Response

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Grace will lead us home

Nikum Pon returns to Cambodia
When you focus on the helpers in a crisis, you see the strength and beauty of a community — a community that remains connected even in a time of social distancing.

Months before China’s first coronavirus case surfaced, I was working on this issue of Response (my first as editor of the publication). I wish I could say I knew it would be important to feature stories of alumni helping in crisis situations around the world, such as our piece on Karen Eubank ’90 who, with her husband, Dave, founded the humanitarian organization Free Burma Rangers. Their organization is helping people suffering in some of the most intense conflict zones in the world.

There is Nikum Pon MEd ’08, who escaped death in Cambodia’s killing fields. Today, he is back in Cambodia sharing the story of God’s protection over his life and planning to build a school there.

I’d like to claim I commissioned an article about Professor of Clinical Psychology Amy Mezulis’ work on trauma recovery, knowing readers would be feeling stressed by the pandemic, but I can’t claim that omniscience. Instead, I believe God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine; He orchestrates things — even the stories in a magazine — to bring us comfort and hope in these unchartered times.

My teens will matriculate from high school in June, either in graduation robes or bathrobes (virtual commencement attire). The world they enter, and the colleges they enroll in, will forever be altered by the impact of the coronavirus, but the mission for people of faith remains the same. Until we one day see our Savior face to face, we are all virtual students — learning remotely, serving others, and, like Professor Gutowsky-Zimmerman, checking in with each other to see how we’re holding up.
Grace will lead us home
Born in the killing fields, Nikum Pon MEd ‘08 returned to Cambodia as an educator

Master of the heritage houses
Msheireb Museums’ director Hafiz Ali Abdulla draws on his background to tell the story of Qatar’s history

Faith on the front lines
Through their organization, Free Burma Rangers, Karen Huesby Eubank ‘90 and her family provide aid to those caught in some of the world’s worst conflict zones
How much do you know about SPU?

BY HEIDI SPECK

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY’S HISTORY?

Email your answers to response@spu.edu by Aug. 30, 2020. If you answer all five questions correctly, we’ll enter your name into a drawing to win an SPU sweatshirt.

1. What was the class gift of 1971?

2. In what year was the Girls’ Hall, also known as the “Young Ladies Hall,” completed?

3. Who designed the concrete panels on Demaray Hall clock tower?

4. In what year was the first issue of The Falcon, the University’s student newspaper, published?

5. In what year was “Seattle Pacific College” renamed “Seattle Pacific University”?

Want to contribute to the SPU Archives?
If you have Seattle Pacific artifacts, keepsakes, photos, or documents that you would like to contribute to the University Archives, or if you have questions about SPU history, contact University Archivist Adrienne Thun Meier ’04 at 206-281-2422 or ameier@spu.edu.

In our autumn issue of Response, we invited you to identify five buildings from a historical campus map. Congratulations to David Schreffler ’71, who won our drawing for an SPU sweatshirt for correctly identifying the buildings.

1. McKinley Hall
2. Alexander Hall
3. Moyer Hall
4. Gwinn Commons
5. Hill Hall
I made good friends and had important conversations and pushed myself to pray. It was an academic, spirit-filled environment that has shaped the type of person I am and want to be.
This seismic disruption

BY DANIEL J. MARTIN

By Danial J. Martin

Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen, who passed away this year, was well-known for his theory of “disruptive innovation” outlined in his book, *The Innovator’s Dilemma*. Reflecting on his book, I often thought Christian higher education’s greatest disruption would not be caused by innovation, but by some external event — maybe legal rulings, evolving governmental regulations, narrowing funding streams, or shifting demographics. I didn’t envision a seismic disruption caused by a pandemic.

In January and February, SPU’s emergency response team monitored news of the COVID-19 situation. The team, already prepared with an emergency plan, regularly assessed reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as the King County Department of Health and Human Services.

By March, the world changed. The Seattle region was on the front lines of the COVID-19 situation in the United States.

On March 6, we announced SPU would transition to a remote-learning environment — to be accomplished over a weekend, no less!

John Robertson, who leads our Educational Technology and Media team, had been preparing for online learning for years. He helped us invest in technology so that when we needed to switch to remote-learning, we already had the tools in place to launch this.

Our world-class faculty quickly converted their curriculum and took advantage of new pedagogical tools and learning methods to ensure students continued to receive an excellent education — a level of excellence recognized by U.S. News and World Report as one of the Best National Universities.

I am grateful for our staff who filled in gaps, adjusted workflows, provided tech solutions, and adjusted to a remote working environment. And I am thankful for those who remained on campus to care for our residential students and maintain our University.

We received updates from the governor and the mayor’s office. COVID-19 was a moving target, and there were moments we had to alter operations quickly to protect our community and serve our students. We planned to finish the Winter Quarter remotely. Less than a week later, we determined SPU’s entire Spring Quarter would also take place remotely.

The pandemic impacted our ability to gather together to pray, worship, support, and encourage one another. The very social fabric of our communities has been disrupted by social distancing. The final week of Winter Quarter, I was talking with Provost Bruce Congdon in his office one afternoon. We discussed how strange it was to be in an academic term when the campus was so empty and quiet. We missed the sights and sounds of students learning; the dynamic energy is not only visible but palpable in the buzz and life they create. It strengthened my resolve to always maintain our liberal arts mission within the context of community.

We face challenges. We face difficult decisions. But it is in these moments that I lean into my faith in Christ; and, as I do, it fosters resiliency and compassion for the needs that surround me.

Our students are capable of learning in new and unimagined ways. This won’t be the last disruption they will experience in their lives. It is a tremendous opportunity for us, as an academic community of faith, to model the path forward.

May we have the courage to open ourselves to the opportunities and the needs of the present. May we have faith not to focus on the storm or waves, but on how God reveals himself through the storm. I am more excited than ever to work alongside our amazing faculty and staff to discover the path God has for our future.
THROUGHOUT THE SPRING, even as the coronavirus pandemic changed life as we knew it and halted cherished University traditions such as commencement and our ivy cutting ceremony, we glimpsed a community responding with grace and generosity.

Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Peggy Noonan was set to be the featured speaker at this year’s Downtown Business Breakfast, our largest spring event for the community. When statewide quarantines forced the cancellation of the breakfast, our corporate partners stood with the University and immediately redirected their sponsorships to help offset our COVID-19 response expenses and to sustain student programs.

We gratefully acknowledge and extend our deep gratitude to these partners:

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Community Partners

BY KATHY HENNING
LAST SUMMER, Tabitha Villanueva’s Instagram feed was full of friends enjoying their summer adventures. There was her friend, an ecology major, who was doing research in the Galapagos Islands. Tabitha’s boyfriend was in South Africa working on a radio tower for Transworld Radio. Those not traveling abroad remained in Seattle, enjoying the summer months when the city’s grey clouds and rain finally give way to blue skies and sunshine glistening off the lakes and Puget Sound.

Tabitha was looking forward to spending her final summer in Seattle before her senior year at SPU. An apparel design major from Alaska, she had lined up a summer job with Zebraclub, a small chain of Seattle-area boutiques that showcase upscale street-style fashion. Then, her mother, Ruth, called.

“She was like, ‘Tabby, I wouldn’t ask this of you if I didn’t really need you, but could you please come home this summer?’” Tabitha recalled. “I said, ‘Absolutely!’ because one lesson my family has really instilled in me is that family is family. God comes first, and then it’s family.”

Her mother needed to undergo a major surgery while Tabitha’s father was on an extended business trip, so it fell to Tabitha to decline the Zebraclub job and return home to Palmer, Alaska, approximately 40 miles northeast of Anchorage. She fixed meals for her mother and two younger siblings and helped her mother lift heavy things and navigate stairs. She worked at Ruth’s retail clothing store to keep it running while her mother
“We had this awesome opportunity to not fall into fear but to fall further into faith.”

Tabitha Villanueva

In autumn 2020, SPU will offer a new “Faith for the Future” scholarship to assist students seeking a faith-based college education. The scholarship will be available to students with a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher who demonstrate a commitment to faith and service through involvement in a Christian faith-based activity or group, and/or who graduated from a Christian high school.

“The Faith for the Future scholarship is a tangible expression of SPU’s commitment to a faith-filled campus,” said Jordan Grant, associate vice president for enrollment operations. SPU offers a challenging academic curriculum as well as a rich environment for students to explore their faith.

Learn more about the Faith for the Future scholarship at spu.edu/faithscholars.
Christians engaging culture: Q & A with James K.A. Smith

BY SHELLY NGO

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED to Christians as they marched out to transform the culture, James K.A. Smith observed. Instead of Christians changing the culture, the culture transformed them.

“We overestimated our convictions and powers of resistance and underestimated how cultural forces can form us,” Smith said in his keynote address at SPU’s 18th Day of Common Learning — an annual day without classes and labs to allow students, faculty, and staff to explore a significant idea or interest together.

Smith, a professor of philosophy at Calvin University and an award-winning author and speaker, is a self-professed fanboy of St. Augustine, the African theologian and philosopher who lived in the late 300s and early 400s in present-day Algeria. It was Augustine who taught that people are shaped and formed by what they love.

As Christians took up the dominant culture’s habits and rituals and rhythms — what Smith calls “liturgies” — the liturgies transformed what Christians valued and loved.

After his address to the University, Smith took the time to talk with Response. Here’s a lightly edited and condensed Q & A with the man who is both a prophet and agitator to the American Christian church.

JAMES K.A. SMITH
is professor of philosophy at Calvin University and editor-in-chief of Image, a quarterly journal devoted to art, faith, and mystery whose offices are based at Seattle Pacific University. An award-winning author, his most recent book is On the Road With Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts (Brazos).

Christians are often wary of the secular culture, yet you say that culture has managed to co-opt and transform them without their knowlege. What makes you say that?

Christians have become experts at being worried about certain messages and certain things in our culture. We look at a movie and say, “What is this movie teaching our kids about sexuality?” Or we think all that matters are Supreme Court nominations or a very particular political concern. While everybody’s worrying about the Supreme Court and what’s happening in movies, Christians have underestimated how much the typical, middle-class, suburban American life, with its rhythms and rituals, performs a story about who we are that is not aligned well with the Gospel. Our liturgies are teaching us what to want, what to love, and that governs the way you live out your life. We have underestimated how much things like consumerism disorder our loves [or priorities].

Despite all kinds of changed laws around segregation, we continue to live in communities that still segregate us. This does not sit well with the biblical vision of people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

How do you personally counter these cultural practices?

I’m not trying to hold myself up as a model, but we have intentionally chosen to live in the core of our city because it is a diverse community socioeconomically and racially. Living there throws us into a mix of people we wouldn’t encounter otherwise.

I’ll give you another example. The first 10 years of my career, when I lived in Grand Rapids, I took the city bus to work. If I commuted on my own, I’d pull out of my garage. I would be alone in my car, and I basically never would have to run into another person. Whereas when you get thrown into this mix of your neighbors, it’s a chance to listen and learn from them, so that’s one feature of us intentionally living in a diverse, urban community.

Are there other ways you see the church being co-opted by the culture?

I think consumerism is the most potent rival to the Gospel that we encounter. It doesn’t present you with ideas to believe. It gives you rituals that you live into that, over time, change what you want
and what you think will make you happy. Consumerism's evangelism is marketing, and marketing works by telling you a story about what the so-called "good life" looks like where everybody is happy and enjoying everything. And everybody has these products. You are so immersed in this, you don’t realize the story is becoming inscribed into your heart, and now you become the kind of person who thinks happiness is having stuff.

If somebody asks you what is your only hope in life and in death, it is “Jesus Christ, my Lord.” That’s your belief. But that doesn’t mean your heart’s affections haven’t been co-opted by the rituals of the mall and this very tactile experience of “looking for love in all the wrong places.” We don’t just buy things, we buy significance and identities, right?

What can the church offer Christians to counter negative cultural liturgies?

The Sabbath is one thing. Christians should start thinking about this in relationship to time. I think recovering the positive, not legalistic, intention of what the Sabbath was meant to be is incredibly liberating. It’s one way to have this micro-season of disinvesting myself from certain liturgies and giving myself, positively, over to the liturgies and practices of the body of Christ.

I’m a big advocate of what we call the church calendar, or the liturgical calendar — the seasons of Lent, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany. During Advent and Lent, we live into denial and abstention that is a kind of fasting. Maybe we choose to fast from our devices so that I master my phone instead of my phone becoming the master of me.

When you spoke to the SPU community, you talked about specific works of art that have moved and influenced you. Why is art important to you?

I spent the last several years trying to make arguments for what our public and political life could look like, and it was not working. Oftentimes, when we are trying to change people’s minds, we’re trying to argue them to our side. We’ve all found this is quite ineffective because we are much more governed by our imaginations than by our intellects. What this means is that when you give me your arguments, and I hear your facts and reasons, I’m thinking about it from my point of view. I’m almost never hearing the same things you’re saying, so we need to find some commonality.

I actually think the way through the morass of our current tribal experience will be through the arts and literature. Art requires me to do the imaginative work of empathetically imagining myself in your shoes so I can understand where you’re coming from. Literature actually gives us the capacity to imagine what it feels like to be a character. This is why I believe in the arts.

You’re a professor at a Christian college, and you speak at universities across the country. What are your observations about the culture and college students today?

We are experiencing an epidemic of mental health issues amongst undergraduates these days — anxiety and depression. We need to ask, “What kind of world did we give to these young people such that they live in almost paralyzed anxiety and self-consciousness?”

I also think it’s related to behaviors around social media and always being “on.” We don’t realize how much that takes out of us and how much self-consciousness that introduces into our lives.

Then, as parents, we also need to ask ourselves, “What are we looking for in our kids’ success? What pressures do we put on our kids to succeed so we can benefit?”

Christian universities in particular should be attentive to asking what is the spiritual malaise that’s going on underneath this. And how can we, empathetically and sympathetically, provide liberation from the performance that our culture asks of us?
ACROSS THE COUNTRY, a special group of Seattle Pacific University alumni work with people in hospitals, senior living homes, memory care facilities, schools, prisons, and private practices. They help their patients work toward mental and physical healing — through music.

They are the alumni of SPU’s music therapy program, the first and only music therapy program in Washington state. In celebration of the program’s 10th anniversary, music therapy alumni, current students, and professionals connected to the program were invited back to campus for two days in October to reconnect and, of course, to make music.

Music Therapy Program Director Carlene Brown believes the strength of the campus and alumni community sets SPU’s music therapy program apart. “One cannot overstate the value of [the community],” she said. “This is a competitive program with small cohorts. The challenge and purpose of the program experience bonds students, whether they attended SPU at the same time or 10 years apart. Everyone at the anniversary event was so excited to see each other.”

The past decade has seen the music therapy field grow. In 2012, approximately 40 board-certified music therapists worked in the region; today, there are more than 100 in Washington state. Employment opportunities have also grown as employers in a variety of care settings recognize the value of music therapy. For example, Aegis Living, a network of assisted living facilities on the West Coast, reports that 11 out of their 17 care facilities now
employ full-time music therapists.

Brown also reports a rise in the number of adult students who come to SPU to change careers and become music therapists. “These are individuals who always felt they had this calling, but didn’t know how to frame it in a program,” she said. “Having freshmen and professional adults taking the same classes has been incredibly rewarding.”

A research-based program, the music therapy courses emphasize viewing each patient as a whole person. Students put their coursework in action right away, starting clinical experience in the Seattle area during their freshman year. “We also emphasize using your gifts in service of others and connect that to our spiritual responsibilities of loving God and one another,” said Brown. “In the classroom, at work, and at events like this, we take time to reflect on why and for whom we’re doing this work.”

To open the anniversary weekend, attendees brought their instruments of choice for a Friday evening session of music-making in Nickerson Studios.

The next day, guest speakers included Jennifer Geiger, former president of the American Music Therapy Association, and Deforia Lane, one of the nation’s leading music therapists. (Lane’s book on faith and music therapy is read by students entering SPU’s program.) Saturday evening, the Seattle Symphony hosted SPU leadership, faculty, and staff at the Octave 9 performance space in downtown Seattle.

Seventy percent of the program’s alumni attended the event, some traveling from as far as Boston. In a profession that is sometimes isolating (music therapists are often the only therapist of their kind in their facility of employment), gatherings like this can be especially encouraging and valuable. “It was a chance for our alumni to come together, but also a rare opportunity to bring together so many music therapists to share ideas, collaborate, and support one another,” said Brown.

“Returning to SPU was so special to me as I was able to catch up with, learn from, and be refreshed by my colleagues,” said Addison Breier ’18, music therapist at Continuum of Colorado, who traveled from that state to attend the reunion. “This time with fellow music therapists reminded me of why I do what I do, as I was inspired by and fed off of the passion others had for the work we are doing.”

SPU’s music therapy program is the first and only music therapy program in Washington state.

Joseph Daley, considered one of America’s jazz elders, spent a week on SPU’s campus in January as this year’s Schoenhals Visiting Artist. Daley is a composer, educator, and musician who has played as a sideman with some of the biggest names in jazz — Sam Rivers, Carla Bley, Gil Evans, Charlie Haden, and Taj Mahal.

The composer-in-residence program was generously sponsored by the Lawrence R. and Ruth E. Schoenhals’ Christian Lectureship in the Fine and Performing Arts Endowment. Daley spent time teaching and mentoring SPU music students, discussing how his faith influences his work. Daley’s week at SPU culminated with a concert that showcased a sample of student compositions before Daley led a large jazz orchestra of Seattle musicians performing his own composition, The Seven Deadly Sins.

“It’s a heavy work,” Daley said, “written, conceived, and driven by the Wade Schuman paintings and the whole concept of the seven deadly sins.” His 2011 CD of the same name received international acclaim from journalists and musicians.
How do we move forward from trauma?

By Amy Muia

In the Summer of 2014, the Seattle Pacific University community suffered the unthinkable — a campus shooting in which one student was killed and several others wounded. In the aftermath, the Department of Clinical Psychology, now chaired by Professor of Clinical Psychology Amy Mezulis, mobilized to provide mental health care for faculty, staff, and students.

It was an odd intersection in Mezulis’ life, personally and professionally. “It’s a close-knit community, and we were all affected by the tragedy,” Mezulis said. “At the same time, I have a professional background in research around post-traumatic stress disorder.”

A question arose in her mind: Can something helpful come from this? Mezulis, along with her department colleagues and SPU graduate students, designed a study that would explore questions of resilience in the wake of traumatic events. Four months after the shooting, SPU community members were invited to participate in a survey of targeted questions about their experience.

While most individuals are able to emotionally come to terms with trauma and move forward, Mezulis wanted to examine those who became stuck in a state of post-traumatic stress, as well as those who were able to move from stress to post-traumatic growth. How and why were they able to do so?

One answer lies in two kinds of rumination — focused attention on a stressful event. It’s important to acknowledge that trauma occurred, but it’s also critical to know how the brain interprets that trauma. Traumatized individuals commonly suffer intrusive rumination, Mezulis said. Unwanted thoughts about the traumatic event return repeatedly and unexpectedly. But there’s a second kind of rumination that holds the key to healing: deliberate rumination, or intentional ways of processing the trauma.

In deliberate rumination, a traumatized
“Practicing gratitude doesn’t minimize or negate what happened, but it’s the most protective thing someone can do for their mental health.”

Amy Mezulis

person allows himself or herself to make meaning of a traumatic event: What does it mean in my life? What did I learn from it? How has it changed me?

“It's instinctive for us to push away thoughts about traumas we've experienced,” Mezulis said. “But when we avoid things we need to process, the brain has a way of sending them back to us in the form of intrusive thoughts. Ironically, dedicating time to thinking about a traumatic event — its meaning and its effect — helps us respond better.”

In the study, people experiencing post-traumatic growth reported that they were able to see beauty in the world that they hadn’t noticed before. They cherished their relationships. They developed a renewed sense of purpose.

While there’s a concentrated focus in society on how tragedy can be prevented, traumas large and small are part of our lives as humans, Mezulis said. The next frontier of study is what we can do ahead of time to build resilience, and what we can do afterward to cope. What are the daily practices that all of us — not only the naturally resilient — can cultivate to build a healthy foundation that can see us through trauma?

According to the data, our best weapon seems to be gratitude. “Practicing gratitude doesn’t minimize or negate what happened,” Mezulis said, “but it’s the most protective thing someone can do for their mental health.” If the brain already has experience looking for the positive before a trauma occurs, we won’t be trying to learn this new skill in the middle of heavy stress.

Seattle Pacific’s campus community was widely praised for its rapid response to the tragedy. “We had counseling services, a memorial service, a prayer vigil, therapy dogs,” Mezulis said. “And the study showed that the more resources people utilized, the more they moved from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth.”

Mezulis sees hope in the data. “Some stress symptoms will resolve themselves naturally over time,” she said, “but there are things we can do to care for ourselves.” Seek all the resources you can: counseling, close relationships, self-care, daily gratitude. Look for helpers. And spend some time ruminating on your experience to leverage a horrific experience into one of growth.

Amy Mezulis PhD

is professor and chair of clinical psychology at SPU. Her National Institutes of Health-funded research focuses on identifying biological and psychological pathways to adolescent-onset disorders of emotion regulation such as depression and self-injury. She also supervises doctoral trainees and teaches courses in adolescent development, cognitive-behavioral therapy, diagnosis, and assessment.
Changing lives: mental health courts

BY KAREN A. SNEDKER

One afternoon in a courtroom gallery, Monique* waited for her case to be called for the last time. After two years on probation, Monique was about to graduate from mental health court. What followed was a ritual full of praise.

“I want to congratulate you!” the judge said. “I know it has been hard. You persevered through the difficulties, and you continued on. The court is happy!”

The judge stepped down from the bench and shook Monique’s hand, congratulating her and giving her a certificate of completion while everyone in the courtroom clapped.

Monique’s day in court was not standard criminal justice but a court innovation for people suffering from mental illness. Mental health courts are part of a broader problem-solving court movement designed to address underlying issues that can result in criminal behavior.

It began with drug courts in the late 1980s and early 1990s that have since proliferated across the country in various forms. Mental health courts specifically address the connection between mental illness and those involved in the criminal justice system, like Monique.

While typical courts have an adversarial model with prosecutors and defense attorneys working on opposing sides, mental health courts adhere to a collaborative approach where teams are committed to offering rehabilitation and therapy to a defendant.

Two years before her graduation, Monique faced charges for assault and harassment. Before mental health courts, she probably would have gone to jail for approximately 90 days.

With little to no support services, her jail time likely would probably do little to curb any future contacts with the law, contributing to the “revolving door” of criminal justice. Instead of the traditional route, Monique was diverted to a voluntary treatment court. Given her prior hospitalizations for mental illness, sobriety issues, and willingness to engage in treatment, she met the eligibility criteria to opt in to mental health court.

Her choice to participate in mental health court meant Monique avoided jail time and cleared her criminal court record if she successfully worked through treatment and other court conditions.

The number of people with mental health disorders in prisons and jails grew over time as criminal justice policies changed, mental health institutions closed, and welfare and other social safety nets decreased as the cost of living increased. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that 44% of jail inmates and 37% of prisoners had a history of mental health problems; with 26% and 14% respectively meeting the threshold for serious psychological distress.

Many also have substance abuse problems which further complicate their mental health needs. Inmates with serious mental illness on average stay in jail longer, have higher recidivism

There are more than 300 mental health courts in the U.S. today, with two in downtown Seattle (supporting the entire King County region). Both Seattle courts started in 1999 and were part of the first wave of treatment courts in the country.

*NOT HER REAL NAME
rates, incur more costs, and spend more time in solitary confinement.

While not all clients who participate in a mental health court are successful, in many cases these programs do change lives. Data shows that mental health courts reduce the rates and severity of someone committing further crimes even as they reduce court costs, especially for felony problem-solving courts. However, more data on the cost effectiveness of mental health courts is needed to evaluate the social and fiscal costs and benefits of these courts.

At its best, treatment courts can be responsive to social problems — mental illness and criminality, safety, homelessness, low-income housing — and potentially improve the quality of life for a vulnerable section of the population. When led by a knowledgeable and empathetic judge and a strong team, these courts provide a model for a more humane, treatment-oriented criminal justice model that lowers recidivism rates, reduces stigma associated with mental illness, and increases the quality of life for clients.

While problem-solving courts are no panacea for problems in the criminal justice system or mental illness in our society, evidence-based reforms that build on the strengths of the mental health court model and address some of its weakness are important steps forward.

**KAREN SNEDKER**

Professor of Sociology Karen Snedker is the author of *Therapeutic Justice: Crime, Treatment Courts and Mental Illness*, which examines the social processes by which mental health courts operate. Participant stories illustrate both the potential and limitations of these courts. Snedker’s areas of research include mental health, homelessness, crime and violence, and neighborhood effects. Her other published works appear in sociology, geography, demography, public health, and crime academic outlets.

Professor Snedker’s courses at SPU focus on criminal justice, urban sociology, law, homelessness, mental illness, and she teaches introductory sociology courses for the general curriculum. Snedker also works on campuswide efforts to engage the SPU community in addressing homelessness.
Swipe out hunger

BY ERINN FIGG

NATHAN SAMAYO HAS had many conversations with students about finding creative ways to stretch their college budgets. Sometimes those solutions involve swapping nutritious meals for instant ramen or even skipping them altogether.

“I know that having access to food is something that some students struggle with, so we approached University Services and started having conversations about different ways we could support our students who are experiencing food insecurity,” said Samayo, a senior sociology major and president of Associated Students of Seattle Pacific.

With extensive help from Kim Karstens, Sodexo general manager of SPU Dining Services, the student body leadership team worked with Chuck Strawn, dean of students, and Sarah Walter, executive assistant in Student Life, along with multiple SPU departments to launch a Swipe Out Hunger pilot program in 2020.

Swipe Out Hunger’s new nationwide program is partnering with food services company Sodexo to pilot a meal swipe bank at SPU and across 12 other universities.

Marissa Schnitman, vice president of programs at Swipe Out Hunger, explained that Sodexo will donate meals based on the number of meal plans sold each quarter with the credits added directly to a student’s ID card. (Sodexo estimates it will donate 2,000 meals to students each year.)

Many people are not aware of how widespread food insecurity is on college and university campuses. Students may hide the problem, afraid their peers will find out about it, Schnitman said. A survey by Temple University’s Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice polled nearly 86,000 students from two- and four-year institutions. The fall 2018 survey revealed that 45% of respondents experienced food insecurity during the prior 30 days.

That same year, Swipe Out Hunger surveyed 800 students who received donated SOH meal passes in partnering public and private universities. Sixty-two percent said the meals helped them stay in school; 54% said the meals helped them improve their grades; and 79% said the meals helped them feel like their campuses were more inclusive and supportive.

“You can’t go to school and focus if you have a hungry stomach,” Samayo said. “When you’re hungry, there are also academic, spiritual, social, and psychological aspects that aren’t being nourished. In order to sustain an individual and set them up for success as a student, we need to make sure their basic needs are covered.”

After a campuswide announcement and publicity around the program last fall, students quickly contacted Karstens about how to tap into it.

“This pilot is going to help us identify if there’s a great need or maybe just a minimal need,” Karstens said. “But the fact that students have reached out to me is telling me that there is a need.”

To participate, students can fill out a form on SPU’s website. Students, faculty, and staff can also submit names of students who may need support getting access to food. To ensure anonymity, staff — not fellow students — will review and approve applications. The University also will work with students who need more holistic solutions beyond just meals.

Samayo said there’s a deeper theological mission behind his personal push for the program.

“We are obligated as a community of Christ followers to discover the needs of our diverse student population, remove those institutional barriers, and steward our God-given resources to uphold and uplift everybody.”

“In order to sustain an individual and set them up for success as a student, we need to make sure their basic needs are covered.”

Nathan Samayo
LAST FALL, Seattle Pacific University poets took the stage at Hugo House, a center for writing workshops and readings in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood. Jennifer Maier, professor of English and writer-in-residence; Mischa Willett, instructor of education, English, and writing; and Scott Cairns, professor of English and director of the MFA in Creative Writing, shared work that Hugo House said expressed “a sense of the intangible within the visible world.”

Cairns, whose work has appeared in The Atlantic, The Paris Review, The New Republic, and Poetry, shared some of the discoveries published in Anaphora (Paraclete Press, 2019), his ninth and latest collection of poetry. [An online interview with Cairns is available at spu.edu/cairnsinterview]

While SPU’s poets shared their work with the community, graduates of Seattle Pacific’s MFA in Creative Writing program are also sharing their work with the following published books: We’ll Fly Away by Bryan Bliss MFA ’14 (Greenwillow Books, 2018). We’ll Fly Away was longlisted for the National Book Award in 2018. This Is My Body by Cameron Dezen Hammon MFA ’15 (Lookout Books, 2019). Where Goodness Still Grows: Reclaiming Virtue in an Age of Hypocrisy, by Amy Peterson MFA ’18 (Thomas Nelson, 2020).

This year, the MFA program added a new second-year poetry mentor, poet Karen An-hwei Lee. Lee is the author of Phyla of Joy (Tupelo, 2012), Ardor (Tupelo, 2008), and In Medias Res (Sarabande, 2004). Winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Prize and the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America, Lee has also written a novel, Sonata in K (Ellipsis Press, 2017); a book of literary criticism, Anglophone Literatures in the Asian Diaspora (Cambria Press, 2013); and translations of poetry, Doubled Radiance: Poetry & Prose of Li Qingzhao (Singing Bone Press, April 2018).

The MFA program is adding a new Young Adult Fiction track. Bliss will serve as the first-year mentor along with Sara Zarr, the acclaimed author of seven novels for young adults (most recently Gem & Dixie), a National Book Award finalist, and a two-time Utah Book Award winner.

Cairns is delighted to see the MFA writing program grow with a commitment to nurturing writers of faith. “That is what I find most exciting, that we are in a position to assist continuing generations of writers who have not previously seen how both their accomplishment as writers and their spiritual development as persons of faith can prove to comprise a single, unified journey.”
WHEN ANDREW DERRICK arrived in October 2016 to take the helm of Seattle Pacific women's rowing program, he knew he had some rebuilding to do.

By the time the 2017 season began, the roster had more than doubled in size, with 25 in the shellhouse beneath Brougham Pavilion. Those athletes bought into his program and the rigorous training regimen it entailed. Improved results on the water followed.

Last spring, that rebuild yielded the ultimate reward: an invitation to the NCAA Division II Championships, the program's first since 2011. “We knew we had an outside shot the year before, but we knew we wouldn’t have the depth,” Derrick said. “Last year was what we hoped for.”

Many rowers arrive at college with plenty of athletic experience — but little to no experience at rowing. However, regardless of what sport they previously pursued, certain qualities are universal.

One quality in particular played a significant role in helping the Falcons earn one of the coveted six berths in the 2019 national regatta. “The team culture really sort of helped us embrace that we are greater than the sum of all our parts,” Derrick said. “On paper, I don’t think we stacked up as well against teams that maybe we were able to get in front of. But the team was able to do it, pull together as one versus a bunch of individuals.”

They ultimately made the most of it, finishing fourth in the varsity eight, fourth in the varsity four, and fourth in the team standings.

Derrick says that same quality is still pervasive, whether on the ergometer (rowing machine) or on the water — often before sunrise.

“We would like to continue to turn heads and increase the awareness that the SPU community, as well as the rowing community, has for our program,” he said.

This year, the team received a pair of brand new racing shells (an eight and a four). The shells were just part of a generous gift to the athletic department from longtime season-ticket holders and SPU supporters Daryl ’66 and Claudia Vander Pol ’66. The couple named the shells for their mothers: The “Dorothy VP” for the eight shell; The “Polly Teel” for the four.

“It can’t be overstated what a true difference that makes [for the program],” Derrick said. “We’re able to put them in some of the best equipment on the market and focus our resources in other areas for our student-athletes.”

Those student-athletes keep coming, as the squad has grown to 32 for the 2020 season.

“In March, the Great Northwest Athletic Conference ended all spring collegiate sports programs due to COVID-19, shutting down the women’s rowing season for 2020.”

BY MARK MOSCHETTI

Berth of a rowing team

BY MARK MOSCHETTI

32
Number of women in the 2020 rowing squad

2019
First NCAA Division II Championships invitation since 2011

4th
Team standing overall at the national regatta
April in Ithaca, New York.

The Great Northwest Athletic Conference, of which Seattle Pacific is a member, called off its entire spring sports schedule on March 16. For the Falcons, that took outdoor track and women’s rowing off the calendar.

SPU athletic director Jackson Stava acknowledged the difficulty of those decisions, particularly for a handful of seniors whose careers came to a sudden end. But he emphasized that the health and well-being of everyone, both on campus and in the wider community, was of paramount importance.

"With the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cancellation of the remainder of our contests is a necessary and responsible decision," Stava said after the GNAC’s cancellation announcement. "While the loss of games is unfortunate, and we feel deeply for the student-athletes who will miss these opportunities, this decision needed to be made."

"We are hopeful that these efforts, along with other conferences across the country doing the same, can aid in slowing the spread of this virus while keeping our constituents safe," Stava added.

The world of athletics experienced its share of the fallout from the coronavirus’ drastic alteration of everyday life.

Seattle Pacific’s teams and the entire spectrum of college sports came to an abrupt halt as the pandemic spread across the country and around the globe.

The Falcon winter teams were among the first to be affected.

In early March, the men’s basketball squad was in La Jolla, California, for the NCAA Division II West Regional tournament. At the start of Thursday, March 12, it looked as though the tourney would go forward as scheduled. Then, it was decided the game would go forward but without fans in the arena. Mere hours later, the tournament was cancelled — along with all other NCAA winter and spring championships.

SPU track and field stars, Dania Holmberg and Peace Igbonagwam, had to return from Birmingham, Alabama, where they were set to compete at the NCAA indoor meet. The USA Gymnastics collegiate nationals also were cancelled. They had been scheduled for early April in Ithaca, New York.

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FAITH ON THE FRONT LINES
In an abandoned school on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq, Karen Huesby Eubank ’90, her family, and Free Burma Ranger team members are leading a group of local children in songs about God’s love. The children are enthusiastically clapping and laughing until their singing is interrupted by explosions outside. Families quickly evacuate in this scene from the documentary Free Burma Rangers, which was released in theaters in February.

The scene might shock an audience in the safe confines of a U.S. movie theater, but for many families in northern Iraq, the chaos is unfortunately all too familiar as Iraqi soldiers fight to keep ISIS out of the area. The explosions by the school were set off by ISIS forces trying to drive away any remaining Iraqis.

“The [families] were not upset; they were not fazed,” Karen said in the film. “It was new for us. ... It’s a much more intense situation than I ever have been in before.”

The Eubanks, however, do not allow that level of intensity to deter them from what they passionately believe to be their calling: to spread hope, help, and love in front-line areas where families are caught in the middle of conflict.

In 1997, Karen and her husband, Dave, a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer and Ranger, founded the humanitarian aid group Free Burma Rangers. The organization provides medical, educational, spiritual, and general assistance to people in the conflict areas of Burma (also known as Myanmar), Kurdistan, Iraq, Sudan and, most recently, Syria.

From their base camp in Karen State, Burma, the couple, their three children — Sahale, 19; SuuZanne, 17; and Peter, 14 — and a staff of both local and international volunteers train relief teams to serve oppressed ethnic minorities of all races and religions in war zones. To date, the Free Burma Rangers have trained more than 4,500 multiethnic relief rangers, treated more than 500,000 patients, and helped more than 1.5 million people.
The family’s journey to tumultuous foreign lands consisted of a series of small steps of obedience, Karen said. “When God opens a door in front of you, you can do it. He’s going to go with you, whatever he asks you to do, as crazy as it may seem. And often the first step isn’t that crazy. The first step is pretty rational, and then if you go 20 years later and connect the dots, it looks pretty galactical, but all the steps getting there have been pretty straightforward.”

The First Steps: Foundations, Flexibility, and Teamwork
Karen, who grew up in Walla Walla, Washington, originally wanted to pursue a career in special education, helping students with learning disorders master basic skills like reading and math. “I never planned to live overseas,” she said. “I was committed to working with kids in America in difficult situations.”

Karen chose Seattle Pacific University because she was impressed with the scope and caliber of its special education courses. SPU’s current special education major allows students to tailor the program to specific career tracks, including teaching, policy development, research, community work, or ministry outreach.

“One of the best things about that special education track was that they’d just drum into your head ‘Be flexible,’” Karen said. “[In] every class, they said, ‘You’d better be flexible. You don’t know what’s going to come at you in your teaching career. Be flexible!’”

Little did she know that being flexible would become an underlying theme in her life, beginning with the opportunity to study with a master teacher in London during her senior year.

“The program itself was flexible because being matched with a teacher in England wasn’t a set program at that point — it was kind of a one-off,” she said. “It definitely was a step in me understanding life overseas and kids in international schools. It’s so interesting when you look back and see the ways God had put steps together to put things in my head that I wouldn’t have even considered before.”

I’m constantly inspired by these young men and women who chose to be rangers, many of whom have lost homes; they’ve lost their families ... yet they’ve chosen to redeem that by serving their people.”

Karen Eubank
Karen graduated in 1990 with a bachelor of arts in special education. Soon afterward, she arrived at another crossroads in her life, one that required her to be flexible with her entire life plan.

A friend introduced her to Dave Eubank, a former military man with a missionary’s heart. Dave was born in Texas but spent most of his early life in Thailand, where his missionary parents ran a Thai dance and drama ministry. As an adult, he served almost 10 years in the Army before retiring in 1992 and enrolling at Fuller Theological Seminary. When Karen met him, he was answering a call to assist a group in Burma.

“I felt that he was the strongest man of God I had ever met, and I wanted to spend my life with him,” Karen said. “Yet I couldn’t see how my vocation as a special ed teacher would play out in the jungles of Burma and wasn’t sure I was cut out to be a missionary. He told me, ‘It’s not complicated being a missionary. People just want to see if you live your life any differently as a Christian: Do you treat your family differently? Do you handle your problems differently? They just want to see your faith worked out.’ That sounded simple enough.

“I knew I would find kids wherever I was, so I decided I’d figure out how to work out my vocation on the mission field with him.”

They married in 1993 and spent their honeymoon in Burma, thus beginning their humanitarian work with oppressed internally displaced persons that would ultimately span more than two decades. The couple both say the keys to their marital success are mutual respect and admiration, shared values, commitment, and, most important, teamwork.

“We feel God brought us together in marriage, and we are a team in all we do. With Karen, I am fully supported, and she inspires me to be the best I can be,” Dave said. “We walk hand-in-hand behind Jesus.”

Others see the powerful dynamic, too. Marci Haigh ’02, who volunteered with Free Burma Rangers from 2004 to 2018, says the couple’s combined character strengths create a solid foundation for the organization.

“I saw in their relationship that it’s possible to 100% be on the same team, even if you don’t always agree. Karen spoke up in team meetings and asked the hard questions, and when the decisions were made (whether they were ones she agreed with or not), she was a solid support for the plan,” Haigh said. “She told me once that you always get to choose your leader. Karen has chosen to follow Dave on a lot of difficult climbs, and they’ve made it through together.”

**Next Steps:**
**The Evolution of Free Burma Rangers**

After a few years of missions to assist ethnic groups oppressed by the Burma government and military, the Eubanks — along with Eliya Samson, a Karen National Liberation Army soldier and medic — formed Free Burma Rangers in 1997.

The organization’s original vision was solely focused on Burma, training members of pro-democracy groups to work as rangers providing emergency medical care and relief supplies to IDPs, while also capturing video documentation to share the raw truth of Burma military attacks (often denied by the Burma government) with the rest of the world.

“I’m constantly inspired by these young men and women who chose to be rangers, many of whom have lost homes; they’ve lost their families; they’ve lost opportunities with education as war ravages their area,” Karen said. “Yet they’ve chosen to redeem that by serving their people as medics or as videographers or...”
teaching kids’ programs. They’ve learned how to take that conflict and put something new into it, put some hope and vision into it, and then inspire other young people to serve their own communities.”

Over time, the work expanded to other conflict zones, but the mission remains the same.

A typical day of ranger training at the Karen State Camp starts around 5 a.m. with physical training, moving on to camp cleanup and showers, and then communal breakfast at 7:30 a.m. Throughout the day, rangers attend both classroom and hands-on sessions with basic and advanced courses that include rigorous physical training, video and digital photography, map reading, mission planning, basic medical and dental care training, mule and horse handling and packing, human rights violation reporting, and other skills. Dinner is at 5:30 p.m.

After about 10 weeks of training six days a week, the Eubanks and seasoned volunteers accompany the new rangers on a monthlong mission, usually hiking 6 to 8 hours a day to villages in crisis.

“

It’s not complicated being a missionary. People just want to see if you live your life any differently as a Christian: Do you treat your family differently? Do you handle your problems differently? They just want to see your faith worked out.”

Dave Eubank
came these rescues in Iraq, specifically during the Battle of Mosul. The movie really dials up in an action-movie kind of way.”

Sinclair met the Eubanks as a photojournalist and produced a four-part series on Free Burma Ranger training as his thesis project for his master’s degree in visual communication from Ohio University. He spent three years accompanying Free Burma Rangers on its missions to deliver aid to oppressed citizens of conflict regions.

“The thing that I admire most about the family is they never consider anything to be impossible or too hard. Everything is an opportunity to give it to God and see what he might do,” Sinclair said. “They see local people as equals. They don’t by any means see themselves as the ‘white savior family,’ and that lives out in their core value of, ‘We’re never going to leave you. If the fighting gets bad, we’re not running just because we have a passport and escape vehicles.’”

Sinclair hopes audiences walk away from Free Burma Rangers inspired and with a greater awareness of the world around them.

“The takeaway is ‘What’s the first step that God might be calling you to be faithful in, to be obedient in?’ That can look different for different people.”

Haigh said the Eubanks temper the physical demands with warmth, motivation, and encouragement.

“Dave Eubank was very motivational. He would ask me to take on tasks or responsibilities with conviction that I could do it — way more conviction than I myself had. I soon found myself driving giant trucks on the left side of the road, shifting gears with the wrong hand while driving over slippery log bridges that seemed about to fall off a cliff,” she said. “There are so many times that I almost backed out of the various challenges. But I would see Karen matter-of-factly stepping out there, paying attention and doing these awesome things. She would often say to me ‘If I can do this, so can you.’ And so I did.”

Steps in Courage: Good Life and Family

Karen was able to put her educational background to work when she started the Good Life Club in 1999 to bring comfort and hope to children in conflict zones. The Good Life Club is based on the words of Jesus in John 10:10: “For the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.”

“In conflict settings, I wondered, What can I offer to these children who have lost their school and their home and some of them have lost their families? What hope can I bring them? Mostly, kids just like to play,” she said. “They have some trauma, but they’re eager to have attention. They’re eager to have love. They want to have play. And I realized I needed to give them some tools for an abundant spiritual life.”

During the programs, kids listen to Bible stories, sing songs, play games, and learn about health and basic hygiene. They also receive a T-shirt and supply packs.

The Eubank children assist with the kids’ program, along with other aspects of Free Burma Rangers’ operations. Karen is used to reactions that range from concern to admiration when people learn that her kids work alongside the couple in conflict areas.

“The local people teach us so much about loving God and loving each other that I want my kids to benefit from it. I want my kids to learn things from the people we’re serving and [learn] how God can open a way to serve that’s just right in front of you,” she explained. “Dave and I tell our kids: ‘The best thing we can give you as parents is this opportunity of following God’s call.’”

Hosannah Valentine ’02 has been working with the organization since 2006. She’s currently coordinating international missions and working with Dave on a book about the group’s efforts in Mosul. Valentine watched the Eubank kids grow up and has nothing but admiration for Karen and how she has succeeded in raising and home schooling them in the regions where they work.

“Karen is tough emotionally and spiritually, being willing to trust God with even the lives of her children in
immediately dangerous situations, as long as she feels sure that is where they’re supposed to be,” Valentine said. “This doesn’t mean that she’s quixotically throwing up her hands and saying, ‘God will take care of everything.’ She’s always been extremely vigilant in doing everything in her power to be prepared for whatever they might face.”

Karen admits there are difficult moments, but she has relied on friends to help keep her focused on hope instead of fear. “The gift of faithful prayer and encouragement from my SPU friends throughout the years has been more significant than I could have ever imagined,” she said.

She also draws on scripture to find peace in difficult situations. “Psalm 23 is remarkably relevant as God promises his presence in the valley of the shadow of death as well as by still waters.

“In any fearful situation you have to return to the conviction that led you down that road to begin with,” Karen said. “Peace comes when I rest in the confidence that God’s hand guides us in all situations. His promise to be with us is the strength I carry with me, and the best gift I can offer the needs of the world.”
In a historical section of Doha, the capital of Qatar, four historic homes have been restored and converted into the Msheireb Museums, a popular destination for schoolchildren, college students, tourists, and locals.

The director of these museums is Hafiz Ali Abdulla, a film director and producer, as well as a graduate of SPU’s language school partner, the American Cultural Exchange Language Institute.

Hafiz’s enduring connection to Seattle Pacific stretches back more than 20 years, when friends from Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar told him about the A.C.E. Language Institute at SPU. “This encouraged me to explore the idea and study at SPU in Seattle,” Hafiz remembered.

The language institute’s affiliation with SPU began in 1976 to help international students learn English and gain cultural skills before enrolling in U.S. universities.

“The students from the Middle Eastern countries were enthusiastic and hardworking students,” said Andy Muller, then director of A.C.E. “They appreciated the access to the hospitality and facilities that SPU had to offer, and they contributed to SPU their rich culture, love of life, and desire for a good education.” Hafiz is still in contact with many alumni from the program, staying in touch with them via WhatsApp. “We [have] very good memories of SPU, where the Arab students organized so many cultural and sports activities throughout the year with the support of the University staff,” Hafiz said.

After his studies in Seattle, Hafiz traveled to Southern California, where he earned BFA and MFA degrees in television and film. In his work today, Hafiz has tapped into his filmmaking background to develop a narrative approach for each museum he manages. Together, the four museums provide a comprehensive history of Qatar.

The Radwani House illustrates the evolution of traditional Qatari family life from the early years till the discovery of oil.

The Company House, once headquarters of Qatar’s first oil company, introduces visitors to the men who shepherded in the country’s petroleum industry.

The Bin Jelmood House takes an uncompromising look at slavery throughout the region, and the social, cultural, and economic contributions made by formerly enslaved people.

The Mohammed Bin Jassim House, originally built by the son of the modern Qatar’s founder, details the nation’s challenge to balance 21st century life with preserving local heritage and culture.

Since the museums opened in 2016, more than 700,000 visitors have toured the interactive exhibits. As museum director, Hafiz oversees temporary exhibitions, workshops, conferences, and programs with local and international institutions, and oversees day-to-day operations.

In 2018, the Msheireb Museums won the best educational program award provided by the International Council of Museums Committee for Education and Cultural Action. A museum visitor commented: “I don’t know why we hadn’t visited this place before. I think this is one of the best museums I have ever been to, and we have visited museums all over Europe.”

Qatar, a sovereign Arab state on a small peninsula jutting into the Persian Gulf, is about the size of Pennsylvania. It was originally part of the Ottoman Empire and then a British protectorate until 1971. Qatar has one of the largest natural gas and oil reserves in the world, but looking into the future, the country is working to build its reputation as a destination for tourists and visitors. Qatar will be the first Arab nation to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup soccer championships. And the Msheireb Museums are part of a major downtown restoration project established by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the mother of Qatar’s current emir.
“Msheireb Museums are an integral aspect of the inner city’s regeneration of the old commercial center with its traditional community-based lifestyle,” Hafiz said. “Definitely my film background made a difference and supported me in my role to define the narrative approach for the research information and to translate the emotion through films and interactive screens presented in the museum. It is very important for us to humanize the content and give it a voice that speaks to our visitors.”
GRACE WILL LEAD US HOME

BY BOB ELMER
PHOTOS BY GREG MO
Just before Nikum Pon MEd ’08 was born, his father asked that his son be named after their Cambodian village, Nikum, “as a remembrance of our struggles.”

But they nearly did not have the chance to remember. As part of a purge of intellectuals during the horrific Pol Pot years of the late 1970s, Nikum’s father was executed by Khmer Rouge soldiers.

When soldiers invaded their village shortly thereafter, Nikum’s mother and extended family members fled their homes and attempted to make it to a nearby monastery for shelter. Nikum’s mother, nine months pregnant with Nikum, fell into a ditch. Family members worked feverishly to pull her out but once she was rescued, she started to go into labor. She was carried to a nearby hut to hide while she labored.

“My older siblings traveled through nearby villages to look for a maidservant to deliver me,” said Nikum. “My godfather and his wife ended up delivering me that night.”

Complications set in, and it appeared that Nikum’s mother would not survive the trauma. Everyone thought Nikum was dead at birth. “They placed me in the corner of the hut and focused on taking care of my mother,” Nikum said.

Miraculously, Nikum’s mother did survive the night, and to their amazement, so had the newborn. When someone noticed he was breathing the next morning, they pulled him from the corner and brushed ants off his tiny body.

The family later learned that those who made it to the monastery were discovered by soldiers and summarily executed. The diversion to deliver Nikum had saved all of their lives.

They hid for another two weeks while Nikum’s mother regained a bit of strength. To their amazement, she remained alive. When someone noticed he was breathing the next morning, they pulled him from the corner and brushed off the ants from his tiny body.

The family later learned that those who made it to the monastery were discovered by soldiers and summarily executed. The diversion to deliver Nikum had saved all of their lives.

They hid for another two weeks while Nikum’s mother regained a bit of strength. But soon they faced yet another life-or-death decision. “If we [stayed] in the village, we would be executed if found by the Khmer Rouge or Vietnamese soldiers. But if we tried to flee to Thailand, there would be little chance of making it to the refugee camps,” Nikum said.

The route ahead was littered with land mines, and the trek would take at least a week through a hostile countryside. Their chances for survival looked slim. Still, the group decided to press through the danger, traveling at night and hiding during daylight hours. They braved torrential rains, mud, and waist-deep floodwaters.

By early afternoon of the last day, Nikum’s tiny body had turned purple from the cold and exposure. His relatives were once again certain the baby had died, and they tried to convince Nikum’s mother to bury him in the field.

She refused to leave him in the country where his father had been killed. If nothing else, her infant son should be buried in a new land. So they journeyed on, his mother stubbornly carrying his limp body in her arms.

In the late afternoon, the family found a plastic bag in a big field and placed Nikum in the bag for the remainder of the journey. “If I didn’t die of hypothermia, I still could have died from suffocation,” Nikum said.

The travelers finally crossed into the safety of Thailand. “My family and my godfather took the plastic bag and opened it. As they prepared to bury me, the Lord breathed that breath of life into me, and I breathed again. Everyone knew it was a miracle. Instead of mourning, they rejoiced!”

A common theme

More than 40 years later, Nikum recounts his dramatic story to acknowledge that amazing miracles happen even in the midst of tragedy.

“When people hear [my story], they may feel pity, or [sorrow]. And you know, in a way, it is sad. But what’s more important is that God gets the glory at the end of the day. I want people to see Jesus through the story. Even through a tragedy like the killing fields, God is still with us. He continues to be with us, whether we know it or not.”

Nikum uses the word grace often to define the story of his life, from near-death experiences and refugee camps, to his family’s eventual resettlement in Minnesota. After a number of years, Nikum’s family made their way to the Pacific Northwest where Nikum became a Christian during his teen years. “The rescue was great, but the greater rescue was that Jesus rescued me, personally. What good is it to be rescued from Cambodia, but not know God? I’d still die and spend the rest of eternity without him. It’s worthless without Jesus,” he said.

AFTER THE KILLING FIELDS

An estimated 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians died as a result of labor camp internments, disease, starvation, or mass executions during the brutal Khmer Rouge years from 1975 to 1979. In an attempt to remake the country into a classless communist society, political leader Pol Pot and his communist Khmer Rouge regime murdered intellectuals, urban dwellers, civil and religious leaders, and teachers, burying their bodies in mass graves known as the “killing fields.” Today, the loss of an entire generation of educators painfully underscores the significance of Nikum Pon’s efforts as he seeks to build a unique, self-sustaining school.
In the fall of 2006, Nikum found himself thinking about attending graduate school on the SPU campus. He had graduated from a public high school and college and longed to continue to learn at a private, Christian school. “It was pretty intimidating being the first in my family to make it to college, one of the few from my community,” Nikum said. “And then to make it to graduate school.”

“I walked through the campus and just continued to pray for God’s direction. I felt SPU was just the right place for me to really push through my training and education, so I could fulfill the call of God in my life.”

Nikum’s children initially were reluctant to leave Seattle, but today their neighborhood is filled with kids and they love their community in Cambodia.

Former School of Education Dean Rick Eigenbrood was one of the first people Nikum met when he visited the campus. “He was the one who encouraged me to pursue my studies at SPU,” Nikum said.

Eigenbrood, professor of education, remembered Nikum as someone who didn’t aggressively push his faith and beliefs in your face. “He is a very gentle spirit. He’s very low-key. But it comes with a certain level of confidence and focus,” Eigenbrood said.

SPU Professor of Counselor Education Cher Edwards was especially impressed with Nikum’s commitment to social justice issues, as well as his passion for serving the historically underserved with “authenticity, compassion, and respect.”
Nikum earned a master’s in education from SPU and then a doctorate in educational psychology and educational leadership and policy studies from the University of Washington. He worked as a graduate assistant and adjunct professor at SPU, and then Nikum’s desire to work in the urban core among the most marginalized led him in a new direction.

Grace in the Rainier Valley

Nikum helped form a new church in Seattle’s Rainier Valley, where he served as a counselor and also did gang interventions. Nikum met his future wife, Jessica, at the church. They were coworkers, then their friendship blossomed into a romance.

“It was all about God’s timing,” he said. But Nikum and Jessica soon discovered new challenges.

“When my wife and I got married and we were doing ministry in the Rainier Valley, that’s where I thought that the dream that God gave me [to do overseas mission work] died off,” he said.

At first, the newlyweds lived in a tiny studio apartment and faced a looming mountain of school loan debt. Finances were more than tight. Then Jessica became pregnant with their first child, and Nikum thought it was now impossible for them to move overseas or pursue mission work.

Nikum changed jobs to work in the Bellevue School District where one of his...
coworkers had a connection with some orphanages in Cambodia.

“He pursued me for about two years,” Nikum said. “I kept telling him I couldn’t go. I couldn’t leave my wife. We just had a newborn. I just started a job.”

His friend wouldn’t give up and readily agreed to fund a vision trip for their family to visit Cambodia and just see the orphanage. It was another moment of God’s provision in his life.

For three years in a row, Nikum and his family spent several weeks to a month in Cambodia, exploring possibilities and rekindling the dream to serve others in Asia. Nikum and Jessica had another child. And he became regional director for the Puget Sound Educational Service District for Equity in Education, a job that suited him well.

“But God’s calling was strong,” he said, “and you have to respond.”

They sold their home in the Rainier Valley, along with nearly all their possessions. Nikum resigned his job, and the four of them boarded a plane last August for Phnom Penh, to live there permanently.

**Ups and downs**

The Pon family is still adjusting to life in Cambodia. There’s the lack of dependable mail service. The language barrier. Getting lost. Getting around. Loneliness. Jessica is realistic about the adjustments they’ve had to make as a family.

“It was really hard in the beginning, because we would have to drive an hour into town to maybe find something, maybe not,” she said. “But now, as we’re settled, actually it’s been a great lesson in minimalism. Do I really need that? Is it going to enhance my life? We’ve spent a lot less money on stuff.”

Nikum misses similar things. “There’s a loss that comes with change,” he said. “We lost our community. I miss our church family at home. I miss our friends at home. We miss the little things, like my wife misses Target. I miss going to Lowe’s and Home Depot.”

When friends heard about their move, people told Jessica, “You’re so brave” or “I can’t believe you’re doing this.”

“We’re just normal people living our normal lives,” she said. “I still clean toilets and make my kids peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We don’t feel like we’re super special or brave or anything. We’re just very rooted in our ‘why’ and our cause.”

They’re also committed to making sure their two children, now ages 4 and 5, find their place.

“My son, leading up to our move, he was really upset,” explained Jessica. “He wrote me a note: I love Seattle. And then ‘Asia,’ he put an ‘x’ through Asia. He didn’t want to move. And you know, it breaks your heart, and there were moments when I would just cry with him.

“He would tell me how sad he was to leave his friends, and I would say ‘Me, too.’ And that’s OK. We can sit in our grief, and we can sit in our sadness. I never want to brush those emotions under the rug; they’re real. We have to just welcome them.”

Over time, the kids have come to love their new home, and Nikum and Jessica have connected readily with their new neighbors, who often stop in unannounced with gifts and warm smiles.

“The first few months here have been great to be able to get to know our neighbors, which never happens in the States,” said Nikum. “I remember [in Seattle] it took a year just to know who my neighbor was. Here, it’s instant. They will come in. A lot of it is an open-door policy here.

“And there are a lot of kids in our neighborhood, so it’s good for our kids. They have an instant community, and they love it. Kids come over every day. This house is always half-full with kids.”

Many of those neighborhood kids attend an international school in Phnom Penh and thus speak English. That allows her own children to make friends more readily, which Jessica considers a clear answer to prayer.

**The dream, revisited**

So Nikum’s lifelong dream of making a difference in Cambodia is very much alive again. He is focused on two primary goals: improving the quality of higher edu-
cation for families through teacher training and school development, and supporting local orphanages.

He regularly visits a local school to help train teachers and oversees an online program, as well. He also meets with local pastors to figure out how to improve schools in remote villages. He’s looking for ways to offer free training to local teachers. The “free” part is critical, he said, pointing to the wide gap between elite, out-of-reach international schools and the local (but under-supported) public schools.

“International schools here are very expensive, and [they are] only accessible to the rich because international schools recruit and retain new teachers from overseas. By doing that, they’re getting a handsome teacher salary, and they’ve got to pay for the plane ticket, living expenses, and all that adds up,” he explained. Tuition for many international schools in the capital city of Phnom Penh can average between $10,000 to $20,000 a year.

In contrast, the average Cambodian worker might earn the equivalent of $200 to $300 a month.

Nikum and Jessica also stay connected with an orphanage they support, located just 20 minutes from where Nikum was born.

A new perspective

Nikum’s perspective has changed over the years as a survivor, refugee, believer, student, educator, husband, and father, but the most significant shift came when they decided to move to Cambodia, as opposed to just taking vision trips.

“Once you’re here, you get to see first-hand how things operate. I thought things were bad here. Once you understand the system, it’s really bad here,” Nikum said.

Nikum dreams of building a new school, implementing a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics) curriculum for pre-K to eighth grade, and introducing the kind of education that will “innovate ourselves out of poverty.” The school will be self-sustaining, with herbiculture and livestock to help feed the children at lunchtime, along with solar panels and rainwater collection for energy and resource independence.

“It would be a gift to the community,” he said. “The kids would learn how to really innovate, to live into what God has created us to be. We tend to forget that he is God our creator, and he has made us to create things.”

Although Cambodia is predominantly Buddhist, he said, not many actually practice Buddhism. “[People] are very open to the Gospel, and the harvest is plentiful,” Nikum said. “We’re definitely praying for more laborers for the harvest field.”

Building costs in Cambodia remain relatively low, compared to the U.S. Nikum estimates initial costs for the primary school would not exceed $30,000.

“We have the land [donated by the pastor of the orphanage]. We have the kids. Everybody’s ready. It’s just a matter of resources,” Nikum said. “I’m still trying to think of ways to funnel resources to build this school, but the beauty of it is, we already have the relationship in place.”

If Nikum is able to build the school, it’ll be done by God’s grace. Fortunately, Nikum has had a lifetime of experiences to trust in that.

To learn more about the Pon family, visit: www.theponfam.com
LAST YEAR, Seattle Pacific’s Board of Trustees voted to rename Alexander Hall, “Alexander and Adelaide Hall” in recognition of the original First Lady’s significant contributions to the University. Adelaide Beers worked alongside her husband to establish Seattle Seminary and served as the head of the school as its preceptress. Among her many roles, Adelaide taught mathematics and music and was later named dean of women.

From Adelaide’s pioneering efforts to today, the women of SPU continue to contribute to the world as teachers and chief technology officers. They walk the corridors of Congress, build community as local business owners, and connect the most vulnerable to social services. We’re pleased to introduce you to just a few of our amazing alumnæ. →
WHEN MAC* ENTERED the Renton Public Library last summer, he had not showered, slept, or eaten in a while, but he was told someone at the library could help him find a place to sleep.

Within an hour of meeting him, Melissa Wirasnik Glenn ’05 had connected him with a local shelter and secured transportation to a center where Mac could shower and wash his clothes.

He told Glenn he was so hungry, he was having difficulty thinking. She sent him on his way with snacks and hygiene supplies donated by local programs.

Since April 2019, Glenn has connected more than 200 patrons like Mac with community organizations in her role as the health and social services coordinator at the Renton Public Library in Washington state.

People look at Glenn quizzically when she describes her job. “Why does a library need that?” they ask. Glenn explained it’s a natural fit. “Libraries have always been places where people seek resources and information,” she said. “And as our communities change, the kind of resources and information that people are looking for also changes.”

Community changes include a broken mental health system and rampant poverty. More than 12,000 families experience homelessness in the area, and those in crises gravitate to the library, said Glenn’s supervisor, Melissa Munn. “There’s free access to computers and books, and it’s warm in the winter and cool in the summer,” Munn added.

Munn advocated for the position for years after her experience as a case manager for homeless youth. If clients missed an appointment, she often went to the library to find them.

Munn hopes it will expand across the 50 branches of the King County Library System. According to NPR, fewer than 40 libraries across the country support a similar role.

Glenn’s job varies daily, but most requests involve housing and mental health. For example, if someone risks eviction for an unpaid utility bill, she knows the organization that will pay the bill.

Glenn helped initiate a homeless resource event each month where local partners provide on-the-spot services, including flu shots, mental health assessments, free bus passes, and access to cell phones.

Glenn also trains library staff, offering Mental Health First Aid training and debriefs after upsetting incidents — tools, that help the staff “provide service to our patrons with compassion and empathy.”

Glenn is a licensed mental health counselor who graduated from SPU in 2005 with a bachelor’s degree in sociology. After earning a master’s in counseling psychology from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology in 2012, she worked in a variety of community mental health and education settings until joining the library in April 2019.

Even with her experience, she’s well aware of her limitations. “I cannot always provide shelter that same day, or food, or funding to keep someone in housing,” Glenn said. “But I am hopeful that if [a patron] talked to me for 20 minutes or 30 minutes or an hour, they felt listened to, they felt cared for, they felt valued. And that in and of itself is transformative.

“I believe that this work is ministry. That’s because I am supporting people in some of the most vulnerable points in their life. And I view that as a privilege.”

*NOT HIS REAL NAME
ON A BRIGHT, chilly afternoon in Washington, D.C., Amanda Wyma-Bradley '14 decided to forego public transportation for a 4-mile walk home from her job on Capitol Hill. Exercise clears her head, and she had no problem walking briskly and conducting an interview at the same time. “I have to be doing at least two things at once,” she explained.

Multitasking is an essential skill in Wyma-Bradley’s job working for U.S. Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state’s 9th District. Wyma-Bradley joined his office in June 2019 as a legislative assistant. She researches legislative issues and gathers feedback from constituents and interest groups to aid the congressman with policy decisions.

“I’m very excited to be in a position where my entire job is to make sure that people’s voices are present and that we are actively pursuing them to engage in the conversation about legislation,” she said. “[My] job is to make sure people see that government does work and that their voices do matter. It’s very rewarding.”

While she’s passionate about her job, Wyma-Bradley said she isn’t a go-getter millennial who set “#goals” and effortlessly achieved them. She’s weathered periods of professional uncertainty; grappled with job-search frustrations in a highly competitive arena; and she’s worked several part-time jobs simultaneously to make ends meet.

“Often, when you’re in that process, you don’t realize that it’s an important part of what will get you to your ultimate goal,” Wyma-Bradley said. Her SPU experiences also helped her reach her goals.

She learned to overcome shyness and stepped into leadership roles in the student senate at SPU. Christian professors were also important role models.

“I had professors who mentored me and emulated core values. Having humble leaders helps you learn not to be afraid to say, ‘I know I’m not the best. How can I be better?’ Not every academic setting is like that.”

One mentor was Jennifer McKinney, sociology professor, co-chair of the Sociology Department, and director of women’s studies. She was also Wyma-Bradley’s adviser for her minor in women’s studies. As the capstone project for the minor, Wyma-Bradley worked for U.S. Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state. The experience was a turning point for her. She finished the internship with a new goal to work for a member of Congress in D.C. Meanwhile, McKinney said Wyma-Bradley’s passion for policy was evident.

“One of the best words to describe Amanda is ‘inspiring,’” McKinney said. “She’s inspired by wanting to make the world a better place, which also makes her inspiring because you see that she has hope for the future, and she’s working to make a better future happen for people well beyond her immediate circle of friends and loved ones.”

After graduating from SPU with a double major in political science and communications, Wyma-Bradley married and moved to Boston. Her husband attended graduate school while she worked on a pilot project funded by the Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime. Through that work, which provided expert forensic support to medical professionals working with sexual assault victims, Wyma-Bradley met another mentor, Kris Rose, then deputy director of OVC.

The project ended in 2017, but the two remained close. Rose offered guidance as Wyma-Bradley pursued her master’s degree in public policy at Georgetown University.

Rose, now the director of strategic partnerships for Healing Justice in Arlington, Virginia, says she was impressed by Wyma-Bradley’s determination, versatility, and the way she used her cumulative experiences to shape public policy.

“Amanda has worked hard, and she has put in the time,” Rose said. “I’ve witnessed her hard work. It gives me a sense of comfort to know that someone like Amanda is working on the Hill on our behalf.”
BEYOND LIVING OUT THE SPU MISSION

IN BETWEEN CLASSES and friends, Shawna Williams ’13 spent much of her time as an SPU student on the floor of her dorm room in Hill Hall, surrounded by bicycle parts — dissembling, reassembling, and fixing her two bikes and those of her friends.

“It became a really good way to de-stress in college,” she laughed. She didn’t have much experience in bike maintenance, but between instruction from her brother, Zach Williams ’08, and YouTube tutorials, Williams began building her understanding of bikes and how they work.

Today, she works just across the Fremont Canal from her alma mater as the managing owner of Free Range Cycles bike shop.

Walk into Free Range on a rainy Seattle day, and you’ll find a warm haven jam-packed with brightly colored bicycles, frames, seats, and wheels lining the walls and hanging from the ceiling, as well as a multitude of tools, gadgets, and commuting gear. The shop is small (only 700 square feet), but friendly and cozy. Behind the desk, a mechanic works away on a client’s bike.

Founded in 1997 by Kathleen Emry, Free Range is a mainstay of the biking community in Seattle where, according to Bicycling magazine, more than 220,000 residents cycle regularly. Most of Free Range’s clientele depend on the shop to keep their bicycles safe and tuned for their daily commutes. Quality is of highest importance here: the shop only carries steel bikes, known for their durability, longevity, sustainability, and ease of ride.

“We have customers who are still bringing in their bikes they purchased from us 20 years ago,” said Williams.

Seattle is consistently listed as a top city for bicycling in the nation, and with a rapidly growing population — and 313,589 employees who work downtown, according to the Downtown Seattle Association — new routes and bicycling incentives appear regularly. Seattle offers miles of bike lanes, barriers, and rails to protect cyclists from traffic, and cyclist-specific traffic lights. Bike-friendly pedestrian trails such as the Burke-Gilman Trail or Seattle Waterfront Trails offer convenient, scenic, and direct routes connecting major Seattle neighborhoods for commuters.

“Watching a young person in front of a bike with a tool in their hand and seeing something click? That’s incredible.”

Shawna Williams

Free Range is a mainstay of the biking community in Seattle, where more than 220,000 residents cycle regularly.
In a city like this, bike shops like Free Range, which provide consistent tune-ups, quality gear, and expert advice, are a necessity.

When Williams heard Emry was retiring and searching for the right person to take over Free Range, she reached out. (Williams worked at Free Range for a short time after graduation from SPU.) The two met at a nearby coffee shop and talked about what the transition might look like.

“It was an exciting but scary conversation,” said Williams. “I had never thought about owning any kind of business before.” But a seed was planted. To Williams, this was an opportunity to take ownership of something, create a community, and continue the legacy of a woman-owned bike shop (still a rarity, according to Williams). Two months later, Williams began training with Emry to expand her bicycle maintenance knowledge, as well as learn an entirely new subject: the ins and outs of running a business.

“If I had realized how much I didn’t know, and how vertical that learning curve was going to be for me, I probably wouldn’t have done it,” said Williams, who officially took ownership of the shop on Aug. 1, 2018. “But I didn’t know, so now I’m in it, and I love it.”

“I couldn’t be happier to see how Shawna stepped in, gathered her wits, and took charge of Free Range,” said Emry. “My energy was waning; her enthusiasm, smarts, and intuition brought a new infusion of energy to an established bike shop. I am proud to have Shawna continue the legacy of Free Range, not only as a bike shop, but as a place of community and friendship for all those who pass through its doors.”

Williams majored in political science at SPU, where she says she learned important values, principles, and leadership skills from professors. But upon graduation, she knew a desk job wasn’t for her. She wanted to work with her hands, fixing tangible problems and creating things that worked well.

She worked at Free Range for a year and a half honing her skills as a bicycle mechanic. Then the same passion that drove her to study political science — to enact positive change in her community — led her to Bike Works Seattle in Seattle’s Columbia City neighborhood, first as a mechanic, then as program coordinator and teacher.

“I used to feel guilty about not using my degree,” she said. “But at Bike Works, I realized bikes are political. Bikes are a form of activism. I saw what they could do as a tool to mobilize and empower people.”

Bike Works, a nonprofit bike shop and community outreach program, supports health, education, and career preparation among community members — especially youth — by teaching cycling and bicycle maintenance and partnering with school teachers to incorporate bicycle education into science curriculum, also leading biking excursions and camping trips in the Seattle area.

“At the end of the day, it wasn’t about the bikes,” she said. “Watching a young person — especially the ones who struggle in a traditional education setting — in front of a bike with a tool in their hand, and seeing something click? That’s incredible. That can bring together communities.”

Williams has many dreams for the future of Free Range. She plans to continue expanding and improving their product offerings, getting people on the best bikes for their needs, weather, distance, and terrain. She hopes to host regular community rides and bicycle education classes. And most importantly, she plans to continue fostering a sense of community where people feel like they belong.

“I see this as not just a bike shop, but also as a community hub, where you are not anonymous,” she said. “Many people have had the experience of walking into a bike shop and feeling stupid, or like they don’t belong. My goal is to make everyone — regardless of experience — feel welcome, heard, and empowered to cycle.”
WHEN JULIE AVERILL ’95 looked around her computer science classes at SPU, there were no other women, save one female professor.

“At that time, we didn’t really talk about it,” Averill said of the absence of women pursuing computer science degrees. “I don’t think we had the words. I just wanted to be equal, so my thoughts were, Don’t talk about the fact that I’m different. I’m here, so let’s just move on.”

Averill did move on, and up. Today, as executive vice president and chief technical officer at athletic apparel retailer Lululemon, she oversees a global team of 700 and helps the company make the most of its technological
investments, including its website, mobile apps, distribution centers, data intelligence, corporate and planning systems, and more. And she uses her position and experience to empower the next generation of women.

“I do a lot of work now with women and girls and STEM, and I’m so happy to see gatherings of women in technology supporting each other,” she said. “But it’s a new thing, and I always encourage young women to look around and appreciate that environment. It represents change. The right thing to do is to hold equal seats at the table together, and men are helping us, and we’re helping each other.”

Among her volunteer pursuits, Averill is on Washington STEM’s board of directors, a statewide nonprofit seeking opportunities for students most underserved and underrepresented in STEM fields. She is also a strategic advisor for IGNITE Worldwide, which addresses the skills and gender gaps in STEM careers by reaching girls in grades six to 12.

Such investment is needed. While 57% of bachelor’s degree recipients were women in 2017, only 19% of them sought computer and information sciences degrees, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The Department of Labor reports just 26% of professional computing occupations in the U.S. workforce are currently held by women.

Computers were new in homes when Averill was a girl. At 10, her father, noting her interest in technology, enrolled her in a coding class for adults.

“I was like, ‘Wow, this is cool! I can interact with a device, and I can solve problems.’ I remember making a little video game that was really no fun to play but really fun to make,” she said. “I think you have to get kids young to make those light bulbs go on.”

When Averill was in high school, her father helped small businesses implement computer systems, and she would train their employees on how to use them for word processing and creating spreadsheets.

“Inspiring girls to pursue STEM careers is hard work, but as someone who benefited from an adult who did that, I can say it has amazing impact,” she said.

Averill previously served as REI’s first chief information officer. Then, as vice president for selling and marketing systems at Nordstrom, Averill led innovations like shipping products directly from stores to customers.

“I’ve gotten to work with great brands that have integrity, commitment to customers and service, and great products,” she said. “I want to work for companies whose values align with my own.

“I love retail because it’s so close to the customer, and you can implement something and see if it works immediately. If you do something to your website that the customer likes, they’ll reward you. And if they don’t like it, then you better undo it really quickly, because they’ll tell you with their wallet,” she said.

“You can go into a store and see how customers are shopping and what their friction points are, and then you can imagine how technology can help. It’s both complicated and simple at the same time, and there’s a tremendous amount of technology required.”

Averill credits SPU with giving her confidence to navigate the technological topography. “I could not sit down today and code. But I’m not afraid of it,” she said. “SPU gave me a really broad understanding of how all the technology works and how the pieces fit together. When you understand the whole landscape, then nothing’s going to scare you.”

AS EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER AT LULULEMON, JULIE AVERILL OVERSEES A GLOBAL TEAM OF 700 AND HELPS THE COMPANY MAKE THE MOST OF ITS TECHNOLOGICAL INVESTMENTS.
COLORADO’S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION named Claudia Figg Ladd ’89 a finalist for the state’s Teacher of the Year award out of almost 55,000 instructors in its public school system. Ladd passionately promotes early literacy and equitable education, making sure that all students receive the same opportunities.

Ladd, who is pursuing her doctorate in reading and literacy, teaches first grade at McMeen Elementary School — a culturally and economically diverse school in Denver whose student body includes English-language learners.

There’s never a lack of engagement in her classroom, said David Adams, McMeen Elementary’s principal. “The students take ownership of the entire lesson. ... There’s a lot of reminding kids, ‘You do the thinking,’ and a lot of posing of questions, and allowing them to turn and talk, formulate responses, and take risks.”

Ladd’s influence is measurable. Every child in her class, regardless of starting point, makes a year-and-a-half to two years’ growth in reading and math within the school year, Ladd said. Adams confirmed this: “[With] every piece of formative data we get, her students are outpacing [other] classrooms.”

And yet it’s about far more than data. In a colorful painting hanging on Ladd’s classroom wall, an orange cat stares at a starry night sky. Ziyare painted it — a first-grader whose family lived in their car. He barely knew the letters of his name and had been kicked out of three other first-grade classrooms before reaching Ladd’s.

Ladd began staying after school, even skipping her lunch period — anything to get Ziyare three extra doses of reading every day.

One time, Ladd had her students read about Vincent Van Gogh, who persevered with his paintings despite numerous setbacks. She then asked her students to draw something on their own. Ziyare’s Van Gogh-inspired painting caught everyone’s attention. “All of a sudden, kids were looking at him going, ‘How did you do that?’” Ladd remembered. No one expected it of him.

At home that night, Ladd laminated everyone’s picture to bring back for them, but Ziyare never returned to school. Ladd admits that it’s not uncommon for children from transient families to disappear. “But I know he had the foundations of reading when he left me,” she added. “He found what he was good at. And I saw in his eyes what it meant to have kids value him for the first time.”

Ladd is influencing the teaching profession far beyond one school. She is now developing a program to address foundational gaps in literacy for older students.

“We are called to be a light on the hill. What can we do to catch our most fragile learners before they fall off into the ravine of lifetime illiteracy?”

Claudia Ladd
When the Emperor Was Divine: Q & A with Julie Otsuka

BY KRISTINE MENSONIDES GRITTER

THIS YEAR, students across SPU’s campus read Julie Otsuka’s debut novel, When the Emperor Was Divine. The National Endowment for the Arts named the book this year’s Big Read, which enables communities to come together to read a book and host a series of events around the book’s topics.

Seattle Pacific University was a recipient of a Big Read grant from the NEA along with Highline College and the King County Library System and Customized Tours.

Kris Mensonides Gritter, School of Education professor and director of the Big Read grant, spoke with Otsuka about her book, which shares the story of a family’s experience during World War II, when more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were sent to concentration camps across the United States.

The characters are nameless. Why did you make that choice?

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, every Japanese American on the West Coast was registered and assigned a number by the government. Some 110,000 people were reduced to numbers overnight.

My mother remembered her family’s number — 13611 — until the end of her life. It was written on the ID tag that hung from her neck as she boarded the train for the camps.

I like the idea of the reader opening the book to a story about a woman going for a walk and encountering a sign on the street. It’s a situation anyone can imagine themselves in. It’s not until several pages in that the race of the woman becomes clear. By this time, hopefully, the reader is hooked.

It seems like the education in the camps was not of great quality and the paid jobs were especially menial. Do you think the lack of intellectual rigor at this time affected the Japanese American community over the long term?

An incredibly complex question. My answer is yes, but not necessarily in the ways you would expect. The quality of education was indeed poor: unaccredited teachers, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of heat, a shortage of textbooks and equipment.

Children responded in different ways. Some withdrew
A lack of intellectual rigor was not their most pressing concern. Many were eager to take on camp jobs, no matter how menial or low the pay. They also planted vegetables on the camp farms — they knew how to work the soil, and the yields were high. There is value to working and feeling like you are contributing to your community. People tried to stay busy and make the best of things.

For the farmers’ wives, who had worked side by side with their husbands in the fields for years, “camp” was the first time they had ever taken a “vacation.” Some came from isolated family farms and had never socialized with other Japanese women. Many signed up for their first English classes. For them, camp was more intellectually stimulating than their previous lives of work, work, work.

After the war, the Issei had to start all over again. They had sold off their family farms and businesses before leaving for the camps. Most lost everything and never made it back. But their children were resilient.

When my mother returned to California in 1945, she was terrified she wouldn’t be able to keep up with her classmates at Berkeley High School, but she did fine and went on to attend college at UC Berkeley. It was her mother, formerly the leisureed wife of a businessman, who went to work cleaning houses to support the family and put her children through college. She worked as a maid for the next 30 years.

Could you tell us more about the book you are writing now?

It’s a novel about swimming and dementia titled The Swimmers. I just finished writing the last chapter. It’s different from anything I’ve written before, but, in an unexpected way, works well as a coda to my first two novels.
CAMP TO COMMENCEMENT

BY DOUG FOX

“[I need a] written request from you stating that you would like to have me attend the Commencement Exercise,” Toshiko Senda wrote in a letter to Seattle Pacific University’s president C. Hoyt Watson in 1942.

Toshiko Senda was a senior at SPU, looking forward to graduation, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 just months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Senda was one of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans rounded up and placed in isolation centers across the country. She was relocated to the Western Washington Fairgrounds in Puyallup, Washington, euphemistically coined, “Camp Harmony,” where its 7,390 residents stayed before they were transferred to relocation camps in Idaho, Wyoming, and California.

Senda’s letter to SPU President C. Hoyt Watson was a plea for help to enable her to attend her own graduation ceremony. She had been incarcerated for almost a month and was making the most of a bad situation.

“There is no formal education, but we are planning for a daily vacation church school,” Senda wrote. “We do, however, have Sunday school and church services. We have choir practice, concerts (records), a very good athletic program, recreation and are now starting interest groups. I’m sure gradually we will have more.”

Senda had a special request. Camp officials told her she could attend her commencement ceremony if someone provided her transportation and agreed to be her custodian while away from the camp.

“Another requirement which I need to ask of you is that I have a written request from you stating that you would like to have me attend the Commencement Exercise,” Senda wrote. “I certainly more than appreciate your doing all this for me. It is asking a great deal but I know you will cooperate. Thank you very much. Another thing, too, will you please arrange about my cap and gown?”

SPU President Watson wrote the incarceration camp manager just a few days later. It was June 1, and graduation was just seven days away.

In 2004, Response published Senda’s story and several former classmates wrote in describing the commencement ceremonies. Tim Nelson, professor of biology, said his mother, Elsie, graduated with Senda and talked about it a lot.

“I heard the story about Dr. Watson arranging for Toshi to be at graduation retold many times by my mom, who held her cap and gown for her as the students lined up for the processional. She arrived just in time to put on the cap and gown and walk with her class.”

Another classmate that year said President Watson gave the audience some background information and when Senda walked across the stage, “The applause went on almost interminably. It was an unforgettable experience.”
The fabric of the fashion world

BY ERINN FIGG

ETHAN MILLER ’13 is a top talent manager and social influencer on the New York fashion scene. Even so, as a black man, he often has walked onto a photo shoot and been mistaken for the help — a caterer, a gofer, a security guard.

“I’d find myself being so frustrated. I’d be the only black person there, and people usually thought that I was the stylist’s assistant’s assistant, when the reality is that I’m actually the agent representing the supermodel,” said Miller, who represents predominantly black clients for IMG Models in New York City, the agency known for such supermodels Tyra Banks, Gisele Bündchen, and Kate Moss. “I started talking to other black people I knew: ‘Wow, are you having this experience?’ They were,” Miller said.

It felt isolating, entering a professional space and feeling like he didn’t belong. So, in 2018, Miller launched The Fabric, a community that gives black creatives in fashion the opportunity to share ideas and perspectives. There’s a grassroots approach to its growth: Miller and his colleagues extend invitations mainly through direct messages on Instagram or word of mouth.

“The Fabric essentially is a Guerrilla-style organization that pops up and plans parties and events where black creators from behind the camera in the ecosystem of fashion can come and spend time together — fellowship, dance, eat,” Miller said.

He chose the name because black people are the fabric of the industry. The idea also was partly inspired by Michelle Beauclair, associate professor of French and Francophone studies at SPU, where Miller earned a bachelor’s degree in that major.

“[Michelle Beauclair’s] class really changed the trajectory not only of my career in many ways, but also my personal life and how I oriented myself in the world,” Miller said.

Beauclair introduced him to the Négritude movement, the works of philosopher Frantz Fanon – specifically “Black Skin, White Masks” – and the influence of colonialism and its effects on different groups around the world.

“I’m forever grateful for her because in many ways The Fabric is really based in some of that literature and that point in my life.”

Beauclair remembers Miller as being insightful and adept at drawing parallels between history and modern experiences.

“He had a gift for connecting with people from various walks of life and diverse cultures, so it does not surprise me at all that he is at the forefront of such a creative and innovative way of bringing people together,” she said. “After my courses, he seemed to be very bolstered in his belief that black men and women can be agents of change and innovation in all areas. And we see that’s what Ethan is doing now in the fashion world.”

Miller mentors up-and-coming black creators in the fashion industry’s business logistics, such as billings and contracts. Photographer Justin French is one of the professionals he’s helped. French burst onto the gallery scene four years ago with his portrait work, a hobby at the time. He was later recruited by Vogue to photograph actor and former football running back John David Washington. His career took off, but the fashion industry was unfamiliar territory.

“In the art industry, in general, there were rules I didn’t understand. There were standards I didn’t understand. There were financial opportunities I didn’t understand,” said French, who met Miller at a mixer put on by The Fabric. “There were so many things that I wasn’t knowledgeable about, and Ethan really helped me understand how to navigate through them.”

“It helps to have someone like Ethan who already understands exactly what I’m trying to do and knows how to find people who can do it,” said French. “He’s someone who’s building a network that hasn’t been built before.”
THE FREEFALL LASTED barely 30 seconds, but it was enough to make 103-year-old Kathryn “Kitty” Hodges the oldest tandem skydiver in the Guinness Book of World Records.

“It was great,” Hodges said of the experience last August, when she jumped out of a plane 10,000 feet over Snohomish County, just north of Seattle, Washington. “I’m going to do it again.” Her courage inspired three fellow residents from Bayview Retirement Community in Seattle to also take the plunge.

Hodges has been an influential force throughout her lifetime. From 1940 to 1944, she was the only faculty member teaching art at then-Seattle Pacific College. With the help of librarian Margaret Bursell, Hodges arranged to have the Seattle Art Museum loan paintings from their collection to display at the college each week, including the works of Michelangelo, Van Gogh, and Dürer.

View Hodge’s tandem skydiving jump at spu.edu/kittyhodges.
WESLEY WILLMER '71, MED '73 recently published Stuff and Soul: Mastering the Critical Connection. He resides in Fullerton, California, with his wife, SHARON WIGGINS WILLMER '71, MED '73.

JON SHARPE '73 recently left Seattle’s C3 Leaders after 12 years. He is now chief strategist for Leaders Vineyard and Just Business Roundtable.

JEFF BARKER '76 is a professor of theatre and department chair at Northwestern College in the northwest corner of Iowa. He has written over 50 plays and directed over 40. Jeff and wife, Karen, live in Orange City, Iowa.

SCOTT NOLTE '76, Taproot Theatre Company’s producing artistic director, will retire at the end of 2020 after 43 years of leading the Seattle theatre, where he has directed more than 90 plays. His wife and Taproot co-founder, PAM BAILEY NOLTE '76, will also retire from her staff position. Taproot was founded in 1976 by six friends, five of them SPU graduates. The Noltes were named SPU Alumni of the Year in 2011.

WILLIAM “CHRIS” HIGHLAND '78 teaches on freethought at University of North Carolina Asheville’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and at Blue Ridge Community College. He also writes a weekly column for the Asheville Citizen-Times. His essays, columns, books, and photography can be found at chighland.com.

REBECCA GROOMTE VELE '78 received a lifetime achievement award from Marquis Who’s Who. She is the director of music at First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, where she has also served as organist since 1991. Rebecca has been an adjunct instructor of music at Oklahoma State University and an adjunct instructor of organ at Oklahoma City University. She is a longtime member and leader of the American Guild of Organists.

LINDA VANDLAC SMITH '70 retired in December 2019 after a nearly 42-year teaching career. For the last 30 years, she taught communication studies at Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon, Washington, where she also created an online speech lab, served as department chair, division chair, coordinator for the Center for Learning and Teaching, and editor of the faculty newsletter. She is looking forward to spending more time traveling, writing, and volunteering locally.

KAREN TOWNSEND '83 is the dean for Health and Human Services academic division at Edmond Community College. She has worked at Edmonds CC for 18 years, serving as a social and human services instructor and then as department chair for the past 10 years.

CLAUDIA LADD '89, a first-grade teacher at McMeen Elementary in Denver, Colorado, was a finalist for the

DIANTHA STEWART WILLMER '41 celebrated her 100th birthday at the Swedish Club in Seattle on March 1, surrounded by her family of Seattle Pacific University alumni.

SPU President Daniel J. Martin wrote her a birthday note: “As one of our longest living alumni, your life, grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, is a vivid example of the competence, character, wisdom, and grace that we desire to instill in all of our graduates.”

It was a fitting tribute to Willmer, a teacher who has spent her life following the lesson plan laid out by the Master Teacher. She taught at several Seattle public schools including Beacon Hill, Viewlands, and Adams Elementary. Willmer’s own three children, SYLVIA WILLMER JEWELL '71; VIRGINIA WILLMER SMITH; and WESLEY WILLMER '71, MED '73 all attended SPU and followed in her footsteps as educators. Willmer has eight grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

Willmer has been an active member of Trinity Church, (formerly Green Lake Presbyterian) for 50 years, where she taught Sunday school, vacation Bible school, chaired the church preschool board, and helped her late husband Kenneth (1915–1999) with his duties as a church deacon. She still attends Bible Study Fellowship.

After retirement, Willmer became involved in the Christian women’s group, Seatleans, that meets at First Free Methodist Church. Willmer was president of this group for years, and she was instrumental in establishing an endowed scholarship that supports and encourages future generations of Christian women at SPU.
Colorado 2020 Teacher of the Year competition. She has been in education for 16 years and lives in Castle Rock, Colorado. Story on page 44.

SUSY SANDERS ’89, a Jungian psychologist and artist, exhibited her Emerging Image paintings at Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina. Susy runs Morning Bridge Center, a psychology and expressive arts practice in Phillips, Maine.

1990s

CHARLES FAGERSTROM ’90 is the new chief executive officer of Sitnasuak Native Corporation, the largest of 16 Alaska Native village corporations. Born and raised in Nome, Alaska, Charles is Iñupiaq, with family roots in Nome and the Bering Strait region. After SPU, he earned master’s degrees from the University of Hawaii and the University of Colorado. He has been a health care executive for the past 25 years.

JONATHAN MITCHELL ’91 became the new pastor and head of staff at First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton, Oregon, last October. He previously led a congregation in Maryville, Missouri, for 10 years. Jonathan received his master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Jana, grew up in Walla Walla, Washington, and are pleased to be back in the Pacific Northwest.

MATT CHILES ’93 manages his family’s 3,500-acre Horseshoe Bend Ranch in Centerville, Washington. Matt grows grass hay and raises Jersey cows. He is married to LISA MOORE CHILES ’93.

MATT LENHARD ’93 was awarded “Music Educator of the Year” for the state of Alaska by the Alaska Music Educators Association.

JOSHUA FREED ’95, real-estate developer and former mayor of Bothell, is running for Washington state governor. He and his wife, LINDIE KIGHT FREED ’95, were college sweethearts and have been married for 23 years. They reside in Bothell, Washington.

CHRIS HILL ’95 is the chief operating officer for Sentry Alarm Systems in Monterey, California, with more than 6,000 clients in the greater Bay Area. The U.S. Army veteran lives with his wife and their three children in Monterey, where they stay busy with basketball and travel.

SONEYA LUND ’98 was elected to the Yakima, Washington, City Council. She is the owner of Yakima’s Saol Salon.

2000s

IAN COOK ’00 is general manager at Seattle’s Slalom Build, a firm that

Remembering 
Response senior writer Clint Kelly 

BY HOPE MCPHERSON

CLINT KELLY, senior Response writer and Seattle Pacific University communications specialist for 30 years, died Nov. 7, 2019, after a brief illness. He was 69 years old.

Kelly profiled hundreds of people for SPUs brochures, fundraising appeals, programs, and publications before retiring in 2018.

“No matter what the topic, Clint brought wit and wisdom to the task,” said John Glancy, former director of University Communications. “Over the three decades we worked together, I was always impressed with the breadth of his writing, both in and out of SPU, and the depth of insight he possessed.”

Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, Kelly earned an associate degree in forest technology from Clatsop Community College. He and his wife, Cheryll, moved to the Canadian wilderness, where he worked with students at a boarding school in Selkirk, Manitoba.

When they returned to the United States, Kelly, his wife, and four children settled in Everett, Washington, where Kelly wrote for publications including Christianity Today, Reader’s Digest, and Family Circle. In 1988, he joined the SPU staff.

Kelly wrote 17 books and was a popular speaker at writing conferences. He was also an active member and elder of Everett’s Westminster Presbyterian Church for 40 years.

Kelly is survived by children, STEPHANIE KELLY HUORTEN ’92, SHANE KELLY ’93, NATHAN KELLY ’96, and AMY KELLY ’98; six grandchildren; one great-granddaughter; and nieces.
Professor leaves legacy of mentoring students and faculty

BY HOPE MCPHERSON

RAYMOND WELLS ’46, professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at SPU, passed away on May 24, 2019, at the age of 94.

Born and raised in Modesto, California, Wells came to Seattle Pacific College as a transfer student from Los Angeles Pacific College (now Azusa Pacific). He excelled in academics, sang in the a cappella choir, and played on SPC’s tennis, softball, and men’s basketball teams. His fellow students named him Athletic Man of the Year in 1946. He also served as editor of Cascade Yearbook in 1946. He met freshman Marilynn Hayes during his junior year, and they married in June 1947.

After graduation, Wells earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree from New York Theological Seminary. He pastored San Leandro Free Methodist Chapel in California, before he and Marilynn traveled to Scotland, where he earned a doctorate at the University of Edinburgh.

In 1967, Wells returned to Seattle Pacific, beginning a 26-year career as a theology and philosophy professor. During his tenure, he served as chair of the philosophy department and led study abroad trips to Europe.

After retiring in 1993, Wells and his wife moved to Lincoln City, Oregon. In 2005, he and Marilynn moved to Warm Beach, Washington, where he was active in the retirement community, even singing bass in the “Beachwood Boys” men’s choir.

Wells is survived by MARILYNN HAYES WELLS ’49, his wife of 72 years; children Mark, Matthew, and Sarah Lynn; six grandchildren; nieces MYRA WELLS GIBBON ’62 and JUDITH THORSEN ENCHELMAYER ’70; and nephew CARL THORSEN ’74.

To contribute to the Dr. Raymond J. and W. Marilynn Wells Philosophy Scholarship Endowment, visit spu.edu/givenow and note this endowment in the designation.

shepherds other companies through the software engineering process. He’s been at Slalom Build for close to eight years, overseeing some 1,000 employees across North America. The team completes approximately 1,000 engineering projects for 400 clients annually. Ian and his wife, Amanda, along with daughters Hailey, Shiloh, and Maya, reside in Issaquah, Washington.

MATTHEW YOUNG ’02 is the dean of natural sciences at Hillsdale College in southern Michigan. An associate professor of chemistry, he previously served as the department chair for four years. He earned his doctorate in physical chemistry at Northwestern University.

CHANNAH HANBERG ’03 is general manager for Seattle radio stations KCMS Spirit105.3 FM and KCIS 630 AM Seattle, part of CRISTA Media. She resides in Shoreline, Washington, with her husband, Tyler, and her children, Hadley and Dax.

ALISON SOIKE ’03 opened Alison’s Coastal Cafe and Bakery on Leary Avenue in Ballard after 12 years working as a director at the Boys & Girls Club of King County. The cafe is in its fifth year serving the community breakfast, lunch, and ready-made meals to take home. It also provides catering services for events. Alison’s Coastal Cafe and Bakery hires and mentors young adults transitioning from high school to college in order to provide them with job skills and work experience.

ALISA KEARNEY ’04, MSN ’11, a certified family nurse practitioner, provides care for patients in neuro-oncology and spine neurosurgery at the Stanford Neuroscience Health Center in Palo Alto, California.

MATTHEW VIERS ’04, an attorney at Lane Powell, was elected a shareholder by his firm. He represents entrepreneurs, startups, and investors with mergers, acquisitions, venture capital financing, and intellectual property licensing. Matthew earned his...
JOELLE HATHAWAY ’05 begins her role as assistant professor of theological studies at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana, this summer. She is currently an instructor at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, where she earned both her master’s and doctoral degrees.

COLBY WILSON MA ’05 is the CEO and president for the Boys & Girls Club of Central New Mexico. He has worked with the Boys & Girls Clubs for more than 18 years, including a role as the chief encouragement officer in Lawrence, Kansas.

SARA HUEY ’06 is the communications manager at Solitude Mountain Resort near Salt Lake City, Utah.

GINGER GUNN MA ’07, PHD ’11 is an assistant professor of psychology at Iowa’s Northwestern College. She most recently worked as a staff psychologist at the Harry Truman Memorial Veterans’ Hospital in Sedalia, Missouri. She has also been a clinical/administrative supervisor for a corrections center and a veterans affairs facility.

ADAM JACKSON ’07 is Mountain West Bank’s assistant vice president of professional and commercial lending in Spokane, Washington. He graduated from Leadership Spokane last year and co-chaired the annual gala for the organization.

BENJAMIN “BJ” MYERS ’08 is a sergeant for the Woodinville, Washington, police force. An Air Force veteran, he spent the past 12 years working for the King County Sheriff’s Office.

MICHIE WARD ’08 is in her first year as principal of Tierra Bonita Elementary School in Poway, California, just north of San Diego. An educator for 16 years, she has held numerous administration and teaching roles.

When Susan G. Werkema ’81 passed away in March 2019, her family was determined to honor her and help future Seattle Pacific University students. A sociology major at SPU, Susan added a visual art minor to her academic load to nurture her lifelong passion for creativity. Even after she became a licensed massage therapist, Susan continued to foster her passion for art.

Susan was the daughter of Gordon Werkema, former SPU executive vice president and former president of the Christian College Consortium, and Jackie Werkema. The Werkema family — led by Susan’s brothers Mark and Gordon Werkema ’80 (Medallion recipient and former Seattle Pacific Foundation board member) — established the Susan Werkema Memorial Art Scholarship Endowment to honor Susan’s legacy.

The family hopes to provide a path for students to nurture a love of art alongside another discipline — just like Susan had. The scholarship will be awarded to a student minoring in art each year.

To contribute to the Susan Werkema Memorial Art Scholarship Endowment, visit spu.edu/givenow and note this endowment in the designation, or call the Office of Endowments and Gift Planning directly at 206-281-2702.
third-grade teacher at Hazelwood Elementary School in Newcastle, Washington.

AMANDA WYMA-BRADLEY ‘15 is a legislative assistant in Washington Congressman Adam Smith’s Washington, D.C., office. She handles agriculture, business, financial services, housing, transportation, and tax issues for the congressman. She formerly worked for End Violence Against Women International. Story on page 39.

MATTHEW BURKE ‘15 has joined a title and escrow company, TitleOne, as an office administrator in Boise, Idaho. He previously worked in the frozen food industry.

SAMUEL SMITH ‘15 is the managing attorney and director of Immigration Legal Services at World Relief Spokane office. Samuel completed the SEA TRIKAN last year, a five-day, 400-mile bike tour fundraiser in support of refugees and asylum seekers in Washington state. His wife, SARAH ANDREWS SMITH ‘15, also works for World Relief Spokane as a volunteer coordinator.

MARCELLA BOULOS ’17 is a program coordinator for the Chamber of Commerce in Ferndale, Washington.

CHRISTOPHER THOMAS ’17 completed his MBA last year at Southeastern University. He is currently working for his home church in Hawaii in accounting, administration, and worship and youth ministries.

Marriages


Adoptions/Births

To JAMIE ELLIS JOHNSON ’12 and TRUSTIN JOHNSON ’13, a girl, Everly Danae Johnson, on Nov. 2, 2019. She joins 3-year-old sister, Paisley.

ANDREW SHUTES-DAVID ‘03 and ERICA SHUTES-DAVID ’03, along with then 1-year-old Kincaide, joyfully adopted siblings Lana and Musashi into their family in October.

Professor emerita of nursing’s influence at home and abroad

ANNALEE OAKES, professor emerita of nursing, died Oct. 25, 2019. She was 85 years old.

Born and raised in Iowa farm country, Oakes received her bachelor’s of nursing and master’s degrees at the University of Washington before becoming a registered critical care nurse. She joined Seattle Pacific College faculty in 1971 and earned her doctorate from Seattle University in 1988.

Before retiring in 1998, Oakes became dean of the School of Health Sciences and director of SHS’ graduate programs. She was instrumental in helping the school develop into one of the state’s premiere educational programs, and she helped establish the master of science in nursing (MSN) program in 1989.

Oakes was elected as a fellow into the prestigious American Academy of Nursing in 1990, the only SPU nursing faculty member to achieve that distinction at the time. When students named her the 1995 Professor of the Year, then-director of emergency services at Harborview Medical Center, Michael Copass, said she was the “single most significant long-term contributor to the quality of Harborview’s Intensive Care Unit.”

Oakes also made valuable connections overseas. Under her leadership, the Gunma University (Japan) College of Medical Care and Technology program became a baccalaureate program in 1996.

After her SPU retirement, Oakes became a senior consultant/visiting professor for the nursing program at Northwest University in Kirkland, Washington, where she continued to foster nurse exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan. She also participated as parish nurse for more than 10 years at Calvary Christian Assembly.

Oakes is survived by her husband of 65 years, Phillip Oakes, as well as daughters ALICE OAKES JOHNSON ’80; Joyce Oakes; and ANNE OAKS STRAND ’83; son-in-law ROGER STRAND ’83; three grandchildren, including RACHEL STRAND ’08; and five great-grandchildren.
CHARLES OLSON, professor emeritus of education and mathematics, died Oct. 29, 2019. He was 78 years old.

Born and raised in Longview, Washington, Olson attended Lower Columbia Community College before studying education at Western Washington University. A math and science scholarship enabled him to earn a master’s in mathematics at Washington State University. By 1977, he added a doctorate in education from the University of Washington.

Olson joined the Seattle Pacific faculty in 1981, where he became known among colleagues and students alike as an encourager. Olson was a member of multiple state and national mathematic councils. He also consulted in mathematics education in school districts throughout the Northwest. In 1990, he earned a Burlington Northern “Excellence in Teaching” award. Olson retired from SPU in 1995.

Olson was a longtime active member of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Everett, where he taught and sang in the choir. He and his wife, Judy, who met in high school, were parents of two children. As his family grew, he was active coaching basketball and soccer.

Olson is survived by Judy, his wife of 56 years, children Eric Olson ’90 and Lisa Olson-Kelly ’84, Med ’91, and five grandchildren.

RICHARD BURLEY ’44 died Jan. 20, 2020, at the age of 95.

LEROY CHARCAS ’86 died Jan. 4, 2020, at the age of 84.

SHARON MARSH DOWNY ’80 died Dec. 16, 2019, at the age of 62.

CORAL DIETZ FINKBEINER ’54 died Dec. 12, 2019, at the age of 87.

FORREST FRANKLIN JR. ’61 died Dec. 4, 2019, at the age of 80.

HAROLD HARRIMAN ’46 CC* died Nov. 4, 2019, at the age of 95.

CLINTON HOOPER SR. ’68 died Jan. 3, 2020, at the age of 75.

DONALD HOWELL SR. ’53 died Aug. 29, 2019, at the age of 91.

VIRGIL IVESON ’56 died Sep. 3, 2019, at the age of 85.

DIANE FINROW THOMPSON ’56 died Aug. 22, 2019, at the age of 84.

THOMAS TAVENER ’58 died Dec. 24, 2019, at the age of 88.

*Cascade College alumnus

PHOTOS BY SPU ARCHIVES

Professor emeritus helped Seattle Pacific move into the NCAA Division II

BY HOPE MCPHERSON

BILL ROSENBERGER, professor emeritus of education, died Dec. 23, 2019, at the age of 91.

Rosenberger earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Washington before joining the Seattle Pacific faculty in 1976, where he began as director of physical education and athletics. In 1978, he was involved in the decision to move Seattle Pacific athletics into NCAA Division II.

By 1984, he moved to the School of Education, where he chaired the school administration program and taught as an associate professor. In 1989, Rosenberger took on new duties for SPIRAL, SPU’s continuing education program for teachers, before retiring in 1993. His wife, Dorothy, passed away in 2017.
What freedom means to me

THIS YEAR, Lithuania celebrates its 30th anniversary of independence from the Soviet Union. Freedom, or laisvė in Lithuanian, means so much to Lithuanian people, as they have had to fight for it many times in their history.

I was born in Lithuania in the ’60s when there was no freedom of speech or religion. My siblings and I were taught the communist view of history in school, but at home, my parents and relatives secretly told us the truth about our country’s history and taught us the Christian faith.

Lithuania was established in the 13th century and grew into the largest country in Europe until it fell under the Russian Empire in 1795. Lithuania became a democratic state in 1918 and remained independent until the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany divided Europe into spheres of influence and allowed the USSR to occupy the Baltic states under the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939.

While the world was celebrating the war’s end in 1945, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia endured a brutal Soviet occupation. More than 300,000 Lithuanians were tortured, murdered, or expelled to Siberia. In the mid-1950s, civilians who waged campaigns for freedom were crushed, and people who resisted were persecuted.

In my home, we prayed for freedom. Our prayers eventually were answered.

On Aug. 23, 1989, on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, more than 2 million people from three Baltic countries formed a human chain that stretched for 420 miles from Vilnius, Lithuania, to Tallinn, Estonia.

I went to the event in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. All around the capital, people were helping each other, cheering, waving Lithuanian flags, and singing. In peaceful demonstrations that year, people sang national and folk songs and hymns previously banned, which is why the Baltic Independence Movements were called, “The Singing Revolution.”

As I held hands in a human chain that became known as “The Baltic Way,” I felt the tremendous energy of freedom. It was overwhelming to be a part of this massive parade of hope for a better life. It was a cry to the world, “Don’t forget us. We want to live in freedom. We don’t want to be slaves!”

Nearly every Baltic student at the time belonged to the Communist Youth organization. Students were compelled to join if they hoped to attend university. After the Baltic Way demonstrations, I, along with thousands of others, canceled my membership to that organization as we no longer feared the consequences.

Seven months later, Lithuania became the first Soviet-controlled country to regain its independence — an independence that withstood Soviet aggression in 1991 that left more than one dozen dead and hundreds injured.

Six days after Lithuania’s independence, I married my wife, Asta. Our wedding occurred during the Soviet Union’s blockade on Lithuania in 1990.

There was no gasoline or natural gas available except on the black market. We had to take cold showers. Store shelves were empty of sugar, salt, flour, and other items. The blockade took its toll, but we knew it was better to be poor, but free. Today, Lithuania has a growing economy and is part of the European Union, NATO, and the Eurozone.

My life there taught me the value of freedom. I will never take this for granted. Problems we face now seem insignificant compared to the life I knew. I have learned to see the world with grateful eyes and to never give up on hope.

DAINIUS VAICEKONIS is an award-winning soloist and collaborative artist in the U.S. and Europe. Vaičekonis, who earned his doctorate in musical arts from the University of Washington, is an assistant professor of piano and head of keyboard studies at Seattle Pacific University.

As I held hands in a human chain that became known as “The Baltic Way,” I felt the tremendous energy of freedom.
BY DANIEL SHEEHAN

At SPU’s 66th annual Homecoming and Family Weekend in February, lead guitarist Nate Canny and his group, Tapestry, took second-place honors at the student talent show. Canny, executive vice president of Associated Students of Seattle Pacific, performed with Aseda Bekoe-Sakyi, Rachael Fasano, Alia Haro, and Eric Peterson.
PARENTS: Is this magazine addressed to an SPU graduate who has moved elsewhere? Help us update our records at spu.edu/response.

Every Falcon leaves a legacy

Seattle Pacific University propelled Bob Thompson '69 to a life of success and impact for God’s kingdom. His desire to help future generations of Falcons receive an SPU education led him to plan a generous bequest gift to SPU in his estate plans. That is his legacy.

What will yours be?

FOR MORE INFORMATION on leaving a bequest gift to Seattle Pacific, or to request the new gift planning guide, contact the Office of Endowments and Gift Planning at 206-281-2702, giftplanning@spu.edu, or online at legacy.spu.edu.