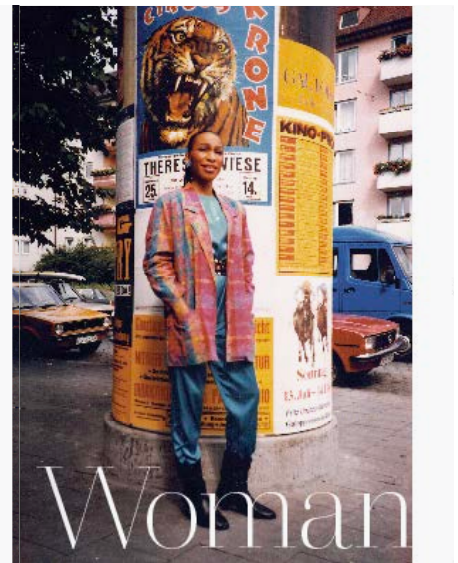


THE TAMARA JOHNSON STORY

Thank you for the wonderful profile of Tamara Johnson '73 ("A Glorious Woman," Spring 2022), the earliest known trans person to transition in the College's community. Her life was more than her transgender status, so I appreciate that the article presented the reporting challenges of tracking down and relating the story of someone who marked herself more in people's hearts than in public records.

It was especially moving for me to hear about her story, as I am also a transgender alumna. I didn't come out until over a quarter century after graduation. My Amherst experience had very little to do with either keeping myself closeted or accepting myself—my own internal safeguards, and the terrors of facing the tortuous, misogynistic protocols for transitioning trans women, until very recently, did the job well enough.

Amherst provided me with a very sweet experience in the tension-fraught time after coming out: Just as Tamara did, I wrote to the College asking that my records be changed to reflect my correct name and gender. Amherst (for a small fee) reissued a diploma, in my proper name, so that I could once again hang it in my office without sparking conversations each time someone new saw it. The College didn't track down Peter Pouncey for



the re-signature—Biddy Martin's more than sufficed—but it was still a tender offering that made my own renewal even more meaningful.

The more we hear about our ancestors-by-affiliation, the richer all of our own transitions become, whether of orientation and identity, or philosophy and worldview. Thanks again for the article.

JOY WILLIAMS '88
Bath, N.Y.

I have been a resident of Amherst since 1983. Many years ago, I tried to reestablish contact with a high school friend who, I assumed, had graduated from Amherst. After contacting the alumni office, I received a call back from someone who shared a piece of information in a way that respected the boundary of professional ethics. I learned little about how this friend's life had unfolded.

Thank you for writing about the life of that friend, Raffaella Tamara Johnson '73. I appreciated how her intelligence, beauty, talent and zest for living was depicted in the article. As I read, I was reminded of how her razor-sharp wit, delivered in a nonchalant manner, could get to the heart of many sensitive issues. Our

"The more we hear about our ancestors, the richer all of our own transitions become."

frank discussions about how race impacted our growing up are a part of my being.

Tamara Johnson helped to make this world a better place.

RHONDA FRANKEL-FEIN
Amherst, Mass.

Thank you for your profile of the late Tamara Johnson '73, who was a classmate of mine. I regret not having gotten to know her during those years—we traveled in different circles, and I do not think we had any classes together. But I recall vividly an evening during freshman orientation when my appointment with our mutual adviser, Reginald French (which was held in a dining hall, of all places), followed hers. Given these logistics, I witnessed the last several minutes of her interaction with Professor French, who was visibly impressed by her energy, confidence and facility in his area of expertise, Romance languages. I was impressed as well, but, feeling at that stage of development a need to be "cool," did not say anything to her.

I knew that Tamara had died some years ago, but was not aware until quite recently that she was trans. Your article showed well what

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courage and strength she displayed in pursuing and living as her true self, and how she was able to live with joy and integrity.

Thank you for shining a light. *Terras Irradiant!*

CHARLES P. "TOPPER" ROTH '73
East Orleans, Mass.

This devastating story of a brilliant light extinguished before its time will haunt me forever.

JIM BENDER '61
Klamath Falls, Ore.

ONE OF THE BEST

Kudos to the staff of *Amherst* for the Spring 2022 issue—one of the best ever, in my opinion. Katharine Whittemore's cover story on the remarkable life of Tamara Johnson '73 was extraordinary. It taught me something important about the Amherst of the early 1970s that, as a clueless freshman in 1972–73, I was completely unaware of at the time.

I also enjoyed the engaging account by Tess Taylor '99 of the course she took in the spring of 1998 on "The Grammar of English." It reminded me of the lifelong impact of a similarly technical French department course I took my sophomore year: "Phonetics and Prosody," taught by Mme. Watkins. Among other things, the course was an en-

"This story of a brilliant light extinguished before its time will haunt me forever."



THE PEOPLE IN THE PHOTOS

Thank you to all the readers who identified (from left) Joyce Chow '97 and Edward Chang '97 as the "Step Sitters" in the Spring 2022 issue and Cynthia Horan (Mount Holyoke '69) and Bill Hastie '68 in the "In Fashion" photo.

counter with the biomechanics of French pronunciation. After four years of high school French and a couple of Amherst French literature courses, I was finally learning exactly how to form my mouth and place my tongue to achieve those elusive French sounds with confidence and precision (an incredibly empowering skill that served me well, a few years later, while living in Paris). And although it was the last French course I took at Amherst, to this day I still remember passages from the poem ("Barbara," by Jacques Prévert) that I chose for the dramatic recitation from memory that was our final class project.

ROBERT HOWARD '76
Newton, Mass.

IMPRESSIVE JOURNALISM

Usually when a new issue of *Amherst* arrives in the mailbox, I take a few minutes to review the class notes but glance at any of the other pages in a manner that I'll generously call random. When the Spring 2022 issue arrived, however, I immediately read two pieces in it: the delightful one by Tess Taylor '99 about the class in grammar and sentence diagramming, and Katharine Whittemore's piece about Tamara Johnson '73.

If Michele Barale and Chick Chickering had offered that grammar class when I was at Amherst, I would have eaten it up with a large spoon. As for the piece about Tamara: Thank you deeply for Ms.

Whittemore's article, which I think gives clear, thoroughly developed insights into something that I knew approximately nothing at all about when I was at Amherst. Exchanges with other alumni suggest I am not alone in this sentiment. Your careful, extensive use of sources who knew Tamara well—including Ted Lenox '73, whom I met in Nashville when I had graduated from Amherst and Ted was about to matriculate—is impressive journalism.

I also am sure I'm not the only member of the class of '68 to be gladdened and moved by your mention of our classmate Harold Wade, who, like Tamara Johnson, graduated from Andrew Jackson High School. Harold's sudden, heartbreaking death, only a few years after Amherst, remains an enormous loss. We—all his acquaintances and Amherst itself—would have benefited endlessly from what more he would have done to insist, over and over, on attention to the feelings and needs of minorities and other marginalized people.

JOHN STIFLER '68
Florence, Mass.

CORRECTION

The Spring 2022 cover story incorrectly stated that Ted Lenox '73 studied in France at the same time as his friend Tamara Johnson '73. It is another friend, Harold McCray '73, who was there that year, and who spoke to the magazine about Johnson's time in France.

MORE ON TAMARA JOHNSON '73

I was so pleased to read about Tamara Johnson '73 in your Spring 2022 issue. What a bold, brave, talented person she was. Though the gay liberation movement had begun to expand possibilities for gender and sexual freedom during her time at Amherst, it could not have been easy to be so out and proud at the College, and as a student of color to boot.

Thank you to Katharine Whittemore, who, in telling Johnson's story, did not shy away from mentioning the great personal price Johnson paid to be unapologetically queer at Amherst, and the homophobia (and transphobia) she endured there. But how nice to learn that Norman Birnbaum, who was once my professor, too, was an ally, along with others.

I only wish I had known Johnson's story, and the stories of other LGBTQI alumni, when I arrived at Amherst several years later. I hope and trust that today's Amherst students have greater access to information about the hidden history of sexual and gender diversity at the College and beyond.

ARLENE STEIN '80
Jersey City, N.J.

My thanks to Katharine Whittemore for her superb piece on Tamara Johnson. I couldn't help but feel

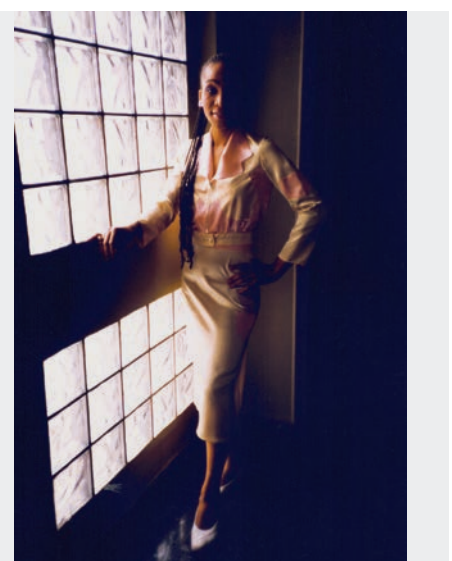
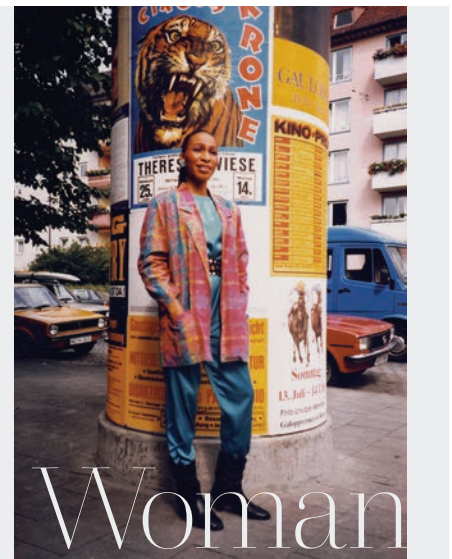
sad, however, to realize that while I was her classmate—and sang in the same section (first tenor) in the Glee Club—I never allowed myself to get to know her. I've no doubt my own discomfort provided the excuse I wanted to keep a distance from someone who seemed different. I regret this. I know now the role fear plays in keeping people apart, people who have much to learn from each other. This too ought to be part

"I couldn't help but feel sad to realize that I never allowed myself to get to know her."

of an Amherst education. Honoring Tamara's memory, for me, will be allowing myself to keep on learning, and to have a high regard for those who, like her, are being authentic and fully human.

PETER S. BUEHLER '73
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Your very thoughtful story about Tamara Johnson reflects some of the ways times have changed at the



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College. Your article got me remembering the ways that Tamara and some of her classmates challenged Amherst's traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Many of us were not ready.

In the mid-1980s I was the project manager for the *Amherst Biographical Record*, a compendium of biographical data for each Amherst alum. One day I received a call from a transgender alum from the mid-1960s who asked that the name she currently used be listed in the book. After running it up the flagpole, the answer came back an emphatic *no*. I do not remember the policy for alumni who assumed a spouse's last name or who changed their names to reflect religious conversions. I suspect we were inconsistent.

Thank you for shining a light on this talented, courageous woman.

RICHARD AMMONS '74
Durham, N.C.



TERRAS IRRADIANT!

Facebook fans loved this photo of a late-summer thunderstorm over the Holyoke Range. "After my four years, I know that mountain line like the back of my hand," wrote Stevens Miller '80. "But I never saw anything like that."

THE DOTS
WERE
ALL THERE.
WE JUST
COULDN'T



CONNECT
THEM.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS

The College's LinkedIn and Facebook followers responded to three recent magazine features, "The Dots Were All There. We Just Couldn't Connect Them" (Summer 2022), in which journalist Michele Berdy '78 recounted her escape from Russia; "Grammar School" (Spring 2022), by Tess Taylor '00, who recalled a course taught by Chick Chickering and Michele Barale; and "A Glorious Woman" (Spring 2022), about Tamara Johnson '73, the first known trans graduate of Amherst. Read all three stories at amherst.edu/magazine.

The Dots Were All There. We Just Couldn't Connect Them.

JAYSON PAUL '16: Incredible story. Glad Michele made it out safely.

Grammar School

DEREK A.R. MOORE '78: What a lovely piece! An excellent concept for an essay, and beautifully done. And what a delight to read about Professor Chickering! To know that he was applying his genially exacting method with such impact in 1998, more than 20 years after I had a course in medieval lyric poetry with him in the fall of 1975, left me in awe of that extraordinary teacher all over again.

AMANDA WEISS '97: What a beautiful remembrance of this course, which I, too, so loved!

PETER ELLIOTT '98: I remember this class so well, and it has formed such an impact on how I teach English. Excellent essay.

A Glorious Woman

GARY HUDSON '87: One of the best articles I've read in the Amherst mag—and beyond.

HANNA CAMPBELL '07: This was an incredible read. Thank you for sharing her story with us.