The decade between 1965 and 1975 was nothing if not volatile. The counterculture had begun and flourished. Seismic events like protests over the Vietnam War, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., Kent State, and Woodstock had a big impact on many University of Hartford students. Which led me to wonder...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Joel GOTLIER?

by Paul D. Tieger ’73, ’83

Create your dreams; they’ll come true.
In college he had diverse interests—from writing poetry to playing baseball—and kept a low profile. But since leaving UofH in 1969, Joel Gotler has become a force in Hollywood as one of the country's leading literary agents.

PDT: When were you at UofH, and what was your major?

JG: From 1965 to 1969....I started out in business, then switched to liberal arts with a concentration in speech and drama.

PDT: When you graduated, what did you think you'd end up doing for work?

JG: I thought I'd be a writer or a poet. I was writing prose and poetry and produced an off-Broadway play called *Only the Flowers Smile, Children*. OK, it was way off-Broadway: it ran at Trinity College.

PDT: Who were some of the people who had the most influence on you during that time?

JG: Two that come to mind are George Michael Evica and Lee Yosha.... Both were fascinating.

PDT: What kinds of activities were you involved in while at UofH?

JG: Well, I actually spent a lot of time hanging out in the Student Union, listening to the Beatles and working in the Theatre Department. But I also was in TKE [Tau Kappa Epsilon], played baseball, and had a lot of fun working on the sports promotion committee with Gordie McCullough.

PDT: What was your greatest achievement in college?

JG: Learning how to make it through four years on $400. It was a challenge, but I became a dorm counselor, borrowed money, got loans from the University, and a few little scholarships here and there.

PDT: So, it's been 31 years since you graduated, and now you're a literary agent. How did that come about?

JG: That's a long story.... but here's the Reader's Digest version. After I graduated, I got a job in the garment industry and wasn't happy, so I dropped out and traveled around Mexico for about a year. My girlfriend suggested I talk to a guy in radio who said I sounded like I should be an agent. After he told me what that was, I walked across the street to the William Morris Agency [WM] and asked for a job. They didn't have any openings, so I started my own agency.

Before long, a job opened up at WM, and I worked there for three and a half years, representing, among other people, Mama Cass Elliot, with whom I became good friends. During the writers' strike in '74, I moved to Hollywood and lived with Cass (tragically, she died two days later). I wrote a script and sold it to Universal, then Paramount. Next, I went to Universal Studios and was made executive assistant to the head of production.

PDT: That sounds like a pretty big jump.

JG: It was. I was only 28—the youngest top executive at Universal. But I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do, when I saw a blind ad in *Variety* for a literary agent. I ended up working for H. N. Swanson, one of the most influential agencies that represented people like Tolkien, Agatha Christie, Elmore Leonard, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Alex Haley. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven! I worked there for four and a half years, and then "Swanie" gave me some money to start my own company, which I ran for 10 years. Then I sold it to a bigger agency and started the Renaissance agency with Irv Swartz. In '94 Renaissance bought H. N. Swanson, and in '95 we bought [Irving] "Swifty" Lazar's agency.

After seven years I sold Renaissance to Michael Ovitz and became CEO of all book publishing and film rights for Ovitz's Artists Management Group, where I'm involved in lots of things, including movie production, music, TV, seven Internet companies, books, and the extreme sports division.

PDT: Who are some of your clients there?

JG: Well, we've got several hundred, including a lot of heavy hitters like Marty Scorcese, Sidney Pollack, Robin Williams, Leonardo DiCaprio, Cameron Diaz,... Michael Crichton, Tom Clancy, and James Ellroy.

PDT: Most people probably think that your life in the entertainment business—life in the "fast lane"—would be very glamorous. Would they be wrong?

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