

Minnesota ALUMNI

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2016

MEET MATT OEHRLEIN AND
HIS GIANT FIGHTING ROBOT

Story page 39

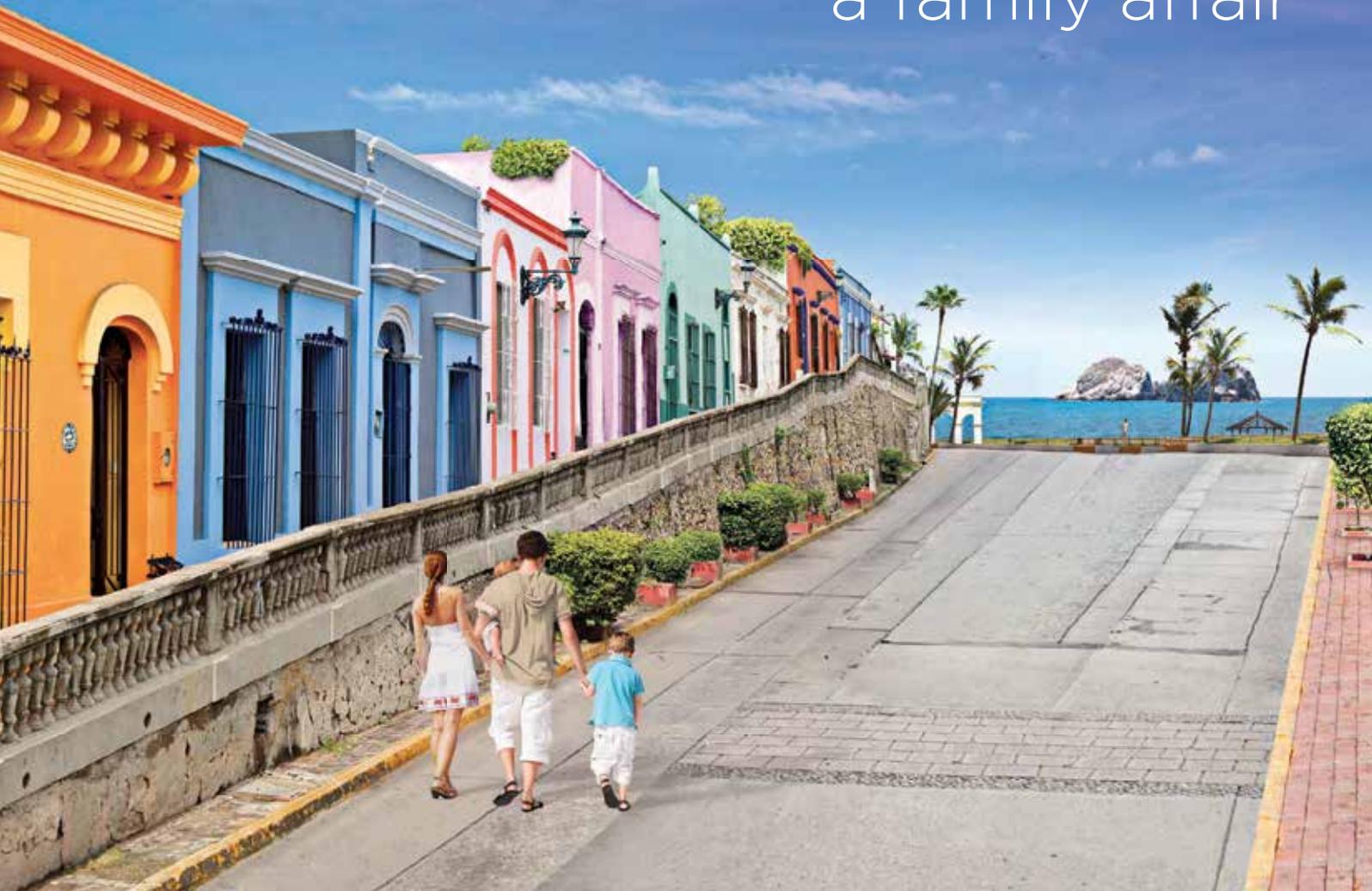
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Alumni Serving
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The Irrepressible
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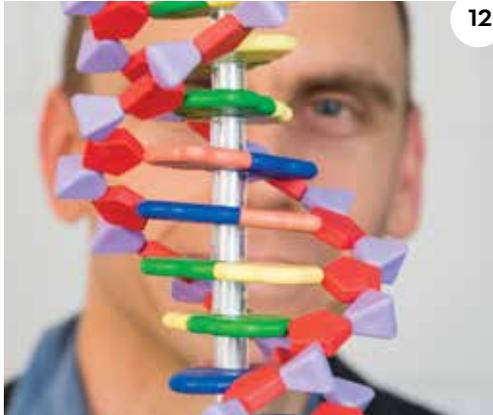
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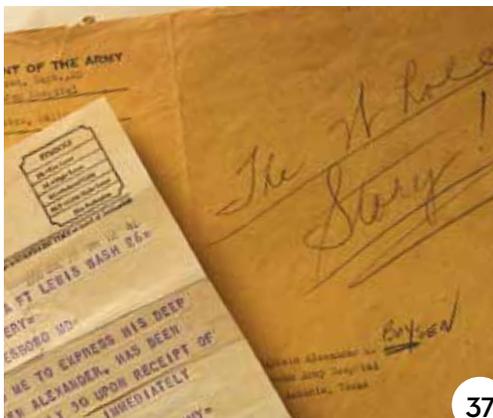
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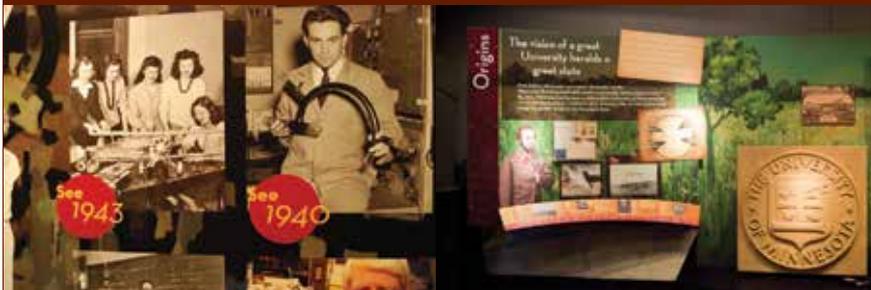
This page from top by Moira Lennox, Ed Carreón, and Rick Dublin



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Cut out and save these!



Creating Efficient Teams Webinar December 17th

Learn how to create chemistry where people buy-in, take ownership, and are fully passionate about the same goals.

Alumni Dinner in Hanoi January 4th

Join fellow alumni, travelers and University President Eric Kaler for dinner at the Sofitel Plaza Hanoi.

Alumni Dinner in Ho Chi Minh City January 12th

Join fellow alumni, travelers and University President Eric Kaler for dinner at the Sofitel Plaza Saigon.

Naples, FL Apple Development Lunch January 19th

The Crunch Factor: Apple Development at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum with Peter C. Moe, Director of Operation and Research and interim CEO.

Emerging Professionals Network Lakes & Legends Brewing Co. March 29th

Join recent graduates for a night of networking at Minneapolis' newest brewery in Loring Park. Enjoy an assortment of food and drinks including a selection of beers, Whistler Classic Soda options and Blackeye cold press coffee.

Annual Celebration April 15th

Come to campus for the Alumni Association's annual event celebrating the global impact of alumni, students, and the University.

Find info on these events and more at
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What's in a Name? You Are



IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE to introduce a new look and new name with this issue of the magazine.

The magazine formerly known as *Minnesota* is now *Minnesota Alumni*, as you likely noticed on the cover. I recently unveiled the new name and design to the University's alumni relations officers, our collegiate partners, by commenting that it was the magazine, not us, that instigated the change. In response, one of the officers quipped, "Do you take medication for that?"

Granted it sounds a little odd to say that the magazine wanted to change its name. But over the past year, as we have poked, prodded, and examined every aspect of our design, our storytelling, our mission, and our audience, it became clear that you—alumni—needed to be as visible in our name as you are in our pages.

In a very real sense, this change harkens back to the magazine's roots. Since its inception in 1901, the magazine has had six different names:

- The Minnesota Alumni Weekly* (1901 to 1943)
- Minnesota Alumnus* (1943 to 1949)
- Minnesota Voice of the Alumni* (1949 to 1954)
- Minnesota Alumni Voice* (1954 to 1955)
- Minnesota Gopher Grad* (1955 to 1959)
- University of Minnesota Alumni News* (1959 to 1977)

In 1977 the magazine became *Minnesota*, the only iteration without reference to alumni in the name. As the Alumni Association has honed its focus to be more responsive than ever to alumni, reclaiming that identity emerged as a natural and seamless step.

At least, that's what the magazine told us. And when a 114-year-old speaks, you listen.

You also give her a well-deserved facelift. Our redesign, led by art director Kristi Anderson—one of the most knowledgeable and skilled magazine designers in the Twin Cities—pumped oxygen into our pages. The result is a fresh, contemporary feel that fully complements the work of our outstanding photographers and writers.

Other changes include a regular column from President and fellow alumnus Eric Kaler (Ph.D. '82), who will offer his thoughts on important issues facing him and the University. We have also added a new column on the back page called Heart of the Matter, a short, first person essay in which writers will speak from the heart on matters of their choosing. And we have added a new section called Stay Connected that will keep you apprised of Alumni Association events, programming, and member advantages. We're constantly adding new offerings, such as our extremely popular webinar series and Gold Mind, a collection of University faculty and expert talks.

Last year we conducted a reader survey that helped guide our decision making. The column by President Kaler is, in part, a response to your comments that you value hearing from key leaders on important issues. You also told us you like reading about University research and discoveries, University history, important campus issues, and the contributions that alumni make to their communities and to the world. We will continue to do all of that, and more, in an inviting new format.

Enjoy the inaugural issue of *Minnesota Alumni*.

Cynthia Scott (M.A. '89) can be reached at scott325@umn.edu.

Minnesota ALUMNI

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Addressing Campus Sexual Assault



OPEN A MAGAZINE or newspaper lately and it's likely you'll read something about sexual assault on college campuses. These issues are front and center, including at the University of Minnesota. It's a subject this magazine reported on last year, and obviously it's critical to the well-being of all of our students and the health of our overall campus climate that sexual assault be eliminated.

But the subject remains controversial. Congressional action on the Campus SAVE Act, which requires campuses to adopt new measures for reporting, response, and prevention education, aligns with our University's collection of data to understand the scope of the problem. At the same time, we are making new investments in training and education.

On the other hand, events like *Rolling Stone* magazine's discredited reporting about sexual assault at the University of Virginia last year give fuel to the fires of those who think the problem is overblown.

The Association of American Universities, or AAU, which is comprised of the 62 top research institutions in the United States and Canada, recently conducted the largest survey ever of students on sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking on campuses. The University was one of the participating institutions. University data is overall in line with what the survey found nationally, and it is extremely troubling. About 23 percent of women students on our campus and others across the nation reported having experienced "nonconsensual contact by physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation." There was similar commonality on other findings, such as sexual harassment (reported by about 48 percent of women), intimate partner violence (about 10 percent), and stalking (about 4 percent).

The survey reconfirms much of what we already know through our Boynton Health Service data about campus sexual assault—including that about three-quarters of all incidents involve alcohol in some way—but the AAU survey results reinforce the need for more vigilance for our entire community.

The positive news is that our Aurora Center is truly a national leader that serves all victims/survivors of sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking on campus. The Center has developed a solid curriculum to orient our incoming students, and it's been recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice for its groundbreaking work with victims. Importantly, the Aurora Center recently hired its first Male Engagement Counselor to work with men on issues of sexual violence.

Another emerging strategy is what's called bystander education. This teaches students that it's OK to call for help or to intervene when they witness an unwanted or drunken sexual encounter is about to happen. That's important, because nearly 40 percent of our student respondents said they'd witnessed such an incident, but 75 percent of them did nothing to stop it.

Of course, we must support those who are harmed by sexual harassment and sexual assault and ensure that resources exist to support them. But what's clear is that we need to create and strengthen a culture on our campus where sexual violence isn't tolerated. I'm committed to that and to the work we need to get there. 

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Readers Weigh in on the Future

I found the discussion in “What Is the Future of Higher Education?” interesting [Summer 2015]. I had the same experience as Dr. Blank in that I could easily fund my education at the University of Minnesota as an undergraduate by working.

I found the remainder of debt discussion a bit unrealistic. When Dr. Brown spoke of annual tuition of \$44,000, was that tuition only or did that include room and board, laboratory fees, books, healthcare, etc.? It is generous to cover the majority of that \$44,000, but what are the terms of the financial aid? Is a student accruing interest on loans while still an undergraduate? What are the monthly payments required upon graduation? If in graduate school, is interest deferred? It is completely unreasonable to average debt across all students, including those whose education was fully funded. The debt increasingly falls upon the shoulders of the populations that can ill afford it. That is, we all encourage impoverished, bright students to go to college, blind to the factor of poor advising regarding loans and the need for a financial safety net. Students from poverty have greater responsibility to issues at home such as parental illness, foreclosure, debt, or unemployment.

There has been much recent discussion about a university’s role in student finances. For example, how responsible have financial aid departments been in making sure students know how much their monthly payments will be and how long they will be required to pay on a loan? How many colleges compete in the “brain gain” ploy by offering free rides to talented students of means, simply to pad academic ranks? What is the ethical role of a college to ensure that financial aid goes to those who need it, not the progeny of wealthy alumni? Another question of late is how universities can keep growing their endowments while increasingly pricing students out of contention for attendance. I find all of these worthy of examination.

It is true that states have increasingly defunded universities. The University of Wisconsin is a sad recent example. I feel, however, colleges are disingenuous if they do not examine their own ethics of money lending, scholarship awards, and financial armaments.

Mary Kemen (B.S. '78, B.A. '79, M.D. '84)
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

We hope to think of educators as progressive thinkers who understand the power of innovation. Unfortunately I saw no such thinking in your article. Learning to do more with less seems completely beyond the grasp of education leaders, even this distinguished group.

Educators appear to be stuck in a world of 19th century methodology and are incapable of self-analysis. There is no discussion here of the possibility of finding ways to do more with less and asking hard questions about why embedded costs

“The rapid decline in support for higher education in the United States should be cause for alarm and thoughtful reflection.”

cannot be controlled. There seems to be only the assumption that to do more always requires more resources. We are in the 21st century. We have tools to improve higher education without adding cost. We can no longer rely on credit as the antidote to runaway cost. If educators are unwilling to analyze their own situation with critical thinking, how do they maintain credibility with students who are already asking the hard questions about why higher education cannot deliver more for less?

Roger Norberg (B.A. '80)
Edina, Minnesota

I have had several discussions over the past year with fellow engineering graduates from the U of M about the rapid rise in tuition and none of them were aware that the rise in tuition was a direct result of the sharp decline in state support. They were generally aware of the decline in state support, but none realized how drastic the cuts had been.

The rapid decline in support for higher education in the United States should be cause for alarm and thoughtful reflection. Might I suggest that a worthy topic that the three Presidents might address is: Why has the public support for higher education declined so precipitously in the past two or three decades? How do universities contribute to this decline? What has changed in our society that has diminished support for education? What needs to change to reverse this trend?

This article is a good starter. It makes clear the problem. Now the issue is, what can be done to solve the problem?

Dale F. Stein (B.S. '58)
President Emeritus, Michigan Technological University
Tucson, Arizona

I do not know [what the future of higher education is]. However, I am sure the group responsible for the article stands little chance of discovering the answer either. The article lacked any objectivity and left no room for exploring issues. No daylight here buried deeply inside the present box. Little thanks for a boring read full of excuses by those responsible for the situation today.

Lawrence Stirtz (M.B.T. '82)
Savage, Minnesota



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Big Catch

Workers assemble Frank Gehry's *Standing Glass Fish* (1986) in the Karen Bachman and Robert Fisch Gallery at the Weisman Art Museum. The sculpture is on long-term loan from the Walker Art Center during renovation of the Cowles Conservatory, where it is permanently housed.

The fish's glass scales are held in place with a clear silicone substance and were disassembled using—what else?—a fillet knife.

Photo by Mark Luinenburg



@PMortell37

Jerry Kill will always be more than a football coach to me. He made me a better person. I love that man from the bottom of my heart.

@PrezKaler

Our Twin Cities #UMN19 class comes from 37 countries, 43 states, and 1,347 different high schools.

@kelseyfinger

Two weeks in a row on #GopherGameDay I've been stopped by someone in D.C. because I'm wearing @GopherSports gear and they say #SkiUMah.

@UMNHorticulture

Congratulations to Julie Grossman on being awarded the 2015 U of M Emerging Leader in Plant Sciences Award!

@irenekfernando

@PrezKaler thanks for saying hi to Ernie (my pup) during his first homecoming parade!

@GopherVball

How sweep it is! #Gophers take the third set 25-21 and get the victory over No. 1 Penn State! #vbscores

Hats Off to Thee, Coach Kill

Gopher football coach Jerry Kill hung up his ball cap for good on October 28, announcing his retirement so he can focus on managing his epilepsy. "I can't do what I love doing anymore," he said at an emotional press conference. "I don't have any more energy. None. I've left it all right here in the great state of Minnesota, and I have no regrets."

We have no regrets either, Coach. Thank you for your dedication to Gopher student athletes and to the University. We wish you health and happiness always. Kill's longtime assistant, Tracy Claeys, succeeds him.



Research Protections Advance

THE UNIVERSITY of Minnesota announced in October that it received a "Reaccreditation-Pending" status from the Council on Accreditation of the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) at AAHRPP's final site visit in June. Under the status, the University remains an AAHRPP accredited organization, as it has been since 2004, but must implement several changes and provide

additional updates to AAHRPP to meet all criteria for full accreditation.

Many of the areas identified are already being addressed through the University's work plan to strengthen its human research protection program and will be fully implemented in June 2016.

In its October update to the Minnesota Legislature, the U reported that four medical institutional review board rosters have been

developed that more closely align expertise with the type of research protocol submitted.

Additionally, faculty and other stakeholders are currently reviewing proposed changes to the individual conflict of interest policy to clarify that investigators on human participant studies must disclose financial interest from the first dollar and may not receive any personal income from the industry sponsors during the time of study.

3 QUESTIONS

for **Jessica Hellman**, director of the University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment

What is your most pressing environmental concern?

Improving the relationship between humans and natural systems: understanding, strengthening, preserving, restoring, and rejuvenating that relationship so we can help each other flourish. Traditionally we think of environmental problems as those where humans have done something bad to nature. It's true that we inevitably alter our surroundings—and when we do, we must take care to do so in a way that sustains rather than degrades. But issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss are just symptoms of a bigger problem, which is insufficient understanding that nature and we are in this together. What benefits nature benefits us. It's like health. We want to be free of disease, but free of disease is not the same as healthy, vigorous, and long living. If we view environmental problems as symptoms to be alleviated, we're missing the bigger picture.

This change of thinking—cultivating a greater appreciation for the interconnectedness of nature and the quality of human life and working to improve both—is something each of us can do.

What will it take to do that?

We have to decide how healthy we want our planet to be. We need to talk about our planetary values and figure out how we are going to manage Earth appropriate to those values. It's all hands on deck. Science and engineering help explain which scenarios for the future are possible and how we might get there. But values and ethics provide direction.

As we do this, we'll find ourselves relying on two core principles. First is the value and power of diversity. Managing for diversity is a really smart thing to do. Whether it's genetic or species diversity, diversity of management approaches, diversity of energy or food production strategies, or diversity of opinions and people, it's all important because you don't know where the next great idea or the solution is going to come from. Second is the recognition that everything is connected. When we release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, we change tropical forests. When we



Jessica Hellman will be a keynote speaker at the 2016 Southwest Florida Chapter Minne-College February 6. She, along with Stephen Polasky and Bonnie Keeler from IonE, will speak on "How Nature Builds Resilience into our Cities." Details at MinnesotaAlumni.org.

over-apply fertilizer, we undermine marine fisheries. The sooner we realize these interconnections and account for them, the better off we're going to be. My job is to create, connect, motivate, and inspire new ways of thinking and doing, while also bringing those approaches into the real world where they can improve the lives of people.

If you could eradicate one misperception, what would it be?

I can think of three.

First, we need to get over the idea that climate change is something you do or don't believe in. As soon as we overcome this barrier, we can take all of the energy we waste arguing and disagreeing and use it productively to talk about solutions.

Second, we need to eradicate the notion that science must be devoid of values. Scientists have something meaningful to say about the broader conversation surrounding environmental challenges. Many of the issues we're confronting are scientific, but they're just as much social, economic, spiritual, or philosophical. Science should be at the table talking about the whole, not just saying, "Well, now that we're done with the technical conversation, good luck politicians and theologians. Let us know how it worked out."

Third, we need to stop thinking there are only techno-fixes for our problems. Science and technology are unbelievably important in navigating our future, but we are not going to solve complex environmental problems unless we restore and protect nature's talent for sustaining us. We're not going to protect cities from sea level rise and storm surges just with big walls; coastal ecosystem management is going to need to be part of the discussion. The built, the engineered, the manufactured, and the chemical are not going to cut it alone.

"IT'S ALMOST THE KIND OF THING THAT MAKES SOCIAL SCIENCES LOOK SILLY. IT SEEMS SO OBVIOUS THAT WE ARE OVERLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HOW GOOD OUR TEAMS WILL BE."

University of Minnesota sociology Professor DOUG HARTMAN commenting on a study published in *PLOS ONE* demonstrating that pro football fans are overly optimistic about their teams. Collectively, participants in the study predicted their teams would win 51 more games than even possible.



LGBTQ-Friendly

THE NONPROFIT organization Campus Pride has named the University of Minnesota one of the top 25 colleges and universities in the nation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students for the fourth consecutive year. The U scored 4.5 out of 5 in factors that ranged from institutional support and campus life to recruitment and retention efforts.

Many different parts of the University played a role in the campus' top rating, says Stef Wilenchek, director of the University's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Ally Programs Office. "Our campus offers transgender-inclusive health insurance, which many colleges and universities don't, and we have a resource center, a student cultural center, alumni groups, an LGBTQ studies program, and an LGBTQ living space called Lavender House, as well as an anti-discrimination policy that covers sexual orientation," Wilenchek explains.

—Meleah Maynard



One for the Books

STUDENTS AT nine colleges and universities across the country have saved an estimated \$1.5 million on textbook costs, primarily over the past year, thanks to the University of Minnesota's Open Textbook Network (OTN), which offers online textbooks for free.

David Ernst (Ph.D. '07), a national expert in open textbooks at the University's College of Education and Human Development, created the OTN three years ago. "Open textbooks eliminate the cost barrier between students and their learning. These are real savings for students and their families," Ernst says. This year, a U.S. college student will spend on average about \$1,225 on books and supplies, an increase of more than 1,000 percent since 1977, according to the College Board, a nonprofit dedicated to expanding access to education.

Currently, the University's network of open textbook supporters includes 84 institutions in all, including the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.

Supporters of OTN estimate students and their families could save hundreds of millions of dollars if the programs are a success.

“When someone hears you say ‘butterfly’ in their language, they know you’re speaking their language.”

University of Minnesota anthropology Professor WILLIAM BEEMAN in the *New York Times* commenting on the fact that the word “butterfly” flies in the face of what is known about how languages work, since it is the one common word that does not have cognates—words that are similar in sound, spelling, and meaning in related languages.

The Ledger

42

Ranking of the University of Minnesota in Reuters' inaugural Top 100 survey of universities in the world that lead in scientific innovation.

.69

Pillsbury Hall's rating out of a possible 1.0 on the Facility Condition Index, qualifying it for "critical condition."

33

The expected price tag, in millions of dollars, for renovating Pillsbury Hall, a project scheduled to begin in May 2017

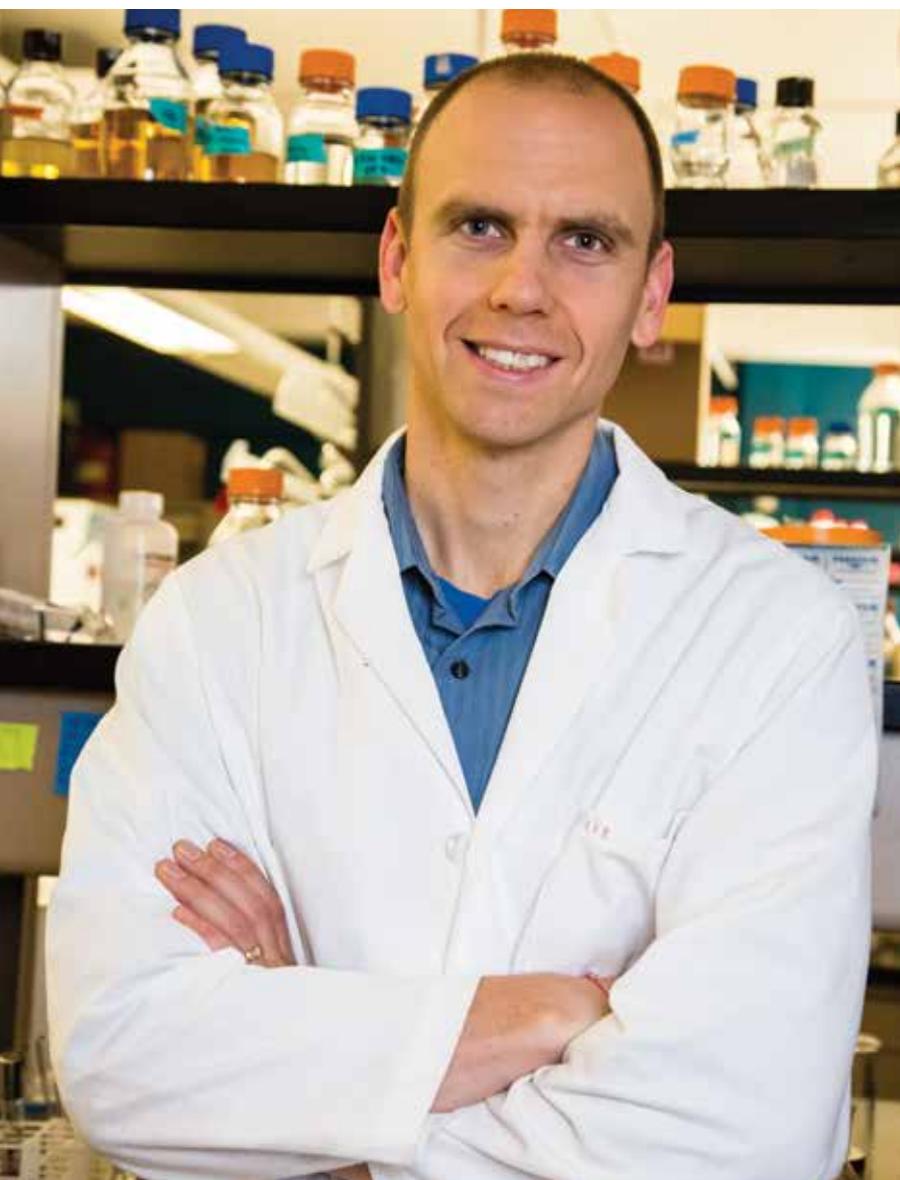
55

The amount, in dollars, Curt Carlson (B.A. '37) borrowed in 1938 to found the Gold Bond Stamp Company, which later became Carlson Companies. The Carlson School of Management bears his name.



Mining Microbes for New Medicines

Breakthrough scientist Michael Smanski *By Deane Morrison*



Returning from a vacation in 1928, English chemist Alexander Fleming checked cultures of infectious *Staphylococcus* bacteria growing in petri dishes and noticed that the bacterial colonies were thriving—except in a clear space around a blob of mold. Fleming realized that the mold, named *Penicillium*, had released a chemical that inhibited bacterial growth. Thus the story of penicillin began.

It was a monumental stroke of luck. Molds, bacteria, and other microbes make many molecules useful to humans, but they don't do it 24/7. Fleming caught that *Penicillium* specimen in the act of fending off other microbes, when the genes needed to produce penicillin were turned on. There's no telling how many other potentially life-saving products lie dormant in microbial genes that rarely, if ever, see action.

Scientists like Michael Smanski are out to find those hidden treasures and turn them into new antibiotics, anticancer agents, and other critical products. Smanski, 31, an assistant professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, and Biophysics (BMBB), is a miner of microbial genomes. He searches them for clusters of "silent" genes, each of which could potentially direct one step in a biochemical pathway leading to a product, just as an architect, carpenter, and electrician each perform one step in building a house.

"Our approach to finding novel molecules is to mine sequenced genomes for biosynthetic pathways that have never been studied," he explains. "For example, the majority of anticancer drugs were originally derived from natural products made in plants or microorganisms, and we are applying our technology to accelerate the discovery of new natural products."

Smanski's work has attracted international attention. He held a highly competitive Damon Runyon Fellowship for cancer researchers from 2012 to 2014, and in January 2015 he was among only six fellowship holders to win a \$100,000 Damon Runyon-Dale F. Frey

Breakthrough Scientist award, given to the scientists whose work showed the most promise for producing paradigm-shifting breakthroughs.

Awakening silent genes

In October, three researchers won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering treatments for two ancient, intractable foes: the nematodes that cause river blindness and other diseases, and the malarial parasite. Both treatments involved products from natural sources: The sweet wormwood plant made the malaria drug, and *Streptomyces* bacteria made the nematode killer.

The nematode work was possible because soil bacteria like *Streptomyces* constantly wield chemical weapons in a war for resources against other microbes. But, as with penicillin, no discovery would have happened if the bacteria hadn't been caught making a nematocidal product first.

"We now know that only a small fraction of the genes required for making these drug-like molecules are naturally turned on when we grow the organisms in the lab," Smanski notes. "For the rest, we need to go in and artificially turn them on using genetic engineering."

He begins by peering into known bacterial genomes. Using computers, he identifies DNA sequences that resemble those for known drugs or other products, which makes them likely candidates to produce new types of drug-like molecules.

With relevant genes identified, he begins waking them up—a complex and daunting task he likens to directing an orchestra. "Dozens of genes are needed to make one drug-like molecule," he explains. "The timing of when we turn genes on or off, and whether some genes are turned on very strongly or just a little, can make a huge difference. If everything isn't working together just right, you won't make the product."

Smanski snips the genes, DNA sequences that switch them on or off, and any other desired genetic elements cleanly out of a bacterial chromosome. He sends the DNA sequence of each element to a company that "prints" numerous copies of them and sends them back in two days. He then recombines the elements into new clusters and splices them into circular pieces of DNA called plasmids. In each plasmid he varies the elements in a different way—for example, the order of the genes or the strength of the various switches. With a starting cluster of, say, two dozen genes plus switches, tens of thousands of plasmid variants are possible.

As a Runyon Fellow, Smanski developed a DNA assembly pipeline technology that allows him to quickly build as many variants as he wants, each in a single test

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tube. After all plasmids are built, he puts them back into cells of *Streptomyces*, like "installing a new app in your smart phone." Next, the engineered bacteria are grown to see what product is made and which variant is most efficient.

"Our technology allows us to engineer these complex biological capabilities by building new plasmids at a speed and scale not possible before," Smanski says. "We can build thousands of alternative designs at the same time and test them all, then use computers to identify the rules that explain why some designs work and others do not."

The need for work like Smanski's has never been greater, because the pipeline that used to turn natural products into new drugs has all but dried up. Analysts have blamed, among other factors, corporate structures and policies that inhibit innovation. Christine Salomon, assistant director of the University's Center for Drug Design, offers another perspective.

"Even though historically natural products were so successful, major drug companies abandoned them when, about 20 years ago, the combinatorial chemists came along," she says. "These chemists took pieces of synthetic molecules, recombined them in new ways, and made huge libraries [of molecules] that were useless. Now the focus is on making large libraries of small molecules that are more like natural ones." Which comes much closer to Smanski's approach.

After Smanski has transferred the synthetic gene clusters into *Streptomyces* bacteria and harvested their products, Salomon will screen them. For potential anticancer agents, she will first test them against a fast-growing cell line derived from human colon tumors. If a compound should kill those cells, she will test it against noncancerous cell lines to see if it is likely to spare healthy cells. If so, a bigger challenge looms: determining whether the product acts against cancer via a novel mechanism.

"We want to . . . make sure it's different from other known drugs, so it won't [run up against] the same drug-resistance strategies as other compounds do, and also so that we can anticipate possible side effects," she says. Products that show promise may later be tested in lab animals and, eventually, clinical trials.

Besides potential anticancer agents, microbes harbor genes that may give rise to products that can counter other threats to health and even the food supply. For example, chemicals made by soil microbes may be harnessed to wage war on pathogens that attack crop plants. "[What we want] is to get bacteria that are already in the soil and not harming plants to kill the bacteria that do," says Will Harcombe, assistant professor

in the University's BioTechnology Institute and Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior. "Mike can give us a lot of insight into the chemicals that mediate microbial interactions—microbes are super social organisms. He can rapidly modify bacteria to excrete large amounts of chemicals of interest. Once we know what the chemicals are and how they work, we can figure out how to manage the communities of soil microbes to optimize production of compounds with natural disease-suppressive activity."

Smanski also applies his technology to non-microbial organisms. He and Wei-Shou Hu, a professor in the U's Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, collaborate to engineer mammalian cells to produce natural disease-fighting proteins like antibodies and erythropoietin, a hormone that stimulates red blood cell production.

But in order to work, many therapeutic proteins, including erythropoietin, must be chemically modified with sugar molecules added to the protein spine. A different enzyme must perform each of the dozens of steps in this pathway. Smanski

and Hu are orchestrating genetic changes they hope will not only alter the chemical structure of the added sugars, but also improve the proteins' therapeutic performance.

"We do mathematical modeling to predict which enzymes should be changed," Hu explains. "Mike is developing experimental tools to change them quickly by adding different combinations of genes to [cultured cells]. We seek better quality and higher production of protein drugs. Now, we're at the mercy of whatever sugars the cells want to add to the proteins."

For Smanski, the work is its own reward. But there are also others, such as when, as part of his Damon Runyon fellowship, he took part in a 5K run/walk in Yankee Stadium to raise money for cancer research.

"As a Damon Runyon Fellow, I got to wear the bright orange shirt that said 'Scientist' on the back," he recalls. "People, including some battling cancer themselves, would come up and pat you on the back and say 'good work, keep it up.' That's the kind of encouragement and inspiration you don't get when you're sitting at a lab bench." ■



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

RAPTORS HAVE KNOWN US FOR 40 YEARS

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The Raptor Center is one of the hidden gems of the University of Minnesota and the Twin Cities. TRC cares for nearly 800 birds of prey every year; the majority are returned to the wild. Learn all about eagles, falcons, owls and hawks and meet TRC's ambassador birds in their new and enhanced living spaces on the St. Paul campus.

Tours are offered Tuesday through Sunday.

Alumni Association members receive one free admission with one paid admission.



THE RAPTOR CENTER

TheRaptorCenter.org | 612.624.2756



Drones flying overhead cause bears acute stress, according to a study by University of Minnesota researchers. Wildlife researchers have increasingly used unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), commonly called drones, to observe animals in their natural settings. Until now, researchers thought bears were taking these encounters in stride, since they rarely startle or run away when a drone comes near. But the new study reveals that despite the bears' calm demeanor, their heart rates soar, a sign of acute stress.

The highest rate increase recorded was in a sow whose heart rate jumped approximately 400 percent, from 41 beats per minute to 162. Researcher Mark Ditmer in the University's Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology called the increase "shocking."

The researchers fitted free-roaming black bears in northwestern Minnesota with GPS collars and cardiac bioggers. The collars sent the researchers an email with each bear's location every two minutes while the bioggers captured every heartbeat. Then Ditmer and his colleagues programmed a drone to fly to the bear's most recent location. All of the bears in the study responded to drone flights with elevated heart rates. Researchers say the data make it clear that the additional stress on wildlife from UAV flights needs to be taken into account when developing regulations and best scientific practices.

The study was published in the August issue of *Current Biology*.

Contrary to conventional opinion, overweight adolescents' dissatisfaction with their bodies isn't an incentive to lose weight, according to a study by researchers in the University of Minnesota's



School of Public Health. The study found that overweight adolescents who feel good about their bodies do not gain as much weight over time as their peers who are dissatisfied with their bodies.

Low body satisfaction during adolescence places young people at risk for a number of negative health outcomes, including depression and the development of eating disorders. Researchers say the study confirms the importance of positive body image in adolescents.

The study was published in the September 15 *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults are more likely than their heterosexual peers to believe they will need long-term care.

That's the conclusion of new research conducted at the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota.

This study follows a January 2015 study in *Health Affairs*, which found that 60 percent of Americans ages 40 to 65 underestimate their future long-term care needs. In reality, only 30 percent will not need care. [See Spring 2015 *Minnesota*].

The study found that LGB adults have higher rates of disability and are more likely to have a close relative who has needed long-term care,

both of which were associated with a greater likelihood of expecting to need care for oneself. Additionally, LGB adults were less likely to expect family to provide care and more likely to expect to use a nursing home or assisted living.

Prior to this study, little was known about whether sexual orientation was a factor in expectations around long-term care.

The findings were published in the September 17 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

With logging interests and conservationists usually at odds, an unlikely partnership in Russia highlights the benefits of collaboration. Research conducted jointly by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the University of Minnesota analyzed the vital role that logging company OAO Amgu plays in ensuring the survival of Blakiston's fish owls, whose numbers are estimated to be just 3,000 to 5,000 worldwide.

Researchers canvassed nearly 8,000 miles in far eastern Russia and found only 19 percent of the fish owls' habitat was protected in nature reserves, while 43 percent was leased to logging companies. OAO Amgu has been working with biologists to identify select areas the owls need for nesting and hunting. Researchers estimate that if parent company Terneyles also continues to help conserve habitat, the number of protected fish owl territories will triple.

The study was published in the September issue of *Bird Conservation International*.

BUZZ

Construction has begun on the University of Minnesota's new \$6 million, 10,500-square-foot Bee and Pollinator Research Lab, scheduled to open next summer. **Here are a few things you might not know about bees and other pollinators:**

- One honeybee produces about 1/12 teaspoon of honey in her lifetime.
- Around 4,000 species of native bees have been identified in the United States.
- Most bees don't sting. Those that do live in colonies; others live in hives, nests in the ground, or tree cavities.
- Mosquitos sip flower nectar and often transfer pollen.
- Moths are underappreciated for their night-shift pollination work.
- Bats often use echolocation to find flowers and are good pollinators.
- Around 9 percent of birds and mammals, such as hummingbirds and bats, are believed to pollinate plants.

—Meleah Maynard



WHAT DRIVES FRANK BATES TO THINK MOLECULAR “BAND-AIDS” COULD BE USED FOR HEART REPAIR?



How can you mend a broken heart? Imagine if you could do it with a band-aid. Soon, doctors may be able to do just that, with band-aids made from molecules that can repair tears in muscle cells and cell membranes. That vision is what drives Dr. Frank Bates and other researchers at the University of Minnesota to transform how doctors treat patients with congenital heart defects or who are recovering from heart attacks. “We could save thousands of lives each year,” Bates says, “Not bad for a band-aid.”

umn.edu/bates



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to DiscoverSM

Crookston Duluth Morris Rochester Twin Cities



More than 400 U alumni in 14 U.S. cities and Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, fanned out into their communities on the Alumni Day of Service September 19. Jocelyn Brekken, Sitso Bediako, and Angela Bediako are pictured here removing invasive plants from a wetland in New York City's Van Cortlandt Park. Turn to page 25 for more photos from the day.

Photo by Hai Ngo

A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt, is smiling and looking upwards while working in a garden. She is holding a dark-colored glove. In the background, a man in a grey t-shirt and another person in a yellow t-shirt are also working in the garden. The scene is filled with green foliage and wooden trellises.

For the COMMON GOOD

Public service is an occupation for some;
for others, it's a commitment to volunteering.
For these alumni, it's a way of life.

LEADING With Care

By Elizabeth Millard



Former Humphrey Fellow **Sahra Noor** (M.S. '07) started growing the seeds of leadership as a teenager living in a Kenyan refugee camp.

Volunteering at the camp's hospital at her father's suggestion, she remembers standing by the bedsides of women who clenched her hand for support and comfort as they struggled to give birth in a place lacking in physicians, medicine, or emergency services. "The nurses and midwives in that camp were up against impossible odds," she recalls. "They were in the middle of desperate, complex, and heartbreaking situations. But they remained composed and focused while everything around them was in chaos."

The experience inspired Noor to pursue her own career in healthcare. And after coming to the United States at 18, she has spent more than two decades working hard

to rise to a position that allows her to influence patient care. In 2013 she became CEO of People's Center Health Services in Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. But while the job may have come with a corner office, it was never Noor's aim to land somewhere cushy where she wouldn't interact with patients. Quite the opposite: Every day she makes it a point to walk around the center and talk with people waiting for care, just as she did in 1998 when she arrived there seeking help for her 2-year-old daughter who was suffering from an ear infection.

Noor, who is originally from Somalia, was a single mother and a freshman studying nursing at St. Catherine University at the time. After graduation she went to work as a nurse at Hennepin County Medical Center before moving on to other facilities to serve as a health educator and clinic administrator. With her sights set on becoming more of a decision maker in areas of policy and prevention, Noor



Receptionist Hasna Abdurahman, seated, and Sahra Noor greet a staff person at Teen Age Medical Services in Minneapolis.

Photo by Sara Rubinstein

earned a master's degree in nursing and health systems administration at the University in 2007 and took a supervisory position with United Health Group that allowed her to advocate for Medicaid patients. Additional upward moves followed, including her launch of the Health Commons in Cedar-Riverside, a drop-in center that offers free consultations with nurses and doctors, as well as wellness classes.

By the time she was named CEO of the People's Center, Noor was widely regarded as a great choice because of her experience, longstanding commitment to patients, and trusted relationship with the Somali community (about 70 percent of the center's patients are Somali). But in addition to all of those things, she credits the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs Policy Fellow program for helping to better prepare her for her leadership role. After devoting her career to working with underserved populations, Noor knew that many complicated factors

contribute to poor health, particularly for immigrant populations struggling with language and cultural barriers, as well as misunderstandings about the way the American health care system works.

To be a voice for the underserved she knew she needed to hone her leadership skills and make more connections in public policy and community circles, so she applied to the Policy Fellows Program in 2010 for help. "Every single part of the program surprised me, and I found myself impressed and excited by all of it," she recalls, explaining that she uses what she learned in the program every day.

Collaboration and change

Now in its 25th year, the Policy Fellows Program is one of the country's most distinctive and respected leadership programs for emerging and mid-career professionals. Each session brings together 35 people from public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Director Larry Jacobs says the program was founded as a way to capture the unique civic culture in the state, and has continued evolving, especially in the past decade as communities change in Minnesota.

"I think of the program as a coral reef," he says. "These are vibrant, living organisms, but they don't grow on their own. Instead, they're the result of many forces coming together." Noor, he says, epitomizes the Fellows program, because she's part of the state's important immigrant community and is already an established leader in the health industry. "We need to be a state that welcomes people from around the world, and allows them to develop their talents. And we need to hear what they have to say." He adds that the diversity of the Fellows is a formidable strength, encompassing not just cultural and ethnic diversity, but also a range of viewpoints when it comes to economics, policy changes, outreach efforts, corporate governance, and other vital issues.

"There is an urgency for this kind of immersive education in policymaking," adds Kate Cimino, program director for the Fellows program. "Confidence in government is at an all-time low, and so many people are pulling back into their siloes and throwing firebombs at each other. We need a way to move forward and find different solutions, and that involves offering people an opportunity to learn from one another."

Fellows like Noor complete the program with a vastly expanded professional network across multiple sectors, as well as insights into leadership and policy that they may not have garnered otherwise. "What impressed me the most was the way the fellows were immersed with each other," Noor recalls. "People came from government, academia, and the corporate sector, and everyone spoke freely about the challenges present in public policy. These are people

with vital points of view, and I probably wouldn't have met them if it hadn't been for Humphrey."

Cimino believes the Policy Fellows' collaborative approach can have a ripple effect that goes far beyond each cohort. "We have seen phenomenal examples of how unlikely partnerships are formed, and compromise is held up as a virtue, not a loss," she says. "In our world, we have policy problems that are getting more intractable. Having these well-educated advocates for change can have a major impact on the biggest issues of the day."

Lasting relationships

Noor's experience as a Policy Fellow continues to influence her daily. Since taking on her role at the People's Center, she has been using the professional connections and insights she gained to grow the organization and expand its services. Drawing on her network of Fellows, she's been able to connect with potential funders, understand complex policy issues, and get involved more deeply in public health issues. She also feels a renewed sense of confidence. "You get things done through the relationships you build," she says. "Being a Fellow gave me a broader network, but it also gave me a wider perspective. I have the confidence to feel like my voice can be heard."

She also feels that she can be a stronger leader, not just at the Center but also as cochair of Governor Mark Dayton's Task Force on Health Care Financing, along with Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. At 38, Noor is already known for her contributions to expanding health care access. She also understands firsthand how to help bridge the gap between the health care system and underserved communities, through creation of programs that center on translator accessibility, patient education, Medicaid and Medicare coordination, and extended-hours clinic appointments. Looking ahead, she has ambitious goals as well: expanding partnerships with nine community clinics, launching more services incorporating medical and dental care, and providing insight for potential legislative changes that will broaden access for underserved populations.

For Noor, it still all comes down to holding the hands—sometimes figuratively, often literally—of those in need. As she walks around the Center talking with patients, she remembers herself sitting there as an anxious young mother who had only been in the U.S. for two years and was worried about being understood in every way. "As a refugee, you feel marginalized—economically, culturally, spiritually, linguistically. I want to make sure that our patients know I represent them, I understand. I'm here to make a difference."

A Major Devotion to SERVICE

By *Laura Silver*

As the fifth of 10 children, Minnesota Army National Guard Major **Amber Manke** (M.Ed. '12, Ph.D. '15) jokingly says she initially found military service a breeze: **Her drill sergeant was a far less intimidating disciplinarian than her long-suffering mother.**

And she took some transferrable skills to the military. "I could eat fast and I already walked fast and I could listen to orders," she says with a laugh.

Despite her self-deprecating insistence to the contrary, Manke has worked hard and overcome daunting personal circumstances to achieve her rank, her advanced degrees, and a collection of honors and awards by the impressively young age of 30. Her dedication to helping others, especially her fellow veterans, through her volunteerism earned her a Veterans' Voices Award from the Minnesota Humanities Center in 2014. That same year she was one of 28 Army officers nationwide to receive the prestigious General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.

Manke's upbringing in a big, often destitute family in Milaca, Minnesota, instilled in her a strong value of public service. Despite two house fires—one that left the family living in a pole shed for a year—Manke and her family were grateful to have a roof over their heads. "My mother really drove home the fact to us that you work hard for everything; there are people less fortunate than us, and we will do what we can and help them."

With no money for college, Manke took advantage of her high school's post-secondary enrollment option and completed her bachelor's degree at St. Cloud State University in two and a half years. But by her senior year she felt something in her life was missing. Motivated in part by 9/11, she joined the Minnesota Army National Guard as a human resources officer, eventually becoming company commander—one of only six female commanders in the 11,000-strong Minnesota Army



Sara Rubinstein

National Guard—responsible for 100 soldiers. With her recent promotion to major she becomes assistant chief of staff. Yet she's not just a reservist; in her day job she is an education services specialist with the Guard in Inver Grove Heights, helping soldiers navigate the complexities of education benefits. She especially loves the developmental counseling component of helping veterans find their passion and purpose in their educational choices.

Manke's passion is in her volunteer work, which bears a striking resemblance to her professional work. She gravitates toward organizations that resonate with her own life experiences—those that serve veterans, homeless families, and disadvantaged children. One such organization is Mission Continues, a group that helps veterans transition back into civilian life through community action projects.

There are about 26,000 post-9/11 veterans in Minnesota, and while their unemployment numbers are dropping, from 14.1 percent in 2013 to 8.8 percent in 2014, they remain higher than for those of other vets and for

the state as a whole. Nationwide, the unemployment rate for veterans in 2014 was 5.3 percent while the overall unemployment rate in Minnesota that year was 3.7 percent. Manke believes part of the solution is to help vets sort through the "abundance of resources" available to find where they fit in. "They have a lot to give," she says. "They have so many experiences, from building small teams to leading."

From 2011 to 2012 Manke was deployed to Kuwait as part of Operation New Dawn, where, in addition to her service, she finished her master's degree in education from the University of Minnesota. Upon her return, the self-described lifelong learner was selected from among thousands of applicants for the Pat Tillman Foundation's prestigious Tillman Military Scholar program. Manke used her scholarship to pursue her Ph.D. at the U in organizational leadership and policy development, with a focus on evaluating leadership development programs specifically for women. Her postdoctorate goal is to teach part-time at the university level and stay connected to the veteran community, most likely working at a nonprofit that helps vets find jobs.

In appreciation for her Tillman scholarship, Manke, a dedicated runner (she's a volunteer coach with Girls on the Run, a nonprofit that benefits teenage and preteen girls) ran the New York City Marathon in 2013 to raise money for the Tillman Foundation. On an unseasonably warm day this past October, she once again ran as a member of Team Tillman, this time in the Chicago Marathon. The money she's raised in her two races nearly matches her scholarship award; it's another testament to Manke's determination not only to give back but to pay it forward by providing opportunities for future scholars.

Manke loves her role as mentor and teacher, and she recently went back to her hometown of Milaca to speak to a group of third graders about being a soldier. When the children entered the auditorium she heard them gasp. "It's a girl?" "It's a girl!" Their reaction surprised and amused her, and it validated the importance of her presence. She told them, "Yeah, it is a girl, and women do serve. I feel like it's part of my duty to educate others about why we're here, why we wear the uniform, and this important role that we play in society."



Grounded in COMMUNITY ACTION

By Susan Maas

Melvin Carter III (M.P.P. '11) woke up on Election Day in 2000 and figured he would go vote if he could get around to it. Carter, a St. Paul native, was an undergraduate at Florida A & M University living with his sister and brother-in-law in Tallahassee. His brother-in-law, it turned out, felt strongly about showing up at the polls. “He insisted that everyone living under his roof was going to go vote,” Carter recalls. So they went together—and then Carter’s brother-in-law, who was registered and had voted there before, was turned away.

“They said his name wasn’t on the list. He was registered; he’d voted there before. We found ourselves at this table, arguing his right to vote . . . it felt like a *Twilight Zone* experience.” That presidential election was the Bush vs. Gore race that hinged on Florida and ended up going to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“That was the most profound sense of powerlessness I’ve ever felt. I just couldn’t reconcile it with this notion I’d always had that the United States is a place where everybody gets a say,” Carter says.

That political awakening fired Carter’s career in public service. Most of what he’s done since earning his graduate degree at the U’s Humphrey School goes back to that table in Florida. “I hope that when it comes time to eulo-

gize my life, it can be said that I worked to keep people from feeling the way we felt that day,” he says.

After earning his bachelor’s degree in business administration and a brief stint in banking, Carter followed his heart into nonprofit work training candidates and community organizers. From there he went to work in St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman’s office before winning a seat on the St. Paul City Council representing the neighborhood where he’d grown up. At the time, new light rail transit from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis promised economic development along its route—but not all the affected neighborhoods were included in the planning, including Carter’s.

The train was slated to run “right through our community, four blocks away from where Interstate 94 went through what used to be Rondo,” Carter says. Rondo was the vibrant heart of St. Paul’s black community, where Carter’s family had lived for generations, that was severed by the interstate in the 1960s. He recalls riding in his father’s car as a child: “Every time we’d pass under the Dale Street bridge my dad would go, ‘We’re under my bedroom now.’” The parallels were striking; light rail plans called for no stops in the neighborhood.

“A lot of us felt the train could be a great thing for our community; light rail is a proven catalyst for development.

Sara Rubinstein

But it was hard to argue that we would get all these great benefits from a train that wasn't even going to stop to pick us up." Carter's quest to engage neighborhood residents on the issue resulted in a more equitable plan with three additional stops.

On the council, Carter also fought to eliminate employment discrimination against people with criminal backgrounds and helped create St. Paul's Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity. But the effort he's proudest of is bringing city, county, school district, corporate, and citizen stakeholders together to form the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, an initiative aimed at combatting educational disparities.

The Promise Neighborhood exemplifies Carter's belief that different units of government can and should work together to address urgent problems. "How do we create seamless systems to support children's and families' success in a way that doesn't require them to memorize the bureaucratic labyrinths we've set up to fund and administer these different functions? Families don't actually organize their lives around units of government," Carter says. His leadership on the Promise Neighborhood led directly to his current role as executive director of the Minnesota Children's Cabinet, housed in the governor's office, where his mission includes trying to persuade policymakers that investing in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers yields major returns.

"You know the saying, it takes a whole community to raise a child? I've always felt like I'm a child the community raised. Whether it was at school, at the after school program, at the rec center, at home, when I just walked down the street in my neighborhood, I was *always* surrounded by adults who cared. Irritatingly so!" he laughs.

Among his most beloved early mentors was his parks and rec track coach, James Banks, who now coaches his 7- and 9-year-old daughters in the same program.

"To have consistent adults like that, in addition to my parents, had a transformational effect on my life." Carter helps with the program when he can, and volunteers with Save Our Sons, the mentoring organization his father, Melvin Carter Jr., founded, and teaches storytelling to young kids through the St. Paul-based ARTS-US.

Carter is proud to live in a place that considers itself an education state, and he aspires to make it a reality for all Minnesotans. "When we talk about disparities in Minnesota, one of the things that's always felt true to me is that if we could get a little more Minnesota into more of our neighborhoods, we'd be doing all right. I think we're up to the task."

OUT IN FORCE ON ALUMNI DAY OF SERVICE

LOS ANGELES

Cheryl Racker helps a sixth grade student and family at Dr. Julian Nava Learning Academy learn how to access digital learning opportunities.



Ed Carreón

MINNEAPOLIS

Volunteers help plant and care for new trees in the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood.

In all, alumni served at seven sites in Minneapolis and St. Paul.



Scott Strebler

NEW YORK CITY

Shaun Fernandes pitches in to help beautify Van Cortlandt Park.



Hai Ngo

Journalism in service to the WHOLE STORY

By Joanna Kakissis

I live in a central Athens neighborhood that some describe as run down, a term I think is inaccurate and incomplete, applied by drive-by visitors from well-to-do suburbs and fellow journalists looking for a neighborhood to set the stage for a story about Greece's post-austerity impoverishment.

My flat is on a stub of a one-way street lined with balconied apartment blocks and a few bitter orange trees. The street is bookended by a tiny, forgotten city park and rocky dirt lot that was supposed to become a church but instead, due to locals opposed to tolling bells, turned into a makeshift parking lot.

My neighbors include retired teachers, shop owners, young couples with babies, an underemployed copyright lawyer, and an untalented aspiring folk musician who sings like a goat.

My relatives also live on this street—my sister, my mother, my cousin, and my resilient Uncle Thanassis, who lived through World War II and the Greek civil war that followed.

My uncle moved onto this little street in the 1960s, when this area was largely undeveloped and neighbors had donkeys and chickens in their backyards. At 85, he remains the unflappable voice of reason to our neighbors, who are all struggling to pay bills and mortgages, who have lost jobs and prospects, who can't save money to support their kids through college, who plan downscaled weddings and baptisms in a cloud of uncertainty.

My uncle was the first to visit the elderly couple near the park after their son and only child, a civil engineer in his early 50s, died a couple of years ago of stress-related heart attack after his business went under, leaving him unable to support his family.

"There is nothing I can say that will make this easier for you," he told the sobbing couple, both in their late 80s, whom he had known for half a century. "But I am here for you. I am here."

My uncle's younger brother—my father—moved us to the American Dakotas from Athens when I was 4 years old. Growing up American,

Joanna Kakissis (B.A. '95) is a reporter for NPR.
This article originally appeared on npr.org.



Moner Nyazi



Ted Richardson



I only had a hazy recollection of my Greek life, an emotional scene of my mother weeping as she embraced her father, a soft-hearted, mustachioed orange farmer in Crete, before we moved halfway across the world.

I had returned for brief stays a couple of times, when Greece's prospects seemed bright. During the 2004 Summer Olympics, for instance, the capital seemed to operate flawlessly, showing everyone that this tiny country could pull off three weeks of blockbuster events.

When I returned for a long-term stay as a reporter in 2010, the feeling that Greece was on the way up had disappeared. Greeks were shocked to discover that their country was deeply in debt and about to go bankrupt. They blamed their politicians, blamed themselves for electing these politicians. And they felt defeated after their leaders signed over much of the country's sovereignty to creditors from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, in exchange for bailout loans to keep Greece solvent.

Reporters are not machines, even when we're covering stories in lands to which we have no connection. Even then, we work hard to balance news, context, perspectives, and storytelling with the emotional weight of the stories we're experiencing or being told.

It's much harder to keep an emotional distance when we're living a story, seeing it unfold in real time as a resident. I've met homeless people in central Athens, rummaging through dumpsters for clothes and food. I've met people who sit in darkened houses because they have run out of money to pay their electric bills. I know people who have taken their own lives. I know people who have lost everything they've worked for, like my cousin Manolis in Crete, who built his home improvement and metalworking business from scratch and went bankrupt during the crisis. He and his wife and two children lost their house and now live with his

sister. He works as a day laborer.

At the same time, I'm hypersensitive about sensationalism and stereotyping, two lenses that have distorted coverage of this crisis. That's because, as a Greek-American, I sometimes internalize the exaggeration as personal insults.

Not all Greeks are tax evaders, and no Greek I know is lazy, I'll huff to myself. Most Greeks don't protest, and only a minuscule number actually throw petrol bombs during protests. And yet, whenever that happens, a TV reporter perched on a rooftop will be declaring that all of Athens is on fire, furthering the trope about the unruly, undisciplined

Greeks who want to have their cake and eat it too.

But I've had to face painful truths, too. That corruption is still rampant, and that it continues because Greeks have failed to tear down the special interests that feed from it. That the public sector, for years a repository for unqualified friends of short-sighted politicians, is inefficient and even primitive—even after welcome changes in recent years to ensure new hires are based on merit, not cronyism.

That political dialogue is polarized, hateful, and often vengeful. That Greek politicians of every stripe are woefully unprepared to lucidly man-



Courtesy, Joanna Kakissis

Clockwise from top: Kakissis in a farmer's field in Bamiyan, Afghanistan in 2011; with Uncle Thanassis in Athens; and talking to Hazara school children near Bamiyan.

“The melodramatics in Parliament and in many media outlets don’t resonate with most people in my neighborhood, who are too consumed with staying solvent, humane, and united when everything is falling apart.”

age a crisis that could unravel this country and tear it away from the Eurozone into some badly managed transition to a devalued currency. This void of competence has created groups like Golden Dawn, a party of neofascists with Nazi roots who glorify violence and xenophobia as ways to “clean” Greece of corrupt politicians and foreigners “leeching” off Hellenism. The party holds 17 seats in the 300-member Parliament.

The economic crisis has also rekindled an identity crisis here, as story after story references the soaring heights of Ancient Greece, a history that’s still the greatest source of pride here even after thousands of years.

The modern Greeks have much more in common with the Byzantines and even the Turks, whose ancestors, the Ottomans, enslaved the Greeks for 400 years. But that’s a challenge to the narrative of Hellenism, that this country cannot be defeated because it gave the world democracy and artistic, philosophical, and mathematical literacy, and it cuts into a Greek’s heart like nothing else.

That existential threat may be a source of the conspiracy theories that seem to flourish here, such as the whopper that claims the Rothschild banking family—blamed by the anti-Semites for controlling wealth and wars—owns the international press (a theory once espoused by a former government spokeswoman from the conservative New Democracy Party) and is profiting from the economic crisis.

Conspiratorial thinking even laces the public debate of the current leftist government, which blames Eurozone leaders for inciting a coup by forcing the government to sign an onerous bailout

agreement. The Parliament speaker, a lawyer educated in France and the United States, even claimed that the new deal would cause “social genocide.”

But these melodramatics in Parliament and in many media outlets don’t resonate with most people in my neighborhood, who are too consumed with staying solvent, humane, and united when everything is falling apart.

Two of our neighbors—a young couple with twin baby boys—ended up leaving a few months ago after they lost their jobs and fell behind on their rent.

The elderly couple who lost their son are now one; the man died after a long illness. His widow is fragile and keeps the curtains drawn.

Another elderly couple spent their savings to help pay their adult son’s mortgage, because the company he and his wife worked for hadn’t paid them in more than two years.

The musician with the voice of a goat stopped pursuing his dream of folk music stardom and is now temping. Two of my cousin’s three kids went to military school, where they’re at least assured a job and a modest salary.

And every day, on his way to the supermarket, Uncle Thanassis strolls past their homes, greeting anyone outside with a warm smile and a wish for good health. Sometimes I see him, a small, dignified figure with a cropped mane of wavy, snow-white hair, making his way down the street with the resolve of a survivor, spreading a calming sense of normalcy in a country where nothing feels safe or sure anymore. **▲**

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U researchers are finding new ways to outwit Parkinson’s disease.

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Mulford Q. Sibley

(Ph.D. '38) was a tall, lean, middle-aged scholar with a penchant for red ties, which he wore during his popular lectures in the University of Minnesota's political science department. The ties symbolized for him an affinity for human solidarity and his belief in socialism, a credo he hid from no one on campus or in the Highland neighborhood in St. Paul, where he lived quietly with his family.

Sibley was one of the most popular professors at Minnesota during his 34-year career at the U, from 1948 to 1982. Known for advocating leftist, pacifist, and freethinking causes, he liked to challenge young people, and each semester invited students to his office to debate him on an issue of their choosing. "One thing that I like to do in my classes," he told an interviewer from the *Ivory Tower* after winning a Science, Letters, and Arts Alumni Teacher of the Year award, "is state a position vigorously and hope the students will attack it." It was said that there was an ever-present line of students snaking down the hall outside his office door, either taking him up on this offer, or just wanting to bask in his passionate ways of thinking.

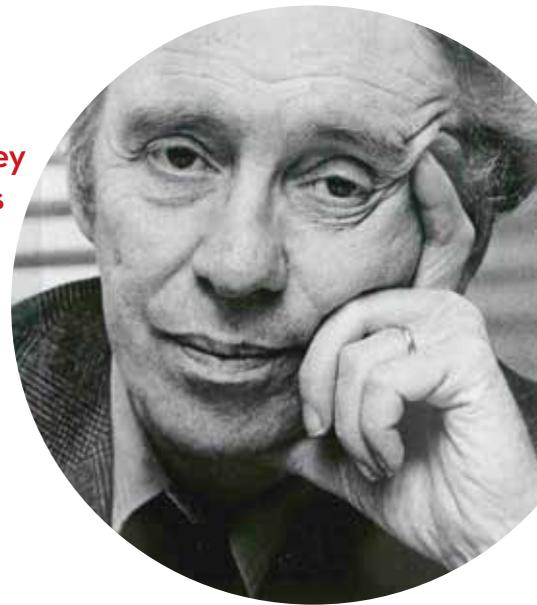
Sibley was not simply a popular professor among the liberal-minded students at Minnesota: He was fully tenured, profusely published, and nationally recognized for his scholarship. One of his many incidental duties was to serve as adviser to a student organization called the Student Peace Union (SPU). It was in this small role,

tucked into the backwaters of a long and distinguished academic career, that Sibley stepped deep into the muck of controversy in the fall of 1963.

That summer, the state's American Legion had gathered at the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis for its annual convention. Rumors had been circulating among the members for some time that communist influence was rife on the campus of the University of Minnesota and something ought to be done about it. A Legionnaire from Watertown, Minnesota, named Kenneth MacDonald put forward a resolution calling for the convention to demand that the state legislature investigate two organizations at the U that were said to be possible communist front groups. One called itself the World Affairs Center; the other was Sibley's Student Peace Union. A story in the *Minneapolis Tribune* recorded "a roar of 'aye' votes" when the resolution was put before the body of the convention. Duly carried, the Legion sent its request for investigations of the U to both the state legislature and

* Quickert

In 1963, Professor Mulford Sibley caused an uproar that raised the hackles of the state legislature, Congress, and the Canadian government.



the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the U.S. Congress.

Neither the legislature nor Congress felt rushed by the demands of the Minnesota American Legion, and the pace of outrage slowed. But when school started in the fall, the *Minnesota Daily* editorialized on the possibility of “a hunt for communists” at the University. The editors wrote that while it was entirely possible that the SPU and the World Affairs Center might have a communist member or two, neither “by any stretch of the imagination can be called a communist front organization.”

Sibley entered the fray at this juncture. He was miffed by what he called “the apologetic tone of some of the defenders of SPU and the World Affairs Center.” To Professor Sibley the point was an issue of academic freedom, plain and simple. As advisor to the SPU, he didn’t know if any of its members were communists, but so what if they were? “Would this justify University or state intervention? I think not, unless we assume it’s the business of the University administration or the state government to tell students what they should and shouldn’t think.”

Sibley went further: “We need students who challenge orthodoxies,” he argued. Planting seeds of doubt and subversion in students’ minds helped create moral and intellectual progress. “Personally,” he wrote, “I would like to see on the campus one or two communist professors, a student communist club, a chapter of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, a Society for the Promotion of Free Love, a League for the Overthrow of Government by Jeffersonian Violence (LOGJV), an Anti-Automation League, and perhaps a Nudist Club. No university should be without individuals or groups like these.”

To some, the list was an obvious tweak at the narrow minds that Sibley saw behind the accusations leveled at the SPU. To others it was proof positive of subversion at the U. Here was a full professor advocating not just for communist clubs on campus, but for free love and

nudism as well. Sibley’s letter was reprinted in a number of newspapers in the region, including the *Minneapolis Star*. Incredulous eyes opened wide across the state and predictable outrage ensued.

Milton Rosen, a neighbor of Sibley’s who was a St. Paul City Council member, not only took exception to the letter, but also followed up the American Legion by writing to the state legislature demanding that Sibley be fired. Rosen also gave a speech at a local business club in St. Paul in which he denounced Sibley and what was “going on at the University of Minnesota.” Included in his tirade was an accusation that U professors were taking coeds “into their cars,” an odd euphemism for having sexual relations. Clips of Rosen’s speech were filmed by a local television station and aired on the nightly news.

The growing strangeness of the controversy did not escape the notice of students on campus, where Sibley’s popularity, if anything, grew because of the dispute. Students mocked the concerns of the “squares” by pinning “I am a member of the Nudist Club” buttons to their bulky winter jackets. A group of scholars also invited Rosen to come to campus and publicly debate Sibley.

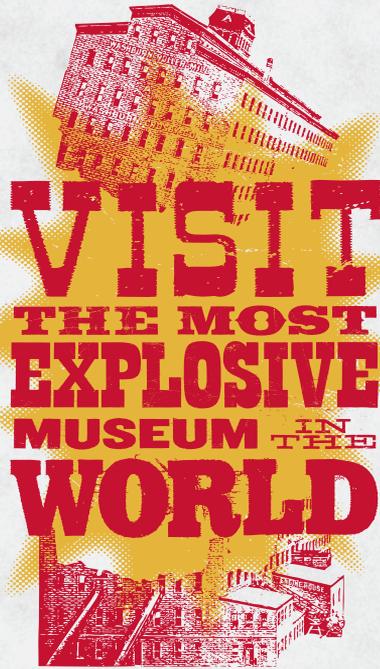
It turned out that Rosen, a plumber by trade, was not as talented as the professor in unclogging an intellectual dispute. The councilman argued that there were some ideas that God had deemed just plain wrong and any teacher who taught them ought to be “bounced out of the university.” Sibley emphasized his central points about how students needed to be exposed to and examine a variety of ideas, even some of which were extreme. Professors needed the freedom to present these ideas and offer instruction on how to view them. About 1,200 students attended the debate and frequently guffawed at some of Rosen’s points.

A far more sizable audience watched the debate on local television at home—yes, it was televised—and many of them were far more receptive than the U students to the councilman’s arguments. Rosen’s request of the state legislature,

By Tim Brady



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the petition of Minnesota State American Legion, and a substantial portion of public sentiment continued to urge the assembly to take some action. They found sympathetic ears in the state senate, where the education committee agreed to hold hearings into the University's hiring policies come May.

More furor ensued as Lieutenant Governor Sandy Keith weighed in, reminding everyone that the University had been governed by the Board of Regents since its inception—legislators, he said, had no business questioning the hiring and firing of faculty. By this time the controversy had gained national attention, as well. In a column entitled "The Professor in Left Field," archconservative William F. Buckley Jr. weighed in on the controversy on the campus. Buckley suggested that while Sibley's exaggerations were intended to be "taken lightly, ho, ho, ho, by those of us sophisticated people who knew that from time to time professors will be boys," for others, communism was no laughing matter. He added that "although Dr. Sibley apparently ran out of breath before he got to it, we should also have on campus one or two Nazis making a case for the genocidal extermination of racial minorities."

Sibley continued to battle. He agreed to debate the head of the Wisconsin state John Birch Society on campus in early May, on the verge of the first senate committee hearing into University policies. However, University President O. Meredith Wilson and Dean of Students E.G. Williamson were eager to put a stake in the controversy. No one in the administration was interested in hearing more on an issue that could only trap it between political ideologies in a statewide forum. Williamson was able to quash the debate by keeping it off the campus, but the uproar continued.

The senate education committee opened its investigation into the University in mid-May and held hearings into June. By then, the Congressional House Un-American Activities Committee, all but forgotten in the local hubbub, decided it ought to hold hearings of its own on the "growing threat" of communism in Minnesota. It arrived in Minneapolis in late June for three days of hearings. The committee steered clear of what was happening at the U, no doubt to

"I would like to see on campus one or two communist professors, a student communist club, a chapter of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, a Society for the Promotion of Free Love . . . an Anti-Automation League, and perhaps a Nudist Club."



Wilson's relief, and instead focused on actual Communist Party activity in the state. Party chairman Gus Hall and several other activists were called before the committee.

Meanwhile, the work of the state senate education committee wound down. On June 25, 1964, 17 members of the University of Minnesota administration, including President Wilson and Board of Regents Chair Dr. Charles Mayo, arrived at the Capitol in St. Paul to offer testimony about faculty hiring, firing, and promotion policies. Wilson quickly eased the minds of the senators and a large body of public opinion. "I would never recommend a known communist to the Board of Regents for appointment at the University of Minnesota," he told the committee. But Wilson also offered a defense of his political science professor. Wilson said Sibley was "a man of great moral character . . . a man of great intellectual stature, uniformly admired by his colleagues."

A spokesman for the Board of Regents said he personally considered Sibley's letter "ill-advised" and "imprudent" but it needed to be read in context, and that no one was really advising free love and nudist clubs on campus.

The hearings closed with no action taken by the legislature, perhaps because, as the

lieutenant governor had pointed out early in the dispute, it was not their business to govern the faculty.

Mulford Sibley never appeared before the committee and went back to teaching his extremely popular classes at the University. He remained unapologetic about his letter and continued to maintain that the most important issue in the controversy—allowing students the freedom to consider and examine a variety of opinions—had not really been discussed.

Wilson was criticized for even appearing at the hearing. Faculty members felt that his testimony alone seemed to acknowledge the right of a legislative committee to have some say in whether a University professor could freely express an opinion.

The issue slowly began to recede from public attention except for one remarkable coda. In the spring of 1965, a full year after the height of the brouhaha, Sibley was invited to Winnipeg to give a speech sponsored by a group called the Voice of Women at the University of Manitoba. He was set to talk on the war in Vietnam, which Sibley vigorously opposed. A Canadian immigration official was waiting for Sibley when he landed. The Western Regional Director of the Immigration Department in Winnipeg had in hand a document claiming that Sibley had advocated for the establishment of campus clubs promoting communism, atheism, free love, and nudity—cause to deny him entry into Canada. The head of immigration in Vancouver, Minister John Nicholson, backed the decision, saying the No Entry stamp was proper. Sibley was put on the next plane back to Minneapolis.

Outraged telegrams and letters flew from the governor's office in Minnesota to Winnipeg. In Washington, Senator Eugene McCarthy (M.A. '39) asked the State Department to provide a summary of what had happened. Even Vice President Hubert Humphrey (B.A. '39) got involved, saying his office would "take any steps necessary to investigate the incident."

There was outrage in Canada as well. Liberal members of the House of Commons excoriated the majority Conservatives

whose policies had caused Sibley to be sent home and Minister Nicholson was ordered to Ottawa to explain what had happened. Ultimately reason prevailed; Sibley was invited to return to Winnipeg for his speech to the Voice of Women.

Sibley would continue to teach at the U

for nearly 20 more years, never retreating from his opinions and continuing to advise students to do the same. When he retired in 1982, a parade of University administrators, faculty, students, and alumni sat in on his final seminar wearing "Mulford" buttons to honor the distinguished professor. **MA**

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what it's like to...

Jim Hughart (B.A. '57)

Play alongside Ella Fitzgerald



I REMEMBER GETTING A CALL from Ella Fitzgerald's office [in the early 1960s] asking if I'd be interested in playing with Ella—I'd been recommended by Ray Brown, a friend who was the most famous jazz bassist at the time. After I scraped myself off the ceiling, I said "Yes. When and where?" Ella and I worked together on an album called *Ella Sings Broadway* and a single, "Desafinado," that was the beginning of the bossa nova craze that swept across the world.

With the absolute best people, their drive is often perceptible. You can observe the performance and know that it's there.

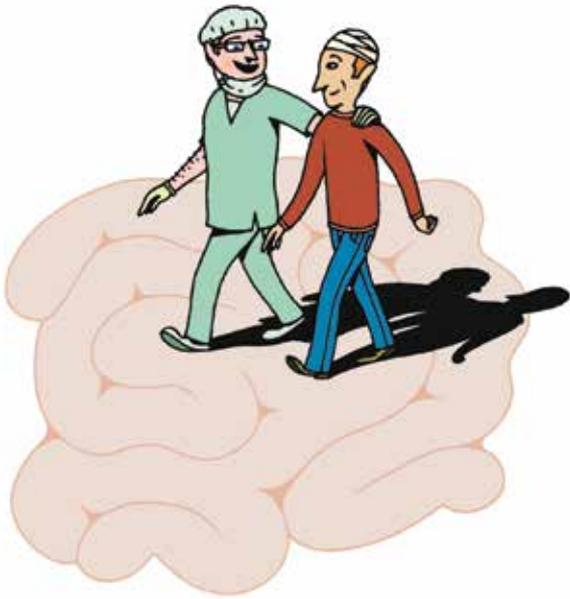
There's a reason they're doing business at that level. They're the cream of the crop.

I did studio work for years, and no matter how good you are,

when the red light goes on [signaling the start of a recording], there's a lot at stake. You've got to play everything perfectly, because there are 25 guys standing behind you, and they're waiting for you to make a mistake so they can get your job.

It can take so many years to get hired on a regular basis, to the point where you can stop playing weddings and bar mitzvahs and Ventura Boulevard saloons. To this day, it gives me chills to realize that I did it.

Jim Hughart has been a bass player for artists including Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Peggy Lee. A Minneapolis native who lives in California, Hughart continues to perform professionally.



Dr. Andy Grande (M.D. '03)

Save a life

PEOPLE MIGHT NOT THINK of a neurosurgeon as a “people person,” but for me, finding a connection with a patient is extremely important. Patients give me a huge level of trust when I walk into their lives, and that’s such a privilege. I want them to know that I do for them what I would do for my family.

A lot of my work is treating aneurysms in the brain, which are life threatening. When I see patients, I talk to them as long as they want. I give them my cell number and my email. I want to make sure they’re very comfortable moving forward.

The biggest joy for me is not when a surgery goes well technically, because that’s no guarantee that there won’t be problems. The joy is when I see patients wake up doing well. And when they come back to clinic and they’re still doing well.

Even when things aren’t perfect, patients may still be living independently. That’s pretty rewarding when I know I’ve fought really hard for that patient. In the end, I know I’ve made a difference, and that’s pretty exciting.

Dr. Andy Grande is assistant professor of neurosurgery and codirector of the University’s Earl Grande Stroke and Stem Cell Laboratory.

By Erin Peterson
Illustrations by Ingo Fast



Former federal prosecutor and judge Sheryl Ramstad (B.A. '67, B.A. '72, M.N. '13)

Go back to school at 62

I HAD A GOAL OF APPLYING to the accelerated nursing degree program at the University, and over the course of four years, I took the prerequisites one at a time.

I didn’t tell anybody as I was preparing to become a full-time student. I didn’t want to be second-guessed or have to explain to everyone what I was doing.

One nice thing I learned was that there’s a senior citizen discount for students who are 62 or older. So I only paid \$10 a credit, and no student fees. That’s probably one of the University’s best-kept secrets. But going back to school was hard—like going into a cement barricade at 65 miles an hour. It was a shock to find myself in a wholly different environment than a courthouse. The crowds, navigating from classroom to classroom, scrambling to find a seat among a room full of people—it was all rather startling and completely foreign to the way I had spent my days previously. My past accomplishments and grade point average were meaningless in this new environment.

At the same time, entering a new field felt more exciting than scary—the change was more about what I was going to do rather than what I was leaving. Having had my own life spared so many years before left an indelible impression on me. I knew it was time for me to act upon something I had felt for a very long time. I wanted to be by patients while they were in their darkest times in order to provide them with some hope.

After spending decades as a successful lawyer, Sheryl Ramstad went back to school at 62 to earn a nursing degree so she could support burn survivors like herself. She currently works at the Burn Center at Regions Hospital, where she was a patient at age 29 after burning nearly 40 percent of her body in a plane crash.

Asha Sharma (B.S. '11)

Be part of a wildly successful startup

When I started at Porch, there were fewer than 10 employees working with [founder] Matt Ehrlichman, and we were literally working in his basement. It was a real basement, with fake wooden paneling on the walls. For a long time, I either sat on the floor or shared a four-foot folding table with other people. One time, the hot water heater flooded, which was a little terrifying.

But I wasn't really thinking about those details—I had come from a place [Microsoft] that was a lot more lavish. But at a startup, the idea of ping-pong tables in the lounge is not what creates the sense of excitement. Instead, I was paying attention to the journey I was going on. I really believe we can fundamentally change the way that people live in their homes.

I started as an individual contributor, and now I have hundreds of people who report to me. At first, I had to figure out what to execute with no resources, then I had to figure out how to find great leaders, and then how to inspire people. The roles have changed so quickly that I'm just trying to adapt and learn along the way. Some might say we're on a rocket ship, but I don't think we've achieved our mission yet.

Sometimes, I do step back a little. For example, we started our all-company weekly meetings, Around the Porch, when there were 20 of us. We'd talk about highlights and lowlights. We still do that, but there are hundreds of us now, and new people are starting every week. Those first meetings were so awkward, and now they're a tradition. People assume traditions start in some beautiful way, but you're actually just stumbling into what works.

Was I worried it was risky? Yes and no. The hardest decision was just deciding if I wanted to commit to this big idea, but once I did, I was all in. The day-to-day can feel gratifying and terrifying all at once. I compare it to running on water—if you look down you'll fall. I just try to stay laser-focused and keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Asha Sharma is chief operating officer of Porch, a company that helps homeowners find contractors for home improvement projects. It was founded in 2012 and was recently valued at \$100 million.



Jeremy Lindquist (B.S. '11)

Run for 24 hours straight

For most 100-mile races, the start is the slowest thing you've ever seen because the average pace might be 10 or 20 minutes per mile. Everybody respects the distance. It's hard for anyone's mind to comprehend what running 100 miles really is, so I really have to break it down. Sometimes I'm thinking about the next aid station, which might be 7 miles away. Sometimes all I can think about is my next step.

So much of it is mental. There's one race where runners go down a snowmobile trail for 75 miles, and then turn around and come back the same strip. You can look down the trail and see exactly where you're going to be in an hour—it's almost like solitary confinement for your mind. But it's also a time to reflect on things and get clarity. There are no distractions.

There's a point at about 3 a.m.—it's dark, I'm cold, I'm really tired, my legs are fatigued—where it's just me and the 6-foot halo of light thrown off by the headlamp I'm wearing. Even walking can feel like too much. I might start hallucinating. The trees seem animated. But when I finish, it's the strongest emotion I can imagine. An ultramarathon is something that's so hard it scares me a little bit. But it gives me so much confidence when I finish it. It's easy to get hooked on that.

Jeremy Lindquist is a coach for The TriFitness Triathlon and Running Club in the Twin Cities. He has run ten 100-mile races. **AS**

A Stirring Memoir of War and Pain



A manila envelope, discovered after the author's father's death, revealed his secret past.

EVEN AS A KID, Catherine Madison (B.A. '73) knew that her father, Alexander "Doc" Boysen (M.D. '49), had a secret. But standing by his bedside as he lay dying in 2002 at age 78, she still didn't know what it was. After years of begging to hear what happened to him during the Korean War, she and her two brothers had only fragments to go on—Doc had one black ankle that was frozen during the war, had suffered at the hands of a cruel guard called "The Tiger," and he had survived a winter death march on which many men died.

That's it. Doc wasn't going to tell his story and he wasn't going to allow his daughter, a respected Twin Cities journalist and editor, to tell it either. But when Madison and her brothers were clearing out their father's house after his death, they yanked on a drawer in an old metal filing cabinet in his office, pulling it all the way out. Peering into the empty space, they found a Department of the Army manila envelope stuffed with papers. On it, in their mother's handwriting, were the words, "The Whole Story!!" (Their mother, Margaret Boysen (B.S. '48), died in 1995.)

In her new book, *The War Came Home with Him: A Daughter's Memoir* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015) Madison tells two interweaving stories based on Doc's writings, a scrapbook her mother kept, and accounts by soldiers her father knew. The first story belongs to

Doc, a young U.S. Army Medical Corps captain captured in North Korea in 1950 and held as a prisoner of war for more than three years. The second is her own, as the daughter

who grew up struggling to make sense of a broken and sometimes cruel man who didn't realize he had brought the horrors of war home to his family.

Madison talked with *Minnesota Alumni* about her approach to the book, how the experience of writing it helped change her perception of her dad, and her hope that the book might help other military families going through similar struggles.

Do you think your mother wanted you and your brothers to find that envelope so you could finally know the story and tell it?

Yes. I'm sure she did. She knew that he wouldn't tell us anything but that he



Rick Dublin



Ony M.

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had written a lot down, and even gotten some information from other POWs. I think he told her a lot of what happened to him, too, because he couldn't spell and was always asking for her help.

Why was he so intent on not sharing what happened to him?

It's complicated, but I know that thinking about it caused flashbacks. If he was even walking through a room and a war movie was on TV, he would have three nights of nightmares, my mother said.

Speaking of nightmares, it's painful to read what you went through as a child. Your dad was so volatile, and you were often afraid for good reason. There was the time you vomited while forcing yourself to clean your plate as commanded and your dad made you eat the vomit. As a teenager you were just five minutes late for curfew and he punched you in the mouth when you got home. The first time he told you he loved you was the day before he died. It must have been terribly hard to write these things.

I went through so many emotions. It was like a roller coaster. I cried a lot. Ultimately, I realized that he did the best he could and he did truly love me in his own way, but couldn't show that. It's a shame that couldn't have happened while he was alive.

In your book you unravel your dad's story, explaining in graphic detail many of the atrocities he and his fellow POWs endured, particularly the death march when the unimaginably cruel Korean officer nicknamed "The Tiger" makes the already frail men march miles through snowy mountains. Many of them didn't make it. When did you realize that his harsh treatment of you as a child was related to his experiences?

It took a while. But the more I researched and wrote, the more I understood how post-traumatic stress disorder numbs emotions and destroys intimacy. This helped me see how much the war came home with him, and I know that happens for a lot of military families. I'm hoping to talk with veterans groups and families and it's my utmost hope that the book can help other people. ❧

—Meleah Maynard

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Giant Dreams

Matt Oehrlein combined a degree in electrical engineering with a passion for making stuff. What came of it? A pugnacious 6-ton robot and a crash course in showbiz.

Matt Oehrlein (B.E.E. '08, M.S.E.E. '10) dreams big. In fact, he believes that one day a generation of kids will grow up watching giant robots fight. They'll be inspired, he says, to be engineers "because they see technology in action, and they go, 'I want to make these things. This is so awesome.'"

If that sounds ridiculous, don't tell Oehrlein. His dream is already in motion. Step 1: Build a giant robot. Step 2: Fight a giant robot. The company he cofounded, Megabots Inc., has built a 15-foot-tall, 6-ton prototype. And in July 2016 it will battle Japan in what is presumably a first.

After graduating from the U in electrical engineering, Oehrlein moved to Detroit, where he immersed himself in the local "maker" culture. Eventually he became the head of Detroit's Makerspace, a community run do-it-yourself workshop he describes as a kind of gym—except instead of lifting weights, you work out your brain. He found himself at home in the freestyle DIY culture. "Really, the way I got involved in this was keeping an open mind about . . . weird stuff. And just being flexible and open to strange opportunities," he says.

It was at Makerspace that Oehrlein met MegaBots Inc. cofounder Gui Cavalcanti, who was running a Makerspace in Boston. "Gui is a great mechanical designer. I'm an electrical controls guy, and so our skills are actually very complementary. So with our skills combined. . . ." Naturally, A giant robot. Thus, MegaBots was born. The company's slogan is, "Making the world more epic, one giant robot at a time."

In February 2015, Megabots relocated to the Bay Area, partnering with a marketing firm in the hopes of realizing Oehrlein's ultimate vision: an international giant robot fighting sports league. But who to fight? It turns out the world has at

least one other giant robot, owned by Suidobashi Heavy Industry of Japan. So Oehrlein and Cavalcanti posted a YouTube video challenging Suidobashi to a duel. It received millions of views.

“We decked ourselves out in American flags and aviators, and we just made it a big hilarious overly American patriotic ‘C’mon America let’s do this, let’s rally around your robot’ video. And people responded.”

One week later, Kogoro Kurata of Suidobashi accepted—on the condition that the MegaBots robot would need to be “cooler,” and engage in hand-to-hand combat. That meant MegaBots would need to redesign their prototype Mark II from a robot built primarily with projectile weaponry in mind to one that could move more nimbly in hand-to-hand (so to speak) combat—one that could take and throw a punch from another 15-foot machine. On the wish list are crushing and grasping claws, shields, pneumatically-driven fists, and a cannon. The problem: All of that takes money—big money.

So Oehrlein and Cavalcanti set up a Kickstarter campaign in August. Nearly 8,000 donations and more than \$550,000 later, they have enough to battle Japan next July. (Date and location to be determined—see MegaBots.com for updates).

In the meantime, Oehrlein is immersed in his dream.

“We’re this weird half-entertainment, half-tech company. I don’t know of any other company quite like this, with a crazy entertaining front end and then behind the scenes it’s actually a high-end robotics research lab. It’s definitely a dream job.” —Adam Overland



Three Gophers are WNBA Champs

In October, Gopher great Lindsay Whalen (B.S. '06), above, helped lead the Minnesota Lynx to their third Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) championship in five years, defeating the Indiana Fever in the best-of-five series. Whalen has been a starter and the team's emotional leader since joining the Lynx in 2010. Former Gopher Jim Petersen, who played on the 1982 Big Ten champion team, is an assistant coach for the Lynx. Shae Kelly, who played for the Gophers last year, is a reserve guard.

Saunders: Noah Graham/NBAE • Whalen: Courtesy Minnesota Lynx



Gophers Mourn Flip Saunders

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA alumnus Flip Saunders (B.S.B. '83), whose name was synonymous with basketball in Minnesota, died from complications of Hodgkin's lymphoma on October 18 at age 60. At the time of his death he was head coach and president of the National Basketball Association's Minnesota Timberwolves. His passing left his many friends and admirers on campus and throughout the nation reeling.

Saunders was a fixture in Gopher basketball after arriving on campus from his native Ohio in 1974. As a point guard from 1974 to 1977, he lit up Williams Arena, starting in all but two games during that span. “He was the guy that made the team go,” said former Minnesota head coach Jim Dutcher. “He

played that point guard spot where we didn't have a backup. He wasn't our best player, but he was our most valuable player, the one guy we couldn't do without.” Saunders went on to a coaching career in college and professional basketball that spanned five decades and included head coaching stops in the Continental Basketball Association as well as the NBA's Detroit and Washington teams, in addition to the Timberwolves. Saunders returned to Williams Arena as an assistant coach from 1981 to 1986, playing a role in the Gophers' 1982 Big Ten championship season.

Saunders is survived by his wife, Debbie, and four children, all of them alumni: Ryan (B.S. '08), Mindy (B.A. '10), Rachel (B.A. '14), and Kimberly (B.S. '14).

Black Alumni Connect

BLACK ALUMNI GATHERED on campus during Homecoming weekend in September for the launch of the new University of Minnesota Black Alumni Network (UMN BAN). Co-organizer Emilia Ndely (B.A. '11), who lives in Atlanta, was one of many who traveled from a distance for the inaugural get-together. "I didn't expect it, honestly. I thought it would be mostly local people," she says.

Ndely and Wil Zehourou (B.S. '08, M.B.A. '15), former president of the U's Black Student Union and African Student Association who now lives in Denver, organized UMN BAN after discovering through conversations and via social media a deep hunger to connect among black alumni. Ndely says she first became intrigued by the possibility of a black alumni network at the U while she was in graduate school at the University of

North Carolina, which has significant alumni engagement from the black community. Additionally, she noticed that a friend and fellow student was closely connected to her alma mater, Clemson University, through its Black Alumni Council.

"I imagined how powerful a similar network would be at the U, especially given that many black alumni leave Minnesota to branch out professionally. Why not leverage this dispersion, and the unique personal and professional experiences that come with it?" Ndely says.

The choice to use the word black is significant, says Ndely. "I'm of African descent. I was born and raised in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, but my parents emigrated here. We didn't want to exclude anybody by calling ourselves African Americans—we want to be welcoming to

everyone. If you agree with our purpose and objectives you are welcome to join us. And you don't have to be black or live in Minnesota." Ndely contacted Zehourou via Facebook after he began gauging interest in a black alumni group as a graduate student at the Carlson School. Both agree that social media will continue to play a vital role in the network. "I want the opportunity to connect, to be there for alumni all over, but especially in big cities," says Ndely. "I want black alumni to be able to leverage each other and be an outlet for undergraduate students so they feel connected to other alumni as they prepare to enter professions."

To connect with UMN BAN, email UMNBlackAlumni@gmail.com or find it on Facebook.

—Cynthia Scott

Members of the Black Alumni Network tailgate during Homecoming.





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UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

We work hard to bring you a wide range of events all year long, both in person and virtually. This quarter we are heading to Florida and Arizona for **Minne-College**, introducing a new virtual networking tool, and wrapping up our 2015 **Alumni Webinar Series**. For the full list of programs and events, visit MinnesotaAlumni.org.

WEBINAR SERIES

JOIN US!



Don't miss our upcoming webinar **Pass the Ball: Power Principles for Creating Effective, Efficient Teams** with Jack Brewer (B.S. '01, M.Ed. '02), CEO/Founder of The Brewer Group Companies on Thursday, December 17, Noon to 1 p.m. (CST)

As a former captain of three NFL teams, Jack Brewer believes every voice is equally valuable. Whether in business or in sports, leaders' and supervisors' most important job is to guide and shape their team. Tune in to this webinar to learn how to create chemistry where people buy in, take ownership, are fully passionate toward achieving the same goal, and find meaning in their life and work.

Our **Alumni Webinar Series** features a dozen or more free webinars on career and personal topics each school year. All webinars are archived so you can watch them anywhere, anytime. Check them out! MinnesotaAlumni.org/webinars

OUTREACH

MINNE-COLLEGE

Arizona and Florida—we are coming to you this spring! Join us at the 2016 **Minne-College** in Naples on February 6 and in Scottsdale on March 5. Some of the most exciting, innovative, and ambitious faculty leaders will share their stories and vision. You are invited to attend three sessions, followed by a reception with presenters. More details at MinnesotaAlumni.org/minne-college



VIRTUAL NETWORKING

INTRODUCING NETWORKING ON THE GO



In the coming year, the Alumni Association will roll out a series of virtual networking events that fit into busy lifestyles. Participants will be able to engage with fellow alumni across a variety of disciplines to build new professional connections wherever they are, on any device.

During each session, you'll enter chat areas tailored to your interests and be instantly paired with other alumni in a series of 9-minute, text-based chats. In addition, dedicated virtual events will allow alumni to share career advice with current students. Stay tuned for more details and email invitations soon.

AROUND THE WORLD

Did you know that we have over 66 networks in 25 states and 12 countries? Welcome to our newest networks, **Paris**, **Singapore**, and **Quito**, Ecuador. Be on the lookout for upcoming events and announcements. MinnesotaAlumni.org/networks



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Portland
S. Willamette
- ▶ **PENNSYLVANIA**
- ▶ **SINGAPORE**
- ▶ **TAIWAN**

- ▶ **TENNESSEE**
- ▶ **TEXAS**
Austin/San Antonio
Dallas
Houston
- ▶ **WASHINGTON**
- ▶ **WISCONSIN**
Madison
Milwaukee

BEHIND THE SCENES AT WCCO

The Alumni Association's **Behind the Scenes** series kicked off on September 17 at WCCO-TV studios in downtown Minneapolis. News anchors and reporters Kim Johnson (B.A. '06), Ali Lucia (B.A. '07), and Kate Raddatz (B.A. '11) gave attendees an insiders' view of a television station by sharing their personal stories and leading guided tours.

Behind the Scenes offers alumni exclusive opportunities to gain access to interesting people, places and events at prominent locations throughout the Twin Cities area. Alumni Association members have registration priority and these events are expected to sell out quickly. Look for more information about upcoming events in future email communications.



Alumni anchors Ali Lucia, Kim Johnson, and Kate Raddatz



The **University of Minnesota Alumni Association** is seeking outstanding candidates for service on the board of directors. Positions are available for a term of service from

July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2019.

Submit names at
MinnesotaAlumni.org/boardnomination.
Deadline is January 13. For more information contact
Ruth Isaak at isaak006@umn.edu or 612.625.9150.

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A Mystery That's a Love Story

By Mary Jo Pehl

"Not as good as some serial killer books I've read," my mother wrote in 1998 of a book she'd just finished. I know because after she died I got all of her books. Or, rather, I got the notes she kept on them. My mother read a lot—so much that she started keeping track of books when she was in her 60s. No doubt she grew weary of telling me for the umpteenth time, "I swear I've read this before."

Over time, she created her own little card catalog, a plastic recipe box full of 3 x 5-inch index cards with notes on every book she read. On each card, in her squat, looping handwriting, she wrote the author's name in the upper-left-hand corner with the book's title underneath. In the right-hand corner, she recorded the month and year she'd read it.

Books, 400 of them, were rated on a scale of 1 to 10. Sometimes she made a point of giving a book a 0. Reviews, when she gave them, tended to be terse: "Dumb." "Loved." "Hokey." "All-time favorite." "Ho hum." "Read no more by this author."

I laughed out loud over some of her lengthier critiques.

"[M]ain character suffers from amnesia and someone is trying to kill her and she can't figure out why—and I don't care."

"On page 4 author used the word eschatological—made me angry at author so I quit the book."

"Heroine named Flick. Oh, please. Quit after 30 pages."

Of one her favorite authors, she wrote: "Love all Amy Tan. Writes about mothers and daughters a lot."

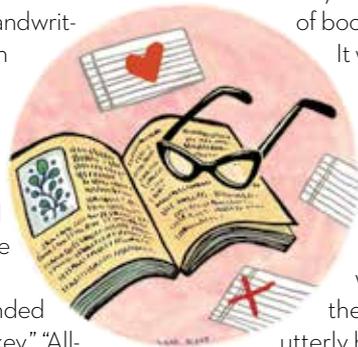
That one really got me. I was in my late 30s

when it hit me that my mother was human, and not a being put on this planet to vex me personally. I'm sure she often felt the same about me. We grew closer, and I loved hearing her story, like when she told me one of the scariest things she ever did was learn to drive at the age of 28 when I was a toddler.

We did not completely understand each other, but it was my mother who taught me to read—not in the way of learning vowels and consonants and how they all work together, but in the magic of books and how to get lost in them.

It was a love we shared. But after she was diagnosed with cancer and the treatments had worn her down, she lost interest in everything, even reading. During an ordeal comprised mostly of worsts, that was the worst of it. I stopped reading then too. It took all my energy to be utterly helpless.

Looking through my mother's card file, I sometimes felt like the lone scholar of her life and wondered if I should be wearing gloves as I touched the index cards. One card I came across surprised me. Years ago, I wrote a book about moving in with my parents for a short time in my forties. To me, the book was dumb and hokey, so I didn't tell anyone about it. But there was my name in the upper left-hand corner of a plain index card, with the title noted under it. She'd rated it 10 out of 10. There was no comment, but I like to think of it in the way she once described another book: "A mystery that's a love story." Maybe it's enough to know that she rated me higher than Isabel Allende. 



Mary Jo Pehl is a writer, comedian, and essayist. She works as an executive assistant in the University Senate Office.

Illustration by Ilana Blady



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