NEW YORK CITY

Alumni Stories
“Crossing over” with Magic Johnson in 1979 after four years at MSU, College of Arts and Letters alumna Susie Arons says she felt fortunate to land a job right out of school at a record company in New York City.

“I’d decided to go on a three-month European adventure with my three roommates,” Arons says. “We traveled through quite a few countries, including England, France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, and Germany, by RailPass.

“Meanwhile, the company where I was going to work was going through its first and most significant layoffs ever, and my job was eliminated before I even arrived in New York.”

But that didn’t faze Arons. “So I came anyway,” she says. “My sister lived here and there were plenty of arts organizations for me to approach and find a job. As it turned out, I walked into the Joffrey Ballet just as someone was walking out and quit, and they asked, ‘Can you do development?’ and I said ‘Yes,’ even though I didn’t know that development meant fundraising—something I knew nothing about. But I knew I loved the Joffrey Ballet.”

Arons began her career working for the main company of the Joffrey, but, soon, says she became fascinated with the Junior Company.

“I asked if I could work with the Junior Company, and they allowed me to go down from the first company to the second company. I traveled with them wherever they went, 40 states, Hong Kong, Bermuda, everywhere,” Susie says.

“They, Ron Reagan joined Joffrey II, which really raised our profile. I learned PR on the spot, granting interviews only if it included the full company, not just Ron. In total, I spent six years with the Joffrey, flying quite a bit by the seat of my pants.”

When a woman friend left her job at MTV, the two decided to start producing special events together for the likes of American Ballet Theater and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

“When, I started a company, although I had no business plan or experience,” says Arons. “Still, my clients included the Children’s Television Workshops, the GRAMMYs and the GRAMMY Host Committee, Sports Illustrated Swimsuit, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, and Schieffelin & Somerset, a global wine and spirits conglomerate.

“I did that for some six to eight years. I had the company to myself, had two kids, and, by the second year, we were doing well. I had a great staff, but it was hectic with two babies. I got a call from Radio City Music Hall and Madison Square Garden, asking if I would be interested in overseeing their entertainment PR. I would be reporting to Dave Checketts, the genius behind the Garden’s success at the time. It was an easy decision.

“My first two events were the opening of the Los Angeles production of The Radio City Christmas Spectacular and the Super Bowl halftime show. I went on to open 17 productions of the Christmas Spectacular worldwide, and oversaw publicity for everything from Michael Jackson’s 30th anniversary concerts and the GRAMMYs to Barbra Streisand’s farewell concerts and the 9/11 Concert for New York City, handling basically all of the PR for Radio City Music Hall and Madison Square Garden with a very good group of people.

“For the GRAMMYs, which hadn’t been in New York in 10 years, we hired an agency called Rubenstein Communications, and they were terrific. In the course of that, the president of Rubenstein and I hit it off, and he asked me if I wanted to come work for him, helping to build their corporate entertainment practice. I said ‘No,’ and he kept after me for about a year, noting that I could stay on with what I was doing and be fine.
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or I could go on to this next chapter. Ultimately, I decided to go.”

Says Arons, “It was a great move. Rubenstein has incredibly supportive, smart and creative people and leadership. So that’s kind of my story arc.”

And it appears part of the next chapter is about to be written. Susie’s son, Aron Augustitus, is enrolled at MSU as an incoming freshman this fall. He even plans to try out for the MSU men’s club hockey team. (Aron was captain of his high school team.)

“He’s always known that I’ve been very proud of having gone to Michigan State,” Susie says. “He is a smart and very focused young man and a sports fanatic. And he’s always wanted to go to Michigan State.

SUPPORT AT HOME & MSU

“Of course, my husband, Bob Augustitus, is the backbone of our family and my partner in everything. He is president at Augustitus Plumbing & Heating, Inc., in Clifton, New Jersey.”

And while their second son, Jeremy, just finished his sophomore year in high school and has “more than enough time” to decide where he’d like to go, Susie says she couldn’t be happier about Aron’s choice.

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Parents Bob Augustitus and Susie Arons with hockey-playing sons Aron (left) who is an incoming freshman at MSU, and 16-year-old Jeremy.

“From the get-go, I had a support structure, and was encouraged by my professors to question. They pushed us to raise our hands and participate even if there were 300 students in the class.

“I believe that when I review all of the success I’ve had in my career and add it all up, MSU helped shape me and what my life has been.

“I came from a small high school on Cleveland’s east side and led a relatively sheltered life, but my parents encouraged us to explore new things, and exposed us to a variety of people. Along the way, so many have taken an interest in me, encouraged me to seek out new pursuits, and listen to new voices. They showed me that so much of what you learn is not in books. You need to reach out, explore, and take the initiative.

“Think of it! I traveled with the Joffrey from North Dakota to China. I went to Alaska, worked with the Bolshoi and the Kirov and visited Moscow and St. Petersburg several times,” Susie says.

“Today? I am still at Rubenstein, doing fascinating projects for MGM, Beats by Dre, Media Rights Capital, Universal Music Group, and more.

“I get to work with St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital, the leading pediatric cancer research hospital in the world, with Marlo Thomas and her brother Tony. I work on The Hunger Games franchise, too, and with Oliver Stone on all of his projects, whether documentary or theatrical releases.

STILL LEARNING

“I’m thankful that I’m still learning and able to offer some modicum of expertise. Our company has worked with BMW the last 14 years, and I’ve recently been learning about electric cars. I keep learning new things!”

Arons says that’s what it’s all about: getting over and reinventing yourself.

“Who doesn’t want to be in a business that is continually evolving and changing? It’s all about determining how to best use communication to achieve business success. And, at the same time, developing a sense of community and giving back.

“I’ve been given that opportunity. MSU and my parents instilled that in me: the understanding that I am part of a community, not just a solo agent.”
Jameyla Troy

Originally from Queens, and currently living in Brooklyn, New York, linguistics graduate Jameyla Troy says it was summer visits to Michigan that led to her attending MSU.

“I could already speak pretty well; I began taking Spanish in sixth grade in the New York City school system. But now I am very fluent; I can understand the language.

“I do remember that day when it all clicked for me. It was like a light switch had been turned on, and Spanish became second nature. It was a very, very rewarding feeling. I was excited to continue my Spanish classes when I returned.

“My current job duties at Spivak Lipton vary day to day. Of course, I have a certain amount of work that needs to be done each day: writing, Excel documents, calculations—there is a lot more math than I ever expected—editing documents before sending to court, and fixing errors or issues.”

Jameyla says that there are situations working with documents where linguistics has definitely served her well.

“As a freshman, I lived in North Wonders Hall, and really liked working in the cafeteria, where I ended up meeting a lot of my friends. Second year, I moved to Landon Hall on West Circle, and my last two years, I lived in Cedar Village. It was nice, but not as easy to meet people as in the dorms.

“Languages were always interesting to me: English, Latin and Spanish. But I didn’t want to major in one, so I put down linguistics as my major. As it turned out, I liked it and continued with it.”

“I graduated in 2012—it really feels so recent—and originally planned to move to Argentina and teach English. But I ended up applying for a few openings, and was offered a position on my first job interview with Spivak Lipton LLP, which specializes in labor and employment law.

“We handle cases involving employees who feel they were unjustly fired, union issues, etc. It’s very interesting. I work as a paralegal and occasionally have responsibility for interpreting.”

Jameyla adds that her Study Abroad at MSU was in South America—in Ecuador—where she learned Ecuadorian Spanish, and says that the difference in how well she could speak the language before and after was amazing.

“Cristina Schmitt, my syntax professor; Karthik Durvasula, who helped me with Indian linguistics; and John Hasty, who I had for Intro to Linguistics, had the greatest positive influences on me at MSU.

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