a powerful plot centered on threats of impending murder contrasted with cerebral notions on the nature of language and communication. *Ratner's Star* has passages swinging from the deeply disturbing to laugh aloud humor and includes wild debates on the nature of higher mathematics. 1997's *Underworld* takes an unflinching look at American society through the lens of numerous alternating plot sequences. Many of these sequences revolve around Bobby Thompson's "Shot Heard Around the World" homerun in 1951 at the Polo Grounds in New York City and the fate of the baseball picked up that day by a lucky—or unlucky—fan behind the stadium as it changes ownership through the years. This highly original story makes for a grand read.

UNDERWORLD
 Don DeLillo

THE SILENT WOMAN
 Hilary Mantel

THE BEALES
 Michael Chabon

THE ANNALS OF IMPERIAL ROME
 Tacitus

THE ROYAL WEDDING
 The Royal Wedding

Photo Courtesy of BERNIE LANGS

This is a photo of the top shelf of one of my home bookcases. What follows is a brief description of what I've taken away from each book and the way in which the author and their ideas changed the course of my thinking for the better.

The image shows a row of books from the Penguin Classics series. From left to right, the books are:

- Underworld** by Don DeLillo (Black cover with a white image of a building).
- Yes I** by Thomas Bernhard (Black cover with white text).
- Thomas Bernhard** (Yellow cover with black text).
- Wittgenstein's Nether** (Black cover with white text).
- Justine** by Lawrence Durrell (Blue cover with white text).
- Balthazar** by Lawrence Durrell (Purple cover with white text).
- Mountolive** by Lawrence Durrell (Green cover with white text).
- Clea** by Lawrence Durrell (Dark green cover with white text).
- The Early Victorian Poets** by D.G. Rossetti (Light green cover with white text).
- The Temple of the Golden Pavilion** by Junichiro Tanizaki (Red cover with white text).
- A History of Chinese Philosophy** by Fung Yu-lan (Grey cover with white text).

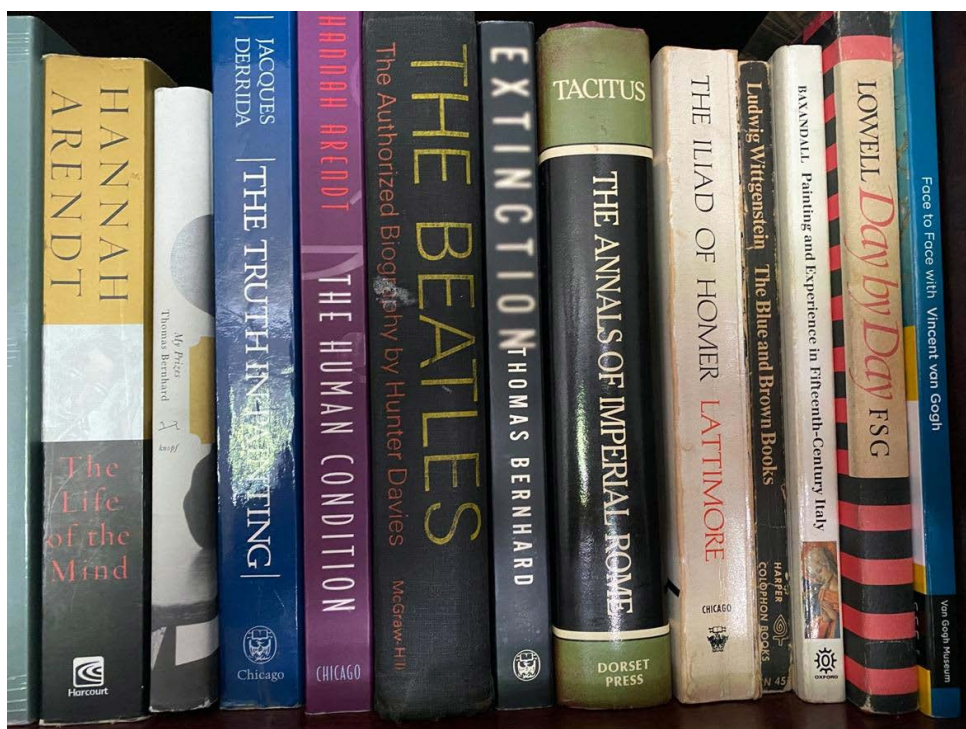
Photo Courtesy of BERNIE LANGS

The Alexandria Quartet by Lawrence Durrell: This set of four books, focusing on a group of friends living in Alexandria, Egypt, was gifted to me decades ago by my brother and was a game-changer in my understanding of what mid-twentieth century literature as an art form could express in

emotion and immediacy. These works of Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) are disturbing at times, and much is made throughout the writings of the Marquis de Sade, so often dismissed as a barbaric writer of cruel sexual titillation. When I tuned into an amusing British-produced television series on PBS, *The Durrells in Corfu* last year, within minutes I realized that the oldest son, Larry, was none other than the pre-fame Durrell who'd penned the *Quartet*. I honestly cannot recall many details of the *Quartet* outside of having enjoyed it immensely.

The Early Italian Poets translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The first edition of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's (1828-1882) collection of Italian verse composed during the Middle Ages was published in 1861. Rossetti was one of the founders of England's Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and had a career across many genres, including poetry, illustration, and painting. The poems in this collection were written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The greatest and most important work is *The New Life* (*La Vita Nuova*), penned by the translator's namesake, Dante Alighieri. The lengthy poem recounts the supposedly true-to-life emotional moments when Alighieri sees for the first time the (very) young Beatrice, his muse. Beatrice also makes a vital, heavenly appearance in the poet's masterwork, *The Divine Comedy*. *The Early Italian Poets* is also of interest as documentation of how the Italians began to take pride in their native "vulgar" language after centuries ceding anything of literary, religious, or historical value to Latin translation.

The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With the Sea, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, and *Confessions of a Mask* by Yukio Mishima: Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) was the gateway author for my interest in Japanese novels, short stories, and novels. Reading this collection of novellas and other post-war Japanese writers allows for a more significant (yet admittedly cursory) understanding of the nuances and culture of Japan compared to simply viewing Edo-period *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints or watching films by Akira Kurosawa. Mishima's stories often touch on violence and tales of emotional cruelty presented and exposed as characteristic of societal norms, in many ways similar to what Bernhard does with Austria. When reading his final tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility*, many readers are aware that immediately after Mishima bundled up



Right side of the bookshelf.

the completed manuscript, he proceeded to die by his own hand in an act of ritual *seppuku*. Mishima stands tallest of the many Japanese writers I've enjoyed, with his bold and stark observances of life in post-World War II Japan. The currently popular writer, Haruki Murakami, continues Mishima's tradition of upsetting and disturbing their nation's appercart.

A History of Chinese Philosophy, Volumes I & II edited by Fung Yu-Lan: It's a huge commitment of time when a reader takes on a book of this scope and size. Later I would read a similar compendium, *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, to solidify the structure of thought built atop this foundation. The chapters are prefaced by Fung Yu-Lan's introductory explanations about the selections by ancient writers who established the course of centuries of Chinese thinking. Works of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and the poetic glosses of the *Tao de Ching* by Lao Tzu and Chung-tzu act as calming meditative balm to the reader. A most memorable chapter, *The Eight Levels of Consciousness*, presents an elegant treatise describing how during the ebb and flow of reality from one nanosecond to the next, the fabric of life, thought, and the physical world, is seamlessly born anew again and again. The description of how this occurs within the sizzling cauldron of white-hot, shining "perfumed seeds" is comparable to digging down to string theory level to explain how the space-time continuum folds

out dimensionally from the subatomic level to form the visual world we take for granted as the ubiquitous space in which we go about our daily lives.

The Life of the Mind and *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt, *The Truth in Painting* by Jacques Derrida, and *The Blue and Brown Books* by Ludwig Wittgenstein: I read the books by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) in 1977 in college and recall asking the professor, "Is it my imagination or whenever Wittgenstein is on the cusp of culminating an idea, he slowly drifts off to a different subject?" to which he replied, "You're catching on!" Many believe that Wittgenstein's books cannot be understood outside of those working at the doctoral level of philosophical expertise. Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), who rose to the level of intellectual superstar, has also been dismissed at times for being a writer of equally confounding absurdity. I find Derrida and his method of deconstruction difficult reading yet tinged with wonderful moments of revelation and humor. The collection in *The Truth in Painting* and the post-9/11 interview published in 2003 in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* proves that philosophy remains a vital method for understanding and explaining how and why we've intellectually arrived at this point in history amid ubiquitous turmoil.

The Life of the Mind and *The Hu-*

The Beatles: The Authorized Biography by Hunter Davies: The volume displayed in the photo is the edition I purchased in 1968 when I was eleven years old (the cover is sadly lost). Released while The Fab Four were still a working band and recording their songs for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, Hunter Davies (b. 1936) followed the group to the recording studio and their homes, having been granted unprecedented private access to all four Beatles. The *Authorized Biography* was my first experience with swear words on the printed page, and I recall my surprise at how much of what John Lennon said had such a harsh tone, contrasting with the public image the band had maintained up to that point. The late-1960s reader finally met the Beatles as actual, honest individuals in this biography, their lives displayed warts and all, with stresses and pains more common to our own experience than perhaps we'd wished to learn.

The Annals of Imperial Rome by Tacitus and *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* by Michael Baxandall: Tacitus (56 - c.120 A.D.) was a Roman politician and historical author living during the reign of the Caesars. He gives an erudite and exciting history in the *Annals* of the days of the earliest post-Augustan rulers, Tiberius and Nero, both of whom descended into violent behavior as a form of political terror. Tacitus is a fabulous, yet strict storyteller and the reader marvels at the intimate details of the many larger than life historical figures that make appearances in the book.

An understanding of ancient Roman art and life is a must if one wants to fully appreciate the classical themes invoked in Renaissance art and architecture. Art historian



Photo Courtesy of BERNIE LANGS

Next week on Episode Two of "Top Shelf"

Michael Baxandall (1933-2008) believed that when looking at Italian paintings, pagan and Christian themes held meanings in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy, often overlooked by the modern viewer. *Painting and Experience* is a great addition to the works of scholars who believe that educated beholders of art must engage and open their minds to the culture and mores of the society in which a piece was produced. This approach is still a subjective one, and is actually more akin to a feat of imagination than science, yet the iconography explained in this book goes a long way in assisting viewers seeking to fully experience the lessons and beauty of Italian paintings.

The Iliad of Homer translated by Richmond Latimore: There is something in this ancient epic that inexplicably resonates with me, and I've read it three times. The classical Greek mind developed and rapidly progressed after the volatile Dark Age, morphing through the Pre-Socratic schools into the Classical Period, the Golden Age of Greece. That entire artistic and intellectual advancement was pushed to birth by Homer's *Iliad* and the later *Odyssey*. Many ancient epics are thought to be compilations of songs and stories passed on for centuries as sacred oral traditions that were eventually codified. The *Iliad* revolves around the interaction between men and women with each other as well as the gods and goddesses influencing them, often without their knowledge. It presents an exaggerated,

imaginative remembrance of what may (or may not) have been the causes and events of the historical Trojan War. Homer's telling has a texture of action and dialogue not found in similar heroic tales of past ages or those by Hesiod and other contemporaries of Homer. This opened the door to writers, poets, playwrights, and philosophers who began to use a more measured, organized, and rational voice.

The last two books on the top shelf are Robert Lowell's collection of poems, *Day by Day*, which my mother owned and kept on her bookshelf for many years, and *Face to Face With Vincent van Gogh*, a small book of Vincent's paintings gifted to me by daughter on her return from Amsterdam in January 2020. The emotions elicited by these two books from my late mom and my recently college-graduated daughter are best related here in the words of Tom Hanks as Captain Miller in the film, *Saving Private Ryan*. During the final minutes of calm before the storm of the film's furious final battle, Private Ryan (Matt Damon) graphically and happily tells the intimate and long story of how he spent his last night at home in Iowa with his three now deceased brothers, all of whom he has just learned to have been killed in the war. When he's finished, he asks Miller to speak from his heart about the Captain's wife and how she tends her garden and their rose bushes at their home, to which Miller softly replies, "No, no—that one I save just for me." ■

Behind the Scenes with Rockefeller's New Nobel Laureate, Charles M. Rice, Ph.D.

JIM KELLER

Even if you're still working from home, by now you have heard that Charles M. Rice, Ph.D. (or "Charlie," as many call him at Rockefeller) is one of the recipients of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine along with Harvey J. Alter (National Institutes of Health) and Michael Houghton (University of Alberta) for research that contributed to a cure for hepatitis C.

Nearly every congratulatory statement by Rice's colleagues mentioned his exceptional kindness, a quality sometimes regarded as mutually exclusive with the pinnacle of career success. I spoke with Santamaria Pecoraro Di Vittorio, the Administrative Manager of the Rice Lab, to gain further insight into Rice's professional reputation and demeanor. I found that it is no facade—Rice is exactly who you would expect him to be: a well-rounded, hardworking scientist, with a penchant for dark chocolate and classical music, who is well-liked, respected, and admired by his employees and peers.

Pecoraro Di Vittorio came to Rockefeller more than fifteen years ago to join her then-fiancé Salvatore Di Vittorio who had been preparing to launch the Chamber Orchestra of New York, "[New York] made the most sense for both of us professionally," Pecoraro Di Vittorio explained over e-mail, "It was my first big move, but everything actually fell into place."

Two colleagues at the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies with knowledge of Rice's character and reputation encouraged Pecoraro Di Vittorio to apply to his laboratory and even facilitated an introduction between them. Soon after, Pecoraro Di Vittorio found herself on a flight to NYC to interview with Rice. She recalled, "It was a campus holiday [President's Day of 2005], but as in typical Charlie fashion, he was there working away, along with some lab members and his Australian Shepherds, Wrangler and Sadie." Pecoraro Di Vittorio started in the Rice lab a few weeks later in March 2005. "It turns out they were having trouble finding someone for the position, so you can say I was looking at the right time. This was the only position I applied for. (I had just started my search! Lucky break!)"

Pecoraro Di Vittorio now oversees grants, finance, personnel, and other ad-



Photo Courtesy of SANTAMARIA PECORARO DI VITTORIO

Santamaria Pecoraro Di Vittorio with Charles M. Rice outside his office after his 10 a.m. press conference

ministrative duties for the lab. She described Rice as, "A generous and dedicated scientist and professor. He is incredibly thoughtful when writing letters of recommendation." Pecoraro Di Vittorio continued by saying that working for him is "an amazing experience," and added, "He works incredibly hard. He is passionate

about the lab's research and wants everyone to excel and succeed in their projects and careers."

Pecoraro Di Vittorio recalled the 60th birthday symposium that the lab organized for Rice on August 25, 2012, in

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Caspary Auditorium, with 166 attendees. “He experienced a wonderful reunion of past and present students, postdocs, and colleagues. His undergraduate and graduate advisors were even present,” she said. “He was really happy.”

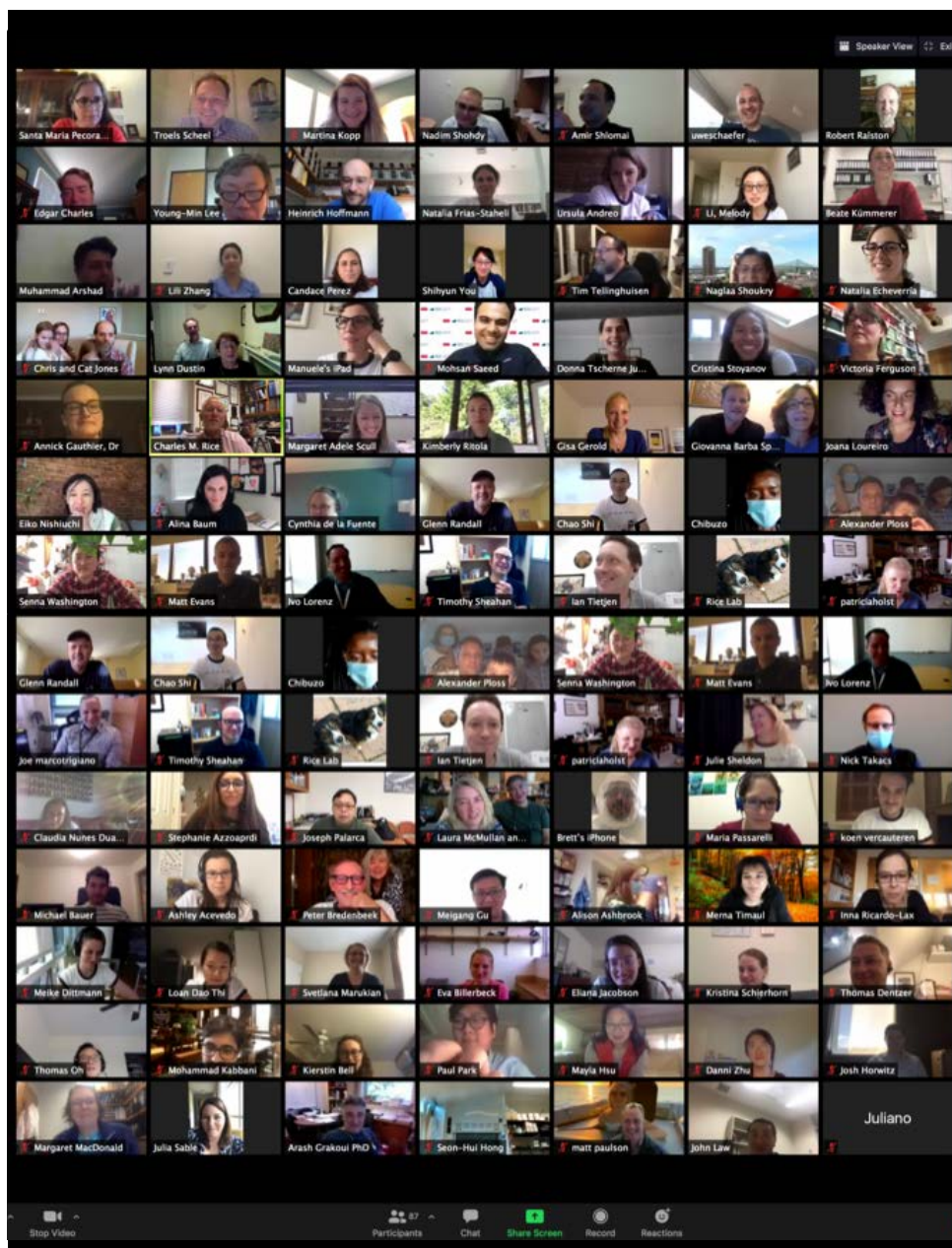
When the Nobel Assembly came knocking, it was not completely unexpected. “There was quite a bit of chatter by lab members about this potentially happening especially after he was awarded the Lasker in 2016,” Pecoraro Di Vittorio said.

Indeed, the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award, one of four awards given by the Lasker Foundation, is presented to honor outstanding work for the understanding, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, and cure of disease, and it is often viewed in the research community as a precursor for the Nobel Prize. So, as that fateful day, Monday, October 5 approached, just as in the last three years, Pecoraro Di Vittorio’s office was contacted to ask about Rice’s schedule on the day of the Nobel Prize announcement. As Rice indicated in the press conference that Rockefeller held following the announcement, at first, he ignored the call, suspecting it was a prank. But the calls kept coming, and Rice acquiesced and answered the phone to a Swedish accent.

Between his time at Washington University School of Medicine and Rockefeller, Rice has had thirty-four graduate students, helped train ninety-six postdocs, and has had a total of 338 lab members at Rockefeller alone. Accordingly, many alumni were anxious to congratulate Rice, so Pecoraro Di Vittorio organized a video conference meeting the following day with upwards of ninety participants. The meeting lasted almost three hours.

Pecoraro Di Vittorio could not comment on the Nobel Assembly’s plans for presenting the three scientists with their awards, virtually or in-person. “This is still being discussed between the Nobel Foundation and the winners,” she said.

When all is said and done, Pecoraro Di Vittorio believes that Rice’s receipt of this highest honor in science will not affect the day-to-day work of the lab. On the morning of the Nobel Prize announcement, “He sent an email to the lab’s COVID research group list around 5:30 a.m.



Merged screenshot showing many of the attendees at the congratulatory video conference.

only with the subject line ‘Do not get distracted!!!’” Pecoraro Di Vittorio said. “Many lab members responded that it was too late!”

View Rice’s press conference here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxrq20WUtlw&feature=youtu.be>

Rice is the 26th scientist associated with The Rockefeller University to be honored with the Nobel Prize. In addition, four other Nobel Prize winners are current members of the Rockefeller faculty: Michael W. Young (2017), Roderick MacKinnon (2003), Paul Nurse (2001), and Torsten Wiesel (1981).

Born in Sacramento, California in 1952, Rice received his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1981 from the California Institute of Technology, where he stayed on as a postdoctoral research fellow from 1981 to 1985. Before he joined Rockefeller in 2001, he spent fourteen years on the faculty of the Washington University School of Medicine. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and a previous recipient of the 2007 M.W. Beijerinck Virology Prize, the 2015 Robert Koch Award, the 2016 InBev-Baillet Latour Health Prize, and the 2016 Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award. ■



Life on a Roll***Inside Iran: the luminosity of Shiraz***

NAN PANG

I caught an overnight bus from [Yazd](#) and arrived in Shiraz just before sunrise, which was rather well-timed to visit Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, also known as the Pink Mosque. It is said to be a feast to the eyes in the morning as the colors flood through the stained-glass windows and illuminate the carpet. Shiraz is often described as the city of poets and culture, and was home to Hafez, arguably the most celebrated and beloved Persian poet. Although the city of Shiraz had been famous for producing the finest wine in the world by the ninth century, alcohol has been prohibited in Iran since 1979. The city itself was pretty compact

and walkable. Lots of mausoleums were free to enter, and I would definitely recommend Ali Ibn Hamza Mausoleum and Shah Cheragh Mausoleum. Their intense interior decorations with glass and mirrors were truly breathtaking.

At night, as I was enjoying *faloodeh* (a traditional Iranian sorbet-like dessert) with some new friends at the Arg of Karim Khan, we discussed why we decided to visit Iran. Strangely enough, I remembered a verse from Hafez's poetry that someone taught me earlier in the day—"this place you are right now God circled on a map for you." Perhaps that was why I was there. ■

VAKIL MOSQUE

ARG OF KARIM KHAN