



# If Rooms Could Talk

**Alumni revisit their campus homes—  
and meet the students living there**

By Alex Andr A Bond '12

**L**ast summer, one of CAM's interns—Ruthie Weissmann '17—mentioned a wild coincidence: she was living in the same Collegetown apartment that her mother, Catherine Coyne Weissmann '90, had occupied as an undergrad. Ruthie hadn't realized it until she was about to sign the lease—and she was blown away by the fact that her bedroom was the very same one her mom had slept in a generation earlier.

That bit of happenstance dovetailed with something the CAM staff was already mulling: the vital role that housing plays in the college experience. Every fall, Cornellians move into their rooms—be they in dorms, fraternities, sororities, program houses, co-ops, or apartments. There, their student lives unfold. They cram for prelims, write papers, hang out with friends, down ramen noodles, sleep until noon. Relationships begin and end, and indelible memories are made. When the school year ends, students pack up and vacate—and the cycle begins anew. Except in rare cases like Ruthie's, students never know who occupied their rooms before them, or who came after.

But what if Cornellians across the generations got the chance to meet up in that temporally shared space? CAM reached out to alumni with an invitation: come back to campus at some point during the 2015–16 academic year and meet the student (or students) living in your former abode.

Many were eager, but often the logistics didn't work out. Alumni couldn't make the trip in the right time frame, the current student wasn't available, or—as with the late, unlamented U-Halls—the dorms in question no longer existed. But in nine cases, the stars aligned. Some alumni had occupied their rooms just a few years earlier, while others hadn't been inside those four walls in decades. In the presence of our reporter and photographers, the alums reminisced, the undergrads taught them about current student life—and both sides made connections with fellow Cornellians whose college experience had been defined, in part, by that common patch of square footage.

*To read Ruthie's essay about her and her mom's apartment, "Déjà Room," or to share your dorm story, go to this story at [cornellalumnimagazine.com](http://cornellalumnimagazine.com).*



## 5603 Cl Ar A DiCkSOn HAl l

### Jay Taylor '80 & Yousuf Anwer '19

**YOUSUF:** "Cornell was my dream school. When I was in grade nine, we came to America from Pakistan and my dad said, 'You have to see Cornell.' It was love at first sight. I was fifteen and I knew then that this is where I had to go."

**JAY:** "It was forty years and three days ago today when I first saw campus. I just came across the parking permit when I came for my visit. I remember that it was a beautiful day, just like today."

*The two learn that they have something in common: both had asked to be housed in single rooms as freshmen.*

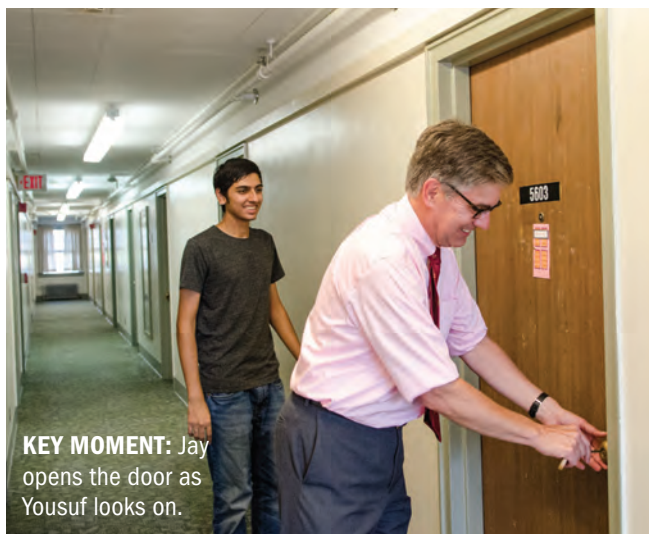
**JAY:** "I'm an only child, and I came from a small school. I knew Cornell was going to be a big, scary place, and I figured it would be one less thing to worry about. 'Am I going to get along with a roommate? What if he's loud, messy, smelly?' If I could cross that off the list, it would be one less complexity for me."

**YOUSUF:** "Yeah, you need your own space."

*Jay tells Yousuf that the room was his only undergraduate home: he lived there all four years. In that time, he became adept at jury-rigging ways to make it more comfortable.*

**JAY:** "In the winter, when it got really cold, this room would get incredibly dry. I built a table that went over the radiator and put trays of ice cubes on it, so the water would evaporate. You could probably just get a humidifier."

*As Jay and Yousuf approach the door, the freshman hands the key to the alum and asks, 'Would you like to do the honors?'*



**KEY MOMENT:** Jay opens the door as Yousuf looks on.





**GOOD CALL:** Erin watches Fiona help Bart navigate his phone.

## 304 VON CRAMM CO-Op

### Bart Mills '64, Fiona Daley '18 & Erin Yandel '18

Soon after meeting the two sophomores, Bart's cell phone rings.

**BART:** "I don't know how to work this thing. Does anybody know how to receive a call?"

**FIONA:** "Try pressing this green button."

**BART:** "I'm color blind." [They answer the call for him, and he speaks to his wife.] "I stare at the phone for an hour and can't do it—and they look at it for ten seconds and figure it out."

*The three bond over co-op house chores, like cooking communal meals and—in Bart's day—waxing the floors with a special machine. Bart recalls how co-ops used to find their future residents through the fraternity rush system, and the students explain that houses now use a more laid-back process dubbed "mosey." Inevitably, the conversation turns to Ithaca winters.*

**ERIN:** "I'm from Florida. Last year was the first time I'd been in snow for more than a week. Fiona is from Minnesota, so we had very different experiences. It was mostly her being like, 'This isn't that bad' and me being like, 'I really hate this.' "

*Later, Bart notes that one of the room's third-floor windows "was perfect for launching plastic bagful of water on unsuspecting sunbathers below"—though less useful for winter fun.*

**BART:** "When it snows a lot, you can pile it all up below—but I would advise you not to jump. It was fine from the second-story windows, but with the third story we got right up to the edge and didn't do it."

*'I was here another year, because five guys pooled their rights to the most favorable rooms,' Bart tells the current residents. 'This was the homework room; we put all the desks in here. The room next door was the bedroom. The room across the hall was the date room.'*





*'When I would come back here after class,' Chimene recalls, 'I was coming home.'*

## Chimene Liburd '92 & Ruby Rhoden '17

*Chimene and Ruby tour Wari, look through vintage photo albums, and discuss the history of the house, which was founded during a time of racial unrest on campus in the late Sixties.*

**RUBY:** "Wari was developed as a safe place for black women on campus, where they could find a place of refuge because of events that happened in other dorms. There was a great need for a place like this."

*Chimene notes how spacious the rooms are, and fondly remembers a visit by two high school friends who slept on the floor. She also recalls some bushy-tailed interlopers:*

**CHIMENE:** "We used to have raccoons. Do you guys have raccoons?"

**RUBY:** "No!"

**CHIMENE:** "One of my housemates couldn't get in one night because a raccoon was blocking the door. They'd come in and get the garbage out of the cans."

**RUBY:** "Oh, now we have a shed for our garbage cans."

**CHIMENE:** "Well that solves that!"

*Chimene, a physician, spots an organic chemistry textbook on the floor, and it sparks a mentorship moment.*

**RUBY:** "I was pre-med until like two days ago. I dropped orgo on Friday."

**CHIMENE:** "You can always go to medical school. You can be a psychology major and go to medical school. You can always change your mind. But if it doesn't feel right, you have to do what's in your gut."

*While touring the kitchen, Chimene asks if the house has any slow cookers—and when she learns that it doesn't, she whips out her phone and orders two crockpots to be delivered to the house the following week.*

**CHIMENE:** "You just throw some chicken in there and go to class, and when you come home it'll be ready."

**MEMORIES:** Ruby (left) and Chimene in their Wari room







The alum introduces the law student to his family, whom he has brought along with him: 'This is my wife, these are my kids'—he points to himself—and this is you in twenty years.'

108 Linden Ave.

## David Travin '98 & David Sverdlov, JD Class of '18

*Travin, an in-house counsel at UBS Investment Bank, shows Sverdlov some photos from his days in the apartment—including one that shows a housemate vomiting into a sink.*

**Travin (laughing):** "It's amazing. These are very successful doctors, architects, hedge fund guys. Having lived through college with them, I would not trust them with anything in the world."

*Sverdlov tells Travin he's from San Francisco, and the alum recalls some students from California who lived in his dorm freshman year—and came to Ithaca with no winter gear.*

**Travin:** "This was before the Internet—I hate to date myself like that—so they'd call their parents, and then a package from L.L. Bean would show up. I mean, they came here without gloves or a hat or anything."

**Sverdlov:** "I don't have gloves or a hat."

**Travin:** "You should order those next."

*When Sverdlov mentions that he's only been on the Hill for a few months, Travin offers some advice.*

**Travin:** "Explore Ithaca as a whole, not just the campus. There are so many awesome things to do. The farmer's market is great. My family and I went to Sapsucker Woods and took a birding tour the other day. It was amazing."



PHOTOS: ROBIN WISHNA

**COLLEGETOWN CONFIDENTIAL:**  
Travin (right) and Sverdlov on the front porch



## 635 Risle y Hall

### Maddy Gell Handler '65, Deja Canty '19 & Emma Eaton '18

*Getting to the room—which boasts a balcony overlooking Thurston Avenue—requires ascending four floors in an elevator, then walking up two flights of stairs. Maddy recalls that during part of her tenure in the room, she had a twisted ankle and walked with crutches.*

**Ma DDy:** “I had forgotten that the closet was out in the hall.”

**DeJa:** “I didn’t know it was out there until a month after I moved in.”

**eMMa:** “Yeah, I forgot to tell her.”

*Maddy reminisces about having fun on the Risle y terrace, including tossing water balloons and throwing green paint on Dragon Day.*

**Ma DDy:** “In the springtime you’d go out here with speakers and blast music at the fraternity house across the street. It was 1964 and I remember playing the Beatles’ ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand.’ ”

*It turns out that she and Deja share the same taste in music: above the student’s bed is a framed photo of the Abbey Road cover.*



*‘My class was at the cusp of a lot of changes,’ Maddy tells the students. ‘The year we were freshmen, they went from elegantly served meals to cafeteria style. They changed the rule so we could go to campus wearing pants—but we still couldn’t go to dinner in them, so we’d just wear a skirt over our pants to dinner.’*

#### ROOM WITH A VIEW:

(Left to right) Maddy, Deja, and Emma on the balcony







'My daughter [Dana Cohen] was Class of 2001, and she was assigned this room freshman year,' Maxine marvels. 'It was unbelievable. Of all the rooms on this campus, she was assigned this one.'



## 4253 Balch hall

### Maxine Roeper Cohen '72 & Cindy Zou '19

*The two women meet under the Balch Arch and turn to enter the dorm.*

**Ma XINE:** "You really can come home again."

*Inside the room, Maxine tells Cindy about the dramatic male-to-female ratio during her days on the Hill.*

**Ma XINE:** "At the time, there were three and a half men to one woman, so women were at a premium. However, the saying went, 'One fella has a hometown honey, one studies all the time, one you wouldn't want to go out with—and what are you going to do with half a man?' " She notes that men weren't allowed in Balch's rooms. "If you went to a men's dorm, you had to have the door open and 'four on the floor'—that is, four feet on the floor. It was a very different time."

*Maxine recalls that in her day, Balch was considered "by far the nicest dorm, with the largest rooms."*

**Ma XINE:** "We had a dining hall and were expected to dress for Sunday dinner. And we had maid service once a week. They'd come and change the sheets."

**c INDY:** "We definitely don't have that."

*Maxine reports that she recently found the bill for her freshman year room and board—a grand total of \$1,100.*

**c INDY:** "It's . . . quite a bit more now."

*Maxine, a parent educator for a branch of Cornell Cooperative Extension, reflects on the opportunities that the University has given her.*

**Ma XINE:** "It's true: coming to Cornell, you really can do anything."



**LOOKING BACK:** Maxine (bottom left) with Cindy on the wall outside Balch. Upper right: Maxine in the same spot in her student days. Top: Sharing memorabilia, including a vintage telegram.

PHOTOS: ROBRYN WISHNA





## Peter Coy '79 & Peter Ciampa '16

The two quickly realize that they have some things in common. On top of both being named "Peter C.," they share a love of marathon running. Ciampa is an economics major, while Coy covers the field for Bloomberg BusinessWeek.

**COY** [pointing out that the room's window looks out onto a lower roof]: "I remember one time a couple of people climbed up there and saw me sleeping and said, 'You're so annoying when you're awake—but you're so adorable when you're asleep.'"

Ciampa asks Coy about the house's hue when he was a student.

**CIAMPA:** "Was it this blue when you lived here?"

**COY:** "No, it was more gray."

**CIAMPA:** "We joke that this house is 'fifty shades of blue.' We painted the kitchen bright yellow last year, and it was the first time we had a non-blue room."

Coy jokingly recalls his room's erstwhile décor.

**COY:** "I remember having one of those Victorian-era posters with nymphs sitting by the water, bending into a pool. Man, it was lame. Back then, I hadn't yet developed my refined tastes."

*'I looked at some fraternities and decided they weren't for me; I thought a co-op was more my lifestyle,' Coy recalls. 'I liked the idea of men and women living together in a natural and sociable way that wasn't all about trying to line up a date for Friday night.'*



**PETER PRINCIPLE:** Coy (left) and Ciampa in their room





## 9114 JuST AbOuT MuSic (JAM)

### Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo '08, Sage Magee '18 & Montana Stone '19

*Enongo still lives in the house, serving as assistant residence hall director while pursuing both a career in hip-hop and a Cornell PhD in science and technology studies.*

**ENONGO:** "The number one question we get asked is, 'Do you have to play an instrument to live in JAM?' The answer is no; you just have to like music."

**MONTANA:** "I don't play an instrument, but I love walking down the hallway and hearing people play."

**ENONGO:** "I think having a space on campus where music can take place outside of an academic context is really important. If you have an interest in music but you don't perform, you can still engage with it."

*Asked to pose for a group photo, Sage organizes a shot modeled after a certain female action trio.*

**SAGE:** "You've got to take every 'Charlie's Angels' opportunity that you're given. That's a good lesson in life."



*'A big part of my musical inspiration happened while I was in JAM,' Enongo says. 'I had my first laptop and I'd be in this room making music. This room had such a significance for me. I don't think I fully understood that when I was here.'*



**GIRL POWER:** (Left to right) Montana, Enongo, and Sage strike a 'Charlie's Angels' pose.





**BROTHERHOOD:**  
Tom (left) and  
Tony at DU

## Thir d-fLOOR TOWer r OOM, deLTa UpsiL ON fr aTer NiTY

### Tony Cashen '57 & Tom Eisenbrown '17

*Tony, who now lives in the nearby Kendal at Ithaca retirement community, is a past president of DU; Tom was president in 2015–16. Tony remains a frequent visitor to the house, and he's clearly at home there—fist-bumping one brother as he walks by and casually joking with another.*

**TOM:** "What makes DU special is that it's the most diverse place with the closest brotherhood. Everyone's unique in their own way, but everyone comes together."

*Tony recalls that when he lived there sixty years ago, the drinking age was eighteen, and parties were more centered in the house than in Collegetown.*

**TONY:** "The whole social life is a lot different now. It used to be you couldn't have ladies in the house unless there was a chaperone. The whole social context of this age group has changed tremendously."

**TOM:** "If anything, I'm the chaperone in this house."

*Tony asks Tom if the brothers still use the third-floor sleeping porch, which was a coveted spot in his day; Tom says no.*

**TONY:** "You used to have to be invited to sleep on the porch. There was a club, with membership."

**TOM:** "Recently we had an alum come back for Homecoming. The alumni suite was occupied, so he asked if he could sleep out on the porch. We were like, 'Sure, why not?' "

*'Running a house is a difficult challenge,' Tony observes. 'I would say that if you can get a crowd of young men to follow you if you're not writing a paycheck, you'll be a great leader when you are writing one.'*

