Alumnae Paths: Spotlight on the 1990’s
-Nicole C. Maloy, W’95

Eight women who graduated from Penn in the 1990’s take a moment to share what brought them to Penn, what they’ve been up to since then, and what bits of wisdom they’ve picked up along the way. Representing fields from law to education, from health care to the arts, these fabulous women are all taking steps to leave the world better than they found it. Keep doing our alma mater proud, ladies. Note: our next newsletter will feature alumnae from another decade. Watch for it!

Meet some of your sisters in Red & Blue:

- **Stephanie Renée, W’91** - Broadcaster
- **Mary Beth Kochman, C’95** - Teacher
- **Lucy Ramos Miller, C’97** - General Magistrate
- **Jenny Chung, W’97** - Country Club CEO
- **Angela Jimenez, C’97** - Photographer
- **Bleema (Moskowitz) Bershad, W’95** - Marketing Entrepreneur
- **Candra Wooten, C’97** - Physician
- **Jordana Horn Gordon, C’95** - Writer
Stephanie Renée, W’91 – Broadcaster

Why did you choose Penn?
I attended a business magnet program in high school and was part of only the 2nd graduating class from the initiative. My school administrators drilled Wharton into my head when it was time to apply for college, and thankfully Penn and Philadelphia filled all of my other requirements for what I was looking for in my college experience. My acceptance package sealed the deal.

What did you study?
I initially arrived as a Finance major, but quickly understood that a life of number crunching was not my preference. I switched to Marketing immediately, and later added Legal Studies as a second concentration at the advice of a professor who saw great potential in me for a possible future in law.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
Penn Gospel Choir was my artistic refuge after making a pretty difficult adjustment to college life my first semester. As a spiritual center and creative outlet, I desperately needed Gospel Choir to feel grounded and a part of a welcome community. But all of my artistic activities significantly impacted my life. My junior year, I had the pleasure of being one of the founding members of The Inspiration a cappella group, and I also directed Ntozake Shange's For Colored Girls with the Penn Black Arts League (now known as the African American Arts Alliance, or 4A). Those two events profoundly changed my life for the better, and let me know that I had to pursue careers with arts as a main focus.

How did you get involved in radio?
My first corporate job after Penn was as a copywriter and broadcast producer for a local ad agency. I was called in to voice a last-minute PSA, interviewed with the company and was hired a week later. I would often spec read the spots I had written for clients, and eventually many of them asked if I could record them for the actual broadcasts. That, plus some encouragement from
WRTI-FM’s J. Michael Harrison, led me to begin hosting my own radio programs.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
At WURD, I had been a frequent fill-in host for my buddy Al Butler, who hosts the afternoon drive slot. I have also worked professionally with several of the station's administrative heads in other capacities. Unfortunately, this past February, one of the station's hosts--Fatimah Ali--passed away suddenly, which left WURD scrambling for a solution to fill her slot. I was one of the people on a short list to audition for the slot and after several weeks of hosting shows, interviews/meetings and positive feedback from the public, I became the chosen one.

What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?
I quit my day job at the ad agency in December 1998, and have been actively working as a performer and teaching artist ever since. I did a stint of three years in professional musical theater in Philadelphia and New York. I began writing and singing house (dance) music and got to travel to Singapore as a resident vocalist for a new club there. I've been a consultant with several non-profit organizations to provide media and creative writing curriculum to teens. I design diversity training programs for colleges and non-profit agencies. I've filmed my first documentary and held screenings across the country and on cable TV. I've helped refine a World Readiness curriculum for the Restorative Justice branch of Philadelphia Mural Arts, where my students are recently paroled offenders age 25 and under. I actively work as a voiceover artist and instructor. I could go on, but the bottom line is that I am blessed to use my creative energies every single day and I love it!

How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?
My high school counselor told me clearly before graduation that my college friends would be the friends I'd have for life, and she couldn't have been more correct. Penn people are the backbone of everything I do, from my professional connections to the lasting friendships that consistently lift me up and push me forward. Philadelphia can be a hard place on people who were not born and raised here, but the Penn network I've developed over the years have always been an open and welcome resource for me to accomplish my goals. DC is my birthplace, but Penn and the larger Philadelphia community have raised me into adulthood.

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?
I would advise any women who desire a career in communications to be a sponge and be relentless. It is essential that you know a good amount of information about just about anything. You have to be outgoing, knowledgeable and ubiquitous. The more people see and hear of you in the right places opens all kinds of avenues for you to be included in future personal and professional development opportunities. Many of my current coworkers have been former clients of mine in another incarnation. Good relationships do not die.

Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?
Penn is a bottomless well of opportunity, if you stay current on University initiatives and find a way to stay connected. My work in Alumni Relations has been such a wonderful way to explore my creative pursuits and to offer insights as to how current students' experiences can be
enhanced by more alumni involvement. Penn isn't just about pursuing a degree; it is a lifelong connection for education, fulfillment and growth.

Mary Beth Kochman, C'95 - Teacher

Why did you choose Penn?
As a child, I had always gone to Penn Relays with my father who was a teacher and track coach, and then was able to run at the Relays as a high school student. When we began my college search, my father suggested I look at Penn. I knew that I wanted to major in English and teach after I graduated, so I was looking for a university with a strong liberal arts background. I was also looking for a place where I could be part of the track team, and I knew that I wanted a university with an urban setting and an actual campus. Penn fit those requirements and many more. It was a dream come true when I was accepted early decision.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
Certainly being on the track team. I made friends who are still extremely dear to me even though we rarely get to see one another. I also loved my work study job at The Penn Children's Center, as well as volunteering with the West Philadelphia Tutoring Project. I loved being able to work with children while I was a college student. It was such a welcome break from college life.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
Currently I teach 7th graders, but I taught high school for 11 years. I knew in kindergarten that I wanted to teach. I loved being in school, I loved reading and learning, and I loved helping other people. I grew up taking care of my younger brothers and sisters and I became the neighborhood babysitter. Not teaching was never really an option for me! I always knew what I wanted to do.

I think everyone can name a teacher or two who has been extremely influential in their lives. For me, one of my high school English teachers, Robin Liebenberg, as well as my first English instructor at Penn, Kate Levin, shaped the teacher I have become. In their classes I learned how
to analyze and question and debate about literature in ways that I had never done in years prior. I had always thought that I wanted to teach younger children but because of them, I began to think that I could bring a deeper way of reading literature to high school students. Teaching has become an artistic project for me. It combines the intellectual and the creative sides of my personality, but ultimately it comes right down to the one student who wants to stay after class to discuss a book. That's when my day has been made.

What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?
I'm still a voracious reader. I love music, I love to travel and have discovered and re-discovered ways to stay active: I've played soccer, taken ballet and yoga classes and recently picked up boxing. And of course, I still run.

Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?
There was an article in the New York Times about community college students who were now going to four-year colleges. A man who had struggled to get his college degree was profiled: he was a student at the Community College of Philadelphia and will be attending Penn this fall at the age of 36. I was dismayed to read that "people have told him that majoring in education would be a waste of an Ivy League degree." I would emphatically disagree -- it is not a waste to go to Penn "just to teach" when one graduates. Teachers may be pretty regular people who don't always get recognized for what they do, but the impact they have on students' lives is profoundly gratifying.

Lucy Ramos Miller, C’97 - General Magistrate

Why did you choose Penn?
Honestly, Penn chose me. As a first generation college attendee, I was extremely ill prepared for the college application process in high school. I had no family guidance in the process. Moreover, while I performed well in high school, I was by no means at the top of my class. I graduated from a very big high school, and our guidance counselor was stretched pretty thinly. So, by the time I was able to meet with the guidance counselor, her goal was simply to get as many of us into any college, mostly local schools with no particular pedigree. So, I wound up starting my academic career at a community school. After quickly realizing that I was capable of
I transferred to Eastern Michigan University. Again, I quickly realized that I was still capable of more, and at the suggestion of a friend (who is now my husband), I applied to Penn. While attending a university of such caliber was always a dream, I never thought it could be a reality for me as I did not fit the traditional Ivy League mold. Penn offered the academic rigor that I sought and the opportunity to obtain a well rounded education. So when Penn offered me admission, I jumped at the opportunity!

**What did you study?**
International Relations

**What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?**
As a student, the activities that meant the most to me were those that involved community service. Specifically, I was involved in both a mentoring and tutoring program where I was paired with inner city elementary students. As a mentor and a tutor, I was able to make a direct impact on these students and witness their development from the start of the semester to the end. While I can't say with any degree of certainty that I had a long term impact on their academic futures, I can say that I at least was able to give them hope for a successful future for themselves by providing them with a real life example of someone who came from a similar background as them and was able to make strides in pursuing a greater future.

**Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.**
I have always known since I was a young child that I would be a lawyer. My mother often jokes that I was born to argue. While I will not concede this point, I will admit that I was always attracted to the perception that a law degree/license came with a certain degree of power, the power of knowledge. I began my law career as an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney where I prosecuted dependency, neglect, and abuse cases and juvenile delinquency matters. While in this position, I realized that the justice system isn't perfect and that often times, people are inadequately armed when facing these types of proceedings. So, I started my own defense and Guardian Ad Litem practice. I also began handling domestic/family law cases as a solo practitioner. While litigating was extremely rewarding, I became more interested in the impact and the role of the decision-makers, the judiciary. So, taking a somewhat nontraditional path, I began working as a Judicial Staff Attorney, wherein I was responsible for researching and preparing proposed judicial decisions. While in this role, I realized the judiciary has the most ability to make an impact on the lives of people and in maintaining legal justice. This led to the pursuit of my current role as a General Magistrate in the Family Law Division. In this role, I hear and decide matters related to dissolution of marriage, paternity, child custody, and support.

**What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?**
Since graduating from Penn and law school, I married a fellow Penn Alum and have three children. As free time is limited, I have had to strategically choose the activities that I involve myself with. These tend to be specifically related to my field of practice, which primarily happen to be local bar associations. I still derive the most fulfillment from community service oriented activities, so I also try to reserve some time for those as well. I still enjoy mentoring students, young women in particular. As I did not have a mentor or much guidance throughout my academic and professional careers, I realize the need and benefits of having mentors throughout each stage in life. For this reason, I believe it is my obligation to try to provide for
How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally? There is no doubt that the Penn degree has a recognizable pedigree that has opened doors in my professional career. However, attending Penn has made all the difference in my life in a much more personal way. As I previously mentioned, admission to Penn was a surprise to me. Before being admitted to and graduating from Penn, I doubted my ability to excel. So, I tended to only set reasonably attainable goals for myself. My Penn experience made me realize that I am always capable of more. So, I strive to achieve more on a daily basis.

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours? My advice to any woman who is interested in pursuing a legal career is to never set limits for themselves. Always set high expectations for yourself and know that you can achieve them. You will have plenty male counterparts who will doubt your abilities in the legal profession, so there is no room for self doubt.

Jenny Chung, W’97 - Country Club Owner

Why did you choose Penn? I chose Penn for three reasons: Wharton, Diversity and Urban/City Life.

What did you study? Finance and Accounting.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why? The three standout activities are experiences which involved interaction with the local Philly community: Penn Corps - volunteering program where we helped build homes in West Philly the week before the start of freshman year, Wharton 101 (now Mgmt 100) – program where we
had a business project working with a local non-profit, and PACE (Programs for Awareness in Cultural Education) – we took Grad. Ed. Classes and became facilitators of cross cultural dialogue for local community groups and businesses.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
The golf course was for sale just at the tail end of a different investment that had gone bad in NY; after that failed investment, I vowed to never invest in someone else- only to invest in myself. The golf course was an opportunity that I didn’t want to overlook just because I didn’t play golf, knew nothing about banquets, and I had never stepped foot onto a country club; I knew that irrespective of lacking any experience, I would work harder than anyone else. So, on April 1, 2005, I became owner and President of JC Melrose Country Club.

What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?
When I was in investment banking in NY, I focused on professional groups to advance my career. Now I enjoy being involved with groups that advance my community: volunteering with the Make a Wish Foundation, acting as CAC Co-Chair of Fox Chase Cancer Center, and serving on the Boards of West Oak Lane Charter School, MAC (Multicultural Affairs Congress of PCVB), and the University of Pennsylvania Association of Alumnae.

What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?
Adventure travel and tennis.

How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?
I love to travel, and I find that even in the most random places I meet Penn people that want to connect by virtue of our common alma mater. I was once kayaking in Cabo San Lucas and randomly hit oars with a neighboring kayak. These guys were wearing Penn shirts so we started reminiscing about our days at Penn. We exchanged business cards (not on the water, thank you very much) and looked for ways to connect professionally. Penn’s reach is so vast, but it’s great that the connections I’ve made with Penn grads are so close.

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?
Entrepreneurship is very empowering –you can dictate your own corporate culture, you can provide employment opportunities and you learn something new every day. On the flip side, it is a very humbling endeavor because nothing is beneath you to do; I have washed dishes for banquets, planted bushes on the golf course and cleaned bathrooms in the locker rooms.

Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?
It’s the same thing I tell my employees- let’s work harder to make the pie bigger so we can each take bigger pieces out of the pie. What this means is let’s not be short-sighted. Let’s work together, support each other and work towards a greater success from which we can all have a bigger benefit.
Angela Jimenez, C’97 - Photographer

Why did you choose Penn?
My track coaches in high school steered me towards Penn, where (then) head coach Betty Costanza recruited me. I wanted to run in college and to get a great education. My athletic ability helped me to get into a school that was an academic reach for me on paper. Once there I was totally focused on being the best athlete and student I could be. I was not really sure of the kind of school I wanted to go to, but I went to Penn on a recruiting trip, with my coach and my co-captain from my high school team (we both wound up going to Penn and running there together) and was impressed. I loved the team- these were confident, smart, beautiful people. I saw the kind of person I wanted to be in them.

What did you study?
I was an English major with a concentration in American history.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
Track & field was my activity, my sport, my sorority and my community. We spent about 2/3 of the year competing and nearly every day training for like 4 hours so there was not much else. Now that I am long retired as a competitive athlete, I have this sort of philosophical perspective on why it mattered so much. I don't care so much about "winning" now. But I was fiercely competitive then. It is the athlete mentality. I loved the sport, and challenging myself physically to be the best. But the deeper meaning was that I also loved the tradition & legacy of being part of that program, and the community of being part of that team. If you have ever stood in that stadium and watched a close race at the Penn Relays and gotten chills on your arms, you will understand it.
Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
I started taking art photography classes at Penn, starting with black & white film in the darkroom. I had always liked art, but had never really pursued it. It started to open up a whole other side of me. I liked to write too, so a really great adviser in the Athletic department steered me towards journalism school, which is where I went for a master's degree right after graduating from Penn. I really owe him for that guidance. I got a full scholarship that first year to study photojournalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia, which is rooted telling of human stories through photographs with an emphasis on social change. It was love at first sight. I started with several years of internships at newspapers and have been freelancing as a photographer/photojournalist in New York City for over 10 years. I own my own company and do a variety of types of work, with documentary stories always at the heart of it.

What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?
Alongside work doing portraits, weddings, events, non-profit documentary work and other commissions, I have tried to constantly pursue self-initiated stories and projects and find places/ways to publish & exhibit them. I have been a regular freelancer for The New York Times the whole time I have been freelancing. I worked on a book project for 8 years, which I self-published in 2009. I now teach visual storytelling workshops in photography, video and audio in the graduate school of journalism at New York University.

What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?
I play music as a hobby, write songs, play in bands here and there. It is great to have something creative that is not at all about money or making a living, because the reality is that so much about photography has to be a business for me. It can be tough, amidst all the hustling for work and the running of the business, to find time for the clarity and joy of just doing something for the sake of doing it. The best thing about Brooklyn is that I am surrounded by this amazing, diverse world of people and art.

How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?
My Penn track friends are, and will always be family to me. And I got a great education there that is the foundation of everything else I have done since, impacting the ways that I think and approach things. It was a great opportunity and I was lucky to have that chance to be there.

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?
Go for it. I can give you all the cautionary and logistical tales later, but if you do find something that you love to do you absolutely owe it to yourself and to the world to do it. And I would say study some business before you start one. I could have used a class or two at Wharton.
Why did you choose Penn?
Making me revisit my 17 year old mind! I knew I wanted to start my career upon graduation, not go to grad school, and I was confident that Wharton undergrad would give me that jump start.

What did you study?
I had a individualized dual concentration in Marketing and Statistics. I always loved math and appreciated early on what an important compliment statistics is to marketing.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
The open door policy of my professors had a huge impact on me. Spending time to help me think through a paper, a math problem, my career... I was supported and encouraged.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
I am one of two partners in MomFocus Marketing, a specialized marketing consultancy. We work with businesses to help optimize their marketing specifically to Moms, who are the primary managers of the family budget. From almost literally the day I graduated from Penn until now, I've worked in marketing, but this is my first business. My business partner and I met at Kellogg (yes, grad school! I guess I didn't think through every detail perfectly when I was 17.) We recognized a need and built our business to help address it. Leaving corporate America wasn't scary, but taking this leap certainly was. It's challenging and exciting on a daily basis.

What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?
My job has always provided networking and other professional development opportunities, so outside of that I have focused on using my academic skills to help others. I've volunteered as a math tutor for many years in public schools looking for extra hands and minds.

How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?
Primarily it's the friendships. People to whom I can turn for any type of support, be it personal or professional, and I am delighted to return the favor.
What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?
Growing up, my parents dominated the kitchen and I didn't really pick up any skills. Over the past five years or so I've developed quite a love of cooking (and hopefully those who have tasted would agree, a skill set too).

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?
Like all jobs, owning and running your own business has moments of extreme frustration, however, the rewards are so much more extreme. Perhaps financially, but more importantly the pride and great sense of accomplishment. So, my advice would be to identify where you passion, your skills and a market need overlap and run with it.

Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?
As you're running with it, don't forget to pause for sanity checks. Your Penn network, perhaps? People continuously surprise me with their great ideas and advice.

Candra Wooten, C’97 – Physician

Why did you choose Penn?
I always wanted to go to an Ivy League School. Once I visited for Penn Scholars weekend in 1992, I felt right at home.

What did you study?
I was pre-med. I majored in Biological Basis of Behavior.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
I became a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the Student National Medical Association. My heart and soul belonged to the Inspiration, Penn’s premier a cappella group. I spent much of my time singing and planning the soulful and funny performances with some of the most talented people I had ever met. I love art as much as I love science, and this was my creative outlet.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
I wanted a career which would allow me to help sick people. I picked workstudy jobs which
would expose me to medicine at HUP and CHOP. After graduation from Penn, I attended Howard University College of Medicine. I attended a family medicine residency program at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami Florida. During residency I worked in a small community clinic called Jefferson Reaves Clinic where I treated many uninsured and underserved families. It is very fulfilling to help people who really need it, and they appreciate your help. Currently I live in Baltimore and work in a community clinic in the city treating many uninsured and underserved families.

**What other professional activities have you been involved in since graduation?**
The National Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

**What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?**
Singing has remained my favorite hobby. I spent time with a jazz band in Philadelphia in 1999, I performed with classmates in medical school. I’ve sung in a few weddings.

**How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?**
Penn connected me with some great people with whom I am honored to be friends, who continue to inspire and motivate me with their career endeavors.

**What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?**
Medicine is as rewarding as it is challenging. I would tell them to find a mentor to help navigate and to take a few classes in business management.

**Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?**
I look back on my Penn experience very fondly. I had a great time. Penn offers so many opportunities for all that you are interested in. Take full advantage of everything.

Jordana Horn Gordon, C’95 - Writer
Why did you choose Penn?
My grandfather, mother, uncle and various cousins all went to Penn. I was therefore determined to hate it. Imagine my chagrin when I went to Penn, as a sophomore in high school, for Homecoming weekend on a special program for alumni children, and loved all of it. I loved the Quad, the diversity of student life, the energy of Locust Walk, the beauty of the campus in the middle of an amazing city - I was hooked. Thank God I got in, especially since I didn't finish typing any other applications (less out of confidence than out of sheer hope/procrastination).

What did you study?
I did a double-major in English and Communications, and then went on to Penn for law school.

What activities meant the most to you as a student, and why?
The Daily Pennsylvanian became my personal university. I spent 90 hours a week there under the fluorescent lights, as a reporter and eventually Executive Editor of the paper (the third woman to hold that role). I made my closest friends there and lost years of sleep there. It was the perfect stepping stone between the 'real world' and the Penn/collegiate world. It taught me responsibility, drive, ambition and how to deal with people. It taught me diplomacy. It is often said that the DP is the hardest you'll ever work without being paid. I disagree. Not only are you bound for a life of teensy paychecks if you take up the journalist's life, but also, the DP did pay in the hard-to-get currency of real experience.

Tell us about your current position, and your path to it.
I can't think of a time that I didn't want to be a writer. I wanted to be the person behind the words that people couldn't stop reading. My path to it was circuitous. I went to work for the Philadelphia Inquirer as a reporter for a short time after graduation, but was then accepted to the London School of Economics for a graduate degree in international relations. I went there, and then returned to Philadelphia for law school at Penn. I was hired by a terrific New York law firm and worked for them in their London and New York offices -- yet the whole time, I kept one foot in the writing world, writing articles for papers, magazines and blogs at 2 am when I was waiting for the next assignment from a partner. I found that when you love doing something, there is very little that will keep you from it. And so when I had my first son, I decided to leave the law and try to make a career as a freelance journalist. It's a career that is always in a state of flux. I've written for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Jerusalem Post, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post and numerous other publications. I'm a contributor/contributing editor at numerous websites, including the TODAY show parenting blog and www.Kveller.com. I am currently trying to hurdle the next leap in my career and working on my first novel -- a battle that I hope will resolve positively!

What hobbies, or personal activities of note, have you pursued in your adult life?
Can one call parenting a hobby? It's definitely a personal activity of note. I have three children and am working on a fourth, and find that they are a hobby, job, personal activity, investment, chore and passion all rolled into one. I've also had the good fortune to travel around the world -- have been to over 60 countries and I'm still not done. I am a voracious reader who is very thankful for smartphones, for the ability to read books while on the go (it takes tremendous restraint, but I do not do it while driving). I am sure my cooking would be better if I did not attempt to read novels as I do it.
How has your connection to Penn impacted your life, both personally and professionally?
Professionally, the DP connections have proved invaluable. Many of my peers are journalists and are more than willing to exchange contacts and to help one another find jobs and assignments. Who needed journalism school? Also, my experience at the law school was a positive one and I always find myself admiring the accomplishments of my classmates and peers. Personally, Penn was remarkable for me and continues to be so. I'm an active alumna, currently serving as class president, and was involved in planning our 15th reunion and hope to be actively involved in our 20th as well. Penn taught me that yes, even in a school of thousands, one can make one's personal mark -- and the same is true for the world at large. I could not have chosen a more perfect school for me.

What advice do you have for other women interested in pursuing a profession similar to yours?
When I was graduating from Penn, some video cameraperson came by -- I think he was making a graduation video, or some time-capsule thing I have yet to see. In any event, I was attending a black-tie ball for our class, and the videographer approached me as I was making out with my then-boyfriend. He asked, "Where do you think you'll be in 20 years?" Confidently, I hoisted my drink in the air and said, "I'm going to be the first woman editor in chief of the New York Times." Well, as you may have noticed, my name is not Jill Abramson and my personal prophecy did not come true. Yet, oddly enough, I find myself not disappointed in the least, but rather, pretty darn happy.

Titles, I've discovered through gaining some nice ones, are other people's yardsticks for success. For me, success has meant forging my own path, and being various things in various places. I write on Middle East politics, parenting, film and literature -- things that don't fall on any one 'beat.' I am a wife and mother and make dinner for my family, however crappily, most every night and eat it with them, reminding them to use things like forks. Now, as I work on a novel, I know that success will not be making it to the NYT bestseller list, but rather, would be the eventuality of a reader coming up to me and telling me that he or she was genuinely moved by my words. In short, my advice is to be yourself -- the best advice ever given was 'to thine own self be true.' You're the only one who can be that person. Don't fit yourself into idealized pictures of success. Instead, create your own picture, and make sure it's one that makes you happy.

Any last words of wisdom to your Penn sistren?
Be yourself and enjoy it!