

# Like “Grandmother”, Like “Granddaughter”: Lira Samanta '10 and Susan Kovacs Buxbaum '60



Photo by Paula Johnson

**Lira Samanta**  
Lira Samanta '10 entered Mount Holyoke with every intention of being a biology major. Then, she fell in love with economics.

Economics professor Jim Hartley played matchmaker. Her favorite class, to this day, was his Macroeconomic Theory course.

When asked to list the best thing about being a Mount Holyoke student, Samanta testified to the school's tradition of academic excellence. "I love how you can really dive into your work," she said. "The academic standards here are rigorous... [and] you have to make the most of [them]. What I love about this place is how there are fewer distractions, such that even the most unmotivated person begins to find their academic niche, and develop their intellectual abilities towards fitting into that niche."

Samanta appreciates the emphasis that the college places on tradition — especially the ones that took her completely by surprise. When she heard the infamous Mountain Day bells — the ones that chime for five minutes after 7 a.m. — she was startled, even annoyed.

"I hadn't realized this was how we would be informed. I awoke... thinking that the bells were broken," she stated. "And then I realized it was Mountain Day, and I woke up my roommate. We had a few moments of excitement, before we promptly went back to sleep."

Hold that judgment — they did climb Skinner State Park's Mt. Holyoke. "I got up an hour later and climbed the mountain with two of my new friends who were my roommates. It was awesome," Samanta said.

She is looking ahead to life after graduation, when she hopes to pursue *work in fields such as consulting or finance — ones that are sure to take her relationship with economics to the next level.*

## BEYOND THE COLLEGE GATES Emily Arsenault '98

BY MEGAN MCGRATH '11  
FEATURES EDITOR

**M**ount Holyoke alum Emily Arsenault '98 is making headlines for the publication of her first book, *The Broken Teaglass*. Released Sept. 29th, the mystery novel was born in the heart of South Africa in 2005, where she and her husband were fulfilling their dream of volunteering for the Peace Corps. "We felt like we were getting old," she said. "If we didn't do it then, we felt like we would never get to do it."

Arsenault and her husband spent their evenings and nights reading and writing in their living situation devoid of electricity and television. For the aspiring author, it was the ideal working environment. "There weren't any distractions...you are kind of looking for a personal project to occupy your time, and that is what the book became," she stated. "[Writing] was an escape for me."

Rewind eleven years to Arsenault's college years.

"Mount Holyoke was an unusual choice for me," she said.

She applied to mostly co-ed schools, not ever expecting to attend a women's college. But Arsenault soon found her niche at Mount Holyoke.

"I came from a high school that put a lot of focus on athletics — we had the top football team in the state. I wanted to go to a place where the focus was on academics and there wasn't that macho element," she stated.

Arsenault assumed she would major in English. Instead, courses with Sam Mitchell and Jane Groshwate led her to double major

in philosophy and religion, along with the college's female environment.

"It felt like philosophy was open to me at Mount Holyoke...It exposed me to lots of different ideas that I hadn't considered exploring before," she said. "Maybe I would have been intimidated by that subject at a co-ed school."

It was at the women's college that she met her husband, a UMass-Amherst student taking a philosophy class at Mount Holyoke.

Immediately upon graduating, Arsenault was snatched up by Merriam-Webster, Inc. in Springfield, MA, where she worked in the editorial department from 1998 to 2002. After two years with the dictionary company, it became clear to her that she would not return to philosophy.

"I came to my senses," she said. "I wasn't going to get a job as a philosophy professor."

She did, however, get a job as an English teacher at the public high school in Coventry, CT.

Arsenault currently resides in Shelburne Falls, MA, located in the Berkshire foothills. Because she is a mere hour's drive from her alma mater, she finds herself revisiting the Mount Holyoke campus often.

"A couple of my good friends and I had a reunion this summer and walked around the campus," she stated.

If the writing process has taught Arsenault anything, it is the need for revision and perspective.

*The biggest challenge is learning how to throw things out — and to be able to live with that.*

"With your first draft, you have so much that you're in love with," she said. "The biggest challenge is learning how to throw things out — and to be able to live with that."

BY MEGAN MCGRATH '11  
FEATURES EDITOR

The smells of cookies and coffee filled the air Thursday, Oct. 1, at the Willits-Hallowell Conference Center. A table topped with these refreshments lined the back of the Class of 1929 room, in honor of two other classes: 2010 and 1960. The "granddaughter" members of '10 were each assigned to a "grandmother," a woman for whom the senior's desired career goal had become a reality. Lira Samanta '10 and Susan Kovacs Buxbaum '60 are in the spotlight.

**Susan Kovacs Buxbaum**

Long gone are the days of house mothers and curfews at Mount Holyoke. Susan Kovacs Buxbaum '60 recalled the challenge of making her journey back to Buckland by 11 p.m. after synchronized swimming practice. "I had to truck it to get back to the dorm," the zoology major said. "I had iceles hanging from my hair."

She has many fond memories of the sport and, as a result, is disappointed to see it absent from the pages of the Mount Holyoke course catalogue. "I think it's a great loss, that we don't have that anymore," she stated.

Not all of the school's changes are met with the same sentiment, however. Buxbaum is impressed by the recent renovations made to Kendall and Blanchard Student Center. "Blanchard was nothing that it is today," she said.

Buxbaum revealed that she is surprised at the amount of freedom afforded to students today, regarding parking. She was not allowed to have a vehicle on campus until the second half of her senior year. Her father, upon hearing the news, made the following spring break a memorable one: he gave her a car. In addition, to register a vehicle with the college, students had to maintain a B average or above. As a result of the more stringent parking policies, as well as the lack of the PVTA (the bus system had not yet been instituted), venturing outside of the Mount Holyoke gates for entertainment was not a common occurrence. "If you did not have a car, you did not go off campus," she stated.

When asked to reflect on memories from her college experience, students hailing from New York City got points with Buxbaum for their study habits. "I was blown away by the New York City students. They were much more prepared than I. They knew how to study," Buxbaum stated. And Buxbaum knew how to persist. She and her roommate were keen on taking courses with the music department's Charles Leedy. The problem? They were not music majors. "We had to petition to get into his courses. We got in and ended up getting the two highest grades on the first exam," she stated.

It is precisely this determination that led Buxbaum to become the Director for Voter News Service, an organization that she describes as "a consortium of ABC News, CBS News, CNN, NBC News, Fox News, and the AP formed to do all the research, exit polling, collections of sample precinct votes, and all vote totals from every county in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia." In 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008, she went on to serve as a consultant to Edison Media Research for national election coverage.

Buxbaum is also the author of five children's books, one of which — *SPLASH! All about Baths* — won the American Institute of Physics prize of "Best Children's Science Book of the Year" in 1987.

## Calling all Chocoholics!

BY ASHA CHAUDHURI '10  
CONTRIBUTING  
WRITER



Photo by Asha Chaudhuri  
From Buddha to beaded necklaces, this NYC fair indulges in the ultimate sweet tooth showcase.

What better way to spend your Halloween weekend than by satisfying your sweet tooth at the 12th Annual Chocolate Show in New York City? This three-day event, which will take place from Oct. 30 to Nov. 1, is devoted entirely to chocolate and will showcase more than 65 chocolate brands from around the world.

Not only can you taste unlimited samples of the world's finest chocolates, but you can also attend culinary demonstrations and book signings from top pastry chefs and chocolatiers (Jacques Torres, Martin Howard and Francois Payard have made recent appearances at the event). Berkshire Bark, Guitard, Chocovision, Perugina, and Madecasse will feature their chocolates — some of which are new or limited edition — along with several artisanal companies. From the classic flavors of dark, milk, and white chocolates, to exotic, innovative creations that incorporate blends of teas, spices, fruits, and other rich flavors, no chocolate enthusiast will be disappointed.

The event runs on Friday from noon-8 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m.-8 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. It will be held at Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 W. 18th St.

Think that is not enough? One of the most exciting parts of the event is viewing the display of costumes made of chocolate, with this year's theme celebrating Halloween. The clothing is designed by world-renowned fashion designers with the help of chocolatiers and top pastry chefs. Much of the clothing is applied with chocolate paint, while other articles are complemented by chocolate beads, carvings and unique shapes.

With 400,000 square feet of chocolate everywhere you look, it is certainly an occasion not to be missed, especially since the only other festival locations are Paris, Shanghai, Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow and Madrid. For more information, visit [www.chocolateshow.com](http://www.chocolateshow.com). Although tickets are sold at the door for \$30, it is advisable to purchase tickets in advance at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com) for \$28.

The event runs on Friday from noon-8 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m.-8 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. It will be held at Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 W. 18th St.