

ACC News You Should Know



Love Lumberjack Style:
Croze for You



ACC Cross Country
Team First in Nation



Happily Ever After: ACC
Alumna Publishes Novel



Call for ACC Clubs of
the Past

Lumberjack Love Story: Croze for You



Picture the perfect wedding: the flowers, the venue, the vows, the dress—and the ACC men’s and women’s basketball coaches pulling up to your reception hall in a chartered bus.

That was the nuptial reality for one Lumberjack couple, who credit ACC as playing an integral part in their love story.

Mari ('99) & Ben ('98) Croze

It all started with former ACC Dean of Students Max Lindsay, who moonlighted as a high school basketball referee for the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA). Max stood face-to-face with some of Michigan’s most talented high school basketball players and would pass along the names of talented prospects to ACC’s men’s and women’s basketball coaches. After seeing East Tawas’ Mari Klingler ('99) and Grayling’s Ben Croze ('98) play back in the mid-to-late 1990s, Max set the ball rolling on their recruitment to play college basketball for ACC.

Mari and Ben were eventually introduced to each other by a mutual friend who played basketball at Tawas Area High School and would later be Ben’s teammate on the ACC Lumberjacks men’s basketball team. Mari was impressed.

“Our first introduction was very brief, but I remember thinking how nice he seemed -- and he was easy on the eyes,” she shared.

Once at ACC and in the swing of being student athletes, Mari and Ben developed a friendship. The men’s and women’s basketball teams travelled together, so there were lots of long bus rides and activities off the court that helped forge a strong connection between Mari and Ben.

“Being a part of the (ACC) basketball team was like having a second family,” Mari explained.

Both Mari and Ben played two years of college basketball in Alpena and when each graduated—Ben in 1998 and Mari in 1999—they transferred to different four-year universities. In a time before social media and smart phones, the friends weren’t in regular contact. Ben was studying at Olivet, while Mari matriculated at Central Michigan University.

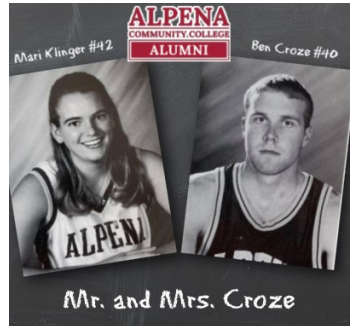
Eventually, their paths crossed again and when they did, Mari said things just clicked. “Having already been friends for a few years, it was very easy and comfortable,” she said, speaking of the way they related. “We then started dating and were engaged in a year and married a year after that!”

Which brings us to the wedding.

Eighteen years ago, on a cold February day, the ACC charter bus pulled up to a reception hall in East Tawas. The newly-minted Mr. and Mrs. Croze had been teased about scheduling their wedding to take place during basketball season, so it was only fitting that bus was there to drop off the couple’s former coaches at ACC: Mike Kollien (then the women’s basketball coach), along with Frank McCourt (the men’s head coach) and Bobby Allen (then the men’s assistant basketball coach). The wedding was a true Lumberjack affair, with five ACC alumni in the wedding party. With the

addition of three Lumberjack coaches at the celebration, the reception hall felt a little like Park Arena.

Ben and Mari now live in Grand Ledge, where Ben is a sales associate for Grand Ledge Ford Lincoln. Mari is the Health and Human Services Director of Operations and Facilities at Lansing Community College. The Crozes are proud parents to two talented children—son Gregory, who is 11, and daughter Paityn, who is nine.

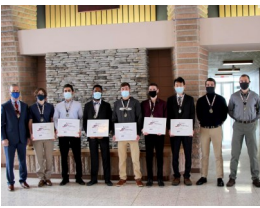


The Crozes' press guide pictures at ACC.

"Both are very active and keep us busy and traveling around the state for sports. This means we spend every anniversary in a gym watching them play basketball, but couldn't picture it any differently," Mari shared.

Could a second generation of Crozes playing basketball for the Lumberjacks at Park Arena be in the cards? Time will tell, but we'll save them seats on the bus.

ACC Cross Country Team Tops All Other Academic All-Americans



2020 ACC Cross Country Team

Alpena Community College is once again outpacing the competition! The ACC cross country team finished their 2020 season with the highest cumulative grade point average (GPA) out of all other junior colleges in the country, earning a 3.85 GPA as a team. The designation as the nation's top academic performers on the community college level came as the team was honored with their sixth consecutive team Academic All-American

designation.

Six Lumberjacks runners were also honored with individual Academic All-American awards: Connor Bagnell, Runi Demirkol, Musa Kabbah, Yuki Nishibashi, Teddy Peters, and Duncan Ross.

Coach Mark Jacobs beamed during a ceremony in ACC's Besser Atrium to honor his team and individual runners as he noted how extraordinary the achievements were in the face of a very challenging year. Students across the nation struggled to adjust to the academic challenge of having classes disrupted, methods of course delivery change, and having to gain the discipline and skills needed to successfully learn at a distance. Student-athletes had the additional challenge of having their seasons disrupted or cancelled, adjusting to new ways of practicing, and being separated from their teammates. The resilience and discipline the ACC cross country team demonstrated this fall is commendable, even without the academic honors they earned.

Now it is the ACC spring sports teams' turn to compete and Lumberjack Nation is behind them 100%.

The men's and women's basketball season, as well as the volleyball and softball seasons, have commenced. Per Michigan Community College Athletic Association guidelines, spectators are not permitted at matches thus far, but ACC will be livestreaming most home games on the ACC [YouTube channel](#).

An exciting addition to this year's men's and women's basketball games is commentary provided by ACC Director of Admissions Mike Kollien, who is also a former ACC women's basketball coach, and Director of Alumni Relations Mary Thurston Eagan, who has an extensive background in radio. Mike and Mary will spice up the stream and entertain viewers tuning in to see the Lumberjacks, sponsored by Northland Area Federal Credit Union. The first home game for the Lumberjacks will take place Tuesday, February 23, at 5:30 p.m. when the ACC men's and women's basketball teams will take the court against the mighty Mott Bears.

Happily Ever After: ACC Alumna Publishes Novel



Kristine Leahy

Once upon a time there was a creative kid named Kristine who lived in a tiny town on the edge of a very big lake. Kristine spun simple little stories like a caterpillar spins silk. As she grew older, Kristine retreated to the chrysalis of education to learn how she could knit together her simple stories and grand inspiration into a beautiful creation. After completing her schooling in the tiny town on the very big lake, Kristine was transformed, unfurling her

wings and flying far away to share her stories with the world.

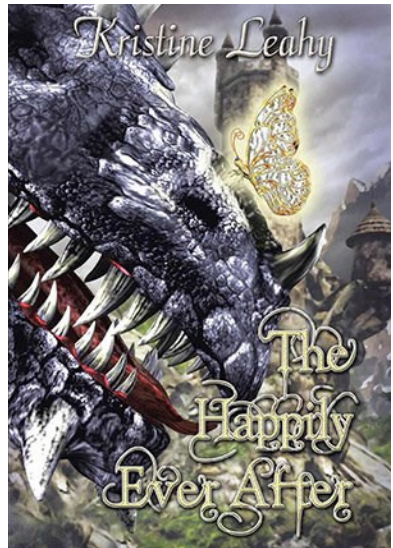
Such is the tale of ACC alumna Kristine Leahy, whose writing career began with a short story about three bunnies outwitting a fox that Kristine read to her kindergarten class and has led to her debut novel, *The Happily Ever After*, being recently published.

Kristine, the daughter of Dan and Paula Welling of Alpena, has always loved fairytales and fantasy literature, but learned to appreciate the depths of those genres while she was a student at Alpena Community College.

“I remember in particular Priscilla Homola's Children's Literature class,” Kristine said, “because it gave me the opportunity to dive deeper into the fairy and folk tales that were already such an integral part of my love for fantasy and in my journey as a writer. It was in her class that I learned they weren't as straightforward and transparent as they seem at first, or as Disney made them; that they dive deep into history and reflect humanity at its worst and its best and are meant to inspire the best.”

Beyond the content of her classes, one of the things Kristine appreciated most about her time at ACC was the access she had to her instructors and how well she got to know them. Priscilla Homola's flair was a quality that Kristine said enhanced the education she got in the classroom.

“I've had just a few teachers over the years that don't fit the mold, that bring their personality with them wherever they go, and Homola was one of them. I found her approachable and warm, and for me this was important in a professor because it made me feel comfortable in class, able to ask any questions without reservation, and creates a learning environment in which I can thrive,” Kristine explained. “Every professor is knowledgeable in their topic, but not every professor is able to connect their students to that topic in an ideal way and is approachable. ACC had a few good professors like that among my classes. Overall, it gave me the confidence I needed to continue schooling in a four-year university where the pace was stepped up a notch. It was a good experience.”



Following her graduation from ACC, Kristine went on to get a bachelor's degree at Colorado Christian University and immediately got a job with Ken Gire, a popular Christian devotional author, doing research for a book chronicling the history of Colorado Christian University.

“He was a great inspiration to me, and a good friend,” Kristine said.

She felt called by God to make writing her career and as any writer knows, the only way to get better at writing is to write. During her time with Ken Gire, Kristine finished a fantasy novel she realized was meant to be part of a trilogy—but not the first book in the trio. (She's still working on the companion novels to her post-graduate opus.)

After her book research gig ended, Kristine took a job leading the children's literature department at a Barnes & Noble bookstore, where she got a great education meeting writers and readers and discovering what worked in the world of publishing.

“I learned the difference between writer's expectations and the reality of the book business, which books sell and which don't, Kristine explained.

Little by little, Kristine's writing began to take a backseat to selling the writing of others until she began to contemplate changing careers.

“It really is a difficult path to follow and took a lot of faith on my part to work at it as long as I did,” Kristine admitted.

Home after giving birth to her son, Donovan, Kristine happened to pick up some of her writing and, reading it with fresh eyes, began to rediscover her passion for the craft. She had come across a page of a story she had started long ago and realized it was time that story was told. It is Kristine's belief that finding that page again—the

beginning of what became *The Happily Ever After*—was providential.

“...Inspiration was incubating from experience, education, those folk and fairy tales and other books I've read—even if I hadn't written anything in a while,” Kristine said. “...it is really like God played his hand.”

Inspiration struck and Kristine began to write. The words just seemed to flow and her main character, Princess Butterfly, grew wings and landed on the page.

The Happily Ever After is a fantasy novel that sees Princess Butterfly held captive by an evil dragon. When handsome Prince Valiant arrives to rescue her, it seems that the story has its happy ending, but Leahy skillfully shows that life doesn't work like that—even in the land of make believe. What follows is plenty of adventure--and some disappointing discoveries about Prince Valiant. Through it all, Princess Butterfly perseveres and fights to return home.

“I was frustrated with the dichotomy between the Disney princess and the feminist characters in books and films meant to dismantle the Disney princess. I wanted something or someone more realistic, between the two seemingly rigid opposites, closer to the tone of the original fairy tales I read growing up, and Butterfly was born.”

Birthing a published novel right after birthing a baby is daunting, but Kristine said the publishing process came even easier than writing the novel.

“The steps and the resources I needed to publish it fell into place like clockwork, every obstacle was erased, and I just kept thinking that God was using this opportunity to keep me on the path he had set for me.”

Now a published novelist, Kristine is already at work on her next project.

“I am currently working on a Christian end-times novel with a futuristic sci-fi twist, but I also have ideas for a sequel to *The Happily Ever After* that I am typing up when I have the time. Life keeps me busy, but to write is to breathe.”

If you're interested in Kristine's work you can [learn more on her website](#) and purchase her book, *The Happily Ever After*, through Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play. It can also be ordered through any local bookstore.

Call for Clubs of the Past



1959 ACC Vets Club

Did you know ACC used to have a fraternity and a sorority? The Lumberjacks had an active veterans club and a debate team, too!

ACC has nearly 70 years of club history—some documented and some not. The Office of Alumni Relations is trying to discover the undocumented ACC club history to better celebrate the rich culture of life on the ACC campus throughout the years.

Much has changed in the world over the past 70 years and life on the ACC campus changed with it. For instance, the Vietnam War resulted in a new generation of veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill, which brought an influx of students to ACC. The Veterans Club helped serve the unique needs of these students and allowed vets to have an easily accessible network of support, long before the invention of the internet and social media.

What clubs and organizations do you remember from your time at ACC? Please reach out to Mary Eagan, the director of alumni relations for ACC, at eaganm@alpenacc.edu or by messaging the [ACC Alumni Facebook page](#) to help document the history of ACC extracurricular activities.

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