Those who came of age between 1975 and 1985 were left to deal with the aftershocks of Vietnam and Watergate. The electorate did so by choosing first Jimmy Carter and then Ronald Reagan, presidents with contrasting, if not downright antithetical, visions of governing. The electorate also let Geraldine Ferraro know that she could be the first female vice-presidential nominee but not the first female vice president.

Leftover from the previous decade were remnants of the counterculture, but were Yuppies emerging with personal upward mobility in mind. In the spirit of the Valley Girls, both Michael Jackson and Madonna decided to “get a new life” by creating whole new personas. We dressed for success, displayed our national pride during the Bicentennial celebrations, and played Trivial Pursuit. “Saturday Night Live” led us to laugh, not march in protest. Saturday Night Fever showed us how to lose our troubles at the discos.

But we didn’t lose them all. We were shaken by the attempt on President Reagan’s life; predictably for this decade, John Hinkley’s motives were personal, not political. For many whose heroes came from a prior era, John Lennon’s assassination was devastating. Sports stepped in to provide other heroes. Carlton Fisk’s dramatic Game 6 home run ended the 1975 World Series, and the U.S. Hockey Team achieved the “Miracle on Ice” in 1980. At the movies, Star Wars and E.T. took us out of this world, leaving us startled when the threat of meltdown at Three Mile Island brought us back to earth. MTV became a TV phenomenon, but all-time TV viewership went to Alex Haley’s historical miniseries, Roots.

By the end of the decade, sheer numbers were forcing the country to acknowledge the existence of a major health threat, AIDS. In the media, CNN and USA Today had created whole new audiences. Forward-looking students at the University of Hartford were purchasing their first personal computers and collecting compact discs.

The impact and aftermath of this decade led us to wonder whatever happened to…?
WHATSOEVER HAPPENED TO…?

Beginning with the next issue of The Observer, Julie Jansen ‘81 will succeed Paul D. Tieger ‘73, ‘83, as interviewer and writer of our feature “Whatever Happened to…?” Moving beyond the 1965–75 decade, Jansen will interview University alumni from the 1975–85 decade. By way of introduction, Jansen herself is interviewed here by Michelle Godin ’00 of The Observer staff.

MG: When were you at the University and what was your major?
JJ: I graduated in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in mass communications.

MG: Were you very involved in University activities while you were here?
JJ: I was very involved. I served as a resident assistant in Roth Dorm, an Orientation advisor, academic vice president and communications vice president of the Student Association, and Winter Carnival queen.

MG: What was your greatest achievement in college?
JJ: Paying for 100 percent of my education and graduating! I always made a difference in at least one person’s life, if not more than one. I enjoy the recognition, and I meet a gazillion people. I’ve learned so much about companies, industries, and business overall.

MG: Your first book is being published by Penguin. Have you decided on a title, and can we expect more books to follow?
JJ: Tentatively, the book is called I Don’t Know What I Want, But I Know It’s Not This: A Guide for Finding Gratifying Work for the Rest of Your Life. It’s very likely that I'll write another book. However, I intend to put all of my energy into publicizing this one first. The publication date has been delayed until January 2003. Because of the events of Sept. 11, the media will be focusing on tributes this September. My book is going to be dependent on media exposure, so it’s probably a good idea to delay publication.

MG: What persuaded you to be an alum reporter for The Observer?
JJ: It’s a fun opportunity to reconnect with people and contribute to the University. Also, Paul Tieger asked me to.

MG: Who had the greatest influence on you during this time?
JJ: Tom Donohue, Roger Desmond, Harvey Jassem, Theresa Tracey, my friends, and that nice teacher, Jim Keener, in television production. My teachers were passionate and committed. They knew their stuff, and that has stayed with me.

MG: What’s the most important thing you learned in college?
JJ: How to be a leader and how to be a survivor. My brother died of cancer in the beginning of my sophomore year, and that made concentrating very difficult.

MG: How to be a leader and how to be a survivor. My brother died of cancer in the beginning of my sophomore year, and that made concentrating very difficult.
JJ: Absolutely! I learned to deal with change and difficulty. I learned the importance of learning and growing, and I gained confidence so that I could believe I can do anything I set out to do.

MG: At the time that you graduated, what did you think your life’s work would be?
JJ: I always wanted to work in broadcasting and I did for a few years. I worked at WFSB-TV in Hartford as a research analyst and at WTIC-AM as a copywriter. I didn’t remain in the field for too long because of circumstances and fit. I always assumed my work would involve people and writing.

MG: Since graduating, you’ve worked in broadcasting, outplacement coaching, career management, training, and recruiting. What do you like best about your current career as a corporate speaker?
JJ: I always make a difference in at least one person’s life, if not more than one. I enjoy the recognition, and I meet a gazillion people. I’ve learned so much about companies, industries, and business overall.

MG: What would you say was the most exciting thing that happened on campus while you were attending the University of Hartford?
JJ: I know this may sound weird, but it was the collapse of the Hartford Civic Center roof. I was a freshman or sophomore and had been there the night before at a Hawks basketball game. I have never seen a sight like the insulation that was all over the city of Hartford. The most important part of the incident was the realization that although no one was killed or injured, life is fleeting. Of course, this doesn’t compare to recent events, but nevertheless, it made an impact on me.

Little-known facts about Jansen

She attended three high schools.

Networking is a way of life for her, the way she solves problems and overcomes obstacles. She has 1,300 active names in her Act! database.

She was adopted and found her birth mother when she was 25.