

# RICE AT LARGE

Engaging with Houston communities.



**JENNIFER LATSON,**  
AUTHOR OF "THE  
BOY WHO LOVED  
TOO MUCH," A  
BOOK ABOUT  
A BOY WHOSE  
GENETIC DISOR-  
DER LEADS HIM TO  
LOVE AND TRUST  
EVERYONE.

## 'THE BOY WHO LOVED TOO MUCH'

**Jennifer Latson spent three years of immersive reporting to tell the poignant story of a boy's coming-of-age complicated by Williams syndrome, a genetic disorder that makes people biologically incapable of distrust.**

Latson, who works as an editor for Rice's Jones Graduate School of Business, talked about her first book, "The Boy Who Loved Too Much: A True Story of Pathological Friendliness," to a group of students, staff, faculty and members of the community Sept. 19 at Farnsworth Pavilion.

"When I first heard a report about Williams syndrome, I gleaned that these people are unconditionally loving, trusting and are nice to everyone," Latson said. "And I really did think, 'Why is this even a disorder?' and also, as an intro-

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## YOUNG STUDENTS GET A JUMP! ON MUSIC

**Caen Thomason-Redus '99 was seeking his master's in flute performance at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, when he decided that he wanted to start a musical program that would reach students in the underserved schools of Houston.**


Thomason-Redus applied for a community-service grant offered by Rice, received \$1,000 and enlisted the help of his fellow music students to create, in 1998, the Woodwind Chamber Music Outreach Program. "We wanted to create a musical experience that was fun and would inspire young students to imagine the possibilities for their own future," said Thomason-Redus, a senior director of community and learning at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and a freelance flutist.

The program he established eventually became JUMP! (Just For U Music Program). Student-run and faculty-mentored, JUMP! has become so popular that music students vie to become its program coordinator. "I decided to

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# JENNI LATSON

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“When I first heard a report about Williams syndrome, I gleaned that these people are unconditionally loving, trusting and are nice to everyone. And I really did think, ‘Why is this even a disorder?’”

— JENNI LATSON

vert, I wanted to know how I could get some of that.”

The story follows Eli and his mother, Gayle, who must decide whether to shield Eli entirely from the world or give him the freedom to find his own way. The event, hosted by Multicultural Community Relations in the Office of Public Affairs, featured a question and answer format between Latson and David D. Medina (included here), director of Multicultural Community Relations in Public Affairs.

**DM: What is Williams syndrome?**

**JL:** It’s a random genetic deletion that about 30,000 Americans have. It has such a wide-range of effects that it has been fascinating for geneticists to work with. They have personality characteristics of being very open, kind and generous. They have certain common health problems, including a serious heart condition. And they have intellectual disabilities. Other symptoms are more like gifts. They are musically and verbally gifted and tend to be really good storytellers and conservationists.

**DM: How did you shadow Eli and his mother for three years?**

**JL:** I knew I wanted to write about Williams syndrome as soon as I heard about it. I started going to a lot of Williams syndrome group events and I met Gayle first. When I met with Eli, I fell in love with him. I would explain to people what I was trying to do, which was essentially come to their house to observe and take notes for an undisclosed amount of time. A lot of people didn’t get it or weren’t open to it, but Gayle.

**DM: How did you keep your objectivity spending so much close contact with your subjects?**

**JL:** That was really hard, because there is no way not to interact with Eli, because of his nature. I got a lot of hugs and over time, he came to see me more like a piece of furniture — the novelty wore off. I always had my notebook and would be lurking quietly and the one time I came without my notebook to a family dinner, Eli said, “Oh no, you forgot your little book.”

**DM: What types of research did you pursue for this book?**

**JL:** I met with a lot of geneticists. The insights that geneticists have gained from studying this one disorder are huge and they affect all of us.

**DM: You mention that people with this syndrome have elfish physical characteristics and that literature may have modeled certain characters after people with Williams syndrome, not knowing what it was. Tell us about that.**

**JL:** Yes. Some folklorists believe that before modern medicine, this was a way to explain people who were different. Not only did they physically look alike, fairytale elves are very benevolent, they help people, they are musical, love singing and dancing. A lot of the traits overlap with people who have Williams syndrome.

**DM: Have you kept up with Eli and his mother?**

**JL:** Yes. Eli graduated from high school over the summer and now he is in a vocational training program.

**DM: Tell us about the writing process.**

**JL:** First I had to do the reporting, which was the hard part. I felt like the story kind of told itself, but it did take seven years to write, so I guess it wasn’t an easy process. I was in grad school for the first three years and this was my thesis.

**DM: You attended a Master of Fine Arts program in creative nonfiction writing. Would you recommend that to young writers?**

**JL:** While I don’t think you need that degree to be a strong writer, if I didn’t have that classroom support, structure and feedback, I probably wouldn’t have written this book. ■

— KENDALL SCHOEMANN  
STAFF WRITER  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## SENDING AID TO MEXICO AND PUERTO RICO

**On Sept. 19, 2017, an earthquake in Mexico killed 370 people and injured 6,000. The following day Hurricane Maria thundered through Puerto Rico, leaving half of the island's 3 million residents without power.**

The back-to-back natural disasters spurred Rice University's Latin American Graduate Student Association (LAGSA) to hold a fundraiser Oct. 19. The group collected \$3,322 for victims in both countries.

Physics graduate student Eduardo Ibarra García Padilla was in class, when he began receiving text messages and phone calls from Mexico. His parents, his brother, even previous co-workers, were all letting him know that they were safe. Safe from what, he didn't yet know.

"A few minutes later, I saw in disbelief the videos that my family and friends sent me of buildings collapsing during this earthquake," García Padilla said. "That same afternoon, another Rice friend from Mexico City and I recognized the cruel 'joke' that the 1985 earthquake, which also caused severe damage in Mexico, happened Sept. 19 — 32 years ago to the day," said García Padilla. "The earthquake felt like such an event for my generation, and I cannot convey with words the frustration that all of us living abroad felt because of not being able to be present and respond in the way any caring citizen would."

The next morning, he contacted his fellow LAGSA members and told them he wanted to organize a fundraiser. "Even though we are hundreds of miles away," García Padilla said, "we could still do our part and send help from Rice." And when news of Puerto Rico's devastation reached Houston, LAGSA, which represents graduate students from all parts of Latin America, saw fit to raise funds for the island's hurricane victims at the same time.



**COMPASSIONATE CONNECTIONS:** Rice graduate students collected funds for the victims of both the recent Mexican earthquake and Hurricane Maria that devastated Puerto Rico.

Their plan was to organize a taco night at Valhalla, the graduate student bar, with all proceeds going to Mexico and Puerto Rico.

"For this task, students from different backgrounds came together," García Padilla said. "It was not just students with strong roots in Latin America, but also students from different backgrounds who empathized with the cause and were willing to help."

Members of the Society of Latino Alumni of Rice (SOLAR) helped to spread news of the fundraiser in Houston's Latin American community, and that night at Valhalla, hungry graduate students and sympathetic supporters gobbled the tacos down — many throwing in extra donations as they ate.

Afterward, LAGSA teamed up with Luis Duno-Gottberg, associate professor and chair of the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, who also had helped to raise funds for earthquake victims through the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy's Mexico Center. "We decided to join our efforts and split in half the total money raised for both causes," García Padilla said.

Funds for Mexico went to InfraRural, a nongovernmental organization building houses for one of the poorest communities in

Puebla, one of the states that was severely affected. Funds for Puerto Rico were sent by Duno-Gottberg to Casa Pueblo, an organization dedicated to community empowerment and the protection of natural and cultural resources, and also to Organización PRO Ambiente Sustentable, an environmental organization that focuses on education and management of sustainable resources.

"The event brought together the Latin American community on campus," said García Padilla, "but more importantly it allowed for meaningful interactions among students, faculty and staff who joined forces to support the people of Mexico and Puerto Rico in the wake of the disasters." He counts the fundraiser among the many acts of goodwill on campus in a year defined by both catastrophe and generosity.

"For the few months I've been here at Rice," García Padilla said, "I've had the pleasure to see how the community demonstrates that Rice is not only a place with high academic standards, but also a university with great human values." ■

— **KATHARINE SHILCUTT**  
MEDIA RELATIONS SPECIALIST  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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— **GARCÍA PADILLA**



## JUMP!

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join JUMP! because I knew it was a highly respected and developed program that would give me the experience of organizing outreach concerts alongside amazing mentors," said Rachel Mooers, the current program coordinator and a second-year master's student in viola performance. "Educational outreach is a deep passion of mine and something I hope to continue my entire life."

JUMP! offers three concerts a semester free of charge: one at a local school and two at Rice's Shepherd School of Music. Each concert has an educational theme that is developed by the student coordinator. Last semester, Mooers put together a "musical invitation" theme because she believes that live performances are an invitation to the audience to experience the music and the emotions and sensations it creates in people.



**ORCHESTRATING THE EXPERIENCE:** From left to right, Rachel Buchman, Rachel Mooers and Janet Rarick manage the musical program JUMP!

"It was important to me that we designed the programs and performances in a way that encouraged the kids to learn how to process and engage with sound," Mooers said. She wants the children to explore the movement, emotions and stories that sound elicits.

In preparing for the concert, Mooers always consults with Rachel Buchman, a lecturer in music and head of the

Young Children's Division in the Michael P. Hammond Preparatory Program at the Shepherd School. An expert on how to present music to children and what materials are appropriate for each age, Buchman coaches all the JUMP! coordinators and performers for every concert.

"Rachel has an amazing ability to get inside a kid's brain," Mooers said. "Her ideas on how to engage the children and how to get

performers excited to engage with the children is contagious and amazingly inspirational."

When JUMP! members perform at a school, they avoid performing on a stage and instead play in the cafeteria or library — a space that allows children to get close to the musicians and to the music. "It makes the interaction more effective. They can see and are almost in the music, in a sense," said Janet Rarick, the director of JUMP! and an associate professor of music career development at Rice, where she coaches chamber music and is program administrator for the music career and skills course group.

A typical JUMP! concert will feature one or two chamber groups of about eight Shepherd School students. They start the program with the introduction of the musicians and the instruments they play. The students talk about how their instruments work, what they are made of, the type of music the instruments create

**ALL EARS:** Students enjoy a JUMP! concert at their school.





**“I like the idea that the young students who we are serving have an exposure to classical music, learn how to appreciate it and learn how this wonderful art form connects to their lives,” Rarick said. “I want them to be inspired.”**

and what led them to choose their instruments. They teach the children how to listen to the music and ask them what emotions the music might evoke.

“It’s basically deconstructing the music in a way that when the performers play through the whole movement, the children really have a kind of road map of what to listen for,” Rarick explained. “But in creating the road map, we always try to get their input into what they hear or how they are responding, such as sensing a spooky sound, or does the sound make them feel like getting up and running around the room.”

The concerts also include singing. At one performance, a Rice opera student asked the children what was their favorite fast-food eatery, and when they responded McDonald’s, he ordered a Big Mac in the style of a Mozart aria.

When the students come to Rice for a concert, they are sometimes given a tour of the campus with the help of Rice’s Welcome Center. So JUMP! is not only teaching students about music, but it is also encouraging students to stay in school and go to college.

As director of JUMP!, Rarick is responsible for working with the student coordinator and deciding at which schools JUMP! will perform. Some of those schools have included Bruce Elementary, MacGregor Elementary, Collins Elementary, Project Chrysalis Middle School and James Madison

**INSTRUMENTAL ENGAGEMENT:**

Rice Shepherd School students play their instruments, while teaching the value of classical music to elementary school students.

High School. Most of the concerts have an audience of about 80 students. Rarick said she prefers to select schools in which the parents don’t have the means to take their children to concerts or where the school doesn’t have the funds for music enrichment.

“I like the idea that the young students who we are serving have an exposure to classical music, learn how to appreciate it and learn how this wonderful art form connects to their lives,” Rarick said. “I want them to be inspired.”

For Sidnie Ituen, a fifth grader from Collins Elementary, the JUMP! concert was indeed inspiring. “I really liked that we learned about different instruments. It made me think about all the different instruments that I can choose to play.”

Rice music students also benefit from JUMP! concerts. Although they are volunteering because they want to give back to the community, they are playing for an audience that is uncritical and tremendously appreciates their performance.

“It really makes a difference in how they see their work,” said Rarick. “They see the relevance of their music and the possibilities that exist for them with music in our society.”

**— DAVID D. MEDINA**  
MULTICULTURAL  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
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## THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING HOUSTON: FLOOD PREVENTION

**“We’re not going to prevent the rain from falling again,” said Harris County Judge Ed Emmett ‘71 at the Urban Flooding and Infrastructure: Moving Forward From Harvey conference. The two-day event was hosted by the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disaster (SSPEED) Center at Rice University Feb. 21–22.**

“We don’t have any control over that. But what can we do to mitigate it?” he asked. “What can we do to make people safer? Pretty soon we have to make a decision and move forward. We have to say, at all levels, flood prevention and flood mitigation are job one — the most important issue we’re facing.”

More than 200 academics, engineers and concerned citizens attended the conference, which featured a variety of speakers from The Netherlands, top academic institutions, engineering companies and representatives from the community.

U.S. representatives Ted Poe and Michael McCaul attended the event, which was covered by various media outlets, including the Houston Chronicle, Texas Tribune, Houston Public Media and KTRK- ABC News.

“We are pleased with the quality and interest in the conference,” said Phil Bedient, director of SSPEED. “Hurricane Harvey taught Houston that urban flooding should be the most important issue for the city if we are going to continue being a thriving place for commerce and community.”

The first day of the conference included discussions on the changing floodplain, communicating risk to the public, urban design for flood protec-

tion and urban flood policy. The discussions were followed by a reception in which posters were presented on engineering principals and modeling surrounding severe storms. Judges rated the 15 different presentations, awarding Carl Bernier, a graduate student in civil and environmental engineering, with a first place win. Second place was awarded to Amin Kiaghadi, a research assistant at the University of Houston.

The second-day sessions focused on communicating flood risk to the public. The talk, given by Jerry Cotter, chief of water resources from the Army Corps of Engineers, was particularly inspiring as he addressed flooding in Texas. There were also critical presentations led by Jim Blackburn, co-director of SSPEED and professor in the practice in environmental law, and Rob Rogers, the founder of ROGERS PARTNERS Architects + Urban Designers.

The afternoon sessions were organized into smaller groups that discussed flood warning systems, coastal infrastructure impacts, land use issues and water quality. The conference concluded with a keynote address by Roy Wright, FEMA’s deputy associate administrator for insurance and mitigation.

“I enjoyed attending a conference with such a unique combination of academics, city planners, government representatives, citizens and engineers,” said Nick Irza, an engineer at Walter P. Moore and Associates. “It was great to get a variety of perspectives on urban flooding and how we can increase the resiliency of Houston moving forward.” ■

— JILL W. NESTING

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT  
SSPEED CENTER

## A HISTORY OF HOUSTON’S TRANSPORTATION

**“Power Moves: Transportation, Politics, and Development in Houston” (University of Texas Press, 2017) by Kyle Shelton, the director of strategic partnerships and a fellow at Rice’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research, is a social and political history of Houston’s transportation decision-making and how those decisions shaped the city.**

The book covers the growth of highways after World War II and the debates about the building of public transportation starting in the 1970s. Each chapter delves into a different element of Houston’s transportation past — from the building of Interstate 10 through the Fifth Ward to the creation of the toll roads in the 1980s. Within each of these topics, Shelton looks at how residents understood the debates around transportation infrastructure and how they were able to participate in the process of shaping it.

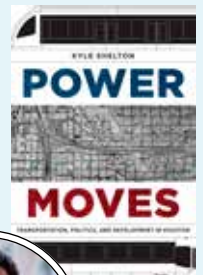
“Everyone moves each day or relies on the mobility of goods and services,” Shelton said. “So this is a system that’s crucial to the functioning of a city. The way Houston’s infrastructure was built enabled a particular brand of growth.” The decisions made around these transportation systems are incredibly formative to the structure of cities.

“There’s no doubt that highways were a crucial underpinning to the city and the region’s residential form and expansion into the suburbs,” he said. “They were built to both encourage outward growth and connect suburban commuters to the city.”

However, the Houston area faces a number of challenges because of previous choices, such as the disruption of key communities for highway space and the encouragement of auto-based growth versus public transportation, walking and biking, Shelton said. Those choices were made as city officials faced enormous pressure from citizens who wanted to drive. Shelton said that people need to have a voice in the conversation about development.

“While conversations about infrastructure have always been part of the daily discourse of Houstonians, they are not elevated enough,” Shelton said. “Houston has spent billions of dollars shaping our system of infrastructure, and the decisions made can last for 40 to 60 years. Most of how we talk about transportation orbits around individual experiences. For example, the need to get out of traffic has been a constant refrain since the 1950s, but the choices are creating huge macro issues — everything from economic development to the way residents experience our city. I think we need more and broader-ranging, inclusive discussions about how our transportation system shapes Houston and each of our lives and where we want it to go.”

Shelton was motivated to write the book because of the lack of work devoted to the history of Houston’s transportation systems, relative to peer cities. “Houston is one of the most important cities in the country, and while there are numerous scholars working on the history of civil rights and the environment and a number of economic and business histories, there is little other work,” Shelton said. “My book adds to the published material about Houston’s history and brings other crucial topics — infrastructure and transportation — to the fore.” ■



Kyle Shelton

— AMY MCCAIG

SENIOR MEDIA RELATIONS SPECIALIST  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS



# MANIA FOR MATHEMATICS AND BASKETBALL

**More than 4,000 students from seven area school districts clapped, cheered and computed mathematical equations during a men's basketball game at Rice University's Tudor Fieldhouse.**

Sponsored by Rice Athletics, the annual School House Mania provides learning opportunities for local students. At the game, the students were deafening as they cheered on Rice and St. Edward's University. Before the game, the students and their teachers participated in educational activities that were presented by the Rice University School Mathematics Project (RUSMP).

RUSMP staff and their student assistants together with a faculty member from the Rice mathematics department and a Rice

engineering alumna helped students and teachers during these activities.

RUSMP welcomed the students to Rice by presenting a slideshow that spotlighted the mathematics that could be found on the university campus. Students then participated in the game "Sammy Says," a version of the game "Simon Says," in which students followed directions given by Sammy, the mascot of the Rice Owls. In this game, students demonstrated their knowledge of computation and geometric terms by physically modeling the answers.

While the basketball teams warmed up, the students were given mathematical clues to determine the jersey numbers for members of the Owls team. The teachers, as well as the basketball



**A FORMULA FOR FUN:** Houston students enjoy a Rice basketball game while learning about mathematics.

players, were elated when the students yelled the correct jersey numbers.

In another activity, RUSMP used real-world objects to describe translations, reflections and rotations. After a brief review of these transformations, the students and teachers danced to the Transformation Shuffle and rocked the stands. The students were then led on a tour of Houston through a slideshow, in which students answered questions related to science and mathematics.

RUSMP concluded its presentation by having students estimate the time it would take to complete "the wave" in Tudor Fieldhouse. As the wave traveled around the fieldhouse, the students stood, yelled and raised their arms for 10 seconds. During game breaks, students answered trivia questions about real-world situations.

RUSMP has been extending

Rice's reach and impact in preK-12 education since 1987 and is helping to shape the future of Houston by providing high-quality support for precollege institutions across the state. RUSMP continues to be the primary catalyst of sustained, progressive change in education in Houston and across Texas with its numerous programs for leaders, teachers and students and through its support to schools and school districts.

This is RUSMP's fourth year to collaborate with the Athletics Department on the event. ■

— **SUSAN TROUTMAN**  
DIRECTOR OF  
SECONDARY PROGRAMS

— **CAROLYN L. WHITE**  
DIRECTOR OF  
ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS  
RUSMP



**JUST THE RIGHT ANGLE:** Students show their knowledge about geometric terms before the start of the Rice basketball game.





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# RICE AT LARGE

FROM THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AT RICE UNIVERSITY  
**DAVID D. MEDINA**, DIRECTOR, MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY  
 RELATIONS, OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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**RICE AT LARGE** is a quarterly newsletter that showcases the university's outreach programs. Each issue of the newsletter includes a series of stories that raise the awareness of Rice's engagement with the city and beyond. Rice At Large has a circulation of 2,500 and is sent to members of the Rice and Houston communities, including alumni, educators, business and political leaders, program funders and others with whom the university would like to engage.