I was a grownup — a forebear with descendants of my own — before I knew I wasn’t very Irish (if Irish at all). It was a bit of a blow to my identity because I had been raised to think of myself as Irish. My mother attributed my quick temper and brooding disposition to my Irish blood as well as my wistfully romantic nature and appetite for poetry and make-believe.

Her mother was a Finnegan, her father a McPhee, and my father’s side of things had simply been rural Southerner for as long as anyone could remember. Not much to latch onto there (or so my mother thought). So we were devotedly Irish-Catholic in alien north Louisiana, and Notre Dame was our place, our city on the hill, our champion.

It’s hard to imagine a university in America that has aligned itself with a foreign country as closely as Notre Dame has identified with Ireland. Despite being started by a French priest of a French religious order, L’Université de Notre Dame du Lac has been the home of the Fighting Irish for decades.

Its athletic teams have embodied that fighting spirit — scrappy, defiant, belligerent underdogs with gritty flair for valiant efforts and dramatic victories. The shamrocks and the wearing of the green may suggest the playful ornamentations of things Irish, but turning the demeaning image of the leprechaun inside out as a symbol of Irish pride, liberation and triumph stands as a fist against the prejudice and power of age-old oppressors.

I can still remember how good it felt at 17 to join — with full-throated zest — the roaring chant, “Here come the Irish!” as Notre Dame marched down the field against No. 1 Texas in the 1970 Cotton Bowl. A full-size Irish flag soon hung in my bedroom.

Not only is today’s student body characteristically Irish but the University is a distinguished international leader in Irish studies, with world-class scholars applying their intellectual spirit to the culture’s literature, language, history, music and politics. A football game in Dublin this September — the jewel in a jampacked agenda of academic and social affairs — attracted almost 40,000 Americans to the city, a stunning demonstration of the bonds between Notre Dame and its adopted homeland.

Many of us think of Ireland as the place left behind. The truth is, we all come from somewhere, and those places do much to tell us who we are and are instrumental in how we understand our life stories. Our geography helps define us — whether we trace our roots to Inishark, the Gold Coast, Rosebud or even planet Earth (as some articles herein suggest).

As for me and my Irish ancestry? More recent genealogical investigations indicate that the McPhee is more Scottish than Irish and the Finnegan was a second husband, one who came along after the biological father had passed through and disappeared. This crushing discovery of being non-Irish has had me adjusting to myself ever since.

— Kerry McPhee Temple ’74
Features

18. Off the Coast, by Brendan O'Shaughnessy ’93
The islands, home to the Irish for centuries, are beautiful, abandoned and silent now — but still divulge stories through those who left and what was left behind.

26. Standing in Their Footprints, by Ian Kuit

28. To Be an Irish American Is Often To Be Haunted, by Liam Farrell ’04
When you grow up as an Irish American, you often grow up homesick for a country you have never seen, because you feel that no matter how much your ancestors have sacrificed, the world you have was only formed because they lost their own.

31. Forty Shades of Green, by Robert Schmuhl ’70

32. Useless Beauty: A Canticle for the Cosmos, by Scott Russell Sanders
What do we make of a universe saturated with an extravagance of beauty?

37. Life as We Know It, by Michael J. Crowe ’58 and Christopher M. Graney
From the beginning the human race has scanned the heavens for the meaning of our existence and signs of creatures living far, far away. The search itself says a lot about who we are.

42. His Last Game, by Brian Doyle ’78

44. Fast Tracking, by Michael Rodio ’12
Kelsey Falter and the hungry, obsessive, speeded-up, success-driven, all-out road to tech stardom. She’s enjoying the ride.

48. A Climb Too High, by Kelly Kammerer ’63
And a friend for life.

53. Author of the Imaginary, by Patrick Dunne ’59
John Bellairs ’59, the celebrated creator of spooky and suspenseful children’s literature, was once my witty and fun-loving guide through the magical vacationland that was Notre Dame.

Departments

Notre Dame Avenue
6. Ireland at ND; the Irish abroad
16. Freshmen on Facebook

Café Arts
56. On the record
59. Café Choice

Alumni
60. Class columns

CrossCurrents
90. Witness to the humanity of killers
93. Their faces open with joy
94. I had hoped for more
96. In a fix

Follow Notre Dame Magazine on Facebook and Twitter
A GOOD PLACE TO DIG Notre Dame's Ian Kuijt has headed a team of archaeologists and anthropologists exploring the abandoned fields and homes of Inishark, an island off the coast of Ireland. It was inhabited for hundreds of years, but the last residents left the island — and a way of life — in 1960. Photograph by Matt Cashore '94
My new Notre Dame

By Tara Hunt ’12

As campus revives from the lull of summer and pulses to the beat of student energy, I realize I am no longer en tempo with Notre Dame.

After graduating in May, I returned just weeks later to work at Notre Dame Magazine. It’s true I barely left the University—just enough time to repay my sleep debt and purchase furniture for a new apartment—but somehow it was long enough to make me feel like a stranger here.

Shortly after moving I went one Sunday evening to the Basilica for Mass and stood in the back, uncertain where I fit in among the rows of campers and ACE students and parishioners. I scanned the church, looking for a familiar face. There wasn’t one. For the first time, I felt alone at Notre Dame.

The school year’s start brought more feelings of estrangement. I became abruptly aware that I was no longer a student. I had traded in my textbooks for a University-owned laptop, my McGlinn dorm room for a cubicle in Grace and studenthood for the ranks of Notre Dame employees.

As the year revolved and students fell into the patter of their course schedules and social routines, I realized I was marching at a pace unlike the one I followed for four years. I now look for the best dry cleaner instead of the best pint specials. I wake up with the sunrise instead of going to bed with it. I go home at the end of the day and don’t dig through stacks of homework.

This life has its perks, certainly. I don’t miss long nights in the library or shouts in the hallway late into the night. I love the handy pass that allows me to drive onto campus (which I admittedly do often just to spite the guards who wouldn’t let the student-me enter on rainy nights).

But still it feels a bit off. I’m uncomfortable facing up my sneakers and running with the students at Rolfs. I feel like I’m intruding when I walk around my residence hall—my home for four years—to visit friends. And the thought of writing on the second floor of the library or the basement of LaFortune, favorite haunts of my undergraduate days, makes me cringe.

In recent weeks I have had conversations with friends about how lucky I am to still be at Notre Dame. I undoubtedly am.

Tara Hunt is an associate editor at Notre Dame Magazine.

The letters we publish here are edited for space and are representative of those we receive. We print only those letters referring to an article in the most recent edition of the magazine, not those responding to letters or commenting on issues not addressed in the recent issue. For a fuller presentation of letters visit our website at magazine.nd.edu.

Then again . . .

I have been reading books and articles in recent months trying to understand why our elected officials can’t seem to get anything done, especially when so many challenges need to be addressed. Father Jenkins’ address, “The Danger of Our Convictions,” has been the most effective clarification of the problem that I have come across. It’s too bad that our politicians won’t pay any attention to his suggestions.

Andrew Crowe ’82
Fairfield, Connecticut

The lawsuit

Richard Garnett closes his article (“Understanding the HHS lawsuits”) defending Notre Dame’s decision to sue Health and Human Services with the phrase, “religious freedom is both foundational and vulnerable.” I might remind all Catholic leaders, including those at Notre Dame, that women’s access to health care and their right to self-determination are equally foundational and vulnerable. Forgetting that fact places one at risk of following the path of those most famous of Christian villains: the Pharisees. They placed adherence to rigid religious dogma above the needs of the people that they claimed to serve.

James Rickert, M.D., ’84
Bloomington, Indiana

The issue of the HHS lawsuit is institutional conscience versus individual conscience. The Church has traditionally taught the importance of individual conscience and this teaching was reinforced by Vatican II. The recent Catholic Church reminds me of the political climate of the McCarthy era when a minority of Church leaders, acting without the collective authority of the U.S. bishops, pushed a political agenda.

John Cantwell ’62
St. Louis, Missouri

It is a unique and unfortunate historical accident that, unlike other nations, most Americans receive health insurance according to the preferences of their employers. Now that the basic human need of health care has become America’s favorite political football, some employers will find more and more reasons to dictate what benefits their employees will have and will not have. When basic rights come into conflict, haven’t we
learned that justice demands awarding the decision to those who bring the least power to the conflict? Somehow those with money and power always seem to manage to take care of themselves.

Since we live in a pluralistic society, we will necessarily participate in things with which we do not agree and which even offend our moral sense. For example, my taxes have supported unconscionable measures taken in the name of “national security,” and I have little recourse.

LAWRENCE M. KNOLES ’66
DIDS, OKLAHOMA

Please discontinue sending me Notre Dame Magazine. Since the school filed its frivolous lawsuit in the name of defending religious freedom that is wrong on both the facts and the law, I’m not really interested in what you have to offer.

DANIEL F. LUECKE ’61
BOULDER, COLORADO

Church observance
Michael Garvey urges us in his excellent article (“Of What Spirit Are We?”) to avoid righteous wrath and lacerating hostilities within our Church. But many of the faithful can best be characterized as “disheartened.” Troubling issues of the role of women, celibacy, contraception, ecumenism and the sexual abuse cover-up concern us. Historians point out that the Renaissance popes simply didn’t get it when faced with the need for reform. Let us hope that, with guidance from the Holy Spirit, the hierarchical march to folly will not be repeated. Dorothy Day would expect no less.

ROBERT LAWTON JONES ’49
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

James Walton
I was sorry to hear about the death of Professor James Walton, who amazed me as a sophomore English major-to-be with how much knowledge one could soak out of the first 20 lines of the Canterbury Tales over two weeks. As someone who wanted to enter journalism, I found Professor Walton’s Early English literature course was better than Quantico for would-be Marines. You had to write a paper once a week, but no longer than one and a half pages — and you had to say something intelligent, interesting and penetrating. I never forgot him and still think of him.

JOHN G. POWERS ’72
NEW YORK CITY

Vetville and the village
Even though our family lived in the University Village a decade before Jennifer Kaczor’s family, we felt our family and community spirit was special and blessed. Thank you for reminding me of the good old days: rent at $125 per month, Mass at the community center that invoked prayers for quiet from cranky toddlers, the “victory garden” that was planted but abandoned because my son ate the rocks, and the not-so-private conversations, especially when we left our apartment door open on hot days. My husband was a 26-year-old freshman and Navy veteran who sprinted through Notre Dame to provide for his growing Catholic family, but we both savored the joys of family and community in the place called Vetville.

SUSAN FRAZIER
PINE TOWNSHIP, PENNSYLVANIA

Football
What do you think the average football fan thinks about Notre Dame football? Do you believe they wonder about legends, memories and traditions? Or do you think they might see Notre Dame as they do other universities? That is, an institution that is engaged in a never-ending, always expanding quest for more football dollars. I am afraid that if Notre Dame relinquishes its independent status in football, the unique character of Notre Dame’s football tradition will disappear.

ROBERT W. GOSSICK ’55
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

The family story
Mel Livatino’s essay, “Wintry Rooms of Love,” is one of the saddest, truest, most beautiful pieces I have read in your magazine or anywhere else. The quality of thinking, writing and feeling is exceptional; it feels like the kind of thing I should read annually.

MICHELE THOMAS ’83
LEBANON, INDIANA

“Wintry Rooms of Love” was the best article I have ever read in my 72 years of life. Notre Dame Magazine has many outstanding articles but this was the best.

DONNA HENNESSEY
GLENVIEW, ILLINOIS

But I must remind them that I am not at the Notre Dame of our undergraduate days.

I don’t spend hours drinking coffee in Waddicks or eating in the dining hall. I’m not planning costumes to themed parties or looking for a date to an SYR. I’m not wrapped in the fervor of everything Notre Dame was to us for our four years. I’m in meetings and lunches on campus, but more often than not I’m staring longingly at the same nd.edu homepage they are, wishing to be back at that Notre Dame.

As an employee, I’ve seen some of Notre Dame’s allure die away. Like any institution, it has a corporate side, one given to money and politics. While it strives for good, it doesn’t always achieve it.

This Notre Dame is still undeniably special. I am surrounded by talented and compassionate people I am humbled to call colleagues. I get to say a quick prayer to Mary on the Dome every day as I walk into work. And perhaps more than anything, I have the opportunity to take what I learned at Notre Dame — maybe not those lessons on French existentialism or human diseases — but the lessons on faith, community, intellectual growth and truth, and apply them to the institution that illumined them for me.

This place changes, and so do we. We transform into who Notre Dame taught us to be, and we come back new to a new place. It can be eerie and uncomfortable, but it’s also beautiful to know that the place is always evolving, always advancing, all while maintaining a bit of the home it was to us, no matter how long ago.

Tara Hunt, an undergrad no more.
Speaking of Irish

BY JOHN NAGY ’00 M.A.

Two and a half years after Caitlin Myron showed up as a freshman in Professor Tara MacLeod’s introductory Irish language class to give the challenging tongue a “tryout,” she found herself standing inside the grand Dublin home of Michael D. Higgins with a set of books in her hand — a gift for Ireland’s new president — and a short message to deliver to him. In Irish.

The path Myron took to the receiving rooms of Áras an Uachtaráin in the Irish capital’s historic Phoenix Park traces the fondest dreams that Professor Christopher Fox and the extraordinary array of Irish history, literature and language professors he’s mustered at Notre Dame since 1993 have for their students.

By the start of her senior year this past August, Myron had spent more than a year on the Emerald Isle in three consecutive study-abroad programs, skipping all the prepackaged experiences of the conventional American tourist and instead immersing herself in the language near Galway, taking classes alongside Irish university students at Trinity College and completing a seven-week professional internship in Dublin.

“I didn’t really know what I was getting into at the beginning,” the English major and proficient Spanish speaker explains. “Like I said, I was just going to see how I liked it.”

Bringing Notre Dame to Ireland

Myron is only one of the most recent examples of the explosive demand among Notre Dame students — undergraduate and graduate — for Irish language courses that Fox, now the director of the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, anticipated nearly 20 years ago.

In those early days, Fox, an authority on 18th century Ireland and the Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, and Seamus Deane, the Irish literary light and Fox’s co-conspirator at what was then the Keough Program, hired a young star scholar named Peter McQuillan to evaluate the jumbled Irish language holdings at the Hesburgh Library. McQuillan was also to teach the first Irish language course Notre Dame had offered in decades.

Fox recalls the registrar calling him up one day to chide him. “Fox! That dog won’t hunt!” Speaking of Irish

I’ll put this thing up there, but nobody’s going to take it.” A few days later, the registrar called back to report the class filled. Fox suggested he post another. That one filled, too.

Since then, Fox has had more trouble finding instructors than students. As many as 200 sign up for the classes in the department each year, and some 20 have declared an Irish language minor in the Department of Irish Language and Literature — the only such department outside Ireland — that sprang forth from the head of Keough-Naughton eight years ago. Currently, Notre Dame employs two full-time specialists, Mary O’Callaghan and Tara MacLeod, Myron’s instructor for three semesters, for whom Irish is a first language.

“I really loved the language and loved learning it,” Myron says, praising MacLeod, who won a Joyce award for undergraduate teaching in 2011, for her interactive teaching style. “She just made it fun and not stressful.”

By the end of her sophomore year, Myron was taking Modern Irish Poetry from the acclaimed Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and was working to keep up with the Irish texts on one page while the visiting professor, whose own works have been translated into more than a dozen languages, led the class full of students with limited or no language background down the English translations on the opposite page.

In Ní Dhomhnaill’s class, Myron encountered the innovative 20th century poet Séán Ó Riordáin, whose brilliance, long struggle with tuberculosis and modernist explorations of life’s darker themes might remind the casual reader of Chekhov, Kafka, Stephen Crane, D.H. Lawrence or Dylan Thomas. She wrote an essay on his poetry that she now hopes, with Ní Dhomhnaill’s encouragement, to build into a full thesis for her English honors concentration.

Myron, however, was just getting started. A few weeks after classes ended, she boarded a plane for Ireland and made her way to a little town called Carraroe — not far from where her grandfather grew up — in the Galway Gaeltacht, the term for the island’s many Irish-speaking districts. She placed in the immersion program’s highest level and spent her days poring over grammar and her nights talking to everyone she could find.

John Nagy is an associate editor of this magazine.
At summer’s end she went to stay with a cousin in England before starting her year at Trinity. “I kind of became part of the family,” she says, describing an Irish family tree whose branches, in her generation, spread to Cork and Dublin and over to London, Belgium, Luxembourg and Australia as a kind of bonsai miniature of modern Ireland’s global canopy. “Now I definitely have deeper and lasting connections. There’s no way I’m going to lose that.”

The Dublin year exposed her to Ireland’s most prestigious university and introduced her to the man dubbed by *The Irish Times* and others as the country’s foremost academic, Professor Declan Kiberd. Now the Donald and Marilyn Keough Professor of Irish Studies at Notre Dame, Kiberd spends his autumns in Indiana and his springs back home again in Dublin, teaching at O’Connell House, the crown jewel of Notre Dame’s intensely competitive Dublin program.

Come spring, Myron once again parted company with a set of friends and began a Keough internship at Foras na Gaeilge, the cooperative body established by the Republic of Ireland and the government of Northern Ireland to promote the language throughout the island.

Myron spent her time working and speaking “100 percent in Irish.” She was nervous at first because at Trinity she’d focused on cultural studies and curriculum requirements and hadn’t formally developed her language skills. But one evening, while walking from her office to O’Connell House on the other side of Merrion Square, she caught herself in mental transition, thinking ahead to the conversations she’d have with the other Keough interns who didn’t know Irish, much less use it professionally all day long. “And I realized that I was still thinking in Irish and I had to make sure I didn’t walk in there and, you know, freak people out.”

And that’s when Caitlin Myron knew she had acquired Irish.

**And Ireland to Notre Dame**

Professor Brian Ó Conchubhair knows something about the kind of effort students like Myron put into learning his language. “Because we’re such an unusual option,” he concedes, “we realize that we have to work very hard at getting students into our classes and keeping them.”

Ó Conchubhair finds students enrolling in Irish for all kinds of reasons. Many come to connect with their Irish heritage, but mere nostalgia doesn’t keep them there long. Others sign up out of simple curiosity, the need to fulfill University language requirements or the satisfying intellectual challenge that the different patterns of thought reflected in Irish syntax can provide.

The teaching reputation of the Irish department and Keough-Naughton — its fellows represent the departments of anthropology; English; film, television and theatre; history; and Irish — doesn’t hurt. “I think the students recognize that there’s an investment on the part of the faculty,” he says.

“If we can capture their imagination . . . on day one and keep them interested, they’ll come back for more,” he continues. “Because at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter what language the literature is written in. If you make it challenging, if you make it exciting, if you make it relevant, if you engage with the big issues, the big questions, it doesn’t matter whether they’re being framed or mediated through French, Spanish or Russian. The basic human questions that great literature addresses are the same, regardless of the language.”

Whether that’s what Brother Simeon had in mind when he was introducing Irish courses the University advertised in the Scholastic in the latter half of the 19th century isn’t known.

You might say Irish Studies at Notre Dame began with the Galway native, whom Ó Conchubhair says taught Irish in the 1860s. It’s known that at least some of the Irish brothers whom Father Sorin recruited in southern Indiana to accompany him to Father Badin’s lakeside cabin and establish Notre Dame in 1842 were bilingual. It’s even possible that as a Union Army chaplain Father Corby spoke Irish at times to the proud immigrant soldiery of the Fighting 69th, though his memoirs have the famous “absolution under fire” at Gettysburg in Latin.

But Simeon and a few confreres were 19th century Notre Dame’s equivalent of an Irish language department, doing what they could to stave off the rapid decline of their first language among the sons of their fellow famine refugees. Irish was offered through the end of the century and seems to have resurfaced briefly again in the 1920s and 1960s.

That was that, until Christopher Fox got it in his head to create an Irish Studies program and found a way lure his friend, Seamus Deane, already a celebrated poet and literary critic, away from University College Dublin in 1992 to become the first Keough chair in Irish Studies at Notre Dame.

Deane’s hire signaled that Fox, Keough and the University meant business in making Notre Dame pre-eminent in Irish Studies. The library began building its collections, and Peter McQuillan arrived to organize them and teach the language classes. Within three years, Deane and Fox had an institute and had created the undergraduate Irish Studies minor and arranged for Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney to give a reading of his poetry to a packed McKenna Hall. Before the millennium was out, Fox had secured what was then the largest National Endowment for the Humanities grant ($2.4 million) to create a permanent fellowship program and an endowed library fund in Medieval Irish and related subjects. By 2010 an external review declared Keough-Naughton the “flagship program for Irish Studies throughout the world.”

The program still makes showstopping hires, like Declan Kiberd and the novelist and literature Professor Barry McCrea, who left a tenured position at Yale to come to Notre Dame. Then there’s this measure of Notre Dame’s international stature in Irish Studies: “Right now arguably there’s no better place to do a dissertation on James Joyce,” Fox asserts.

“Really, the purpose is to bring Ireland to Notre Dame and Notre Dame to Ireland,” says Fox, who is justly proud of the success the program has had on both fronts. He takes as Father Corby forever tied ND to the Irish Brigade through his chaplaincy in the Fighting 69th. The restored banner of the 63rd New York Infantry lives in the Archives.

For quick looks at the leprechaun and the lodestar of Notre Dame’s Irish language program, go to magazine.nd.edu/news/33137.
much delight in the people he works with as he does in the superlatives, even when the two intertwine in compelling personal stories.

Like Bérendán Ó Buachalla, who learned Irish as a second language growing up in Cork and arrived in 2003 to take the first chair in Irish language and literature established in North America since 1896. When Ó Buachalla died suddenly in 2010, Ireland’s national public broadcasting network featured his life and scholarship in a short, Irish-language television documentary that highlighted his contributions at Notre Dame.

Then there’s history department chair Patrick Griffin ’87, whose immigrant great-aunt had put aside money for him to attend Notre Dame from what she’d earned as a domestic servant. Griffin first studied Ireland under emeritus Professor Jay Dolan and joined the faculty in 2008 as the inaugural Madden Hennebry Family Collegiate Professor of Irish-American Studies.

And Kiberd? Rumors had him leaving Ireland for an American university for a quarter-century before he finally decided on South Bend. Kiberd had directed some 60 doctoral dissertations in Ireland. Notre Dame, among other attractions at a time when the Irish economy is tanking, ensures Kiberd’s ability to keep working with graduate students.

And, as it turns out, with Caitlin Myron, who will develop her ideas about her favorite Irish-language poet this fall under Kiberd’s direction. When Myron pitched her thesis idea, she says Kiberd expressed enthusiasm to re-read Seán Ó Riordáin and acquaint himself with new scholarship on his poetry. In other words, here’s be learning, too. “For a professor to say that, to be interested in your project and to make it seem valuable, is wonderful,” she says. “You feel validated in what you’re doing.”

“I think these kids are getting something special,” Fox comments. “And that’s our job, to make sure they’re getting something special.”

Down the road

Still, Fox and his colleagues aren’t satisfied. He gives every minors student an exit interview and remembers one telling him, “If you’re dead and Irish, Notre Dame has you covered.” But ND has little yet to offer students of contemporary Ireland apart from Rev. Sean McGraw, CSC, ’92, who teaches Irish politics. Fox envisions more hires in the future.

Keough-Naughton hosts renowned Irish composer Micheál Ó Síleátháin as a visiting professor. Without a full-time musicologist, however, students can’t study it properly. And what, Fox asks, is Irish culture without Irish music?

He wants more undergraduates going to Ireland and has been able to attract enough donor support that students don’t have to pay. Professor Ian Kuijt has taken undergraduate archaeology students to western Ireland for years (see “Off the Coast,” p. 18). Now Tara MacLeod has added a trip to County Galway’s Aran Islands for her course on Ireland’s Edge and a visit to Belfast may be coming for a class on The Troubles.

But whether their focus is on interdisciplinary cultural studies or more purely on Irish language and literature, these students have to get serious about the language. An Irish Studies minor requires three language courses, while Myron’s minor in language and literature requires four. Now, motivated students coming up behind her can pursue a full major.

What isn’t required is being Irish-American or growing up around the culture the way Myron did, spending countless hours at Chicago Gaelic Park practicing Irish dance for international competitions (“The wigs!” she exclaims wistfully. “The fake tan!”) while her grandfather watched games of hurling. Somehow, though, she’d heard him speak it with friends, Irish never registered with her as a foreign language until she came to Notre Dame.

And it wasn’t long then before she found herself in Ireland’s presidential palace walking toward Michael D. Higgins with those volumes from the Irish Text Society in her hand, looking the part with her luminous red hair. She did most of the talking, and he smiled while she introduced herself in Irish and presented the book on behalf of Foras na Gaeilge. He thanked her, and that was it. It was a great confidence boost, she says, and she had made sure he knew she was an American and a Notre Dame student.

“Otherwise I thought maybe he would mistake me for being Irish, and then it wouldn’t be quite as unique that I’m able to speak it.”

The story of Irish

First off, it’s not Gaelic. The name of the language is Irish.

Irish is a Gaelic — or Goidelic — language, most closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx, within the family of modern Celtic languages that also includes the Brythonic tongues of Wales, Cornwall and Brittany. The antecedents of all these languages were spoken in Europe back to prehistoric times.

The Irish spoke Irish almost exclusively until the 18th century. Almost. It got complicated, especially around Dublin, the gateway to all sorts of influences. The Vikings started it by settling Dublin and littering the place with Norse words for common things, mainly to do with fishing and commerce. The Church was already praying and writing all over everything in Latin. Later, Normans invaded with French, and the English soon brought English.

Irish, French and English all got on pretty well through the 17th century, says Brian Ó Conchubhair, associate professor of Irish Language and Literature at Notre Dame. Bilingualism was beginning to take hold, with English finding its place as the island’s second language, certainly among Anglo-Irish families and the closer one got to Dublin. But mostly the Irish spoke and wrote and sang in Irish.

The 1700s saw a push to promote English. Not just the language, but English dress and other cultural norms. And the English were getting a bit stiff about the Irish language, the games, the dancing and other customs. They kept trying to outlaw it. “We know it’s not successful,” Ó Conchubhair says, “because Irish is outlawed again and again. And again.”

Another century went by, and Irish semi-narians were training in English. Before long English became the language of Ireland’s education system. Going to market required English. Suing your landlord or defending yourself against criminal charges required English, lest ye be thought of as shifty. In short, British authorities didn’t need language laws once English became the cultural passport to a better social and economic life.

So Ireland in 1840 was bilingual. The famine that started five years later changed everything. “It wipes out the lowest class in Ireland, who were the monoglots,” Ó Conchubhair explains. They either

The library houses the O’Neill Collection of Traditional Irish Music — possibly the best in the world — and this fall

Fox, always looking ahead.
You can go home again

University photographer Matt Cashore '94 has traveled to Dublin and taken thousands of photographs of the city and of Irish life that will soon be available in the Hesburgh Library for students’ use. The best of these will appear in a book scheduled for release in late November: Notre Dame’s Happy Returns: Dublin, The Experience, The Game.

The book offers an illustrated history of Dublin and an essay on Notre Dame’s growing presence in Ireland through O’Connell House, the Alliance for Catholic Education, Teach Bhríde, a lay Catholic community for music and youth ministry launched by Notre Dame Folk Choir director Steve Warner ’80 M.A., and numerous academic programs like the annual Irish Seminar, which lead author and Professor Brian Ó Conchubhair calls “the gateway into Irish Studies academia” for doctoral students and junior faculty around the world. A third section chronicles American football in Ireland, culminating in the September 1 game against Navy. “If you went to the game, here’s a memoir,” Ó Conchubhair says in describing the project. “If you didn’t go to the game, here’s what you missed.” The book was co-authored by Susan Mullen Guibert ’87, ’93 M.A.
How the (Fighting) Irish engage civilization

Whether Notre Dame is really French by dint of its name and founding vision or more truly Irish by virtually every other measure, it hardly matters. These days the Fighting Irish come from — and go — just about everywhere. Here, then, is a sampling of Notre Dame people at work in unexpected places and a peek at what they’re doing there.

Ciudad Cayalá, Guatemala. Professor Richard Economakis didn’t just travel to this sustainable, mixed-use suburb of Guatemala City, he helped build it. His main contribution is the Athenaeum, a civic hall evocative of Mayan temples, with pyramidal steps and a classical portico that can be used as a stage for public performances. Cayalá’s traditional master plan is the work of Estudio Urbano — the firm of Pedro Godoy ‘00M.Arch. and Maria Sanchez ‘00M.Arch. — and Leon Krier, the inaugural laureate of the School of Architecture’s Driehaus Prize.

Haiti. In 2011-12, Haitian data collectors used iPod Touches, GPS tools and good old shoe leather to survey and map their country’s 2,315 Catholic schools. The result: a comprehensive assessment of educational quality, resources and needs that will be used to strengthen facilities, teacher training, governance and equipment across the system. Local leaders hope the Haiti Catholic Education Initiative — a partnership of Haitian and international entities including Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education — will spur broader national education reform efforts.

On the France-Switzerland border. Physics Professor Colin Jessop leads a team of Notre Dame researchers laboring among thousands of colleagues at the subterranean Large Hadron Collider, the world’s biggest atom smasher. The ND team — more than two dozen professors, postdocs, technicians and graduate students with a revolving door of undergraduate researchers — works on one of two grand-scale experiments searching for the Higgs boson, a sub-subatomic-particle-in-concept that atomic theorists proposed 40 years ago to explain how electrons, protons and neutrons are formed. Many were on the scene this summer when the announcement came that scientists had discovered something “consistent” with the Higgs.

Mopti region, Mali. Political science Professor Jaimie Bleck and Kellogg Institute visiting fellow Kristin Michielitch are studying how increased access to radio broadcasts affects political knowledge and participation in rural areas, where widespread illiteracy and the control of information by village chiefs and imams has historically led to block voting by villages. Their fieldwork continues despite the March 2012 coup d’etat and intensified rebel activity in the West African nation’s desert north.

Lima, Peru. As a senior history major, Joseph VanderZee ’12 pored over administrative papers, parish records, seminary constitutions and the work of a 17th century Jesuit historian to learn how the colonial Church approached the work of forming European and indigenous Peruvians in the faith. The Glynn Family Scholar also traveled to Rome for his undergraduate thesis, directed by the late ND history Professor Sabine MacCormack, which he presented twice at undergraduate conferences before graduating.

St. Augustine, Trinidad. The mosquito genetics and genomics lab of biology Professor David Severson, the director of ND’s Eck Institute for Global Health, has a long-standing collaboration with colleagues at the University of the West Indies. In field studies of Aedes aegypti, the scourge chiefly responsible for the spread of dengue fever, More recently, Severson and his research team have expanded their examination of dengue transmission through a collaboration with biologists at India’s University of Pune.

Want to know more? Tell us which of these verbal snapshots intrigued you most and full stories may appear in future issues of Notre Dame Magazine. Email us at ndmag@nd.edu.
**Milan, Italy**. Since 1982, art history Professor Robert Randolf Coleman has been cataloging the 8,325 drawings and prints in the collections of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana as part of a project to make available — via scanned images in the Medieval Institute’s Ambrosiana Collection — the entire artistic and manuscript holdings of the historic library founded in 1607. Nearly complete, Coleman’s catalog is searchable for free at italnet.nd.edu/ambrosiana/eng/index.html. “Almost everything needed for a scholar to begin work on Italian drawings is right here,” he says.

**Near Sarandë, Albania**. Classics Professor David Hernandez is the dig director and principal investigator at the site of the Roman city of Butrintum, or Butrint. Mostly abandoned since Venetian rule in the 16th century, Butrint is a treasure trove of 2,500 years of Mediterranean life, featuring one of the best-preserved examples of a Roman forum. Hernandez takes undergrads with him each summer to learn about excavation methods and the layering of ancient cities.

**Kabul, Afghanistan**. Journalist and Kroc Institute research associate Sarah Smiles Persinger conducted dozens of interviews with research support from adviser Mariam Safi. She asked Afghan women, many working as leaders in civil society, what they think will happen to gains in women’s health and education as foreign troops depart. The August 2012 report, “Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan,” co-authored by peace studies Professor David Cortright ’68 and research associate Kristen Wall, is available at kroc.nd.edu.

**Northern Uganda**. Two ND scholars are working on separate projects driven by extensive on-the-ground interviews with Ugandans who have suffered 20 years of civil war and atrocity. Theologian Todd Whitmore asks how people sustain hope through poverty and armed conflict. Political scientist Daniel Philpott is exploring the role forgiveness and reconciliation may play in making a lasting peace. An early project, a film about responding to the crimes of Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army, Uganda: The Challenge of Forgiveness, is on YouTube.

**Johannesburg, South Africa**. Xenophobic violence against refugees and other immigrants, mostly from elsewhere in Africa, climaxed in 2008, but fresh attacks since then indicate the need for a cultural shift in beliefs and perceptions. Graphic design Professor Robert Sedlack ’89 and his students visited in March to work with local organizations on together +, a multifaceted public-relations campaign promoting unity through diversity while orienting immigrants to South African social services. Learn more at togetherplusza.squarespace.com/.

**Seoul, South Korea**. Rev. Oliver Williams, CSC, ’61, ’69 M.A., a management professor in the Mendoza College of Business, is teaching courses in business ethics and the UN Global Compact as an instrument of peace-through-commerce to undergraduate and graduate students at Kyung Hee University. He will also present workshops on “Business as a Vocation” for Catholic leaders in Seoul.

**Nepal**. For years, industrial design Professor Ann-Marie Conrado ’93 has used her skills as a designer, consultant and educator to help Nepalese craftspeople translate their artistic skills, traditions and work ethic into products desirable in the global marketplace. Notre Dame ID students have spent summers in Nepal learning local techniques, sharing ideas and researching design-based solutions to humanitarian problems — like an umbilical-cord cutter that must be boiled before it will open for reuse.

**Manila, Philippines**. Anton Juan, senior professor of directing and playwriting, was directing professionally at age 17 in his native Philippines and shaping his views of theater as a means to illuminate the diversity of people’s perspectives. Twice knighted by the French government, Juan has worked with actors from high-school dropouts and juvenile offenders to professionals and ND students. This summer, he staged Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

**Looking ahead**. Last spring the College of Arts and Letters unveiled an international economics major combining nine courses in economics with seven to 10 courses in French, Spanish or Italian language and culture. The vision? Train professionals to understand and shape the world market as leaders and global citizens, the chairs of economics and Romance languages say. Concentrations in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean are expected.
seen & heard...

“LATHER, RINSE, REUSE” seems to be the model for ND senior Andy Boes’ project to collect and donate used hotel soap and shampoo. While interning at United Way of St. Joseph County, Boes saw that many people who rely on food pantries and food stamps don’t receive or can’t afford adequate toiletries. His solution was to gather the gently used soap and shampoo from the Morris Inn and donate them to United Way’s People Gotta Eat program. The shampoo and cleaned-up soap are given to 18 food pantries. Other hotels quickly joined in the collection effort, and to date Boes has gathered nearly a ton of hygiene products...

A MODERN-DAY PATCH ADAMS, sophomore Caitlin Crommett has founded DreamCatchers, a nonprofit organization that grants the dying wishes of hospice patients. Crommett began the project in high school and with the help and resources of the Hesburgh-Yusko Scholars Program, she spent the summer traveling to Raleigh, Nashville, Washington, D.C., Phoenix and Las Vegas, meeting with hospice organizations and schools in the hope of spreading her organization. She takes on wishes from gourmet meals to family reunions to yacht rides. “When I help to fulfill a dream for someone with not much time left in their lives, it is like giving them a happy ending, which is something I think everyone should have,” Crommett says. “For me, meeting and getting to know these people that we fulfill dreams for is so rewarding, as they usually have so much to teach us, and I often spend days going back to visit them. Sometimes they simply want someone to talk to, someone to laugh and smile with, in their final days, and I hope that DreamCatchers can give everyone hope for a happy ending.”

A PAIR OF ND FENCERS brought home bronze from the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Sisters Kelley Hurley ’10 and senior Courtney Hurley both contributed to the podium finish for the Women’s Team Epee. Kelley had served as an alternate for Team USA and replaced fellow fencer Susie Scanlan in the bronze-medal match, topping her Russian opponent 4-1 to add to the team win. The last fencer, Courtney lost her bout to Russia, 5-3, tying the match at 30-30 and sending it into sudden-death overtime. Courtney then touched her opponent 16 seconds in to claim a 31-30 win over Russia and clinch the bronze.

SHAKESPEARE’S NEW STAGE is the iPad, thanks to Notre Dame English Professor Elliott Visconsi. With co-author Katherine Rowe of Bryn Mawr College and funding from Notre Dame, the bard buff created an enhanced ebook of The Tempest, complete with audio readings from professional actors, commentary from scholars, and options to share notes and discuss with a group. “The humanities have... always been about conversations across time and space,” Visconsi told Fastcompany.com, adding, “That kind of collaboration, conversation, interpretation — social readings rather than living in a vacuum — is well suited to mobile devices.”

NEW CULINARY OPTIONS range from croissants to fried rice as campus welcomes Au Bon Pain, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and Panda Express. As students came back, a combined Taco Bell/Pizza Hut shop had replaced the location Sbarro held in the basement of LaFortune for 10 years. Upstairs, Panda Express is set to replace the Buen Provecho burrito stand in the Huddle next summer. Soon the Hesburgh Library will renovate the current first-floor lounge and vending area to accommodate Au Bon Pain, the first one in the South Bend area and a real treat for late-night library-goers.

THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS elected a new Provincial Superior, Rev. Thomas J. O’Hara, CSC, ’77M.Th., to lead the recently merged U.S. Province of Priests and...
Brothers. In July 2011, the Eastern Province merged into the Indiana Province, forming the new group of more than 500 priests, brothers and seminarians. . . .

**NOROVIRUS HIT NOTRE DAME**

Summer sports camps, affecting 106 young athletes and sending 29 to local hospitals. Most of the individuals affected with the gastrointestinal outbreak were high school and middle school campers. Food poisoning was immediately ruled out, and it was later confirmed by lab results as Norovirus, the most common stomach virus in the United States. . . .

**IRISH MEN’S SOCCER**

 Took on the professional under-23 Mexican team Chivas of Guadalajara in front of 3,400 fans in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in August. The 1-1 draw was part of the Shindigz National Soccer Festival and marked the first time in event history that a professional team competed against college teams. Food poisoning was competitive because of a healthy rivalry between the Mexican and American teams, head coach Bobby Clark says. "I was pleased with the way our team handled playing against such a good team. I don’t feel we’ll play any stronger or more technical team this season, and we have a very strong schedule." . . .

**FROM LANDFILL TO SCULPTURE PARK**

 Landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, in conjunction with the Snite Museum of Art and the University Architect’s office, is transforming the eight-acre strip of land between the Irish Green and the Compton Family Ice Arena. The space will be renovated into a canopied retreat for walks, reflection or small concerts and other gatherings. The landscaping will feature indigenous trees, shrubs and prairie grasses that may have stood in the area before it was inhabited. The Notre Dame Sculpture Park will rotate various works. The inaugural exhibition will feature five sculptures ranging from a kinetic stainless-steel piece to a horse made of collected driftwood and branches. It is set to open in November. . . .

**A THREE-YEAR GRANT**

 For $500,000 has been given to a team of researchers from Notre Dame and Purdue by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop a portable technology to quickly test milk and other dairy products for pathogens. The project will first try to reduce brucellosis, the most common animal-to-human infection, which can cause prolonged health problems in underdeveloped countries. While the infection isn’t often seen in developed countries, there is concern that with increased tourism and immigration, it may spread internationally. . . .

**AMERICANS LIE 11 TIMES**

 Per week on average says Anita Kelly, Notre Dame professor of psychology. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the research of Kelly and Lijuan Wang, a ND assistant professor of psychology, reveals that people who make an effort to lie less report stronger relationships and fewer health complaints. Their 10-week study compared two groups, one that was instructed to try to lie less and the other which continued on as normal. While both groups tended to avoid the whoppers a bit more, by week 10 the truth-tellers were down to less than one white lie per week and also had more than four fewer mental health complaints. So admit it, you weren’t stuck in traffic on the way to work. . . .

**MY FIRST DAY OF CLASS**

 I intend to. . . . introduce myself as an ex-con,” new theology professor John T. Fitzgerald says. He may not be an actual criminal, but he did spend the last 31 years at the University of Miami, and as a former football player he plans to allude to the legendary Notre Dame vs. Miami or “Catholics vs. Convicts” game of 1988 in his lessons. At Notre Dame, Fitzgerald will continue his religion and society research on the New Testament and will work with both doctoral and undergraduate students. . . .

**MOSQUITOES SMELL YOU**

 Before they bite you, Zainulabeuddin Syed says. The mosquito biologist with Notre Dame’s Eck Institute for Global Health studies mosquito olfaction and has concluded that the pests are able to use their antennae to smell small amounts of nonanal, a chemical substance given off by humans and other vertebrates like the avian carriers of West Nile virus. Female mosquitoes, the only biting ones, move the virus from birds to humans. Syed has also debunked the myth that DEET masks the odors that attract mosquitoes. Instead, he argues that mosquitoes smell DEET distinctly and try to avoid it. Syed’s research will likely lead to better understanding of mosquito prevention and control here and internationally, where mosquito-borne illnesses are frequently deadly. . . .

**LIGHTING UP CIGARS**

 With Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC, Zahm Hall residents celebrated their hall’s 75th anniversary on August 26 by creating a new “Hesburgh Challenge,” an agreement for all residents to live lives of service, sustainability and inclusivity — priorities Hesburgh values. The current residents pledged to end their version of the “Ole, ole, ole” chant in order to be more inclusive, to make larger donations to charities and to participate more often in Zahm service activities. They also made Father Hesburgh an honorary Zahmbie as part of the event. . . .
Giving voice to a new generation

By Meg Morrison ’13

While his peers were soaking up the California sunshine in the summer of 2009, Connor Toohill was glued to his computer. It wasn’t video games keeping the San Diego native indoors; Toohill was laying the foundations for his own student-run web publication, NextGenJournal.com.

Now a junior at Notre Dame, Toohill was a junior at Cathedral Catholic High School when he first noticed a pattern of politicians and commentators discussing the national debt and putting words in students’ mouths without actually asking for their opinions. “There was a lot of ‘This is what the next generation wants’ or ‘This is how the next generation feels,’ but it never felt very connected to where our generation was actually at,” says Toohill. “What we lacked … was a platform to vault the authentic voices, perspectives, opinions and priorities of young people like ourselves into the national dialogue.”

So he and some fellow students created that platform with NextGen Journal (NGJ), which was launched on July 4, 2009. With Toohill as editor-in-chief, the team initially included around a dozen editors and a few dozen writers.

By the time Toohill started his freshman year at Notre Dame in 2010, he was looking for new contributors to write on news, politics, college, sports, culture and music. “We did a fair amount of random outreach — identifying strong student bloggers, reporters [and] columnists from various college papers, then sending ‘cold’ emails,” Toohill says. These days, many now apply through the site, and NGJ has grown to a staff of more than 160 students and recent alumni from nearly 75 colleges and universities, including more than a few from Notre Dame.

“It’s a lot to ask for people to pick up a project that doesn’t pay and may take up quite a bit of time, but with ND students, that’s never really seemed to be an obstacle,” Toohill says. “People wanted to get involved because they were excited about what we were doing.”

Coordinating such a team around the country requires careful organization, notes NGJ managing editor and ND junior Kelsey Manning. On Fridays, section editors share their ideas for the upcoming week with writers, who can also pitch stories. Also, she adds, “We have a Facebook group where all the editors on for the night talk about what pieces are in, potential problems with pieces and what we’re running the next day.”

Toohill and his team have also started expanding NGJ’s scope leading up to the presidential election. “We’re working on a series of live events for the fall that we’re pretty excited about,” he says.

NGJ grew from a few thousand monthly unique visitors in September 2010 to around 100,000 this past spring, but Toohill says he doesn’t measure success simply in terms of these numbers. His priority is giving young people a platform to voice their opinions, which includes encouraging the site’s contributors to seek exposure via major media outlets.

“If the DREAM Act is in the national conversation and an undocumented student writes a fantastic piece on NGJ about their experience, we still want to push their content out to a wide audience,” he says. “But we also want to help get them booked on CNN or Hardball. We want to offer them a chance to offer their view to a wide mainstream audience in addition to a collegiate one.”

Toohill himself is no stranger to such publicity: Earlier this year he appeared on the Dylan Ratigan Show and Andrea Mitchell Reports.

He says his TV appearances led to more applicants, Twitter followers and emails for NGJ. “Above all, though, I think they just helped to give us a little bit more prominence and focus in the media sphere.”

When he’s not working on NGJ, Toohill studies economics and is considering adding a major in political science as he spends this semester in Washington, D.C. He is also a member of the first class of Hesburgh-Yusko Scholars, and, according to program director Joseph A. Buttigieg, exemplifies the program’s emphasis on leadership.

“I think [NGJ] is an excellent example of what we hope to see our scholars do, to pursue a goal in a forceful, passionate manner and face the hurdles and learn how to overcome them,” Buttigieg, also a ND professor of English, says.

Toohill faced a hurdle in July after a contributor’s controversial piece, “Why Every Social Media Manager Should Be Under 25,” elicited nasty feedback. Toohill’s post the following day explained that articles posted on the site do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial staff but that the harsh personal attacks on the author were inappropriate.

“Feel free to disagree, as we occasionally do as well. But don’t fall into the trap of personal attacks or blanket condemnations of young people,” Toohill wrote. “If you keep up with us regularly enough, we think you’ll discover that millennials are a much more interesting generation than you might have previously assumed.”
DEATHS IN THE FAMILY

SABINE MACCORMACK

At age 9 she couldn’t read, but SABINE MACCORMACK grew up to become “one of the most distinguished humanists in Notre Dame’s history, and one of the leading humanists in the contemporary scholarly world,” said John McGreevy, dean of the College of Arts and Letters. MacCormack died in June at age 71.

MacCormack was born at the end of WWII in Frankfurt, Germany, and the uneasy situation in Europe disrupted her education. At 9 she was sent to Bavaria to live with her grandmother and attend Catholic school. At 11, she moved to England and later attended Oxford there.

Academically, she plunged into two dissimilar fields — Ancient Rome and colonial Latin America — and achieved prominence in both. Her studies focused around the progressions of culture and religion. As a reprieve from heavy research, she could often be found in South America painting the landscapes she studied, her friend Marika Smith said.

In studying religion, she became curious on a personal level. “She told me she came to Notre Dame to find out if she might become a Catholic,” Smith said. After taking instruction from University President Rev. John Jenkins, CSC, MacCormack became a Catholic and daily communicant.

Her personal life was equally rigorous. Colleague Tom Noble said, “You had this feeling she had read every novel ever written and had the terrible capacity to remember them all.” She also wasn’t afraid to share her opinions. “She would get her jaws on an issue like a pit bull,” Noble said. The Hesburgh Library was one of those issues. MacCormack was known to bring up the library at every meeting she attended, a persistence that may have escaped the current renovations.

MacCormack was equally determined that Notre Dame establish a doctoral program in Latin American history and a Latin American Indigenous Language Learning Program, which she generously endowed from her Melkon Foundation award.

A faculty member since 2003, she was elected to some of the most prestigious academic societies, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, yet still found ample time for students and time to enjoy humor.

“Her sense of humor was not paralyzing, he always thought we could get over it. He had the ability to embrace lots of other things that could create happiness,” said Kroc Institute director, said.

JOHN DARBY

JOHN DARBY, a professor of comparative ethnic studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, will be remembered not only for his applied scholarship but also for his Irish sense of humor. He died in his home in Portstewart, Northern Ireland, at the age of 71.

Darby was born during a tumultuous period in Northern Ireland. As the Troubles escalated, he was removed from his teaching position at Saint Malachy’s College Belfast and appointed to a research position for the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission. He began to study conflict across countries and time periods and situations and eventually founded the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster.

He also put his research into action. His extensive research in combination with his unbiased demeanor allowed him to serve internationally as a mediator during wars and peace treaties.

“[John] understood that despite its brutality there was a certain logic to violence and conflict — it had a real face — a face even beyond the participants and combatants at the table,” colleague George Lopez said. “He knew that what a scholar could bring to that was to speak the truth of history by… getting right into their face.”

In 2004, Darby became the director of Kroc’s Peace Accords Matrix, the world’s largest compilation of data on peace agreements and one that allows for easy comparative analysis. The matrix is funded by the U.S. Institute of Peace and has brought many doctoral candidates to the University.

Darby was adamanent that students, even the undergraduates, work on the matrix and collaborate with faculty. “He was always looking ahead to the next generation of researchers and peace builders, and felt that shaping members of that generation was central to his vocation as a scholar,” Scott Appleby, the Kroc Institute director, said.

His work on violence never darkened his personality and he was known for his humor, Lopez said. “John was one of those people for whom violence was not a surprise — it was not paralyzing, he always thought we could get over it. He had the ability to embrace lots of other things that could create happiness.”

A U T U M N  2 0 1 2 | 15
NICE TO HAVE ALREADY MET YOU

At the Notre Dame of decades past, you arrived on campus with your suitcase teeming with dungarees or flannel shirts or leg warmers, anxiously anticipating the first sweaty handshake and nervous mumbles with the person you would share a 10x12 cell with for the academic year.

Not today. The incoming freshmen no longer walk into a dorm or chem lab full of strangers. They’ve mastered social media, namely Facebook, and use it to meet their classmates and to begin friendships before they ever set foot on campus.

On the site they compare class schedules. They plan pre-arrival gatherings in their hometowns. They color-coordinate décor with roommates. They challenge and question each other.

They’re connected to one another from the moment they mail in their enrollment confirmation. But some things haven’t changed. They’re still bright and ambitious. They still worry about being buried under snow in South Bend. And they still get nervous when they meet their roommates, no matter how many Facebook chats they’ve had.

Here they are, the class of 2016, as seen on Facebook.

— Compiled by Tara Hunt ’12
Off the Coast

The islands, home to the Irish for centuries, are beautiful, abandoned and silent now — but still divulge stories through those who left and what was left behind.

By Brendan O’Shaughnessy ’93
Photography by Matt Cashore ’94
RUNNING THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION OF MOST IRISH STORIES, THERESA LACEY’S TALE BEGINS IN TRAGEDY AND ENDS IN A WISTFUL LONGING.

Lacey was 25 years old in 1960 when she and the last two dozen residents evacuated her ancestral home of Inishark — Shark Island — a rocky emerald jutting from the sea seven miles off the western coast of Ireland. After thousands of years of struggle and survival in harsh conditions on the fringe of Europe, the modern world came in a rush. And an ancient County Galway island that once harbored more than 300 souls died in a day.

For Lacey, it was an idyllic childhood, isolated from the Irish mainland and the boundaries polite society placed on women of the era. She fondly remembers doing every kind of work: rowing the traditional currach boats, fishing with her father, sowing rows of potatoes, cutting turf peat for the fire, even killing sheep herself.

Now 76 and sitting inches from a roaring stove in a government-built house on the mainland, Lacey insists on more tea for all. I’m sitting on a couch in her kitchen with Ian Kuijt, the Notre Dame anthropology professor whose team of students has been excavating and mapping and studying Inishark life for the past six years. She clearly loves answering questions about the way it was.

An added lilt enters her voice when Lacey describes island celebrations — the music played and stories told at her old school, which transformed into a social center at night. She recalls lighting summer bonfires on the hill to celebrate Saint John’s Night, residents singing and dancing and drinking like bacchanal pagans, then spreading the ashes over the potatoes — an island ritual to make them taste better than mainland spuds — as the sun rose over the Atlantic.

The loss of their home is an emotional tale for the surviving Sharkers, now fewer than a dozen. One man broke down in tears trying to describe it, despite the half-century intervening. Islands along the length of the western Irish coast share similar stories of population loss or abandonment, leaving the survivors worried that a cherished way of life will someday be forgotten.

Kuijt’s undergraduate and graduate students have been collecting these stories, plus archaeological evidence and historic records, as part of a project called Cultural Landscapes of the Irish...
Coast (CLIC). Their goal is to shed light on a fascinating culture and history in danger of becoming another legend.

“I still love that island,” Lacey says. “I never felt isolated there. I’d go back in the morning and live there and die there, but who would be the idjit who’d go with me?”

Few would. When they left, just nine years before the first moon landing, island life had changed little over the past centuries. There was no electricity, running water or telephone lines. The island has no natural harbor, so the weather often stranded residents for days or weeks when boats could not land. A century of emigration had recently escalated, leaving the island without enough strong young backs for the physical labor needed to survive.

After Shark residents were socked in for a brutal seven-week stretch in 1959 that included an airdrop of supplies, the government finally granted the residents’ request to evacuate. But harbingers of the end of centuries of occupation had come earlier.

* * *

ON EASTER SUNDAY IN 1949, two Lacey brothers and a cousin — the family Theresa later married into — rowed a currach from Ini-shark across the channel to Inishbofin, a larger island with a full-time priest, doctor and store.

Returning after Mass, they capsized and drowned; two of the bodies were never found. On an island that size, three youngsters were known to all and represented a large share of the workforce. Fishing and boating disasters were considered a part of island life, but the stress became harder to tolerate after the drownings. Lacey said the women and elderly would watch the lads go out fishing at night, then sit awake terrified at the sound of a change in the wind. The fear was magnified because few fishermen could even swim.

The island’s death knell came in 1958, when a neighbor had become ill with what Shark residents suspected was appendicitis. They couldn’t launch a boat in the high winds and waves, and they couldn’t call the mainland for a helicopter. The government in Dublin would not install a telephone line for fewer than 100 people.

Leo Murray, another Inishark evacuee who now lives near Lacey, recalled the desperate solution: He and others went to the top of the highest hill on the island and lit a large fire that could be seen on Bofin a mile away and even the mainland seven miles away, hoping help would be sent. Nothing else could be done, and the neighbor died three days later.

“That was a real shame, because we could have saved him,” Murray says. “It was preventable.”

After years of refusing to invest in a better harbor and boat landing, the government finally granted the islanders’ last resort: It built simple houses on the mainland and sent a priest to oversee the evacuation. Lacey said the final day was so shocking she can hardly remember it. Here is how a reporter from the Daily Mirror described the scene:

“The last . . . members of six families moving out of Shark like a garrison surrendering after a life time’s siege. . . . Men, women and
children were staggering along the stony 500 yards between their cottages and the landing stage with their burdens. . . . A huge, home-made wardrobe lashed to the shoulders of . . . Michael Cloonan. A dark brown cat in an old blackened cooking pot. . . . Anne Murray’s geraniums, hens in baskets, geese in sacks, straw brooms and string-tied suitcases, iron bedsteads and baths. . . . and a tear in the eye of Thomas Lacey.”

Thomas Lacey was Theresa’s father-in-law, who stayed an extra night alone on the island, leaving the door open and setting the table for his lost sons. He left the next day, finally at peace. Theresa had never seen her new home before arriving at night with three kids in tow.

“It was a cold house, and there was nothing but a single chair,” she says. “I sat there with the baby in my lap waiting for the furniture. It was diabolical. The next day, my husband went outside to plant potatoes. The ground was nothing but rock.”

Lacey said today’s young people, including her own 10 kids, aren’t interested in the old ways. While modern convenience has benefits, she also appreciates that the world left behind has found a rapt audience from Notre Dame. The stories and silent ruins are all that is left, but what wonderful tales they tell.

* * *

TWO MENACING GREEN EYES seem to stare through me from the ruins of a 17th century fort as the ferry enters the harbor of Inishbofin. Inishbofin’s neighboring island, rejuvenated by electricity in the 1980s and the tourism that followed, is the base for exploring the region.

The eyes are really holes in a crumbling wall, and their color comes from the grassy moss on the hill behind, but the impression of a skeleton warning off visitors is hard to shake. If Disney built these ruins at a theme park, you would shake your head over how perfect and phony they look.

The reality is more chilling: Oliver Cromwell built the fort as a penal colony for Irish priests, considered dangerous because those who could read and write might foment rebellion. A boulder at the base of the fort is called Bishop’s Rock because Cromwell reportedly lashed a bishop there and let the tide rise and drown him.

In Ireland, legends and history aren’t just tales taught in school. The remnants of the past surround the Irish people and the stories seep into the bones. With so many centuries and so few records, reality and myth tend to intermingle more fluidly than in youthful America or document-rich England.

On the other point of the harbor entrance, little can be seen of the former castle of Grace O’Malley, a redheaded pirate queen who marauded around the western Irish seas in the 16th century. Local storytellers say O’Malley once took revenge on rival clan members who killed her lover by stealing their boats and stranding them to starve on a deserted island. When she famously met with Queen Elizabeth I in 1593, these strong women negotiated — in Latin — an end of piracy in exchange for the release of O’Malley’s sons from an English prison.

In Irish, Inishbofin means “Island of the White Cow.” It takes its name from an old legend: Two fishermen lost in a fog came upon the enchanted island. They stoked a fire from peat they carried in the boat. Suddenly the mist lifted and an old woman appeared, driving a white cow. She struck the cow, and it turned to stone.

I prepared for the trip by watching a terrific family movie called The Secret of Roan Inish. A young girl returns to an abandoned Irish island and believes she has found the lost baby brother who floated out to sea on their evacuation day. She believes he has transformed into a selkie, a mythic creature that is half human and half seal. The parallels to Inishark are uncanny, and I look warily for the seals that often bask on these islands.

Island legends seem more numerous today than the people, who have dwindled on Inishbofin to fewer than 200 from five times that number a century and a half ago. The island is believed to have been inhabited for up to 10,000 years. Celtic forts have been dated to about 1000 B.C., and other evidence points to Bronze Age residents. The first written accounts come from Saint Colman, a Connemara monk who founded a monastery on the island in 668 A.D.

Legend holds that Inishark shares a similar history not fully told. The roofless houses, stone walls and potato ridges speak of the lives of people who called Inishark home for centuries. Looking across the channel from Bofin, I feel an eerie sense of loss similar to visiting a western ghost town.

Down the coast off the Dingle Peninsula, the archivist of The Great Blasket Centre tells nearly the same story of Great Blasket
Island’s 1953 evacuation: emigration, a bad pier, fishing disasters, a medical emergency and too little population.

“It’s unlucky,” says Daithi de Mordha, the archivist, “They missed the tourist boom by 20 years. If they could have held on and gotten a better pier, they might still be there.”

The western isles used to be the bus stops of heavily trafficked shipping lanes before roads made the mainland more accessible. Now, on a wind-whipped rainy day, the islands feel like the furthest edge of civilization holding out precariously against the battering Atlantic Ocean.

DOONMORE HOTEL ON INISHBOFIN soon puts the cold, lonely feeling to rest. A half mile from the pier on a one-lane road, the complex owned by the Murray family overlooks the harbor. Margaret Murray, the owner whose daughter Aileen runs the operation, once taught school on Inishark for two years.

A pub serving homemade brown bread, creamy Guinness and occasional Irish music is filled with locals and about a dozen American students from Kuijt’s team. Having just spent two weeks camping and excavating on Inishark, they will spend the next week cleaning and analyzing what they have found. In another room, a table for laptops sits next to heaps of tagged pottery shards, unusually shaped bottles and the remains of broken tools and other unearthed trash treasures.

The Murray family and their employees treat the ND group like old friends. I’m quickly introduced to Tommy Burke, a local farmer and oral historian. Over several days, Burke, 41, shared his trove of island stories. He met Kuijt years ago while working on the ferry and was delighted to join this summer’s dig team on Shark, especially since he had just been accepted to study archaeology at a college in Galway.

Kuijt, a Canadian of Irish and Dutch descent, first came to western Ireland on his honeymoon in 1995. Though he was working on a major project in Jordan at the time, he knew he wanted to return to Ireland. So when he came to Notre Dame in 2000 with his anthropologist wife, he began teaching a class on Irish archaeology and history, especially the Potato Famine of the 1840s.

He first visited Inishark in 2006 with Irish archaeologist Michael Gibbons. They had lunch near the graveyard, and Kuijt was taken by the peacefulness of the silent, unmarked headstones and the abandoned homes. He’s the type of intense academic who often uses the word “stunning,” and he felt a need to learn more about the “soft footprint of the island inhabitants.” He saw the island as a freeze-frame that revealed life in Ireland a century earlier; daily life there had changed little in the decades before the evacuation.

The Cultural Landscapes of the Irish Coast project began in 2007 with a grant from Notre Dame donor John Tynan through the Irish Studies Program. The goals are varied. Kuijt says that studying and recording these 18th century houses, which will soon be gone, are a crucial link to understanding the Irish past and present.

“Our work can shed light on a time and place that is under-explored — the post-Famine period,” Kuijt says. “The Famine was painful for Ireland but led to an Irish resurgence in America. I would argue that the Irish are not out of the Famine. Just three or four generations back, families were pulled apart and have not been put back together. There is still a guilt of survivorship and a sense of dislocation.”

His team has tracked the movement of Shark emigrants to America, where most settled in Clinton, Massachusetts, or the Pittsburgh suburbs. Some of the former Shark residents who moved to the mainland did not know what became of their emigrant relatives. But Kuijt has found many, collected their stories and fostered connections.

Kuijt’s favorite American story came from the children of a Shark emigrant in Clinton. Their father spent all his spare time making
Irish filmmaker Kieran Concannon, working with Notre Dame anthropologists, produced a 50-minute documentary about the Inishark evacuation. *Inishark: Death of an Island* is available online at youtube.com/watch?v=VmAaDIrIQc.

fishing nets even though he never fished again. He would hang them in the garage and start the next one. Kuijt likes to think the father was keeping his skills sharp in case he ever got to go home. Another Shark emigrant in London said he’d spent the first 20 years of his life trying to get off of the island, and the rest wishing he could return.

Brendan McGrail, a graduate engineering student at Notre Dame, appreciates the CLIC team’s work because his Pittsburgh family traces its origins to Inishark. His great-grandfather left Shark in 1896 looking for work in America.

“Turn-of-the-century steel manufacturing is my family formation here,” says McGrail. “But it’s cool to learn where I came from. I can see why a fisherman would be good at steel work.”

**I FINALLY MAKE IT TO INISHARK** on a rainy summer day, scrambling up the slippery rocks of the inadequate boat landing. Tommy Burke is my tour guide, and we start at the medieval graveyard on a bluff overlooking the sea. Burke says he has seen bones and skulls sticking out of the eroding hillside. The broken headstones are not marked with words.

We slip into Thomas Lacey’s house as the rain turns to hail. A third of the roof has caved in. Some Bofin farmers and former Shark families still graze sheep on the island, and mounds of rotten wool are piled in one end. Tommy says Theresa once shared that tiny space with her husband and kids after she married a brother of the boys who drowned.

Water streams down the grassy carriage lanes as we walk up to the old school and the roofless Saint Leo’s Church, where the CLIC group set up its kitchen. Burke says there were no pews; the women brought three-legged stools and the men leaned against the walls if the priest was able to make the monthly trip from Bofin. Sheep and serene ruins are all that remain in a sea-and-island view that really is stunning.

We walk over the hill that hosted so many bonfires to Saint Leo’s Clochan, a medieval site where the CLIC team excavated. Burke shows me where he made the biggest find of the expedition. He unearthed an ancient Celtic cross carved into a rock slab from the 10th century — the first cross of its kind found in years.

“Ian felt it was important to have local involvement, and he was really happy that I was the first to see the cross in about a thousand years,” Burke says.

Franc Myles, an Irish history expert and Trinity College lecturer who also camped on Shark, explains the significance: “What they’ve excavated, I think, is a shrine for the founder of the monastery. It’s nearly identical to those found on High Island, and it puts another dot on the map of early Christian monasticism. Until now, no one knew for sure if the monks lived on Shark. All my friends want to see it.”

Kuijt’s concerns about local buy-in are not without reason. For islanders over the centuries, outsiders have usually come in the form of tax or rent collectors, armed invaders or thieves. Even the scientists have a sordid history.

In the 1890s, Irish anthropologist Charles Browne traveled the western coast measuring the craniums of island residents to classify them on his “Index of Nigrescence.” Considering the islanders to be primitive, he was looking for evidence of an Africanoid Celt. Burke says Browne is suspected of stealing skulls in the night from Saint Colman’s monastery on Bofin.

The Notre Dame group takes great pains to correct this historical abuse. They have taken five of the former Shark residents on bitter-sweet tours of their home island. Their trip ends with a community event on Bofin where the students do a kind of show-and-tell about what they found.

At individual tables, each student explains their area of concentration, everything from medieval heritage to old village maps and immigration records to the history of land ownership.

Claire Brown ’11 participated in CLIC each summer she studied anthropology at Notre Dame. She is now pursuing a Ph.D. degree at SUNY Binghamton through a paid fellowship from the National Science Foundation, expanding the field work she began as an undergraduate.

“My graduate work came directly from our project,” Brown says. “I’m studying how Connemara ponies have become a status symbol of wealth after traditionally being used as farm animals.”

A few tables away sits Philip Lettieri, a senior double major in anthropology and biology. He is explaining his health project, which was to burn peat in a closed-up house on Shark and measure the humidity, heat and particulates in the air. He has lectured on the topic at national conferences.

“So many places today, the problem isn’t disease but access to cures,” Phil says. “Inishark was a place without running water or waste removal, where people lived close to animals. Yet the records show that they did not have problems with disease. So whatever they were doing in how they built houses, cooked, got rid of waste — it was cost-effective and [could be] teachable in the Third World today.”

His description finally crystallizes for me why Inishark is such a mesmerizing place. Besides its craggily ethereal beauty, it is a frozen window into the past. It shows us how our ancestors wrested sustenance and happiness out of a hard piece of land, reminding us of the physical toil and simple pleasures often absent in modern life. A people plunged into modernity so abruptly can tell the story of what we’ve lost — a way of life both primal and beautiful.

As Theresa Lacey puts it: “On the mainland, you just buy potatoes or turf at the store.”

* * *
It is almost always clear when archaeological research projects start. It is that brief and unplanned moment when someone connects in a deeply personal way with the world of the past, of someone else’s world, and sees the need to learn more. In my case, it was in 2006 when I was having lunch on the remote island of Inishark, County Galway, eight miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. Shark never had electricity or much of a port, and when the last 25 people left the Irish island on October 20, 1960, they left behind a village of stone houses, outbuildings and a graveyard where their relatives were buried.

Michael Gibbons has been guiding my archaeological interests in Ireland over several years, and that day we were opening up sandwiches on a remarkably bright day next to an empty village on the island.

Stepping away from the others for a few minutes, I walked through the graveyard eroding out into the sea. As is often the case on rocky coastal islands with limited soil, these individual graves appeared as long mounds with small, rounded stones placed at each end. Looking closely at the stones that must have been dragged up from the beach, I thought, “There are no names. Why are there no names?” Not a single one of the 50 or more stones marking the ends of the graves showed any carving.

As I looked upslope to the empty houses — none with windows and only a few with even partially preserved roofs — and listened to the gentle wind moving the grass around the vacant buildings, I was struck by the soft footprint of the people who once lived there.

Ian Kuijt is a professor in Notre Dame’s Department of Anthropology and the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies.
Shark had been abandoned for only about 50 years, but already the former residents’ lives, memories and histories were disappearing.

Like other Irish islands, Shark was a coastal community from which many people emigrated to America. First mapped in 1816, about 100 people inhabited 11 residences and lived by fishing and farming. In 1848, during the Famine, Shark was home to about 300 people who lived in dry-laid stone buildings. By 1901 this had dropped to 130, and by 1960 only 25 people called the island home. Shark was the starting point for the lives of islanders who eventually adopted America as their homeland. Shark is, therefore, the first half of a story, one in which the practices, language and music of its residents were developed on the sea before the islanders ventured abroad.

Despite the Irish sense of pride and identity connected to island life and the enduring physical buildings on these islands, we have a poor understanding of the lives of those who lived there. For many reasons, our evidence for the rich life of the people from Shark, the very people whose relatives traveled to America and Canada in droves between the 1850s and the 1950s, is now largely limited to oral history, stone houses and beach cobble gravestones at the ends of earthen mounds: the fleeting footprint of an important period of the recent past.

It was from this anonymous graveyard, the final resting place of an unknown number of women and men who lived on this exposed island since at least the 1800s, that the Cultural Landscapes of the Irish Coast (CLIC) project emerged. From this simple idea has come a great challenge: How can we shine light on a dark and poorly known island on the western edge of Ireland?

Drawing upon archival research, archaeological fieldwork, historical records and, perhaps most important, oral history, our Notre Dame research team has for six years provided a voice to the islanders now gone. For the past six summers, our field crews have focused on connecting the empty stone houses of the village with the voices of the people who once lived there. Each summer we camp out on the island, bringing all our water, staying in tents, and working in cold rain and burning sunshine — often in the same day.

From a distance, the houses of Shark appear as empty shells, standing as silent reminders of the life that used to be. The houses are now surrounded by green grass and lots of sheep, and it takes time and labor to record the 50 or more standing stone buildings on the island.

But silent stone houses can speak — at least when you bring islanders along who can help you understand what they are saying. To some people, what we record seems simple, for it is the stories of everyday life on an island. But these are powerful and deeply personal stories which speak to the broader patterns of island life that are all but gone and to the historical foundation of Irish-American culture and heritage.

At different points I have been asked by people back in America as well as in pubs in Ireland why we bother to record these old, abandoned and worthless buildings. I tell them that these are not just buildings, for, in combination with the oral history work we are doing, they speak of the disappearing world and memories of our ancestors. This world is but two generations removed, and these empty houses and unmarked graves, all soon to be gone, were home for many islanders who immigrated to North America and whose families live among us today.
Their stories are separated by decades. They are separated by geography and circumstance. One tale is of water, one tale is of earth. They are united through later generations. They are united because both of their stories are Irish.

A 13-year-old girl is in the belly of a steamship as it cuts its way through the Atlantic Ocean, the latest in a line of exploration stretching back to Phoenicians who sailed to claim sea creatures holding a precious purple dye. A 38-year-old man, the son of Irish immigrants, descends into the cold Pennsylvania earth to mine amid a swirl of choking grime and dust, looking for valuable anthracite coal.

She is joined by more than 1,000 other passengers — Irish, English, Swedes, Germans, Russians, laborers, tailors, servants, peddlers — but is still alone, the first of her immediate family to head to America. Born to Irish parents, she had traveled before from home in England to Dublin by boat, visiting her grandmother, a matron at Trinity College, and enjoying cinnamon toast heated by the fire. But the girl’s father died and her mother, Mary, has four children.

Mary has — or, rather, had — brothers, but they disowned her, disappeared from her, because her husband had been in the British Army.

The man is joined beneath the ground by another miner, an Italian bachelor from a town more than 100 miles away. Mines always had their own transients, too — mules and the rats that followed them in, and the microscopic variety, germs of never-ending colds, tuberculosis, infections. And there was the company of sounds from the

_TobE an IrIsh AMerIcAn IS OfTen To Be Haunted_

'When you grow up as an Irish American, you often grow up homesick for a country you have never seen, because you feel that no matter how much your ancestors have sacrificed, the world you have was only formed because they lost their own.'

By Liam Farrell ’04
The girl, Sadie Haviland, travels past a coastline of cold sea winds and rain-weighted skies. It is June 4, 1892, and the ship enters the New York harbor before a maze of tenements bursting with ambition, the city’s iron and steel allowing new buildings to stretch to new heights. The man, Thomas Walsh, works beneath the unseasonable frost of the northern Pennsylvania coal basin. It is May 3, 1911, and he brings up the fuel for road cars traveling lines owned by industrial titans.

The Irish would have life and they would have death in America. Before Sadie, there were only moments. Sadie would study nursing and marry Thomas Carey, the borough clerk and librarian of East Newark. When he died of an infection, town officials would offer her the job, one she kept in spite of verbal harassment from men who believed a woman shouldn’t have the position during the Great Depression.

Frank Hague, the boss of the Hudson County Democratic machine, spread the word that there was a “brick wall” behind Mrs. Carey, and the jabs ended. Seven years before her death, Sadie would see John F. Kennedy become president of the United States.

She also raised children, one of whom was Anne, who grew up and gave birth to Maryanne, who is my mother.

Digging in the mine, Thomas would have been straining to listen. With helmet lamps limiting the miners’ peripheral vision, problems underground could often be heard before they could be seen. And with trained ears, Thomas might have heard the mine begin to collapse, a trickle of rock that turned into a roar of stone and crushed him. But he wouldn’t have heard himself being dug out, the sound of his body being dumped on the kitchen table of his home, and he wouldn’t be able to listen for anguished cries from his wife, Katherine.

And he would never again hear one of his daughters, Florence, who grew up and gave birth to Thomas, who is my father.

To be an Irish American is often to be haunted. This is not a statement of monopoly, simply one of fact: When you grow up as an Irish American, you often grow up homesick for a country you have never seen, because you feel that no matter how much your ancestors have sacrificed, the world you have was only formed because they lost their own.

Our ghosts live in the water and they live in the earth. They are digging in America’s coal mines, riding the railroads and walking the streets of political wards; they are sailing above and drowning below the churning, gray Atlantic; and they are standing on the docks in Ireland, wandering through Famine houses, and passing in and out of the many-colored doors of Dublin.

There is an inescapable feeling of the past always being present, of an existence stitched together from threads of time unspooling from two coasts and across rolling waves.

“Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon,” Seamus Heaney wrote of the 1798 Irish rebels. “The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave. They buried us without shroud or coffin and in August the barley grew up out of the grave.”

Four years ago, I watched rain falling in sheer continuous curtains on the black River Shannon, its waters slowly coursing through a sad, old city. I was standing on a covered balcony, holding one of the last pints of Guinness I would drink on that trip to Ireland, savoring the cream and bite of the dark liquid. Above me stretched floor after floor of the Clarion Hotel, a touch of modernity just downstream from a 13th-century castle.

Limerick had seemingly been whiplashed by good and bad impulses in the wake of the overheated impulses of song as the “Celtic Tiger.” Neighborhoods filled with off-track betting, daytime casinos and young men warily eyeing another were uneasy outliers of vibrant shopping districts with pedestrian malls and gourmet menus. That June was split between ongoing drug and gang violence and the triumphant red, blue and yellow banners celebrating the championship of the province’s rugby team.

And in the hotel — a chunk of glass strikingly standing among stone walls and factories — time intertwined on a sonic level. A party ended and a man sang a different type of song than the blaring collection of pop music that had already pulsed through balcony windows.

His voice was a tenor of excellent tone. I didn’t know the name of the song at the time, but my brother said it was “The Town I Loved So Well.” It talks of Derry, one of many places ravaged during the violence of the Troubles, the period from the 1960s to ‘90s when Catholics and Protestants clashed in the fight for the future of Northern Ireland.

But when I returned how my eyes have burned
To see how a town could be brought to its knees
By the armored cars and the bombed out bars
And the gas that hangs on to every breeze.
Now the army’s installed by that old gas yard wall
And the damned barbed wire gets higher and higher
With their tanks and their guns, oh my God, what have they done
To the town I loved so well.

I’ve waited in line to see the Book of Kells, kissed the Blarney Stone, had more than a few pints in Temple Bar, taken pictures of the Cliffs of Moher, and stood in the courtyard of Kilmainham Gaol, staring at the lilies that mark where the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising were executed. Yet my most striking Irish memory is from that melodious
moment, as I stood in a monument to the present’s prosperity while listening to a song about the past’s despondency.

It calls to mind the scene from James Joyce’s “The Dead,” wherein a man watches his wife stopped in her tracks by a song from a tragic part of her life and marvels at the “grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something.”

And yet, after the man was finished singing four years ago, there was no great shedding of tears among remaining revelers. It was just a late night at a hotel bar again, with attendant conviviality and good humor.

A few months later, I met Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson at an event in Annapolis, Maryland. McGuinness, a nationalist political leader with an Irish Republican Army background, and Robinson, a founding member of one of the most strident unionist parties in Northern Ireland, had made a stop to watch, of all things, a presentation on government data tracking.

I was asked later if McGuinness had any scars. I said, “No,” but a better answer would have been, “No visible ones.” He was taller than I thought, very genial, with a well-cut blue suit and a soft handshake. If you didn’t know he had been in the IRA, you might have guessed he was a bank manager or well-meaning boss who needs a punctual secretary to get through the day.

How much has changed, and yet so much hasn’t. I can’t say for sure, but I don’t think McGuinness and Robinson said a personal word to each other in the room, besides remarking on the government toys paraded for their benefit.

And I don’t remember — although, I can’t say for sure — that ever meeting could end in anything but bloodshed.

DIGGING IN THE MINE, THOMAS WOULD HAVE BEEN STRAINING TO LISTEN. WITH HELMET LAMPS LIMITING THE MINERS’ PERIPHERAL VISION, PROBLEMS UNDERGROUND COULD OFTEN BE HEARD BEFORE THEY COULD BE SEEN. AND WITH TRAINED EARS, THOMAS MIGHT HAVE HEARD THE MINE BEGIN TO COLLAPSE, A TRICKLE OF ROCK THAT TURNED INTO A ROAR OF STONE AND CRUSHED HIM.

“grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something.

“Distant Music” he would call the picture if he were a painter. . . . The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer’s hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief.”

Would some generations have thought those two, from such disparate ends of ideology, could ever sit near one another for a presentation on a government management tool? I think some would have been surprised if any meeting could end in anything but bloodshed.
Forty Shades of Green

By Robert Schmuhl '70

From the air, on the descent into Dublin Airport, the Irish landscape shows off a multitude of its numerically suspect yet popularly promoted 40 shades of green. A long sweep of fields suggests ancestral permanence before any urban outskirts come into view.

But once you’re on the ground, along city streets or out in the villages, talk among the Irish today tends to revolve around new realities of unsettling change. The country’s roller-coaster ride over the past two decades has produced, if not 40 competing emotions, at least a baker’s dozen of separate responses.

Back in the 1990s — thanks to foreign investment (much of it American), a low corporate tax rate, a more educated workforce and other factors — unprecedented economic prosperity invigorated Ireland. What was labeled the Celtic Tiger took off more like a rocket than a jungle cat, creating nearly 10 percent annual growth between 1995 and 2000 before cruising along at an average expansion of more than 5 percent over the next seven years.

In a little over a decade, the island — smaller than Indiana geographically — made a dramatic about-face, showing the world enviable vitality. As Michael Lewis cracks in his recent book, Boomerang, the Irish had “gone from being abnormally poor to being abnormally rich without pausing to experience normality.”

At the same time the economy was flexing dormant muscles, efforts to end the decades-long Troubles sought to stem the largely sectarian violence between republicans and loyalists in the six counties of Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, pushed the peace process along — so, in effect, a more harmonious climate surrounded the emerging economic prosperity.

Then, with the Troubles and their 3,500 deaths a tragic memory, the fabled Tiger lost its teeth as well as its vigor. In a ferocious turn, Ireland’s economy began a deep, swift decline. The global downturn of 2008 and the collapse of Lehman Brothers played a part, but the Irish point to the unholy trinity of real estate developers, bankers and politicians as expletive-worthy culprits for their current financial and social malaise.

Some numbers help tell the story. The government had a budget surplus as recently as 2007, but then it had to seek the equivalent of about $115 billion from the European Union and other sources in 2010 to stay afloat. House prices — Ireland has the highest rate of home ownership in the world at 87 percent — plummeted 50 to 60 percent during the past few years. Unemployment (at about 4 percent in 2006) spiked to 14.9 percent in mid-2012, the highest level since 1994, just before the boom began. One economist estimated that Irish financial institutions lost about $150 billion in property transactions alone.

Consequences of the exploding real estate bubble, which resulted in a massive bailout from the government’s treasury to Irish banks, are readily apparent, and a new term often pops up in conversations. “Ghost estates” are unfinished housing and office developments that in most cases have been abandoned for lack of construction money and potential buyers. More than 2,000 such estates now spoil city scenery and haunt the landscape.

With unemployment high, many Irish have been forced to look for work beyond their shores. Emigration, so dramatically begun during the famine years of the mid-19th century, has returned in what’s become a lamentable and recurring national pattern. Historical records show more than 900,000 emigrants leaving Ireland between 1851 and 1855, with more than 740,000 arriving in the United States. Last year upwards of 42,000 Irish departed, and this time Australia was the most popular destination.

Some of the saddest stories come from people who emigrated before the Celtic Tiger years but then moved back to enjoy the promise of expanding opportunities. “We made a terrible mistake,” wrote one returnee in a newspaper column. “We came back. Because promise of expanding opportunities. We made a terrible mistake,” wrote one returnee in a newspaper column. “We came back. Because we wanted to, we believed that the country had changed. We believed in the miracle.”

Despite current economic woes and the loss of faith in established institutions, including a Catholic Church bedeviled by revelations of child abuse, several signs point to a less stormy time ahead for the Irish. A popular new president, Michael D. Higgins, commands respect and conveys optimism wherever he goes. The belt-tightening austerity is improving balance sheets in government and business, with investor confidence brightening. Last summer Ireland even raised money again on the international bond market. Tourism, a critical industry in the economic equation, is on the upswing.

How long it might take Ireland to reach 40 or so shades of equilibrium is anyone’s guess. But it’s worth remembering that in Ireland a history of calamity and periodic setbacks goes hand-in-hand with the deeply rooted traits of resilience and recovery.

W.B. Yeats, Ireland’s first of four Nobel Prize winners in literature, encouraged fellow citizens of an earlier age in a poem that echoes with contemporary pertinence: Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry.
Useless Beauty

A CANTICLE FOR THE COSMOS
What Do We Make of a Universe Satirated With An Extravagance of Beauty?

By Scott Russell Sanders

In a niche above our hearth, alongside books and rocks and bird nests, my wife and I keep the shell of a chambered nautilus. My mother bought it for us at a flea market more than 30 years ago, thinking we might welcome a reminder of the ocean here in landlocked Indiana.

Like the shell of a lowly snail, and like our galaxy, it has a spiral shape. When the nautilus was in residence, it would have floated with the knobby core of the spiral uppermost and the curving tail pointed down. As large as a saucer and thinner than fine porcelain, our shell has been sliced down the middle in such a way as to produce two symmetrical halves, which we display side-by-side, one half showing the exterior and the other showing the interior.

On the outside, wavy stripes the color of butterscotch radiate from the center of the spiral, contrasting with an ivory background that is faintly grooved, as if from brush strokes in glossy paint. The lustrous interior reveals a sequence of chambers resembling crescent moons, 30 in all, which the nautilus fashioned as it grew, beginning with a cranny too small to see without a magnifying glass and increasing, step by step, to the size of a child’s grin.

It is a marvelous feat of construction — as if a baby fashioned its own cradle and then, having outgrown that first home, went on to make a crib, a bedroom, a hut, a cottage, a mansion, on and on, all life long.

Over the years, visitors have often admired the shell. Many ask if they might look at it more closely, and I am always happy to reach the two pieces down from their niche and lay them in curious hands. The visitors run their fingers over the tigerish stripes on the exterior, tilt the half-shell to catch the sheen of its pearly interior, examine the spiraling chambers. They marvel at how a deep-sea animal could produce such elegant patterns and captivating colors. Some visitors go further and ask a question that the nautilus shell has long posed for me — not how this beauty is produced but why. Why such beauty in a seashell? For that matter, why such beauty in a sunset, in a blossom or birdsong or butterfly wing, or anywhere at all?

Allow this innocent question into your mind, and it will be followed by a host of others that philosophers have pondered for ages: What is beauty? Is it an intrinsic feature of the world, like the mass of an apple, or is it an artifact of human perception, like the apple’s red color? If beauty is an aspect of reality, independent of our perceptions, how does it arise — purely by the operation of physical laws or by design? If by physical laws, how do they happen to generate a quality so pleasing to us? And if by design, then who or what is the designer? Whatever its nature and whatever its source, why does beauty appeal to us so deeply? Why do we crave it, savor it and seek it out, and why do we strive to create beauty with our hands and minds and voices?

Despite having devoted thousands of pages to these questions, philosophers disagree about the answers — as they tend to do about all the perennial puzzles, such as how we know what we know, how we should act, what the universe is made of and why there is a universe at all. As an amateur, I will leave the great enigma of beauty to the experts and merely reflect on one small piece of the puzzle, which I stumbled across while reading about the chambered nautilus.

According to scientists, the pattern on the outside of the shell, which we find so lovely, provides camouflage from predators and prey. The wavy butterscotch stripes, thick and dark on the portion of the shell that floats on top, gradually fade as the spiral opens, leaving the bottom portion clear. Seen from above, the stripes obscure the outlines of the shell and blend into the darkness of the deeps; seen from below, the unmarked ivory blends with light from the surface. That we find these markings gorgeous is a happy accident. What seems beautiful to us is beneficial to the nautilus, a legacy of evolution, helping its kind survive for some 500 million years.

But what about the shell’s interior — that mother-of-pearl luster, that exquisite series of crescent-shaped chambers — all invisible to predators? This beauty gave no benefit to the nautilus; indeed, it sealed its doom, for the only predator that knew of this hidden splendor was the two-legged kind which fished the shell from the sea and sliced it in half and introduced it to the marketplace of beautiful objects. Although of no use to the nautilus, this interior beauty has kept...
the fragile half-shells intact as they passed through innumerable hands, including my wife’s and mine and those of our many curious visitors.

Among the things in nature we find beautiful, many, like the outer pattern on a nautilus shell, are the result of natural selection, adaptations that improve the chances of survival for an organism or a species. Think of the peacock’s tail, attractive to mates. Think of the monarch butterfly’s cautionary orange-and-gold, or the Day-Glo colors on rainforest frogs, warning of the poisons they carry. Think of the zebra’s stripes, confusing to predators, or the scent of roses, alluring to pollinators. Consider the chameleon’s shifting colors, the buck’s imposing antlers, the song of the canyon wren, the beaks of hummingbirds exactly fitted to sources of nectar, the white crowns of clover seductive to bees, the courtship dance of sandhill cranes or the daring flights of woodcocks, the flicker of fireflies — all can be explained as resulting from natural selection.

You could discover as many examples as there are living species, for if you carefully observe anything alive you will find something biologically useful that is also beautiful.

In addition to that useful beauty, however, you will discover something more, an extravagance of design, an opulence of materials — like the pearly interior of the nautilus shell — that serves no evident purpose other than to make the natural world inexcusably interesting. If you study flowers, for instance, you will find quite a few that seem fancier than they need to be. Look at fuchsia, with its blossom of purple pantaloons overtopped by a pink tiara. Look at bleeding heart, with its plump valentine blossoms dangling from the stem like charms on a bracelet. Look at iris, with its streaked petals flung out in all directions, like the blurred arms of a whirling dervish. Or look at wild columbine, which might be a scarlet moon lander, with five spurs thrust skyward like spiky antennae, five pointed sepals spread out like wings, a white interior for a firing chamber, and yellow threads of stamens shooting downwards like the tracery of rockets. If color, odor and beckoning shape are the key signals to pollinators, why all the flair and filigree?

The same lovely extravagance shows up everywhere you look or listen in the living world, from the dazzling patterns of microscopic diatoms to the sea-filling arias of humpback whales. The wings of butterflies known as painted ladies resemble the stained glass on Tiffany lampshades, a fanciful collage of swirls and curlicues and eye-shaped spots. There are beetles covered in polka-dots, beetles as shiny and colorful as new cars in a showroom, beetles bearing scralls on their backs as jazzy as urban graffiti. There are fish gaudier than clowns, salamanders flashier than neon signs, medusas like alien spacecraft, birds as flamboyant as Victorian Easter hats. Look anywhere you like — at monkeys or mushrooms, cacti or dragonflies, frillaries or ferns, leafhoppers or leaves — and you will discover designs more various than any vocabulary we might use to describe them.

Even if this seeming excess of beauty could be accounted for as biologically useful, what of the glories in the nonliving world? What of sunsets and sunrises? What of the northern lights? What of the moon, our fellow traveler, with its captivating phases? What of the stars, those faithful Muses? What of the sea, with its troughs and swells, its rhythmic drumming on the shore, its vast expanses for the eye to roam? What of canyons and crevasses, waterfalls and glaciers, the play of current in rivers, the restless ballet of clouds?

There’s useless beauty everywhere, even among seemingly stolid rocks. Here in the limestone country of southern Indiana, for example, our creek beds are littered with brownish lumps of mineral sediment called geodes. Ranging from the size of peas to the size of basketballs, they are dull on the outside, with little to catch the eye, but if you find one that has been cracked open, or if you split it yourself with a hammer, inside you will find translucent crystals of quartz, or bands of purple amethyst, orange agate, pale blue chalcedony or sultry red jasper, colors and forms as resplendent as anything a jeweler could offer.

Our remote ancestors paid heed to such earthly and heavenly glories, painted them on the walls of caves, wove them into religions and rugs, etched them into stories and stones. In the past few centuries, however, our ingenious technology has revealed beauties from realms our early ancestors knew nothing of. Telescopes, microscopes, cameras mounted in satellites or in deep-sea
submersibles, receivers capable of reading the whole spectrum of light and sound, and a slew of other devices have greatly extended the range of our senses. If you graduated from childhood without having looked through a microscope at the menagerie of beasts in a drop of pond water, or through a telescope at craters on the moon, you were deprived.

More powerful instruments reveal even more astonishing designs. The compound eye of an ordinary house fly, viewed through a scanning electron microscope, might be mistaken for the head of a sunflower or a geodesic dome; at higher magnification, the facets of that eye look like hexagonal pastries crowded onto a baking sheet. Undersea rovers have photographed luminous creatures more exotic and majestic than anything conjured up by the makers of science fiction films. The Hubble Space Telescope has brought us mesmerizing close-ups of our sister planets and of our own precious globe; peering into distances that stagger the imagination, it has also brought us images of quasars, supernovae, black holes and other spectacular phenomena that were unknown even to astronomers a century ago.

Moreover, thanks to computers, data-banks and the World Wide Web, you can summon up such revelations in your home, school or library, or through a gadget that will fit into your palm. You can listen to whalesong, watch meteor showers, trace the motions of amoebas, study a lattice of carbon atoms or glimpse exploding stars. If you have access to this technology, you can behold riches that were hidden from every previous generation.

EVERYWHERE WE LOOK, from the dirt under our feet to the edge of the expanding cosmos, and on every scale from atoms to galaxies, the universe appears to be saturated with beauty. What are we to make of this?

If you believe that so much stunning design can only be the work of a cosmic Designer, then the Designer must be inordinately fond of beauty (as the British biologist J.B.S. Haldane is said to have remarked about God’s regard for beetles). It would seem to follow, for anyone who holds such a belief, that this beauty is sacred to the Designer and is therefore deserving of our care. We can’t protect the glittering stars or flaming sunset or cycling moon, but we can protect the streams that salmon need for spawning, the high plains where sage grouse dance, the ancient forests required by spotted owls, the Arctic calving grounds of caribou. We can defend the last groves of redwoods from loggers, the creeks and mountaintops of Appalachia from miners, the ocean floor from trawlers, the atmosphere from polluters.

On the other hand, if you believe these ubiquitous beauties can be accounted for entirely by the operation of material processes, you may nonetheless treasure them. Indeed, you may treasure them all the more, as gifts we have no reason to expect from an indifferent universe. You may feel an obligation to protect whatever falls within your reach, not because it is divinely created, not because you can eat it or wear it or display it above your hearth, but because you love the beautiful thing itself — a creature, a species, a place. Even if you happen not to marvel at salmon or wolves, even if you’ve never seen an unplowed prairie or unlogged forest, you might still favor the protection of these and other natural beauties out of a respect for the people who do know and love them.

Or you might take yet a third view of these matters, a view that will long since have occurred to the philosophers in my imagined audience. You might argue that what I call beauty is not a feature of the universe at all, sacred or secular, but only a
quality of experience, a certain inner weather, like sorrow or joy. Even on this view, if “beauty” is merely a label for a feeling, that inner state is so enthralling, so invigorating, so nourishing, you might wish to protect whatever source outside of consciousness gives rise to it, for your own sake and for the sake of others who could enjoy the same experience. If it thrills you to hear owls call from a deep woods, you want the woods and owls to survive, and you want your own children or children yet unborn to have a chance of feeling the same thrill.

Whatever our philosophical or scientific or religious views, a close attention to beauty in the natural world ought to inspire in us an ethic of ecological care. It ought to make us live lightly. It ought to make us ardent supporters of laws aimed at protecting air, water, soil, endangered species and wilderness. Ought to — but frequently doesn’t.

Those who regard “beauty” as only the name of a pleasurable feeling might find all the stimulation they desire in movies or music or mathematics, without recourse to nature. Those who regard the universe as a machine that has been grinding away for billions of years, without purpose or direction, might regard natural beauty as having no intrinsic value, but only as a commodity to be used up or discarded to suit our appetites. Those who believe in a beauty-loving Creator often claim, based on a literal reading of the Bible, that the universe is a few thousand years old, and that everything in it, on Earth and beyond, was created for humans to exploit.

Our collective behavior suggests that the dominant view, at least in America, is that nothing in nature has value except insofar as it is useful to humans — and useful today, not in some future generation. What good is a wilderness if we can’t drill it for oil or mine it for minerals? What good is an ancient forest if it doesn’t yield board-feet of lumber? Why protect wild salmon if we can grow fish in concrete vats laced with chemicals? Why worry about any nonhuman creature if it stands in the way of our plans? This is not a minority view. These utilitarian sentiments resound from legislatures, boardrooms and editorial pages; they permeate economics textbooks and the buy-it-now babble of advertisements; they guide shoppers looking for the cheapest deal.

Measured by its consequences, the utilitarian ethic has proven to be disastrous. A child born in America today enters a world chockfull of human comforts and contrivances but sorely depleted of natural wealth — topsoil lost, rivers dammed, air and water poisoned, wetlands drained, roadways and oceans littered with trash, resources squandered, species extinguished. We are trading forested mountaintops for cut-rate electricity. We are swapping the sound of meadowlarks and the sight of prairie coneflowers for casinos and parking lots. We are sacrificing rainforests for hamburgers, coral reefs for island cruises, glaciers for SUVs. With every upward tick of the GDP, the richness and resilience of the greater-than-human world declines.

Of course, that same child born in America today may never know what has been lost. She may take the diminished world as the way things must be, if we are to enjoy what Madison Avenue and Wall Street call progress and prosperity. With each passing year, Americans on average spend more and more of their time inside human constructions — buildings and vehicles; symbolic zones made out of numbers, musical notes or, like this essay, out of words; and inside the trance of TV, video games and the burgeoning empire of cyberspace. Cut off from direct contact with natural beauty, people make do with crude substitutes — plastic flowers, air freshener, Muzak — with artistic imitations — films, photographs and recordings — or with tokens — flowers in vases, flowing water in fountains, nautilus shells above the hearth. If those counterfeit borrowings are all we know of nature, then natural beauty is in jeopardy, for we will not protect what we do not know.

A FINAL LOOK at the interior of our nautilus shell suggests a possible way out of this impasse, a way of reconciling the world we’ve made with the greater world that made us. By compressing nitrogen into those inner chambers, the nautilus can regulate its buoyancy, ranging in its seemingly fragile hull from the shallows of tropical seas to depths of 2,000 feet, nearly 10 times as deep as a scuba diver could safely go.

More intriguing, the pattern of crescent-shaped chambers illustrates a mathematical rule, first described by Descartes, called a logarithmic spiral. The formula can be written out in a string of symbols shorter than the title of this essay. The same pattern appears widely in nature — in the bands of hurricane winds, the spiral arms of galaxies, the array of seeds in sunflowers, the heads of certain broccoli, a hawk’s curving approach to its prey, even in some wave-scoured beaches.

This congruence between nature and numbers does not lead me to conclude, with Pythagoras, that the universe is mathematics writ large, but rather the opposite — that mathematics is the universe writ small. Indeed, this consonance between the patterns we make and the patterns we find in nature reinforces my sense that not only mathematics but also music, poetry, painting, photography, storytelling, dance — all forms of art and symbolic language — are manifestations, through human beings, of the cosmic penchant for creating beauty. The universe out of which we have evolved is inscribed in our intelligence and imagination.

This does not make us gods, nor does it justify our dominion over Earth, but it does confirm that we belong here, in spite of what otherworldly religions claim. The creative genius of nature runs right through us, as it runs through the chambered nautilus.

I will let the philosophers define what beauty is. But I think I understand some of what beauty does. It calls us out of ourselves. It feeds our senses. It provides standards for art and science, for language and literature. It inspires affection and gratitude. How then should we live, in a world overflowing with such bounty? Rejoice in it, care for it, and strive to add our own mite of beauty, with whatever power and talent we possess.
FROM THE BEGINNING THE HUMAN RACE HAS SCANNED THE HEAVENS FOR THE MEANING OF OUR EXISTENCE AND SIGNS OF CREATURES LIVING FAR, FAR AWAY. THE SEARCH ITSELF SAYS A LOT ABOUT WHO WE ARE.

By Michael J. Crowe '58 and Christopher M. Graney
THE ARISTOTELIANS WERE WRONG; THE COPERNICANS WERE RIGHT.

Our home is not the center of the universe! it is merely one planet circling one star in an incomprehensively vast universe. But what is the deeper significance of this important claim?

David Wootton suggests an answer in his recent biography, Galileo: Watcher of the Skies. The Copernican theory, he writes, “[O]ffered a view of the cosmos in which humankind, and the things that matter to humankind — love and hatred, virtue and vice, mortality and immortality, salvation and damnation — were irrelevant. Far from embodying a scheme of values, far from embodying a telos or purpose, [this] universe appeared to be indifferent to moral and metaphysical issues, and even indifferent to our own existence. . . . Galileo’s greatest and at the same time most disturbing achievement was to recognize that the universe was not made for the sake of human beings.”

Thus many see the significance of the Copernican theory as summed up in what is called the “Copernican Principle” or sometimes the “Principle of Mediocrity”: the claim that there is nothing special about our Earth, and by extension, nothing special about its inhabitants.

We, however, suggest the surprising conclusion that a number of important scientific results indicate that our great-grandchildren may live in a world where the “Copernican Principle” has been consigned to the dustbin. In their world Earth will be understood to be special indeed, possibly even unique, swimming in a vast alien universe that speaks to them about Earth’s specialness.

Moreover, in this universe they will still recognize the universe that many early Copernicans originally envisioned. For although the first Copernicans did see the Earth as orbiting the sun, most viewed the sun and solar system as being unique within a vast and alien cosmos of strange bodies that had little in common with the Earth, the sun and the solar system — a cosmos that spoke to Earth’s inhabitants of the power of God.

Copernicus proposed that the motions of heavenly bodies could be better explained if Earth circled the sun and rotated about its own axis rather than if, as Aristotle had said, Earth was fixed in place at the center of the universe. In proposing this, Copernicus immediately made the Earth “a” world rather than “the” world. Mercury, Venus, Mars and our solar system’s other planets, which had previously been “wandering stars” — heavenly lights made of Aristotle’s mysterious heavenly “Aether,” moving in heavenly epicyclic curves, and powered by Aristotle’s heavenly “Prime Mover” — were now bodies with something in common with Earth: We all circle the sun.

Pluralism reigns

As telescopic discoveries showed the “wandering stars” to have a moon (and sometimes more than one) like Earth and to rotate like Earth, it seemed logical to assume they were similar to Earth in other ways — including being the abodes of intelligent life. By 1800 intellectuals believed in “pluralism” — that possibly every planet and every moon is home to intelligent life, and that inhabited planets orbit every star.

The French astronomer Jerome Lalande wrote: “[T]here is every possible resemblance between the planets and the earth: Is it, then, rational to suppose the existence of living and thinking beings is confined to the earth? From what is such a privilege derived but the groveling minds of persons who can never rise above the objects of their immediate sensations?”

In the 1830s, science writer Thomas Dick estimated the population of our solar system at around 22 trillion, and the population of the universe as a whole (because of course all the planets assumed to be orbiting all the other stars in the universe were similarly populated) at nearly 61 sextillion intelligent beings. And extraterrestrial intelligent life was not limited to planets. Leading figures from the late 18th and the 19th centuries subscribed to the possibility of “solarians” — intelligent beings who lived on the sun — including William Herschel (the discoverer of Uranus), Carl Friedrich Gauss (the brilliant mathematician and professor of astronomy), David

Michael J. Crowe is the Cavanaugh Professor Emeritus at Notre Dame, where he teaches a course on the history of the extraterrestrial life debate. Among his nine books, two treat that subject. In 2010, the American Astronomical Society awarded him its LeRoy E. Doggett Prize for lifetime contributions to the history of astronomy. Email him at mcrowe1@nd.edu. For the past few years Christopher M. Graney has been translating the writings of astronomers such as Tycho Brahe, Thomas Digges and Giovanni Battista Riccioli from Latin. He is professor of physics at Jefferson Community & Technical College in Louisville, Kentucky. His email is christopher.graney@kctcs.edu.
Brewster (the Scottish physicist), and Norman Lockyer (the founder of the journal *Nature*).

Many came to view an Earth that is just one of many inhabited worlds as a challenge to Christianity. Thomas Paine, in his 1794 *Age of Reason*, wrote, “[T]o believe that God created a plurality of worlds, at least as numerous as what we called stars, renders the Christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous, and scatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind; and he who thinks he believes both, has thought but little of either.”

Paine continued: “From whence then could arise the solitary and strange conceit, that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world because, they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple! And, on the other hand, are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an Eve, an apple, a serpent and a redeemer? In this case, the person who is irreverently called the Son of God, and sometimes God himself, would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world, in an end- less succession of death, with scarcely a momentary interval of life.”

President John Adams, a Unitarian, laid out this same pluralist argument against Christianity. In 1825, when Thomas Jefferson was hiring faculty for the University of Virginia, Adams urged him to avoid professors who “believe that great Principle which has produced this boundless universe, Newton’s universe and Herschel’s [sic] universe, came down to this little ball, to be spit upon by the Jews” — in other words, professors who were liable to believe in the Christian Incarnation and Redemption, beliefs that he felt flew in the face of modern astronomy and would corrupt the university.

The early 19th century was the high-water mark of pluralism, and since then the tide has been ebbing steadily. In 1853 William Whewell of the University of Cambridge asserted that there was no sound evidence to support the many claims for extraterrestrial intelligence. Using information long available but never fully appreciated, he showed that the inner planets must be too warm for life, the outer planets too cold. Whewell thereby became the first 19th-century scientist to glimpse the nonpluralist solar system we know today, in which we are the only intelligent beings.

Martian canals

The idea of intelligent life in the solar system was hardly dead, however. In the late 19th century the idea appeared to be proven by certain astronomers’ reports of their detection of a canal system on Mars. The year 1895 saw the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli discussing how the appearance of the Martian surface could be explained by the workings of Martian engineers and the instructions of the Martian Minister of Agriculture. A decade later Percival Lowell obtained photographs of the canals, prompting *The Wall Street Journal* to write: “The most extraordinary development [of 1907] has been the proof afforded by the astronomical observations of the year that conscious, intelligent life exists upon the planet Mars... There could be no more wonderful achievement than this, to establish the fact of life upon another planet.”

*The New York Times* would feature in 1911 a large article on the progress of Martian canal-building. It is in this era that H.G. Wells wrote his *War of the Worlds* about invading Martians, and Edgar Rice Burroughs created his “John Carter of Mars” character. In the midst of all the Mars hoopla Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of the theory of evolution by natural selection, argued that the number of variations required for the evolution of a human being is so immense that the evolution of intelligent beings elsewhere is improbable. He also rehashed Whewell’s arguments, declaring that no planet in the solar system besides Earth is inhabited or even inhabitable, and that included Mars.

Twentieth-century science showed that Whewell and Wallace were right: there is no other intelligent life in the solar system. Today no astronomer expects to find so much as an extraterrestrial tree within the solar system, let alone extraterrestrial intelligence. Astronomers such as Lalande or Herschel had presumed similarity — that if Jupiter, like Earth, circles the Sun, rotates, has moons, is a world, then reason dictates that Jupiter, like Earth, should have intelligent inhabitants. But since then astronomers have found that planets display astounding diversity. Jupiter is so unlike Earth that the Jovian world lacks even a surface — Jupiter is largely a world of gas. Lalande, Herschel or Dick would be scandalized by the nonpluralist solar system of today.

While 20th-century science may have ended pluralism in our solar system, pluralism somewhere in the universe was kept alive by the 20th century’s development of communication technology and the resulting possibility that we might detect signals transmitted by advanced civilizations on planets orbiting other suns. This idea
usually is referred to as SETI — the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Pluralism outside our solar system became a staple of modern popular culture, the unspoken assumption behind blockbuster stories such as *Superman*, *Star Wars* and *Avatar*. And in the 1990s, astronomers finally detected that which they had always assumed to exist — planets orbiting other suns, or “exoplanets.”

In 2009 there was even a Vatican Observatory and Pontifical Academy of Sciences conference on extraterrestrial life. For centuries Catholic thought has made room for the possibility of intelligent life beyond Earth — as Vatican Observatory director Father José Funes, S.J., summarizes it, “This does not conflict with our faith, because we cannot put limits on the creative freedom of God” — but modern-day Thomas Paines still view pluralism as antithetical to Christianity. If there are intelligent beings outside of Earth, said physicist Paul Davies, a speaker at the Vatican conference, “then Christians, they’re in this horrible bind. They believe that God became incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ in order to save humankind, not dolphins or chimpanzees or little green men on other planets.”

Yet SETI and the discovery of exoplanets have only continued the trend of the past two centuries away from pluralism, away from little green men. SETI pioneers optimistically hoped to quickly detect signals from a universe teeming with advanced extraterrestrial civilizations, but 50 years of searching has come up empty. Exoplanets have shown that what held true for the solar system — diversity rather than similarity — appears to be true of planetary systems as a whole.

Indeed the study of exoplanets has rendered the ebb of pluralism nearly visible in “real time.” NASA’s “Kepler” mission to find Earth-sized worlds is now in its fourth year. Between 2011 and 2012, the number of planetary candidates found by Kepler grew to 2,321 from 1,235. Yet the number in their stars’ habitable zones (where temperatures are not too extreme for life as we know it to survive) actually declined, from 54 to 48 (some of the earlier 54 had been reclassified). And of the 48, only 10 were similar to Earth in size. Other Earths appear to be rare. As the data flows in, the universe of Thomas Dick’s sextillions of intelligent beings is vanishing before our eyes.

What is more, scientists have begun to consider whether the development of intelligent life on Earth may have been contingent upon various special circumstances, such as Earth having a large moon (to stabilize Earth’s axis of rotation and influence its tides and plate tectonics, which are very important for life), and giant Jupiter (to protect it from collisions with comets and asteroids, which could destroy higher forms of life, just as the asteroid that collided with Earth 65 million years ago doomed the dinosaurs). Several leading evolutionists, including Simon Conway Morris of the University of Cambridge, have come to agree with Wallace that the evolution of intelligent beings elsewhere is improbable.

A special place
Thus we are seeing serious discussion of the idea that the Earth may be a special world. The last two decades have seen the appearance of a number of publications by prominent scholars expressing skepticism about the claims for widespread extraterrestrial intelligent life, including Stephen Webb’s *If the Universe Is Teeming with Aliens . . . Where Is Everybody?* (2002).

We are also seeing it in popular media. In 2010 Robert Kruelich of NPR did a story with noted Caltech astronomer and planet-hunter Mike Brown (perhaps most famous for discovering Eris, the dwarf planet that prompted Pluto’s demotion) entitled “The Fruitless Search For Solar Systems Like Ours.” The story discussed how the planetary systems being discovered around other stars are not like our solar system, and mentioned the strong possibility that Earth is a rare exception in the universe. In 2011 *American Scientist* published the article “Alone in the Universe” by Harvard astronomer Howard Smith, which argued that we are sensibly alone (that is, even if other intelligent life exists in our galaxy it is so rare that we will never find it).

Unless this centuries-long trend somehow reverses, the idea of a universe widely inhabited with intelligent life — the universe of Paine and Adams, of *Superman* and *Star Wars*; the universe of the “Copernican Principle” — is going to look to our great-grandchildren
moves relative to the stars in the Copernican theory, and that motion should reveal itself in the stars — a phenomenon known as annual parallax — but no such effect was seen. Copernicus solved the problem by making the stars so distant that the Earth’s motion is negligible by comparison, and any parallax thus likewise negligible.

In response to this, Sobel’s Rheticus challenges Copernicus, saying, “The stars get in your way? You just wave them off to some other place!” to which Copernicus answers, “Don’t impose any puny, human limits on Creation.” When Rheticus asks, “In the name of the Creator then, what is the use of all that empty space?” Sobel’s Copernicus answers, “What is the use of grandeur? Of splendor? Of glory?” and then, echoing words from De Revolutionibus that speak of the distances to the stars in terms of the artistry of God, he says, “Thus vast, I tell you, is the divine handiwork of the one Almighty God!”

**Varied views**

Sobel seems to have captured something of certain Copernicans’ original envisioning of the universe. The question of distance was but half the matter: It is generally not understood that in the Copernican universe the stars were not merely distant, but huge and alien. To the eye, stars appear of varying sizes. A prominent star like Sirius, the Dog Star, appears larger than a less prominent star like Polaris, the North Star. But what were the actual, physical sizes of the stars? Consider this well-known exclamation: “Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! No, it’s Superman!” Well, if “it” is a bird, it must be nearer, and smaller. If “it” is a plane, it must be farther, and larger.

In “waving” the stars off, Copernicus changed them from “birds,” as they were in the geocentric theory (closer, smaller) to “planes” (farther, larger). Indeed, when the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, the finest of the pre-telescopic observers, measured the apparent diameters of different stars, and considered how far away the stars had to be to show no parallax, he calculated that even the smallest stars would have to be so huge that the sun itself would be tiny by comparison — a pea among pumpkins. The Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Riccioli would later get similar results when updating Brahe’s work using a telescope. By contrast, in geocentric theories like Aristotle’s, stars were located just beyond the planets, and of reasonable size: somewhat larger than Jupiter or Saturn, somewhat smaller than the sun.

In light of Brahe’s measurements, a Copernican had to conclude that every star was an alien body unlike anything in our solar system, next to which every body in the solar system, even the sun, was trilling by comparison. However, there is good evidence that two of the most important early Copernicans — Copernicus himself and Johannes Kepler — believed the Earth to have a special place in the universe. Kepler, for example, stressed that our Earth “does not belong to an undifferentiated swarm of countless others.” So perhaps it is not surprising that many Copernicans viewed the huge stars as the divine handiwork of Almighty God. The English Copernican Thomas Digges wrote that in seeing this visible glorious court of God, with stars “far excel-

**ASTRONOMERS FIGURED OUT THAT STARS ARE ACTUALLY MERE POINTS OF LIGHT — VASTLY DISTANT, YES, BUT NOT SO LARGE AS TO MAKE THE SUN SEEM NEGLIGIBLE. THE VAST COPERNICAN COSMOS, WITH THE HUGE, ALIEN STARS THE PURPOSE OF WHICH WAS TO TELL HUMANITY ABOUT GOD, WAS LEFT ON THE BACK SHELVES OF HISTORY.**

ling our sun,” we may be able to conjecture on God’s infinite and unsearchable invisible works. Other Copernicans, such as the German Christoph Rothmann and the Dutch Phillips Lansbergen, echoed the language.

Eventually, of course, astronomers figured out that stars are actually mere points of light — vastly distant, yes, but not so large as to make the sun seem negligible. The vast Copernican cosmos, with the huge, alien stars the purpose of which was to tell humanity about God, was left on the back shelves of history. That Copernican cosmos was re-envisioned, with the vast stellar distances still there but the absurdly huge stars reduced to suns with inhabited planets, to become the populated cosmos of the “Copernican Principle” and Thomas Paine — a cosmos where the Son of God “would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world” to save little green men on other planets.

But should the centuries-long trend away from pluralism continue, and bring our great-grandchildren to the point where the “Copernican Principle” of our planet’s mediocrity must be set aside (at least as regards intelligent life), the original vision of the Copernicans — with the sun and its planets negligibly small and yet unique in a vast, alien universe — is sure to regain currency.

Certainly future generations will develop some equally interesting ideas regarding what science has told them about the universe and what it has to say about them and the special world on which they (and we) live, ideas that will affect their perception of religion and their popular culture, just as the “Copernican Principle” had an impact on Paine and Adams and brought us Star Wars. Their view of the universe will be as different from ours as ours is from that of the Aristotelians. \*\*
e were supposed to be driving to the pharmacy for his prescriptions, but he said just drive around for a while, my prescriptions aren’t going anywhere without me, so we just drove around. We drove around the edges of the college where he had worked and we saw a blue heron in a field of stubble, which is not something you see every day, and we stopped for a while to see if the heron was fishing for mice or snakes, on which we bet a dollar, me taking mice and him taking snakes, but the heron glared at us and refused to work under scrutiny, so we drove on.

We drove through the arboretum checking on the groves of ash and oak and willow trees, which were still where they were last time we looked, and then we checked on the wood duck boxes in the pond, which still seemed sturdy and did not feature ravenous weasels that we noticed, and then we saw a kestrel hanging in the crisp air like a tiny helicopter, but as soon as we bet mouse or snake the kestrel vanished, probably for religious reasons, said my brother, probably a lot of kestrels are adamant that gambling is immoral, but we are just not as informed as we should be about kestrels.

We drove deeper into the city and I asked him why we were driving this direction, and he said I am looking for something that when I see it you will know what I am looking for, which made me grin, because he knew and I knew that I would indeed know, because we have been brothers for 50 years, and brothers have many languages, some of which are physical, like broken noses and fingers and teeth and punching each other when you want to say I love you but don’t know how to say that right, and some of them are laughter, and some of them are roaring and spitting, and some of them are weeping in the bathroom, and some of them we don’t have words for yet.

By now it was almost evening, and just as I turned on the car’s running lights I saw what it was he was looking for, which was a basketball game in a park. I laughed and he laughed and I parked the car. There were six guys on the court, and to their credit they were playing full court. Five of the guys looked to be in their twenties, and they were fit and muscled, and one of them wore a porkpie hat. The sixth guy was much older, but he was that kind of older ballplayer who is comfortable with his age and he knew where to be and what not to try.

We watched for a while and didn’t say anything but both of us noticed that one of the young guys was not as good as he thought he was, and one was better than he knew he was, and one was flashy but essentially useless, and the guy with the porkpie hat was a worker, setting picks, boxing out, whipping outlet passes, banging the boards not only on defense but on offense,
which is much harder. The fifth young guy was one of those guys who ran up and down yelling and waving for the ball, which he never got. This guy was supposed to be covering the older guy but he didn’t bother, and the older guy gently made him pay for his inattention, scoring occasionally on back-door cuts and shots from the corners on which he was so alone he could have opened a circus and sold tickets, as my brother said.

The older man grew visibly weary as we watched, and my brother said he’s got one last basket in him, and I said I bet a dollar it’s a shot from the corner, and my brother said no, he doesn’t even have the gas for that, he’ll snake the kid somehow, you watch, and just then the older man, who was bent over holding the hems of his shorts like he was exhausted, suddenly cut to the basket, caught a bounce pass, and scored, and the game ended, maybe because the park lights didn’t go on even though the street lights did.

On the way home my brother and I passed the heron in the field of stubble again, and the heron stopped work again and glared at us until we turned the corner.

That is one withering glare, said my brother. That’s a ballplayer glare if ever I saw one. That’s the glare a guy gives another guy when the guy you were supposed to be covering scores on a backdoor cut and you thought your guy was ancient and near death but it turns out he snaked you good and you are an idiot. I know that glare. You owe me a dollar. We better go get my prescriptions. They are not going to do any good but we better get them anyway so they don’t go to waste. One less thing for my family to do afterwards. That game was good but the heron was even better. I think the prescriptions are pointless now but we already paid for them so we might as well get them. They’ll just get thrown out if we don’t pick them up. That was a good last game, though. I’ll remember the old guy, sure, but the kid with the hat banging the boards, that was cool. You hardly ever see a guy with a porkpie hat hammering the boards.

There’s so much to love, my brother added. All the little things. Remember shooting baskets at night and the only way you could tell if the shot went in was the sound of the net? Remember the time we cut the fingertips off our gloves so we could shoot on icy days and dad was so angry he lost his voice and he was supposed to give a speech and had to gargle and mom laughed so hard we thought she was going to pee? Remember that? I remember that. What happens to what I remember? You remember it for me, okay? You remember the way that heron glared at us like he would kick our ass except he was working. And you remember that old man snaking that kid. Stupid kid, you could say, but that’s the obvious thing. The beautiful thing is the little thing that the old guy knew full well he wasn’t going to cut around picks and drift out into the corner again, that would burn his last gallon of gas, not to mention he would have to hoist up a shot from way out there, so he snakes the kid beautiful, he knows the kid thinks he’s old, and the guy with the hat sees him cut, and gets him the ball on a dime, that’s a beautiful thing because it’s little, and we saw it and we knew what it meant. You remember that for me. You owe me a dollar.

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland, and the author most recently of a novel, Mink River. His brother, Kevin Doyle ’69, died in June.
FAST TRACKING
KELSEY FALTER AND THE HUNGRY, OBSESSIVE, SPEEDED-UP, SUCCESS-DRIVEN, ALL-OUT ROAD TO TECH STARDOM. SHE’S ENJOYING THE RIDE.

BY MICHAEL RODIO ’12

When Kelsey Falter and Stacey Milspaw ’12 and I meet on a June day in Manhattan, we agree our first order of business should be sandwiches. So we wander around Cooper Square, navigating the gnarled streets by iPhone, making small talk under a sky-scrapped stratus.

We finally duck into Brad’s sandwich shop. Stacey remarks that it’s probably good for Kelsey to get out and get lunch, since they both admit Kelsey has a tendency to forget whether she’s eaten or not.

“It’s not that Kelsey forgets to eat. It’s that she forgets if she has eaten. Once, Kelsey says, she was at a very important lunch meeting with several potential investors (all her meetings seem to be very important and with potential investors) but was so preoccupied with meeting and talking to people that she forgot all about the sandwiches she was supposed to eat. She even took half a sandwich back to the office, where she proceeded to forget it was there until 11 p.m., when a hungry Kelsey Falter tried to remember whether she had actually eaten anything. The napkin-wrapped sandwich implied not.

In the middle of her senior year at Notre Dame, Kelsey put her undergraduate degree on hold, moved to New York City and devoted her time to launching her own startup company called Markover, which she later renamed Poptip.

Kelsey created Poptip and serves as its CEO and head of product development. She’s a sinewy dynamo with severely blue eyes and a blunt, bullet-point manner of speaking. No equivocation. She is a graphic and industrial design major, which surprises some people, given her ability to read HTML and Java fluently (or “full stack”). On her blog, she writes, “One friend has described me as ‘raw.’ I’m not sure what that means, but I like to think of it as an unrefined, unedited, upfront approach to getting things done.” Yep. Pretty much.

Stacey, who is Poptip’s happiness officer, is a bubbly, doe-eyed blonde with a newly minted Mendoza marketing degree. Stacey, who roomed with Kelsey in Pangborn and created an entrepreneurship magazine (Type E) with her, worked from Notre Dame and joined Kelsey after graduation. She writes all of Poptip’s correspondence, works on business development and keeps the team in good spirits.

By the way: Whatever stereotypes you’re leaning on about software developers being overweight, unshaven twentiesomethings with caffeine habits and World of Warcraft addictions, forget them. Kelsey and Stacey are eloquent, deeply intelligent and look like they should be working at Saks Fifth Avenue or Condé Nast. (Although Kelsey has a soft spot for espresso and Cuban coffee. So, yeah, a caffeine habit.)

Since spring break of 2012, Kelsey has developed Poptip through a program called TechStars, a Denver-based startup accelerator founded by CEO David Cohen in 2007. TechStars acts like a launching pad for potential entrepreneurs and their businesses. If a company can win acceptance to TechStars, there’s an 85 percent chance that company will succeed. TechStars owes its unparalleled success rate to its grueling selection process: Out of more than 1,500 applicants, TechStars selected exactly 13 companies for New York’s Spring 2012 program.

TechStars rewards each company with about $164,000 in perks: web hosting, free banking, strategic communications and PR. Then they invest up to an additional $118,000 to launch the company — generally to hire new engineers. But TechStars’ true value is mentorship from established entrepreneurs who guide fledgling companies through infancy. It’s also a venture capital magnet.

“We run a three-month, unsustainable, energy-filled, sleep-deprived process of getting your startup from wherever it is to a lot further,” New York program managing director David Tisch said in an interview with Mashable. “In that three months, a lot happens and startups do really change the course of their trajectory significantly.”

Kelsey hadn’t initially thought to apply to TechStars with her first startup, Markover, which her site calls “a community for entrepreneurs, enabling fast, hyper-specific feedback over any sort of creative content online.” But after visiting TechStars and meeting Tisch, who encouraged her ambitions, Kelsey and her team applied at the last minute on the day of the deadline (“Maybe it was even 12:01,” she says with a grin). Tisch saw a rare spark. Markover was in.

“Kelsey is a standout entrepreneur,” Tisch told Business Insider. “She has an amazing product mind and an incredible passion for making beautiful products.”

When Kelsey first started working with her team at TechStars, she jetted between Notre Dame and New York as she simultaneously finished her last semester and built Markover and raised thousands in venture capital.
But fledgling companies are voracious. Kelsey’s workload roared into a vortex of time and energy. So she weighed her options. She talked to her parents and professors. She decided to skip her final semester and come back to Notre Dame when her senior year course load wasn’t competing with thousands of dollars in venture capital. (She insists she will, and I’m inclined to believe her.)

This is the world of tech startups: sleep-deprived, mercilessly competitive and relentlessly driven by the new new thing.

* * *

Even Notre Dame’s business professors admit that entrepreneurship’s definition is nebulous. But Kelsey makes one thing deadly clear.

“Ideas don’t matter,” she scoffs. “No one cares if you have an idea. Nobody cares. Because the real question is, ‘Can we build it?’ And most of the time, the answer is, ‘Yeah, but it’ll take three months.’ And in the tech startup world, three months is too long. Way too long.”

She adds: “Engineers and designers are so valuable in this industry because they are builders. Builders are the people that make things work. So you’ve got an idea. Great. Can we build it into something?”

To emphasize Kelsey’s point, Stacey whips out her iPhone and shows me an app called GroupMe, which lets people send text messages within a group of friends. It’s not a new idea, they note. Chat groups, after all, have been around since AOL Instant Messenger, which thrived in the Internet’s Jurassic period, when we were in seventh grade.

But here’s where Kelsey’s point about engineers makes sense. On May 22, 2010, at the eve of a New York startup conference called TechCrunch Disrupt Hackathon, about 300 computer programmers sat down for a day and a half nonstop and wrote the code that later became GroupMe. After its founders raised venture capital, Skype bought GroupMe in August 2011 for $80 million.

This is why Kelsey says engineers make the best entrepreneurs. Dreamers can only create their ideas in one of two ways: They build things themselves, or they spend a lot of money for someone else to build their dream. Either way, engineers make it work.

* * *

Kelsey’s brilliance stems from her understanding that creative people depend on acute feedback to develop their ideas. Without excellent feedback, entrepreneurs are driving blind.
The proverbial light bulb zapped to life when Kelsey’s artistic younger sister, Hannah, scanned one of her drawings onto a webpage. “She got 40 comments on the first day,” Kelsey says. “Literally every day after that, she would come home and wouldn’t even change out of her school uniform — she would just start drawing. And I saw that these comments were . . . propelling her forward. And that made me want to start researching the role of feedback and coming up with ideas.”

So Kelsey envisioned a tool for better entrepreneurship: She and her team of engineers built a better feedback mechanism, then called Markover. It’s not an idea. It’s her vision.

“I’ve always had a fascination with innovation and creativity and how all that works,” she says. “Feedback is a key component to innovation and creativity.”

At TechStars, Kelsey quickly pivoted her initial product, Markover, into an elegantly simple tool called Poptip. With Poptip, users run polls on Twitter and analyze the responses in real time. Prior to Poptip, some poor intern had to manually count those Twitter responses.

Let’s say ESPN’s talking heads want focused college football coverage. Using Poptip, Hannah Storm ’83 tweets, “Who’s the best ND player in today’s game so far?” in the first quarter. She includes choices: #Wood #Te’o #Eifert. Twitter users reply to Storm’s question with their votes (“#Wood”), and Poptip totals responses as viewers tweet their answer. Poptip even accounts for misspellings, responses without hashtags and unlisted responses (“#Skylar for QB?”).

Poptip’s big selling point is analytics; its colorful graphs show poll results over time. In an alternate reality, when Skylar Diggins ’13 jumps in at quarterback and takes the college football world by storm, viewers respond to the poll and Poptip shows a spike in #Skylar or #Diggins. ESPN can then even share the stats (“67 percent think Skylar’s got a shot at Heisman!”). Feedback, rendered so effectively, is immediately and immensely valuable.

Our sandwiches long since reduced to crumbs, Stacey and Kelsey and I head back to the TechStars office, a “co-working space” that inhabits the sixth floor of an aging brick edifice overlooking Cooper Square. Forget cubicles: each company (usually with about six people) works at a row of computers. The TechStars HQ is essentially a high school computer lab commanded by those kids who cut gym to learn Javascript.

The office is a beehive of nervous energy. Kelsey and Stacey explain that the startup teams, which look simultaneously haggard and inspired, are readying themselves for TechStars Demo Day in two weeks. They’ll pitch their polished products to potential investors and the press. Each seat at Demo Day is worth, on average, $50,000 in potential venture capital.

I wave goodbye. Kelsey is already submerged in her giant Mac desktop. That night, she and the team stay up until 3:30 a.m. working on a pitch — not for Demo Day but for potential customers. They deliver it five hours later. Stacey says it goes well.

Just out of curiosity, I later text: “So when does the team sleep? Never?”

Stacey’s reply is succinct: “20 minute naps are taken when absolutely necessary.”

Ten days after our sandwich trip, Kelsey and I meet again on a Saturday morning at the mostly deserted TechStars office. We make a brief caffeine jaunt and then hunker down in a tiny conference room overlooking 41 Cooper Square’s modernist stainless steel folds. Demo Day is five days away.

Kelsey explains her background is design. She studied art in middle school. Because her mother, a dot-com entrepreneur, worked from home, computers perpetually surrounded Kelsey. She started teaching herself HTML, the primary website programming language, at age 8.

“I remember sitting at this desk and looking out a window, and seeing all my friends playing outside with one of those big, red exercise balls,” she says without a hint of sorrow. “And I was inside, like, on the computer, using AOL keywords.”

At Saint Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale, Falter created her own school newspaper, The Aquinas Word, to learn page design. She designed MySpace pages for the Tribune Company (owner of the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times). Before she could drive, she hitched rides to Barnes & Noble to read InDesign guides for hours.

This may sound obsessive. It is, sort of. But by the time she was designing her first programs at Notre Dame, she had long since accumulated her 10,000 Gladwellian hours in entrepreneurship and all that came with them: independence, willingness to fail and an inherent dissatisfaction with the status quo.

“A lot of people ask me, ‘How do you know about business things, because you weren’t a business major?’” she says bitingly. “I know that seems silly. But I think the reason I know about certain things are the situations I’ve been in. I’ve watched my mom negotiate with people. I watched her deal with customer service. I watched her talking with programmers.”

She became a design major after taking 2-D Foundations at Notre Dame. “Riley’s the best building on campus, in my mind,” she says. “I wanted a playground, a workspace where you could create cool stuff.” Professor Ingrid Hess’s typography class was her favorite (typography requires exacting attention to detail), so that’s one thing she has in common with Steve Jobs.


In the summer of 2011, Kelsey worked at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York so she could pay rent while accessing the city’s burgeoning tech startup sector. She woke up at 5 each day and started coding her project (which then developed into Markover) in
a McDonald’s because it had free Wi-Fi and cheap breakfast. She then headed to her regular 9-to-5, stopping at a Starbucks during lunch to — again — write code, staying as late as she could before her boss noticed. She returned to the office until she could head to a co-working space in the Flatinor Park called General Assembly.

“There’s no big players yet in New York,” Kelsey says. “There are some that are growing, like foursquare, Tumblr. But there’s still an opportunity to make something big in New York. To say, ‘This is the spot.’”

When she returned to Notre Dame for her senior year, Kelsey had an idea and the space — Innovation Park — to incubate her startup. She started coding nonstop, often staying up until 4 a.m., returning home for only a nap and a shower before arriving back at Innovation Park at 7 a.m. While some of her classmates reveled at Club Fever or football games, she crunched code.

“When I look at the typical Notre Dame student versus myself, I didn’t think I was an outsider,” she says. “However, I did always have lots of questions as to why people take things the way they are. Typically speaking, you could get out of class to go play a sports game, but you couldn’t get out of class to go interview for TechStars.”

As we talk on that New York Saturday, Kelsey is visibly weary. She’s mashed her normally taut bun into a messy screwball. Somehow, she says, she’s lost weight since we last met less than two weeks ago.

At this point, Kelsey’s dedication seems positively robotic. I ask her if she ever thinks about something besides her business. I’m completely serious.

“I think the only time I don’t think about my business is if I’m on a date or something and I’m having an amazing time,” she says, deadpan. “I never wake up in the morning and think about, ‘Oh, I wish I could go to the beach.’ I never think like that. I will think about breakfast, but only sometimes.”

“Aha, I think. She thinks about breakfast!”

“I’ll specifically think about eggs,” she corrects. “They have more protein, and there’s a study that was done, something about protein and your mind working better. And so I’ll think that I should get eggs, because then my mind will work better, and I’ll be able to do better work for the business. That’s my thinking. Like last night, I got salmon for dinner because I was like: protein.”

Then Falter giggles, as if she’s realized that when she’s not thinking about her business she’s actually thinking about her business and the proof is right there on her plate.

“I hazard one more try. I ask if social life even occasionally enters the equation.

“Yeah, you have to be social as well to know more people, so your idea can permeate more.”

Maybe Kelsey’s story wouldn’t be unusual at a tech-entrepreneur factory like MIT, but at Notre Dame — where weeks are punctuated by dorm Masses and dorm parties — it might seem hers is the path of an iconoclast.

She doesn’t see it like that. At all.

“Creative ideas are what address poverty, injustice and oppression,” she says, riffing on Notre Dame’s mission statement. “If you can’t get to the point where you come up with a creative solution, then these things are going to continue to exist. The mission of Notre Dame, ‘where learning becomes service to justice,’ is that you’re taking your talents, your learning, your thoughts and using them to serve a greater purpose.”

She recalls someone’s suggestion: “‘You could just take Mark- over and put celebrity photos in your application and just become a People magazine where people can comment on the celebrity fashion piece that they like or didn’t like.’ And I was like, ‘No, I don’t want to do that!’”

Poptip, she says, “can be used for everything from ESPN asking about what your prediction for a sporting event is to some- thing like OpenIDEO, which allows you to crowd-source the creation of something like a toilet for a Third World country that doesn’t have sewage systems. That’s human solidarity.”

Falter and her team have effectively created a stand for Archi- medes’ lever, a way to harness the tweeting masses into moving the world. By quantifying the world’s thoughts in short hashtag responses, Poptip gives the increasingly populated social media universe the power to push back at the people in charge. In a very broad scope, Poptip is a new tool for democracy.

“I imagine,” Stacey said afterward, “if a user with serious followers tweets a question of substance. We’re hoping it’s an idea catalyst for campaigns, television shows, sporting events, world and U.S. events coming up that actually have importance to people.”

Sure, Poptip is useful for deciding whether the NBA MVP was Lebron or Durant (the former) or if Rachael Ray’s cherry bar face is more telegenic over cupcakes or brownies (the latter). Forget that. Poptip gives Twitter the power of the ballot box. Revolu- tions have already faced down totalitarian regimes, proving that social media can be a powerful weapon (see: Arab Spring). While traditional media powerhouses can hold sway because of their large Twitter followings, nontraditional sources can do it, too. The beauty of Poptip and the world of social media as a whole is that anyone — anyone — can wield the lever.

For all the team’s stress, Demo Day brought media praise and venture capital. Peter Kafka of AllThingsD hailed: “While [Falter’s] youth makes for a good story, my hunch is that the company is going to get plenty of attention on its own merits.” As of late July, venture capitalists and companies such as ESPN, Twitter and Facebook had invested more than 1 million reasons for Poptip to succeed.

After Demo Day, I giddily watched as actor Jared Leto of Fight Club fame used Poptip for an inane question and received 1,600 responses. It felt like watching a space shuttle lift off.

Kelsey has lifted Poptip to its feet and says she’s gotten healthier. I’m inclined to think that happened when Poptip started gaining Fortune 200 companies as customers.

“I hadn’t really even connected with some of the most impor- tant people in my life in New York,” she says. “I joined a gym, so I’m doing physical, normal exercise. I’m going out to dinner with friends.” Then she catches herself: “But I’m still committed to what I’m working on.”

She has her doubts. Her vision. Hunger. Obsession.

“I want to be able to say wholeheartedly, this is the right thing, this was always the right thing. I want to say in modern times you can focus on one thing. It might not be widely accepted and you might have so many questions going into it, but it can turn out okay if you execute and stay focused.”
We were close to the summit on Naya Kanga, a 19,000-foot mountain in the Langtang region of Nepal. It was late afternoon and the sky was turning dark blue. A cold north wind was blowing off the Tibetan plateau. I was tired and anxious to get down.

At that moment I was roped to my friend Nanu Thapa, an experienced Himalayan climber, descending slowly on a snow-covered slope so steep we had to face into the mountain as we climbed down. I moved carefully, one foot at a time, using my ice ax and the toe points on my crampons for support. There was nothing to stop a fall for a thousand feet.

Pushing my ice ax into the snow, I fixed my rope around it and planted my toe points as firmly as I could. I watched Nanu unrope above me. He would climb down and leapfrog to a point below me, a pattern we would have to repeat many times before reaching the safety of the ridge that led to our tents.

But this time, just as Nanu pulled his ice ax from the snow, his crampons failed. With no warning, he fell off the mountain, out into space, tethered to me by our climbing rope.

TRY, TRY AGAIN

I was not an experienced climber. I had used crampons only once before, 10 years earlier on a failed attempt to climb the Matterhorn, part of a midlife-crisis adventure when I turned 40.

I was 50 now and working in Nepal as part of the U.S. economic assistance program (USAID). Not having learned my lesson in Switzerland 10 years earlier, I had happily joined three colleagues in planning an ascent of Naya Kanga, the 15th highest trekking peak in Nepal — and 5,000 feet higher than the Matterhorn. It is one of the few trekking peaks in Nepal accessible to fit but not technically trained climbers.

In addition to Nanu, our climbing team included Todd, the political officer at the U.S. embassy; John, the embassy doctor; and Tom, with whom I worked at USAID. They were each extraordinarily fit. John also was a technically qualified climber, having summited a number of difficult peaks. I was the oldest, but I had trained hard and was confident, unjustifiably so as it turned out, endurance would not be a problem.

Todd’s girlfriend and future wife, Julia, was also with us. She was in Nepal working on her doctoral dissertation, and was also

Before his retirement in 2003, Kelly Kammerer was a public service lawyer and civil servant/foreign service officer working on economic assistance issues. He and his wife now live on a farm in Provence, where they produce “a fair olive oil and a barely drinkable wine.”

And a friend for life

By Kelly C. Kammerer ’63
in terrific shape. She carried the same heavy pack as the rest of us, but never planned to climb higher than base camp.

To summit Naya Kanga we had to overcome two logistical problems. The first was to reach Ganja La pass, where we would find a ridge leading to the couloir from where we could climb to the summit. The second was to acclimatize to the altitude once we got above 10,000 feet.

The rule is to “climb high but sleep low.” Above 10,000 to 11,500 feet it is safest to camp no more than 1,000 feet higher than you slept the night before. With this in mind, we took a jeep from Kathmandu to the hamlet of Sundarijal, at the end of a dirt track, and started our hike at about 4,500 feet. We reached the Ganja La pass, at an altitude of 16,000 feet, after an easy ascent over five days. The only technical section of this part of the trip was getting through the pass itself, where we had to inch our way across a narrow, snow-covered ledge in the rock face of the pass, with a 40-foot vertical drop below us.

Once across the pass we had a short climb to a protected clearing among some rocks where we set up our camp in the snow. It was almost dark by the time we got our tents up, and since it was too cold to be outside once the sun went down, we quickly made our supper and got into our sleeping bags. We had to get an early start the next morning to avoid climbing in the heat of the day, when the intense rays of the sun can turn the snow to mush.

Out of the tents at dawn, we put on our crampons and cold weather gear, carrying light packs with only the water and food we would need for the summit push. Before starting out, John demonstrated how to use an ice ax in case of a fall, making each of us fall on the snow and slam in our ax as if arresting a fall on a steeper slope. It was not an auspicious way to start, but we treated it lightly.

The wrong way

None of us had been on Naya Kanga before, including Nanu, our guide. We had a general description of the route, but only a poor photo of the actual mountain. As a result, we picked the wrong way up. Our route was directly in the sun all day. It soon got so hot we were climbing in our thermal undershirts, and the snow on the steep slope became heavy, wet and difficult to navigate. For a while I took an adjacent ridgeline, above the couloir, but that was even worse.

Climbing several thousand feet in those conditions was hard on all of us, but I don’t think I realized how fatigued I was. When we finally reached a plateau, a mere hundred vertical feet below the summit, we stopped briefly to rest. But we were well behind schedule so couldn’t stop for long.

When the others got up to complete the climb to the top as the wind blew hard, I found I couldn’t go on. I yelled up to Tom, asking him to come back to help me tighten my crampons. I couldn’t seem to reach them in my bulky clothes — and my body, not very limber to begin with, had stiffened during our short rest. Disregarding his own anticipation at reaching the summit, now only steps away, he generously returned to help me.
As Tom worked on my crampons, I became obsessed with the desire to get off that mountain. I was suddenly as scared as I had ever been in my life. I demanded that Nanu take me down, insisting, for added safety, that we be roped together.

Almost two decades later, I still find it hard to come to grips with that moment. Up until then I had felt no fear on Naya Kanga, and I was in absolutely no danger sitting where I was. But fear consumed me. I could think of nothing but my own safety. I read recently that experienced climbers call that kind of collapse “crumpling.”

I have never been able to rationalize why I panicked, much less how I justified appropriating our guide for my own safety. I can only imagine that I was extraordinarily tired, and what had been up until then a sunny, pleasant day was turning dark and ominous. The strong wind near the top added to my sense of foreboding.

Tom recently told me that when he turned back to help me with my crampons, and looked down the slope we had come up, he felt an imminent sense of disaster. Peering down into the Langtang Valley, at least 10,000 feet below us, he remembers seeing a helicopter flying eastward and feeling certain that unless we found the correct route down one or more of us would fall to his death. He too forgot about the summit and started focusing on finding the correct route down.

Todd and John, who had continued on towards the summit, must have been confused by what was happening, but they didn’t object when we started going down without them. Nanu, a gentle soul with muscles of steel and as limber as a cat, clearly understood my fear. He didn’t object to abandoning his own climb to help me down. I felt an enormous sense of relief as we roped up, leaving the others to enjoy the summit before they would have to hurry down to beat the sunset.

My sense of relief was short-lived.

What I didn’t know when we started down was that Nanu was wearing Todd’s crampons, which Todd had rented in the Kathmandu bazaar. They were half split through in places and would not stay secure. When Todd had showed them to Nanu earlier during the climb, Nanu had insisted on giving Todd his own German-made crampons, and thus was wearing Todd’s defective crampons on our descent.

Soon after we started down and got out of the wind, I regained my composure. I felt fine, normal. Several minutes later, when we were out of sight of the others, we discovered the correct route we should have taken to the top. It was the couloir adjacent to the one we had climbed, with the ridge that separated them keeping the proper route in the shade during most of the afternoon, which would have made for easier climbing.

There was no way to tell the others what we were doing, but we assumed they would see our tracks in the snow and realize we had found the correct route and follow us down. It was about 20 minutes later when Nanu’s defective crampons failed, and he fell off the mountain.

Fate at work

I wish I could say what happened next was a result of mountaineering skill. It wasn’t.

When I saw Nanu fall, I closed my eyes and wrapped my arms as tightly as I could around my ice ax. Nanu didn’t make a sound as he fell. Miraculously, he didn’t hit me on the way down. When he reached the end of the rope (about 30 feet), it was with a jolt that pulled my crampons at least a foot down the slope. Somehow the shock of his weight at the end of the rope didn’t pull me off the mountain.

I opened my eyes and looked down. Nanu was hanging upside down, dangling from the rope. He quickly righted himself, dug his boots into the slope and planted his ax, which had been tied to his wrist during the fall. We both caught our breath, and then he yelled up to me that his crampons were completely broken and he couldn’t climb farther without them.

There was a rock outcropping on a ridge about 40 feet from us. Very carefully, we worked our way laterally to it. When we got to the safety of the rocks, and after we unrope and waited for our hearts to stop pounding, we realized we were still in a jam. Nanu couldn’t climb without crampons, and I didn’t have the skill to belay him on the single rope we had. If our friends failed to see our tracks, and descended on the original route we had climbed up, we would be stranded.

You can survive a night exposed at 18,000 feet, but we didn’t want to try. We both began yelling up the mountain, hoping to attract attention. It was pretty hopeless as the wind was against us. We spent a few glum moments as the sky continued to darken, but very shortly we heard voices. Our companions had seen our tracks and followed us down the new route.

As soon as they reached us, John, the experienced climber, started rigging ropes to belay Nanu down the rest of the way. We followed. By that time I was happy not to be roped to anyone. I took my time and arrived at the bottom just as it was getting dark, exhausted but happy. Walking across the ridge back to the tents, I heard Todd ask John, “What happened to Kelly at the top?”

I didn’t hear John’s answer, and it was never mentioned again, but I have often thought about that moment. I was chagrined to have lost my nerve, especially in front of my friends. I knew I had been overcome by something irrational, and assumed physical exhaustion had contributed to it, but that didn’t make me feel much better. The only thing helping my battered self-respect was that somehow I had been able to stop Nanu’s fall.

The more I thought about it the more I started to believe fate must have been involved in that climb. If I hadn’t asked Nanu to help me down, we would have descended as a group, and most likely been unrope, as that is how we had ascended. Nanu’s borrowed crampons still would have failed, but no one would have stopped his fall.

Nanu must have felt the same way, for soon after we got back to Kathmandu he presented me with a new pair of German-made crampons. I didn’t want to accept them as I knew how expensive they were, and that he really couldn’t afford it, but he insisted. I had saved his life, he said, and giving me a gift in return was important to him. According to
his religious beliefs, he now had a responsibility for my life.

He also told me that when he fell off the mountain he knew he was going to die and had only one thought while he was falling: He felt humiliated knowing he was about to pull me, his client, off the mountain. His responsibility as a Sherpa was to protect me, and he had failed.

I wanted to tell him, but didn't because it would have sounded as ridiculous as it was true, that I was the one who should have been thanking him. By falling off the mountain, Nanu gave me a chance, unconscious as my actions were, to save him. He had allowed me to redeem my seriously flagging sense of self-esteem.

Nanu was an inspiring guy, good-natured, with an almost spiritual calm under stress. He was careful and skilled at his work, and was always smiling and doing more than his share. I have thought about Nanu's kindness on Naya Kanga over the years, not only because that moment was important to me, but also because it was not the end of our friendship.

The morning after our climb, as pre-arranged, Tom and I left on a 10-hour hike to Dhunche, a trailhead where a jeep would be waiting to take us back to Kathmandu. Todd, John and Nanu stayed on to hike out via a little known route first explored by English Himalayan explorer H.W. Tilman in the 1950s. Rather than return to Kathmandu with us, Julia decided to spend a few days at a tea house in the Langtang valley.

I remember telling my colleagues when I got back to the office that high altitude climbing was not an activity to take up in your 50s. When Todd, John and Nanu returned a week later, having bushwhacked a trail even more arduous than they had anticipated, they looked like they had aged a decade.

**A final farewell**

At that point I was sure I would never again set foot on a high mountain, at least not in crampons. But time passes and one forgets. The pull of adventure takes over. Just a few short months after our November 1991 climb, Tom and I began planning another trip with Nanu, this time to a mountain over 20,000 feet, called Mera Peak.

As the time for the climb approached, Nanu asked that we meet him at Namche Bazaar, a Sherpa village at the beginning of the trek to Mount Everest. He would be leaving Kathmandu before we to participate with other Nepalese climbers in an ascent of Everest, or Sagarmatha as the Sherpa in Nepal call it (“Chomolungma” in Tibet) — in both cases meaning something like “goddess mother of the world.”

There is something about Mount Everest that makes climbers take extraordinary risks. People have skied down it, paraglided off it; someone even rode a kayak down on the snow until reaching the water coming out of the Khumbu glacier. There is even an annual Everest marathon, from base camp down to Namche Bazaar.

In Nanu’s case, his team was trying to break the speed record for the fastest ascent. A Frenchman then held the record, having climbed from base camp to the summit and back in a little under 24 hours. Nanu would be stationed at the South Col, at about 26,000 feet, with oxygen and hot drinks for the principal Nepali climber as he passed by.

Sherpa guides often have been given secondary roles when it comes to sharing the glory of an Everest summit, so this all-Nepali expedition aroused a great deal of pride in the Sherpa community. When Nanu and his teammates passed through the small villages on the way to Everest base camp, while carrying extraordinarily heavy loads, the local populace lined the route offering drinks of the local, potent liquor to toast their success.

Nanu made the journey from the Lukla airport, at 9,100 feet, to the Everest base camp, at over 17,000 feet, in one day. Trekkers normally take six or more. He had to be extraordinarily strong to do that with such a heavy load, but he was tempting fate to climb so high in one day without acclimatizing. Perhaps the alcohol clouded his judgment.

Later that night he began to show symptoms of cerebral edema. Leaving his tent in extreme pain, he wandered around base camp looking for help. For some reason, perhaps because they were also feeling the effects of alcohol, his fellow Sherpa failed to assist him. A foreign climber with another climbing team realized how sick he was and arranged to have him carried down in the dark to Lobuche, where a volunteer high-altitude doctor had a depressurizing tent.

The volunteers who carried him down managed to get him into the tent while he was still alive, but it was too late. He died before the tent could reduce the pressure on his brain. The next day his compatriots cremated his body on the mountain.

Tom and I were obviously shocked when we heard. We had been scheduled to join Nanu in only a few more days. We immediately canceled our climbing trip but decided to travel to the Everest region and find the spot where Nanu died and pay our respects. We carried with us a plaque Tom had made in Kathmandu honoring Nanu’s memory.

When we reached Lobuche, after flying into the small mountain airport at Lukla and hiking in via Namche Bazaar, we found the high-altitude clinic, but the doctor was absent. We never did get a chance to ask him what exactly happened that night. We stayed in a Sherpa hostel next to the stone hut where Nanu died. The proprietor allowed us to hang Nanu’s plaque on the wall.

Earlier we had climbed to the spot where rock cairns (shortens) have been erected over the decades to honor the many foreigners and Sherpa who have died trying to climb Everest. We built one for Nanu.

It was important for Tom and me to honor Nanu’s memory. He was our friend. And one afternoon on a minor mountain in Nepal, Nanu had taught me an important lesson: You may not always have the strength to live up to your own expectations, but fate can give you strength when you need it most.
A few years back, wandering through Houston’s Half Price Books, I came across The House with a Clock in Its Walls by John A. Bellairs ’59, a prolific creator of children’s and young readers’ books, and my classmate, mentor and best buddy during our undergraduate years at Notre Dame.

John Bellairs ’59, the celebrated creator of spooky and suspenseful children’s literature, was once my witty and fun-loving guide through the magical vacationland that was Notre Dame.

By Patrick Dunne ’60

The young lady at the checkout counter was delighted. “He was my favorite writer when I was growing up,” she said.

And well he might have been, for what young reader could resist titles like The Secret of the Underground Room, The Lamp from the Warlock’s Tomb or The Curse of the Blue Figurine?

Growing up fat, pimpled and homely in Marshall, Michigan, a hopeless klutz on the playing field and an admitted trembling coward, Bellairs spent his childhood and adolescence the target of other boys’ incessant hectoring, a perennial victim of the sort of bully who nowadays forms the cynosure of educational reformers. None of those self-aggrandizing childhood taunters, I daresay, ever went on to graduate magna cum laude from Notre Dame, write a best-seller, or have a historical plaque or a guided walk for tourists dedicated to their memory in their hometown.

Seizing the only refuge from nonstop teasing he could find, he retreated early into books, becoming an avid and voracious reader, devouring literature with a ravenous appetite and an encyclopedic memory that made him, by the time he entered Notre Dame

Patrick Dunne lives and writes in Houston, Texas. After a career teaching literature and writing, he enrolled in law school at age 53 and practiced immigration law until his retirement in 1999. He and Bellairs lost touch in their middle years.
as a freshman in the fall of 1955, “a bottomless pit of useless information” — his own not wholly inaccurate description of himself.

From him, to give only two proofs of that characterization, I learned how to chant — in Arabic — “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet,” as well as the correct spelling and pronunciation of Chagogagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg, the New England site of the longest place-name in the United States, and otherwise known as Lake Webster, along with a famous translation of that gigantic polysynthetic word-sentence, “You fish on your side, I fish on my side, and nobody fishes in the middle.”

Small wonder that he was named to Notre Dame’s G.E. College Bowl team, hosted back then by Betty White’s husband Allen Ludden — selected along with our classmates Phil Gibson, Andrew Connelly, Brian Moran and Tom Banchoff — or that in answer to one question he reeled off a dozen or so lines from Chaucer’s prologue to the Canterbury Tales in fluent Middle English.

He loved to play with the English language, throwing an original twist on clichés — as in his rendering of a particularly easy task as “A piece of park, a walk in the cake.”

Then as now a hit-the-books school like Stanford and Duke, Notre Dame was for him and me a magical vacationland where we both managed to earn consistently high grades while devouring pizza and movies, listening to Al Myers’ huge classical record collection, and spending hours in Bellairs’ disheveled room in Sorin playing chess, pinochle and Scrabble, meanwhile dissecting every aspect of the liberal arts, deep intellectual speculations endlessly enlivened by Bellairs’ boisterously funny asides.

In games he had no hesitancy to cheat: In a chess game, when I felt the urge to run across the hall to the head, I had to break world landspeed records to get back before Bellairs rearranged the board in his favor. The only break I can recall in our daily gaming was the widespread campus outbreak of Asian flu in late 1957, which landed me in the infirmary and rendered him, by his sworn account, bloated and floating about the room until his bellybutton grazed the ceiling.

We managed all this time free of tedious study by virtue of an educational technique Bellairs was generous enough to share with me early on. “The time to cram a subject,” he said, “is not at the end of the course, the night before finals, when you should be taking in a movie. Cram at the outset, right after registration.”

So after signing up, we would hit the bookstore, buy a couple of worthy books on each subject we’d registered for, blaze through them over the weekend, and sail into class on the first day armed with erudite facts and ready to dazzle the professor.

Our favorite eatery was Febbo’s Pizzeria, where two or three of the Febbo parrots (the ultimate cause of Febbo’s downfall at the hands of horrified health authorities) would perch on the edge of the pool table or the shuffleboard to watch and squawk while we awaited Mama Febbo’s incomparable
sausage pizza. A past master of the English language, Bellairs would often interrupt his sentence during our long walks to Febbio’s with an hilarious parenthetical, picking up the original sentence a mile and a half later exactly where he had left it off.

He was an avid disciple of the campus then-guru, Frank O’Malley, and as an English Lit major Bellairs’ final exams were always of the essay type, a medium in which he could easily charm any instructor with his erudition and wit. He was ready at all times with a canny riposte, as on one occasion when he and I were suffering through an appalling student production of Romeo and Juliet at Washington Hall and I whispered to him, “The plot thickens.” Instantly he rejoined with “Yeth, it duth,” and later told me, “I’ve been waiting for years to use that one.”

Assisting one of his professors by evaluating student essays, he was collapsed in helpless laughter one afternoon by a euphuistic freshman’s characterization of his family home, rhapsodizing about the beautiful scenery “that circumnavigated the house.”

We used to walk around the lakes on fine days, often reflecting ruefully on what we knew were halcyon days at Notre Dame, inevitably to be followed after graduation by the drudgery of a 9-to-5 job with meager two-week vacations. Meanwhile he honed his writing skills, writing a regular humor column for the student magazine Scholastic.

His vast reading and entertaining conversations had given him a huge repertory of favorite comical anecdotes — solid truth or wanton fantasy — including the tale of the young man who approached Mozart asking how to write a symphony. When Mozart advised starting with a few ballads before tackling something so complex as a symphony, the young man protested, “But Maestro, you were writing symphonies when you were only 10 years old.” To which Mozart replied, “Yes, but I didn’t have to ask anybody how.”

One of Bellairs’ favorite stories, beyond any doubt apocryphal, was that of the ultimate end of the imperial state crowns of Mexico, glittering remnants of the emperor Maximilian and his mad consort, Carlotta.

It seems that Napoleon III, among his many gifts to the infant University of Notre Dame, had bestowed upon the University the ill-fated monarchs’ jeweled diadems. After reposing for decades in the dusty display cases of the now-defunct campus museum, the crowns had long ago been appropriated by unwitting campus drama enthusiasts for use on the stage of Washington Hall as Shakespearian props. But being found too garish for the willing suspension of disbelief, many of their jewels had been pried out and the precious metal painted with gilt. Eventually they had been discarded as junk, ultimately to become part of the landfill upon which Moreau Seminary is built.

Bellairs’ penchant for humor did not exclude the occasional practical joke. One of our favorite undergraduate pastimes was to join the assembled freshmen classes in the auditorium where the departmental final examinations in history were to be administered. In the quarter-hour or so before the exams were handed out, Bellairs and I would seat ourselves two or three rows apart, disguised as fellow examinees, and panic the multitude by calling out to each other such gems as, “Don’t forget the dates loved to tell funny stories, not excluding those with himself as the butt of the joke. At his first job interview, to teach English in a Catholic college for women — the venue in which his first published book, St. Fidgeta & Other Parodies, gestated — the headmistress quoted an annual salary to which he politely replied, “Oh, Sister, that would be too generous,” never dreaming that the nun, nobody’s fool in matters fiduciary, would immediately counter with a substantially lower figure.

Writing primarily for the young, Bellairs did publish one adult novel, The Face in the Frost, a masterpiece of sheer terror. Of the works still incomplete at the time of his too-early death of cardiovascular disease at age 53, a number were completed by author Brad Strickland, who has also gone on to write additional originals continuing the fictional existence and adventures of several of Bellairs’ characters.

As you might expect of a celebrated, award-winning and best-selling author, with works adapted for television and translated into many languages, Bellairs is all over the Internet, including reminiscences from his
Orlando, Florida, was a magical kingdom for Dennis Wolfe ’92. Not because of the nearby Disney World opening its gates just a year after his birth but because this was where music came into his life. At 5 he learned to play the piano. At 6, violin. And, at 7, the instrument that would take him the furthest and make his neighbors the angriest: drums.

His career has followed a beat. Steady, clear, moving to the crescendo. And he doesn’t follow the stereotype — the dreamer who saw the music and little else. No, he saw that, and the ending, and walked out just in time for a different number.

Those are the breaks
The music industry was very different around the millennium. This was the age of CDs costing as much as $16.99 and people paying it, albeit begrudgingly. This is the world Wolfe entered into when he moved to Los Angeles in 1998 and later joined The Exies, an alt-rock band named after a term used by Beatle John Lennon to refer to art students who called themselves “the existentialists.”

However, when the group went national, signing with Arista in 2000, Napster had come along and changed everything. Music could, at least temporarily, be freely downloaded by the masses.

For The Exies, the odds of big-time album sales became that much steeper. But into the studio they went. They knew the benchmark: 500,000 units — a gold record. Anything less would be a disappointment.

It was.

Unlike some bands, the Exies weren’t immediately dropped by their label. The group would get at least one more crack. “I really felt the second album was fantastic,” the 41-year-old Wolfe says of Inertia. “We did it with Nick Raskulinecz, who had done the prior two Foo Fighters albums, and we made it at Grandmaster Recorders at Sunset and Cahuenga [in Los Angeles].”

Friday barbecues in L.A. had band members partying with Nine Inch Nails and Dave Grohl, frontman of The Foo Fighters. The Exies were hot, too. “Ugly,” the video off of their third album, Head for the Door, “tore up the charts to No. 6 on active rock charts,” says Wolfe. “In a 14-month cycle we played Letterman, round two culminated with us on Motley Crue Carnival of Sins tour. It was Sum 41 and Silverstide on that tour, too — that was when that record was over.”

Despite an album the band could be proud of, it still fell short of gold. There wouldn’t be another album with a major label. It was either go indie or go home.

Wolfe, surprisingly, chose the latter. “You see what happens to these bands most of the time,” he says. “I had done it. I’d been in a band. I experienced being with a major label. What would it be about now? I was around 30, I got to move on.”

He didn’t stray far from his previous occupation. He walked into Capitol Records in Los Angeles as an A&R (artist and repertoire) associate, now helping to develop musicians. But would it feel strange to do a job without fans, to live the straight life? “I had a regular Joe office job at IBM for five years,” he says. “At least I didn’t have to wear a suit this time — when I got the record deal with Virgin [formerly Arista], I was temping for Capitol, so I was already going there on a day-job basis. It was like a return to my roots but with more respect. I had a two-album touring experience, and people saw me differently — they wouldn’t have given me that opportunity if I didn’t have that experience.”

His greatest moment came when he was promoted to the head of the department in less than three years, with other producers reporting to him. “The four producers all had franchise artists assigned to them, so they were in charge of directing all efforts for those artists, whether it was a new reissue, compilation, box set, vinyl release, digital download, ringtone or whatever,” Wolfe says. “We had 70 franchise artists that we actively managed, from The Beatles and The Beach Boys all the way up to Radiohead and The Smashing Pumpkins.”

His job, Wolfe explains, “was to produce projects for the artists assigned to me, ensure there was an even workload across the other producers, and provide overall leadership and management support to the team. I ran meetings, conducted performance reviews and made sure everyone was on the same page.”

But while Wolfe’s title improved, sales didn’t. “It was happening to everybody, though,” he says. “The record companies didn’t know how to react.”

The companies were fighting over the cost of singles, says Wolfe, “saying they shouldn’t sell for less than $1.29, even if it’s something really old. You’re not selling a...
Billy Squier hit from the past for the same as the new Katy Perry.”

Part of the reason they were avoiding the change, Wolfe believed, was incentive. “All the people who were in charge, they’re all making bank, fat-cat salaries and dependent on the old model to keep their lifestyle afloat — so why would they make a bunch of changes? They just figured, ‘We sue everyone downloading and take down Napster.’

But the thing is, it’s not exactly good business to, uh, sue your customers.”

Eventually, stubbornness gave way to music singles that could be downloaded, most for less than a dollar. It was a necessity for a sustainable business model, although it could mean the eventual death of the album. But for Wolfe, his greatest accomplishment may have been helping to give life to one.

Now smile

The Beach Boys’ *Smile* was always rumored to be the greatest album never finished, maybe the rock ’n’ roll era’s version of Mozart’s “Requiem.” *Smile* was partially created by Beach Boy chief songwriter Brian Wilson but always put on hold for various reasons. There couldn’t be agreement among the personalities involved — the Beach Boys didn’t exactly love each other every second — and Wilson, as documented, struggled with many a demon. Or sometimes it was the record company that just didn’t have the interest in what the undertaking would require.

But finally the pieces came together in the summer of 2010 and, as Wolfe puts it, he was fortunate enough to be at the right place at the right time. “It’s like someone finally said, ‘Hey, let do this,’ and everyone else happened to be ready, too,” he says. Now the hope was that no one would change his mind and that it wouldn’t fall apart. And that they would choose the right parts. After all, there were countless hours of recordings to pick from.

Here’s where Wolfe felt his most confident. “I honestly didn’t feel scared about screwing it up,” he says. “I knew I’d make good choices. Bands try things out in the studio, and they sound awful sometimes.

You experiment, never know what it’s going to be. I know that, I can tell the difference.” And, along with producers, Wolfe was proven right. *The Smile Sessions* was named in 2011 as *Rolling Stone*’s reissue of the year, and Wolfe had the biggest feather in the cap of his career.

Sometimes his job wasn’t quite as romantic. Take Pink Floyd’s reissue of *Dark Side of the Moon* and the band’s insistence that the U.S. and U.K. versions sound identical, down to the most minute of sounds.

“What we put these two manufacturing plants through to get the CDs to sound as identical as possible was insane,” he recalls. “We take a pressing of *Dark Side of the Moon* from the U.S. plant and then the European plant goes to a mic suite at Capitol, loads it into a digital workstation so they exactly lined up each one and switch back and forth, doing a three-man blind test. You don’t tell the guy which one they’re listening to, you just ask, ‘Is this one better? Is the bass better? Is the stereo field wider? Narrower?’ Round after round of things like that.”

Wolfe walks

That takes us to our final number. The exit. Wolfe saw that as Capitol was in the process of being bought by Universal in 2011, changes were coming. Firings, layoffs, adjustments. Wolfe believes he understood what some others didn’t. “You have to know when it’s time,” he says. “I was thrown a party, got good wishes, and I moved on.”

That’s not to say he didn’t take that trusty feather in his cap with him when he officially left in January of this year, negotiating to continue working with the Beach Boys as a consulting producer. The result has been contributing to projects which include a 50-year retrospective package, minivinyl reissues for Japan and a six-disc box set.

And he’s taking his time to think about the next step. How that band he used to party with, Nine Inch Nails, now has a lead singer working on scoring movies. How there’s a profitable world outside of music altogether.

And he still drums — but just don’t expect him to join another band. “I will always be a drummer, I will have a set of drums in my garage and will always go to shows and be a consumer of new music. That’s an integral part of who I am,” he says. “I made a living doing that and that’s not going away.” He then manages a laugh before adding, “But my days of schlepping gear across town, and small gigs and smoky towns, those days are over . . . and they should be.”

Dennis Wolfe: ‘I had a two-album touring experience, and people saw me differently.’
Voices travel through time

By Michael Rodio ’12

When international pop star Shakira of “Hips Don’t Lie” fame needed a background track for a song on her album Oral Fixation 2, she turned to a classical choral ensemble called Seraphic Fire.

At first, collaboration between the Latin singer and a classical choir seems unusual. But to Patrick Dupré Quigley ’00, who’s directed the Grammy-nominated Seraphic Fire for the past 10 years, Shakira’s choice made perfect sense. The Miami-based choral ensemble has earned a reputation for varied repertoire, musical adaptability and concerts that speak to Miami’s young and diverse population.

“There was some bridging the gap between all of us, who are in a lot of ways wedded to the page, to communicate music,” says Quigley, who founded the popular campus a capella group, The Undertones, in his freshman year at Notre Dame. “It was great. She’s wonderful.”

The 24-member Seraphic Fire and its partner ensemble, the seven-member Firebird Chamber Orchestra, purposely perform a wide range of musical genres. In April, they presented a concert of such American works as “Hoedown” from Aaron Copland’s Rodeo, John Adams’ “Shaker Loops” and a new composition by Christopher Theofanidis. In May, they performed religious music created by Spanish Baroque composers in the missions of the New World. Seraphic Fire even received two 2012 Grammy nominations, but for different recordings: A Seraphic Fire Christmas and their recording of Johannes Brahms’ Ein Deutsches Requiem.

Modern ensembles rarely perform such a wide repertoire, but Quigley says the cultural and musical variety keeps Seraphic Fire performances interesting.

“We, as a choral ensemble, can traverse many different musical aspects, many time periods, and weave in those time periods . . . into the events that we do,” Quigley says.

In January 2011, Seraphic Fire presented a concert of sacred music at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. Their performance included a typically broad swath of choral music, from modern Estonian composer Arvo Pärt to Spanish Renaissance composer Tomas Luis de Victoria.

Professor Margot Fassler, the co-director of Notre Dame’s Master of Sacred Music Program, managed to get a seat at the sold-out event. “The genius of Patrick shone through in the concert,” says Fassler, who taught at Yale when Quigley studied there. “You could really get a sense of the extraordinary sonic landscape of the Basilica.”

Quigley attributes Seraphic Fire’s success to its accessible concerts designed for the people of Miami-Dade County. The group performs multiple short concerts, often in local churches.

“We try to make the concert experience as inclusive as possible,” Quigley says. “We will teach you about the music. You don’t have to know about what you’re seeing prior to seeing it.”

Quigley and Seraphic Fire have also made their mark in Miami by extensive community outreach. With a grant from the Knight Foundation, Quigley also created the Miami Choral Academy, a youth music education outreach program. Now in its second year, the choral academy teaches 200 young students who participate in five choirs in four inner-city elementary schools.

“The average household income in all of these schools — and this is household, not personal, meaning both parents’ income — is at max $33,000,” Quigley says. “So these kids would have no access to the arts if it weren’t for the Choral Academy.”

Whether Quigley is directing educational outreach or adventurous concert programming, his goal remains the same: faithfully presenting new, exciting music to a community that may be hearing it for the first time.

“Music is music, when you come down to it.”

I got the music in me


Those musical styles are part of the Spirit of Notre Dame collection, which includes a Reflections CD of soulful tunes and a Celebration CD of upbeat songs. Produced by the piano-playing O’Neill Brothers, Tim ’94 and Ryan ’97, the set features 33 songs performed by members of the Notre Dame family.

The project, commissioned for the Spirit of Notre Dame campaign, started with a request by the O’Neills in autumn of 2000 for ND students and alumni to send “radio-ready” CDs and tapes for the album.

“I was thinking it would be fun to do,” says Tim O’Neill. Then the deluge began. “I personally listened to 1,200 songs,” he says. “It turned into like two years of a full-time project.”

In selecting songs, he says, “I really tried to capture different decades.” He also captured different styles, from the “O Magnum Mysterium” chant, which includes a prayer by University President Father John Jenkins, CSC, ’76, ’78M.A. to the bluegrass “Pickin’ Wild Mountain Berries,” performed by Edward S. Thomas Jr. ’58, the traditional Irish lullaby “Too Rah Loo Rah Loo Rah” sung by Regis Philbin ’53 and the “Warriors” rap by the musical duo of Santiago X The Natural (Lawrence Santiago ’05 and Jeffery Stephens ’07).

The CDs’ liner notes offer the stories behind the songs. “The Mermaid,” for instance, was a song contributed by Kevin Short ’78J.D. in honor of his deceased classmate, John Cotter, while Rudy Hornish ’59 wrote “A Galway Farewell” in memory of his mother, with whom he often sang old Irish songs. Inspired by Notre Dame’s halftime TV commercials, singer-songwriter Emily Lord ’96 recorded “What Are You Fighting For?”

Spirit of Notre Dame is available at the Hammes Notre Dame Bookstore or at pianobrothers.com/Music/SpiritNotreDame/.

— Carol Schaal ’91M.A.
Forever Irish: Tailgating Songs in the Irish Tradition. Ken O’Malley. Dublin-born musician O’Malley joined forces with John Tabis ’00 for this 10-track CD. The music, says Tabis, “combines the mythology of Notre Dame football lore with the tradition of Irish pub/sing-along songs.” Except for the bonus tracks of “Danny Boy” and “I’m a Rover,” all songs were the bonus tracks of “Danny Boy” pub/sing-along songs.” Except for ball lore with the tradition of Irish music, says Tabis, “combines the Tabis ’00 for this 10-track CD. The O’Malley joined forces with John

Directory of Devotional Prayer. Congregation of Holy Cross (Ave Maria Press). The prayers and texts used here are from the writings of Father Basil Moreau, CSC, founder of the congregation, and from those newly composed “in light of our Constitutions, charism, and spiritual heritage.” Included are prayers for daily meditation, an essential practice that, Father Moreau wrote, “determines the entire day, and without prayer and silence we grow negligent in the service of God.”

Finding the Game: Three Years, Twenty-Five Countries, and the Search for Pickup Soccer. Gwendolyn O’Shea ’07. With movie-making grants in hand, the author, her boyfriend and two friends began to travel the world, playing pickup games anywhere and with whomever they could — in a Bolivian prison, with women in hijab in Tehran and moonshine brewers in Kanyakumari. A witty travelogue in the international language of soccer, the book also serves as a companion to the documentary Pelada.

A Walk’s As Good as a Hit: Advice/Threats from My Old Man. Jamie Reidy ’92 (Lamo Publishing). “This may not seem like a love letter,” the author writes in his “For Dad” dedication, “but it is.” He shares stories both poignant and amusing on life from childhood through college with his tough-love father. That stance, Reidy admits in these at times R-rated essays, didn’t hide the fact that his dad loved his kids. Reidy also is the author of Hard Sell: The Evolution of a Viagra Salesman, which served as the inspiration for the movie Love and Other Drugs.

The Boy Recession, Flynn Meaney ’09 (Poppy). The author of Bloodthirsty returns with another comedic novel for young adults, this one following the students at a small Wisconsin high school where the male population has taken a dive as families move to larger towns. Can the shy, down-to-earth Kelly beat the four-girls-to-one-guy ratio and land a date with her crush, the guitar-playing Hunter? Publishers Weekly calls the book “sassy and very funny. . . . rarely has a recession brought such enjoyment.”

Coach Knute Rockne so desperately wanted to win a national championship that he took a gift to Knute Rockne, and a subsequent line of terriers inspired fans for more than 40 years before the leprechaun. This book for readers ages 4 to 10 is a sequel to Clashmore Mike Comes Home. An old terrier in the Irish village of Clashmore recalls how he accidentally joined a family immigrating to America in 1924 and wound up at a small Wisconsin high school where the male population has taken a dive as families move to larger towns. Can the shy, down-to-earth Kelly beat the four-girls-to-one-guy ratio and land a date with her crush, the guitar-playing Hunter? Publishers Weekly calls the book “sassy and very funny. . . . rarely has a recession brought such enjoyment.”

Compiled by Carol Schaal ’91M.A. Visit magazine.nd.edu for Choices in Brief.
If you would have asked me three years ago what I would do if I ever encountered a man who murdered seven innocent people, I’m not sure what I would have said. In any case, it definitely would not have been, “Shake his hand and hold his 2-week-old baby.”

Yet that was exactly what I found myself doing in August of 2011. His name was Jean Paul, and he was the third man I had met in the past two years who I knew for certain had participated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. I wasn’t happy to be in his presence. But because my friend Emmanuel, a survivor of the genocide, introduced me to this perpetrator whom he called his friend, our encounter was civilized. Our meeting concluded a journey which showed me a way to perceive humanity that I had never been exposed to before.

This journey began in the summer of 2009. It was the summer I met Emmanuel, when I arrived in Rwanda on a research trip through my school, the University of Nebraska. I was a 19-year-old sophomore broadcasting major who had never traveled outside of the United States before. I was inspired to go to Rwanda after I had read a memoir by another survivor, which left me with a question I thought I might be able to answer if I went there: how can a country go from being the most violent place on Earth to one of the most peaceful African nations 15 years later?

In her book, *Left to Tell*, Immaculee Ilibagiza describes in gruesome detail how all of her loved ones were murdered in 1994, for no reason other than that they had been born into the Tutsi ethnicity. The Tutsi made up about 10 percent of the population. The genocide itself was planned and implemented by anti-Tutsi extremists within the government. The actual culprit of the missile attack that brought down Habyarimana’s plane remained a mystery until this past January, when it was officially reported that Habyarimana’s own army had shot down his plane in a secret coup d’etat. It was just one piece to the puzzle of why citizens began killing their neighbors.

On April 7, 1994, the genocide began. The primary weapons used by the Interahamwe were machetes and clubs, while victims often had to pay money if they wanted to be killed quickly with a gun. By the time it was over, only about 20 percent of the Tutsi population in Rwanda was left alive.

When I arrived in Rwanda to research its recovery from this horror, Emmanuel, a law student, was serving as a liaison for our study-abroad group, helping us navigate the country and conduct our research. I learned he was a survivor one day when we were at a memorial.

“Have you ever been here before?” I asked.

“No here,” he replied. “But one day I’ll take you to the place where my parents were killed.”

We had already been to several genocide memorials, all placed on sites where people had been massacred. The majority of the sites still contained the victims’ bones and blood-stained clothing, which were preserved for visitors to witness as proof of the brutality that had occurred. I distinctly remember an odd stain on the wall of one church we visited, with something of an unidentifiable texture stuck to it. Later that day I was told that in this room killers had slammed babies against the wall. What I had seen was dried blood with bits of decayed skin still stuck to...
the place they had been bashed to death.

This is what true evil looks like, I thought. Then I realized, no. We were witnesses to the remains, but only those who were physically there could be considered true witnesses to this evil. They knew about the depths and capabilities of it in a way we could never understand.

A few days after visiting the church, I was on the bus heading to the village of Nyamata, where we would meet with an association for peace and reconciliation. I was uneasy, as this meant we were about to meet former killers.

I had heard of these peace-and-reconciliation associations before but still couldn’t get my mind around how they worked. They had started taking form throughout Rwanda about 10 years after the genocide, when most of the perpetrators were released from prison under the agreement that they would ask the people they victimized for forgiveness. These killers were granted amnesty predominantly because the prisons could not house all of the inmates. The government then was controlled by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which had won the civil war, ended the genocide and ousted the former regime in July of 1994. In the years following, rulers decided to try facilitating peace and reconciliation rather than implementing the death penalty on all of the genocidaires.

Following this amnesty, a remarkable number of victims did decide to forgive the people who had slaughtered their families.

WHAT HAD I DONE? I HAD JUST SHOWN A KILLER THE SAME POLIETNESS I’D OFFER ANY PERFECT STRANGER.

This process was often followed by the establishment of associations for the purpose of counseling both parties toward a functioning state of unity in their areas.

By the time we finally reached Nyamata, I had mixed feelings about who we were about to meet and couldn’t imagine what Emmanuel had to be feeling.

After filing off the bus, our group of about 30 congregated in a semi-circle of benches in the front yard of a house where the association met. After the director of their organization said a few words, a short man wearing a trucker hat stood up and began to tell us his story. He said his name, but I immediately forgot it. From the moment he began speaking, his identity was hard-wired to my brain as “the killer.”

A member of the Interahamwe, he had participated in a group that murdered 12 people. When we realized who he was, or what he was (a word I would have rather used at that moment), our entire group grew tense.

He talked about how he had been taught since childhood to hate Tutsis, how he participated in the genocide in 1994 and was later incarcerated for it. Then, after eight years in prison, he became convinced that he was destined for an eternity in hell unless he repented before God and before the people he terrorized. So after being released, he went back to his village to ask for forgiveness from the families of the people he killed.

As I thought about the memorial sites we had visited, part of me felt I had an actual responsibility to hate this man. But his sincere remorse confused me. It didn’t make my hate for him unjustified, but after a while it made it seem useless. His shame was potent; he didn’t emanate the monstrous characteristics I would have expected from a murderer. Perhaps the only reason I could think this way was because I just wasn’t processing how horrible his actions had been 15 years before. I looked over at Emmanuel, thinking that maybe his reaction to this man’s words could show me how I “should” feel, but his face was blank.

The killer then was detailing the time when he asked for forgiveness from the Tutsi man whose family he had killed. At first the killer’s return had traumatized this Tutsi survivor. Eventually, our speaker said, his continued expression of remorse resulted in forgiveness. Seriously? I thought. And if that wasn’t remarkable enough, the two men later started a small business growing peanuts.

The killer was the president, the survivor the vice president.

As the tension among our group began to ease, I felt less guilty about looking at this man as a human being. That was a strange thought, since the common philosophy is that we should put ourselves in other people’s shoes. But we are socialized to make exceptions to this moral code. Thirty-three U.S. states still implement the death penalty as punishment for murder. We simply are not taught to consider the humanity of cold-blooded killers. The logic for this seems to be that since the actions of killers have been inhumane, they are no longer human.

This was a concept I never believed more strongly than when I was at the genocide memorials looking at the remains of what had happened. Yet, in post-genocide Rwanda, the reality was that thousands of murderers were out walking the streets every day. And there was peace. How?

My train of thought was cut short as the man concluded his speech. Before I knew it, I had walked right up to him and was extending my hand to shake his. I told him I was making a short documentary about reconciliation in Rwanda and wondered if I could interview him. He said that that would be fine and wrote down his contact information.

The next thing I remember was filing back onto the bus, sitting down and suddenly feeling disgusted with myself. What had I done? I had just shown a killer the same politeness I’d offer any perfect stranger. Despite the survivor’s ability to forgive him, I wasn’t convinced that anyone who killed before could ever be trusted again. My brain was doing 180s, which I suppose is a normal part of processing discomforting and confusing information.

A week later, Emmanuel came with me to interview this killer. I still couldn’t read exactly how Emmanuel was feeling as a survivor being face-to-face with a perpetrator, and he remained an enigma until about an hour after the interview. That’s when we met Jeanette, another member of the association. She was both a survivor and a friend of this killer.

Jeanette told us that her father was killed by her maternal uncle. (That uncle was Hutu; her father was Tutsi.) She said that when her uncle was released from jail and came to her asking for forgiveness, she granted it. These words had to be translated for me by Emmanuel, and after taking a moment to absorb them, I blurted out to him, “I don’t think I could ever do that.” I was not criticizing her. In fact, her strength astounded me. But then Emmanuel whispered that he didn’t think he could forgive like that either. “If the people who killed my family asked me for forgiveness, I could try, I guess,” he later told me. “It’s good for the country, so we don’t really have a choice. But I’ll never know who killed my parents, so, without hearing an apology, forgiveness is too hard.”

The next day, I left Rwanda with more questions than answers. All I knew was that I wanted to come back. And, one year later, I returned to shoot a documentary about the children who had lost their parents to the genocide and raised themselves in the years since, which Emmanuel co-directed with me.
As we researched and shot the documentary over seven months, Emmanuel and his surviving siblings helped me to continue to make sense of everything I was learning about peace and reconciliation.

“[Whether] you can forgive someone or if your heart remains in hatred . . . depends on if the killer, or the person who destroyed your home, first asks you for forgiveness,” Emmanuel said almost every time reconciliation was brought up. This was a consistent viewpoint among the other survivors we interviewed. I can’t name one person we met who seemed determined to hold onto anger. Rather, it seemed to be something they desperately wanted to part with, but they needed to be asked for forgiveness first. It amazed me that these humble terms were all they were asking for. Yet, many told me, it was still rare for a killer to come forward and make that first move toward reconciliation.

It was disheartening, however, to learn that many genocide survivors still live in fear. Emmanuel and I interviewed several people who were being harassed by the people who killed their families. Even Emmanuel had recently received death threats from a group of former neighbors who, in 1992, had burned down his home and attempted to massacre his entire family. Many of them continue to harass him by periodically destroying his crops and even poisoning his livestock.

When hearing these stories, I felt disillusioned about reconciliation. The new government had established clear-cut punishments for anyone who committed further violence. Could the modern state of peace in Rwanda be the beneficial result of fear more than love? As I watched the unexpected transformation Emmanuel went through as we continued our journey, I learned that reality was somewhere in the middle.

When I went back to the United States to start editing our footage, I came with me. After five months of producing the film and interviewing several North Americans who were in Rwanda in 1994, Emmanuel flew back to Kigali. It was another four months before I saw him again.

I was surprised one day when he called me from Rwanda to tell me about an afternoon he spent with a woman who not only forgave the man who killed her family but even came to his aid when he was in trouble. “He—the killer—was having financial troubles a couple years ago,” Emmanuel said, “so she told him that he could come live with her in her home. Now she is like a grandmother to his children.”

“What is your reaction to that?” I asked him.

“It’s very inspiring. I mean, it’s amazing,” he said.

Two months later, I returned to Rwanda to shoot some follow-up interviews. During this trip, I realized just how much Emmanuel had taken these stories to heart. We had gone to visit Shyongi, the district where Emmanuel had lived as a child and where he still owned land. As I looked around at the beauty of the hills that descended into the Nyaborongo River, it felt surreal to stand in the very place where Emmanuel’s neighbors had attempted to kill his family and, after failing to find them, burned down their home.

As I walked around the ruins, a stranger came over to greet me. “Hello, how are you today?” he asked in English.

We only talked for a few minutes before Emmanuel came over, shook his hand and began a conversation in Kinyarwanda. Before they parted ways, Emmanuel said something that made them both laugh. Later that day, I mentioned that the man had seemed nice. Emmanuel agreed. Then he asked me if I knew where the man had learned English. I shrugged. “Where?”

“In prison,” he replied. This man, I learned, was part of the gang that had destroyed Emmanuel’s home. “And you’re friends with him?” I asked, surprised. “He asked for forgiveness from my sister,” said Emmanuel. “So I knew about the day he asked me for a job on the farm. So, I said ‘sure.’”

This, I realized, might be the closest Emmanuel would ever get to reconciling with someone who had attacked his family. Those responsible for killing his parents and siblings during the genocide would never be identified, and Emmanuel had accepted that long before. But he did know the people who destroyed their home and later went on to kill other people during the genocide. Many of the people in that gang still posed a threat. But in the case of this one man at least, he took the opportunity to forgive.

This led me to reconsider the question I struggled with when I met “the killer” two years before: Can a person ever be completely transformed? If I were looking at a man who repented all the evil things he did 17 years ago and had led a different life since that time, a life that garnered love and cooperation rather than hate and conflict, was the person I was looking at in 2011 a different person than he was in 1994?

The survivors I met seemed to believe this change was possible. Not that it was common, not that it happened quickly, not that it was easy and not that it always worked when someone tried to change. And it was always excruciatingly difficult to forgive. But it was possible.

Despite the rarity of this kind of transformation, the survivors I met demonstrated a belief that the act of expressing regret, deep remorse and repentance slowly transformed these monsters into humans again in their eyes. And if the survivors could see it and treat the killers with dignity, then I realized I had no right to behave any differently when I crossed paths with them. My only role was to listen, learn from and support the survivors in whatever way they chose to handle their situation. Anything else would be an insult.

That was how I found myself shaking the hand of another killer two days later, when Emmanuel and I visited another association for unity and reconciliation. Emmanuel had met Jean Paul while guiding another group of U.S. students around Rwanda. Even though Jean Paul had killed seven people, the survivors in his village chose to accept his plea for forgiveness. Upon meeting him, Emmanuel decided to regard him as a friend as well.

We gathered in Jean Paul’s sitting room, where Emmanuel and I sat across from Chantal, a survivor; Jean Paul; and Claudine, another survivor. They explained how they now trust one another enough that they watch each other’s children.

After a few minutes, Jean Paul’s wife walked in with their 2-week-old baby and gently put her in my arms. I looked into her tiny face, then looked up at Jean Paul. I wondered what would happen the day he would have to explain to this innocent child what he did in 1994.

Meanwhile, he sat with Chantal, Claudine and Emmanuel—three beautiful people who had lost almost everything they loved at the hands of men like him. Despite their irreplaceable losses, the survivors seemed to be at peace. They did not speak of resentment, revenge or hate. It wasn’t until that moment I realized forgiveness wasn’t just something they granted for the sake of a better Rwanda; it was also something they did for themselves.

“Hate eats up a person’s soul, even if it’s justified hate,” Emmanuel told me later that day. “So if you can get rid of that burden, if it’s possible, you should. It’s taken me almost 20 years and it will take much longer for others. It’s complicated and extremely difficult. No words in English or Kinyarwanda can express how difficult it is. But I realized that when you can actually reply, ‘Yes, I forgive you’ to the person who asks for it, it sets you free. It sets the perpetrator free, it sets Rwanda free, but it especially sets you, the survivor, free.”
APPROXIMATELY 150 CELLS floating in a sac of fluid and burrowed into my uterus are multiplying at an astounding rate toward viable life. Assuming I carry this pregnancy to term, it will be the first time I give birth. It won’t, however, be my first child.

I became a parent last year. Since then I’ve changed the diapers of a developmentally delayed 8-year-old. I’ve watched at midnight as another child was strapped to a stretcher outside of my home then driven off in the back of an ambulance. I’ve played impromptu hostess to three police officers during one crisis or another, as well as to dozens of social workers, lawyers and volunteers. I’ve gone to court twice, registered two kids for school and seen one transferred midway through the year. At too many meetings with too many administrators that dragged on too long, I’ve advocated on behalf of children with special and varied needs, often to no avail. I’ve repeatedly calmed down tantrum-prone kids who were intermittently irate and fluxing between extremes of laughter and tears.

In total my husband and I have opened our home to seven foster children for lengths of time ranging from one day to more than six months (and counting).

At a foster parent training session, a social worker asked our motives: Why did we want to offer our homes and hearts to children who were strangers and eventually would leave?

Our reasons ranged from the practical to the moral. We could. We had an unused extra bedroom. We had a dual-income household. We had transportation and the ability to provide. We wanted to give: our time, money and love. We felt we could offer a safe home to children who needed one. We believed it was the right thing to do.

Many people seemed to find it difficult to understand why we would choose to be foster parents, especially at our ripe and fertile childbearing ages; why we continued to choose it after several early traumatic experiences; and, finally, why we chose to attempt parenting not one but two kids together on a long-term basis, especially considering their court-mandated goal was to eventually go home.

“Two of them?” my 93-year-old grandmother asked. “I don’t know how you do it.”

“The same way you did,” I replied.

“What?”

“How did you do it? You had three. I do it the same way you did.”

“That’s different,” she said. “My kids weren’t strangers.”

“Neither are mine,” I said.

Living with other human beings — even suffering children who reflexively reject love — means they aren’t strangers long. Besides, loving these small strangers has yielded amazing results — results I’d go so far as to guess surpass in certain senses the safer love of flesh and blood. There is vulnerability in it, risk, danger; the rewards, though perhaps rarer and less certain, are consequently concentrated with meaning.

In the past year, my husband and I painted one daughter’s face green so she could be a witch on Halloween, then we took her and her princess sister trick-or-treating. We applauded when our child began to learn to play the sax. We collected artwork and displayed it throughout our home. We read to our kids and helped them learn to read. We stayed up working through addition, subtraction, multiplication, and quizzing on spelling words, the skeletal system and the body’s many muscles.

We were Santa. We took them sledding. I braided and curled our daughters’ hair, cooked for and with them. We had dance parties and made up bedtime stories. We told jokes, had birthday parties, took day trips to museums and pick-your-own farms, visited cousins in the country and laughed in hilarious fits. We sang them to sleep, kissed them goodnight and tucked them into blanket burritos, their ensuing giggles spurring our own delighted laughter.

We cheered on one daughter at the school’s annual Turkey Trot and a few weeks later waved to the other from the audience at the winter concert. Their faces opened with joy when they saw us there. As tears of love gushed in my eyes, I smiled at the irony that I was now one of those parents — about whom I’d previously only cracked jokes — who cried at their kids’ holiday pageants. Of course I also cried because I knew it was likely to be the only Turkey Trot and winter concert at which we’d be able to cheer for them.

Soon our daughters will leave us. I don’t know how I’ll breathe when they go or if I’ll want to. Technically, biologically, they are not my daughters. But I love them. We are family. Their impending departure is one reason my husband and I recently decided that they will be our last foster children, at least in the near-term.

Foster care has stripped us to our bones and taught us what we’re made of. Since beginning this journey, we’ve lost more friends than we’ve gained, but relationships have strengthened with friends and family members who have stood by us and embraced the kids as if they were our own.
Likewise, my marriage has grown stronger than ever because it’s been more challenging than ever. While my husband and I quickly learned to parent exceptionally challenging kids in exceptionally challenging circumstances, it has been harder to manage and accept the foster care system. After our relatively brief experience with it, we’ve concluded that at this time we’re unable to roll with it and its demands in the way that would be required of us to succeed and to maintain a functional and professional relationship with it — and a happy and healthy relationship with each other.

All of the system’s inconveniences and flaws, however, are on a different plane than the loss of loved children.

I knew intellectually from the day we accepted our daughters into our home that they would leave and they’d take our hearts with them.

That’s another reason that we’re choosing to stop: We don’t want to again assume the job’s myriad challenges in addition to another acute loss. By the time the year ends, we will have said goodbye to seven children. The loss of these two girls threatens to be the job’s myriad challenges in addition to another acute loss. By the time the year ends, we will have said goodbye to seven children. The loss of these two girls threatens to be our most painful yet.

People warned us about the loss, but we wouldn’t trade our experience. Loving these kids has been a microcosm of every life lesson worth learning and has only further illuminated the deal we make every time we choose to love: In exchange for elevated feeling and experience, we accept the crush we’ll endure when a relationship ends. As they all do.

But I don’t know how the kids sustain it. They are brave and resilient, I guess because they have to be and also perhaps because they are conditioned to be. They grow up locked into perpetual cycles of loss. They fall off the edge of the world then circle back, only to fall again. One way or another, they adapt. What other option do they have?

I aim to emulate them. Knowing them has yielded an unparalleled experience of family and has challenged me to accept and love the world as it is. I’m managing to abide the haunting sense that I’m abandoning them by striving to do what they do: accept things as they are, the way they need to be now for my husband and me. I keep my hope that they’ll be safe in other homes and families, and based on the number of amazing foster parents we’ve met, I have good reason to hope.

As for the kids we’ve been privileged to parent, I hope the work we’ve done somehow will yield in them more love. That they’ll carry a fragment of it with them and that they can call anytime. More than anything, I hope they will.

A friend recently told me that when you sustain a traumatic emotional loss — a broken heart — you can adjust, brace yourself, improve upon your fitness to survive: “Next time you don’t have to be the artery,” she said.

Since then I have been visualizing myself as the farthest corporeal point from the burst heart: the last capillary in my pinkie toe or, better yet, the hardened callous overgrowing my husband’s big toe. No feeling throbs in that dead gray flesh.

For now, we remain the artery, but we also prepare. To aid healing we build new life into our grief process. Our child — today only the size of a poppy seed — needs us to not bleed out. At the same time, he needs us to continue being vital conduits through which gush life, love and even loss.

I had hoped for more

BY HEATHER KING

A FEW YEARS AGO I gave notice on the L.A. apartment where I’d lived since 1992, disposed of or gave away most of my belongings, packed up my ’96 Celica convertible and took off for an open-ended sabbatical.

It was a big move — I didn’t know whether or not I’d return — and before I left, my friend Ellen volunteered to let me use her address and to forward my mail.

Ellen, who was raised Polish Catholic in Detroit and has long since “moved on,” is in many ways a far better person than I: honest, generous, decent and fair. She doesn’t gossip and she rarely badmouths, but there are a couple of groups for whom she can barely hide her contempt: bum politicians and the Church.

“They won’t let ‘em use condoms in Africa!” she’d railed on our last hike. “They hate gay people!”

“The Church doesn’t hate gay people,” I replied weakly. “The Church isn’t hoping people die of AIDS. It’s acknowledging the power of sex, trying to get across that we miss out on the gift if . . .”

People warned us about the loss, but we wouldn’t trade our experience. Loving these kids has been a microcosm of every life lesson worth learning and has only further illuminated the deal we make every time we choose to love: In exchange for elevated feeling and experience, we accept the crush we’ll endure when a relationship ends. As they all do.

But I don’t know how the kids sustain it. They are brave and resilient, I guess because they have to be and also perhaps because they are conditioned to be. They grow up locked into perpetual cycles of loss. They fall off the edge of the world then circle back, only to fall again. One way or another, they adapt. What other option do they have?

I aim to emulate them. Knowing them has yielded an unparalleled experience of family and has challenged me to accept and love the world as it is. I’m managing to abide the haunting sense that I’m abandoning them by striving to do what they do: accept things as they are, the way they need to be now for my husband and me. I keep my hope that they’ll be safe in other homes and families, and based on the number of amazing foster parents we’ve met, I have good reason to hope.

As for the kids we’ve been privileged to parent, I hope the work we’ve done somehow will yield in them more love. That they’ll carry a fragment of it with them and that they can call anytime. More than anything, I hope they will.

A friend recently told me that when you sustain a traumatic emotional loss — a broken heart — you can adjust, brace yourself, improve upon your fitness to survive: “Next time you don’t have to be the artery,” she said.

Since then I have been visualizing myself as the farthest corporeal point from the burst heart: the last capillary in my pinkie toe or, better yet, the hardened callous overgrowing my husband’s big toe. No feeling throbs in that dead gray flesh.

For now, we remain the artery, but we also prepare. To aid healing we build new life into our grief process. Our child — today only the size of a poppy seed — needs us to not bleed out. At the same time, he needs us to continue being vital conduits through which gush life, love and even loss.

Heather King blogs at shirtofflame.blogspot.com. Email her at hdking719@gmail.com.
I’d just come out of three months of relative solitude (my first stop had been a writer’s residency in Taos, New Mexico). And though I’d been looking forward to this retreat for almost a year, I soon found I had no intention of praying, and probably no ability to pray, for any such length of time each day. Still, I did the best I could. I woke and sat in silence for an hour or two: praying the divine office, listening. I read my notes on what I read. I napped. I wrote. I sat for an hour or two more, looking at the birds. I took long walks.

Though I was happy to be there, and grateful, I had many objections. Oh, many reforms I wanted to make. The first thing that made me crazy was the food: fake bread, fake cheese, fake salad dressing. How could people of prayer eat such bad food? I’m as into austerity — maybe more into austerity — as the next person, but would ordering in some fresh, crusty bread, or a decent hunk of cheddar, or some sharp-tasting greens have killed anyone?

The second thing that made me crazy was the Mass. Why did the cross in the chapel where daily Mass was celebrated not have a body on it? Why did we not genuflect upon entering the sanctuary, observe the Sign of Peace or kneel? why had the Penitential Rite, the Intercessary Prayers, the Responsorial Psalm — the Psalms!!! — been excised? Where was the blood, the anxiety, the majesty? The Mass had been sanitized and euthanized. The Mass had been emasculated.

Meanwhile Ellen would forward my mail. Ellen would send batches of homemade chocolate espresso bars, neatly packaged and labeled. One day I received a small, clearly old hole-punch notebook, bound in black plastic. Stuck to the inside front cover was a turquoise Post-It on which she’d written:

Heath dear—

My 88-year-old aunt, Sr. Emelita, often gives me stashes of old notepads and pens. (Usually, the pens don’t work.) She gives me old chocolate, too . . . all the gifts that people bring nuns. So, I take the notepads and use them. This little notebook spoke to me because I like the little-lined paper. When I got home and looked more closely, I saw she had notes from a retreat almost 20 years ago and it seems fitting to send it to you. Use it. Give it away. Throw it away. Whatever. Love you. Miss you.

Ellie

The first page was headed “Retreat — 1992.” I began reading, transfixed by the fact that, 18 years before, Sister Emelita had been grappling with the same things I was grappling with now; that an 88-year-old nun and a 57-year-old former drunk, ex-lawyer, divorcee, wanderer-seeker-pilgrim could meet in Christ; that in spite of Ellen’s and my seemingly divergent views, she had understood that I might find value in this relic.

Three lines, from separate pages, jumped out and instantly assembled themselves into a kind of mantra:

Look for the good in people.
Aging is part of Calvary.
Mary couldn’t see the road ahead.

I liked having the notebook nearby. Every time I looked at it, I thought of Sister Emelita and the mantra. I used the blank pages to keep track of the birds I saw from my porch and on my walks. Scarlet tanager. Cedar waxwing. Hawks, vultures, owls.

I kept hoping that my spiritual director would be more forthcoming, but as the days rolled by there was nothing from his end at all. I sincerely tried to be open and honest: nothing. I told him my heart was burning within me, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus: nothing. I copped to my pettiness, my irritation, even my concerns about the Mass: nothing. My “desert” had shaped up to be of a completely different kind than I’d expected. I’d gotten rid of half my belongings, and I wasn’t going to get even a drop of water. I’d come hoping for a moment of peace, and I’d been in more or less continual suffering, with no peace, since I arrived. I kept thinking of that passage from the Gospels: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Matthew 12:39).

The day before I left, I went, one last time, to talk to my spiritual director. There he sat in a long-sleeved plaid shirt, a spidery, hunched-over figure drinking water from a white plastic cup. Six days a week noon Mass; Sundays at 9. His was a life the usefulness of which I had always felt I would stake my life on. But what if he had wasted it? What if I were wasting mine?

I thanked him. I said how much I had gotten out of my time there, which was true. I had learned that I was not a hermit. I had learned that I had no “special” vocation to solitude or prayer. In the oppressive heat, in the gone-wrong silence, in the perceived lack of fellow feeling, I had seen that my place was among people: trudging to Mass; communing with my fellow sober alcoholic/addicts, shoring up my dear, loyal friends — chief among them Ellen — just as they shored up me.

I saw that I had come out to the desert hoping to get closer to God, and God had fried my fingers off of him. I had come out, at least in part, hoping to avoid the tension of writing — the sticky arena of self-promotion, the inglorious world of publishing, a culture that values writing, if at all, as a means to become a celebrity, not as a vocation — and the message I’d “heard” was: That tension is your life.

I’d hoped there’d be more. I had hoped to gain a foothold. I had hoped to “hear” something else in the silence.

I packed up my notebooks and icons and bird guides and left the next day. I saw a pair of white-tailed deer on the way out, and the pond with the pale pink lily pads, and a golden-fronted flicker.

“Love you. Miss you.” wrote Frederick Buechner in The Longing for Home.

I pulled out onto the highway. Look for the good in people. Aging is part of Calvary. Mary couldn’t see the road ahead.
ONE OF MY SPECIAL worthless talents is memorizing inspirational quotes. “Success is a journey, not a destination.” I even ordered letters off the Internet so I could stick this quote on the front-room wall: “To those who much is given, much is expected in return.” That’s a paraphrase from the Gospel of Luke, but I’m not sure it was intended to get someone to pick up their room.

I recite inspirational quotes to my kids so often they sometimes come back to me. When I congratulated my 5-year-old for jumping off the diving board this summer, she turned to me and said, “Mom, it’s easy. You just have to face your fears.”

I think about quotes when I’m struggling, although what I really need isn’t a quote on the front-room wall but a hug. This year I needed lots of hugs, but I was so mad at my primary hugger that I could just spit, and my husband was so mad at me he beamed the television with the remote, thereby adding the line-item “replacement television due to emotional response” to our renovation budget.

Last year my husband stood in our outdated kitchen, the one I was supposed to renovate six years ago when we bought the house, and tried once again to make toast. As he once again stormed down the stairs to the fuse box, muttering grown-up words, the children and I once again scurried around the house turning off all the lights. I realized in one of those “aha moments” that I couldn’t put it off any longer. It was time for a change. It was time to face my fears. We needed a new kitchen.

Picking out appliances, tile, counters and cabinets was exciting. Realizing how much we could spend on a refrigerator was not. Demolishing something that has worked (although not well) for 40 years or more, redesigning, rebuilding and trying to be positive about the entire process was exhausting. Our kitchen renovation was also an exercise in self-aggrandizement. How did I ever think I could manage to pull this one off?

Other excitement: Ripping apart our home, tucking my children into their beds as water dripped through holes in the walls of their rooms, cursing electricians who walked into my bedroom while I was still in it, picking up cigarette butts decorating the backyard and Styrofoam Dunkin’ Donuts coffee cups decorating the front room, and looking a strange man in the eye and saying calmly, “I have never seen you before, I have no idea who you are or why you are standing in my hallway taking your medication.”

“Mom, it’s easy. You just have to face your fears.”

Right, okay, that’s all I needed to know, stay out of my bedroom.

As stranger after stranger showed up in my house, they would all tell me how patient I was, how difficult it must be to live through the dust and the work, what a saint I was for putting up with all this. They had no idea what I said about them when they couldn’t hear me. I am not a saint. And the only saint I’m still talking to is the one who gives me the strength to tell the contractors, “I don’t care what you call it, there is no way in hell I’m paying for that.”

The only advice I want to share with others contemplating a renovation: “Don’t do it.”

But then I had another one of those “aha moments,” this one at my kid’s hockey camp. Next to the sign on the weight-room wall that read, “Success is a journey, not a destination,” was another inspirational quote, “The largest room in your house is the room for improvement.”

As I stood there sweating in the Minnesota heat listening to the coach’s orientation speech and searching for the sign on the weight-room wall that read, “Just don’t do it,” I realized that was not the sort of advice I would pay someone to give my kid at hockey camp. I also realized I should pay attention, not to the coach who was talking about water safety and bugs and other camp stuff, but to the truth.

In the evenings, I find that our family gathers in our new kitchen; the space brings us together. Last night my daughter sat at the kitchen island with her head bowed over her homework and my husband gave out hugs before sitting down to check his email at the table, where my son was working on a Legos project. As I was prepping our evening meal, my 5-year-old raced up to me and asked, “Can I help you make the dinner, Mommy?”

Despite all the anger and the tears, my embarrassing breakdown over the flecks in the island countertop, all the pages torn out of magazines and the hours spent on details and decisions, the cigarette butts and Styrofoam coffee cups, the effort to create a dream kitchen, something perfect, our new kitchen isn’t perfect. The space is constrained by budgets and boundaries, by flecks and the extra two-and-a-half feet of space I will never find. Still, every morning when I walk downstairs, the new kitchen makes me happy.

Once I’ve finally surrendered to how much we paid for the refrigerator, I think I might order some more sticky letters off the Internet. I’ll put them on the kitchen wall: “Sometimes in life, it is time to make toast.”
Plan for your future and take care of your loved ones by participating in the Notre Dame Endowment. Invested and managed by Notre Dame's top-tier investment team, life-income gifts create a significant income stream for the rest of your life and a personal legacy to the University to last forever.

To learn more about creating your legacy through the Love Thee Notre Dame initiative, please contact the Senior Director of Gift Planning, Greg Dugard, at (877) 631-8631 or gdugard@nd.edu.