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Voices Raised, Issue 42

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The Adventure of a Lifetime



Laura Huber

In the summer of 2013, Laura Huber, a senior and triple major at UD (international studies, political science and Spanish) embarked on a month-long trip to Liberia. What started as a trip to conduct research for her honors thesis, studying the impact of UN peacekeeping missions on local women's empowerment efforts, turned into a transformative experience.

When asked why she chose Liberia, Huber explains, "After the country's 14 years of civil war, women played a very important role in bringing about peace. UN peacekeeping missions there contain the first and longest deployment of all-female peacekeepers."

With the exception of the people in Liberia contacted via email prior to her trip, Huber went on this adventure alone, "which was extremely intimidating," she says. "I didn't know any other person in the country, but I was lucky to find a support group once I arrived."

Huber describes Liberia as a "beautiful country with a very sad recent history." As a postconflict society, Liberia faces challenges other countries do not, such as unpaved streets, buildings made of sheet metal and only one traffic light in the capital of Monrovia, where she stayed for the

month. There was definitely some culture shock for Huber during her stay. The language barrier was the most difficult hurdle. Liberian English is a mix of southern American English and local Pidgin.

Huber conducted more than 40 interviews on her trip, speaking with international residents working with the UN and humanitarian agencies, but also participated in social activities. "I did something different each weekend. Once, I went to the beach with some UN police and other researchers to play beach volleyball," she recalls.

Huber ends by saying, "Liberia was the most impactful experience I have had in my life so far. I am more aware of world issues and my own blessings. It has confirmed my passion to help women in postconflict societies empower themselves.

"There is a huge world outside of our lives at UD. We could learn so much by listening to people's stories."

Huber still carries some Liberian money with her at all times as a reminder of her experience and her good fortune.

Associate Professor Natalie Hudson has worked closely with Huber during her undergraduate studies; she says Huber is "one of the brightest and bravest undergraduates that I have had the pleasure of working with. She has a bright future ahead of her."

— Sam Hamilton '14, English major

Learn more about the peace movement in Liberia by attending the University of Dayton Speaker Series event in January.

Leymah Gbowee

Founding president of the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa and co-recipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for leading a women's peace movement that helped end the civil war in Liberia. Presented as part of the annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday celebration.

**Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2014
7 p.m.
Kennedy Union ballroom**



Leymah Gbowee

PROFILES

Follow Your Heart



Alecia Smith

Alecia Smith, coordinator of alcohol and other drugs prevention education, enrolled at Central Michigan University to study interior design and beautify rooms; now she stands in rooms filled with UD students and educates them about high-risk drinking and the effects it can have. This shift may seem drastic, but Smith just stayed true to what her personality and her heart seemed to lead her to do.

After living in Pinconning, Mich., and attending Central Michigan University for her undergraduate degree and Grand Valley State University for her master's degree, Smith migrated to Dayton after it "popped up" in a national job search. With a background in student affairs, leadership, and substance abuse prevention, education, early prevention and treatment, Smith pursued the subjects that made her feel like she was making a difference.

This pursuit catalyzed after a scheduling fluke.

"I was originally going to school for counseling, but I saw the position open at Grand Valley to do this work and I knew it was what I wanted to do more than counseling. So, that sort of led me into a student affairs position," Smith explains. "[Programming] definitely fits my personality more."

About 70 percent of Smith's work consists of prevention programming, part of which includes a program called Alcohol and Women that addresses the fact that alcohol affects women differently than men. What she speaks about and what she does every day influences her outside life, just as much as her outside life has influenced what she does.

Smith elaborates, "I think more of my work affects the people in my life, and what I do. Talking about alcohol and talking about high-risk drinking and substance abuse kind of affected me more as I got older, influencing who I decided to keep in my life as friends."

Educating and influencing people on the risks of drinking is sometimes similar to dealing with her newly adopted cat, that Smith describes as a "holy terror" currently "tearing up" the rooms of her home. She tries desperately to tame the behavior and readily admits she may have underestimated the responsibility. However, whether she is preventing high-risk drinking or destruction of a room, Smith is determined to make a difference — or at least do everything she can to try.

Smith recently turned 25 and shared that she received a sentimental card from her father expressing his pride: "I am so proud of you for doing what you love and making it your job."







'I am so proud of you for doing what you love and making it your job.'

— Amanda Dee '16
English and journalism major

It's a Bird. It's a Plane. No, it's Mentor Woman.



Sitting at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) annual conference listening to a presentation about Nassau Community College's Mentoring Moms program in their campus childcare center, my mind drifts to how many examples of women mentoring and being mentored I've witnessed in just the past two weeks. I quickly jot down:

-  Two "initial training sessions" for the mentors and mentees in the women's center's mentoring program for faculty and staff women. These women (and one man) will soon join more than 200 alumni of the program.
-  An ongoing email exchange between concerned UD faculty and staff asking about lactation spaces on campus for their mothering colleagues (more to come on that topic in a future issue of *Voices Raised*).
-  Continuous discussions with Associate Provost Deb Bickford about leadership development opportunities for women.
-  Twenty-five UD women (including five graduate students), sponsored by the women's center attending the ACE Women's Network – Ohio annual conference, *Moving the Needle: Advancing Women in Higher Education*, where they learned from and networked with 170 women from other Ohio institutions, including five university presidents.
-  A Start Smart compensation negotiation workshop for women engineering majors.
-  Networking and knowledge-sharing among women's center staff from across the country at the NWSA women's center's preconference.

These are just some examples that came immediately to mind when I reflected on the past two weeks. What's not recorded here is all the informal mentoring that occurs on a daily basis among UD women. We all are engaged in mentoring, which is why this article is a profile of — drumroll please — "Mentor Woman."

Mentor Woman assumes many identities. She is often a faculty or staff woman; other times, a student. She is rarely in a formal mentoring role, instead doing most of her work under the guise of teacher, colleague or supervisor. MW is rarely identifiable by her clothing, eschewing cape and mask for attire that allows her to blend in. She may not even think of herself as a mentor. What sets MW apart — and elevates her to everyday hero status — is her willingness to share her time, experience and knowledge for the growth of other women. At the same time, she absorbs knowledge and learning, ensuring that healthy, reciprocal mentoring is occurring. Because any woman can be Mentor Woman, she is anywhere and everywhere. In fact, there is a good chance she is reading this article right now ...



— Lisa Rismiller, Director,
Women's Center

“It would have killed you.”

By Carolyn S. Ridenour, Professor and
Bro. Joseph J. Panzer, S.M., Chair in Education



Carolyn Ridenour

“It would have killed you.” In his subdued, gentle, but crystal clear, deep tone of voice, Dr. Moroney’s response on that cold spring morning in 2011 haunts me still.

I’ve got no pink ribbons, but please hear my story.


It was September 2010. I was eagerly looking forward to a sabbatical leave to begin after Christmas with plans to write all the way through summer 2011. I was appointed to an endowed professor position that month. All was going well — better than well.

I was healthy. I regularly worked out in our home gym; my husband George, a faculty member in health and sport science, is a great trainer who could give me pointers on the way I lifted weights or did stretches or hit the heavy bag. I practiced healthy eating. A vegetarian, I was always challenged to find sources of protein and so ate fish occasionally, as well as lots of tofu. In my late 60s, I was pleased with the way I felt as an aging woman.

Throughout that fall, I felt some intermittent slight discomfort in my pelvic area and lower abdomen. A slight burning perhaps, but it was nothing I could not handle. I’m tuned in to my body and tolerate pain well, as do most women. The discomfort did not bother me. I attributed it to remnants of a stress fracture from a training injury I’d suffered in the left side of my pelvic bone about eight months earlier. With an explanation for the slight discomfort, I could have let it go.

But one October day, I found three or four tiny spots on my underwear. Pinkish, very slight, almost imperceptible. Actually, had the underwear not been white I might not have noticed it at all. “Now that was odd,” I thought. “Is this anything?” I had to almost squint to make sure it wasn’t my imagination. I could very well have let it go.

A couple of weeks passed before I called Richard Scharrer, M.D., my gynecologist of many years. He examined me and did a Pap test. I got a call a few days later to come in for a transvaginal ultrasound test. Painful. Results led to a hysteroscopy and polyp resection at Good Samaritan Hospital on Dec. 3. Basically, that’s a biopsy. This outpatient procedure was on Friday, the day



before our extended family was scheduled to come for a Christmas family holiday reunion at our home. George and I (I, tearfully) decided to cancel this reunion that had been months in the planning. About 15 minutes before my 7:20 class on Tuesday evening, Dec. 7, Dr. Scharrer called to tell me I had “hyperplasia of the endometrium” — basically an overgrowth of the lining of the uterus which was potentially, but not likely, cancerous. He referred me to John W. Moroney, M.D., at Miami Valley Hospital’s Gynecologic Oncology Center. I rushed to class, but taught that night in a distracted fog.

George and I met with Dr. Moroney and he talked with us for well over an hour, explaining the da Vinci robotic surgery procedure for a total hysterectomy along with possible removal of selected surrounding lymph nodes. Ultimate diagnosis would be made during and after the surgery that was done on Dec. 28.

After one night in the hospital, George and I went home to a quiet but painful and anxious week of recovery. Exactly one week from the day of the surgery, Dr. Moroney called me and immediately said, “I’ve got very good news for you.” The diagnosis was uterine cancer, stage one, and there was no need for follow-up chemotherapy or radiation. The uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries and several surrounding lymph nodes were removed. Biopsy during the surgery found no atypical cells in the lymph nodes. In essence, the hysterectomy was, if not the cure, the treatment at this point. I was put on a schedule of pelvic exams every three months for a year, and then exams at expanding intervals over a period of five years. So, my sabbatical leave turned out to be far less productive in scholarly writing than I’d planned, and was rather a time of healing and gratitude.

“**It would have killed you**” was Dr. Moroney’s answer to the questions I asked during a follow-up visit: What would have happened if I hadn’t checked out that discomfort? What if I hadn’t noticed those few tiny pinkish spots?

My message: Even if you think it’s nothing, check it out. Even if friends and family tell you you’re overreacting, check it out. **Your body is telling you something.** Wear white underwear. According to Beka Abraham, nurse practitioner at the Gynecologic Oncology Center, “Any bleeding after menopause is abnormal. *Any bleeding at all.*” Call your doctor and make an appointment at the slightest symptoms. Don’t hesitate even if you think it’s probably nothing. Hopefully it will be.

While I’ve got no pink ribbons — which still we sorely need — tune in to your body. Notice things. Push well-meaning people out of the way if you have to. Check it out!

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Ask Dr. B.

Raise Your Awareness of Endometrial Cancer

Approximately 49,600 cases of endometrial cancer are diagnosed each year in the U.S. It is the most common cancer of the female reproductive organs, exceeding the number of ovarian and cervical cancers combined. About 8,000 women per year die from uterine cancer, with half of cases occurring in women aged 50-69. The most common symptom is any vaginal bleeding after menopause. Risk factors include family history, older age, higher estrogen levels (from medication, obesity or higher number of lifetime menstrual cycles), high-fat diet and some medical conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome and breast, ovarian or some colon cancers. Protective factors include pregnancies, lower-fat diet, exercise and use of oral contraceptives or IUDs. The American Institute for Cancer Research estimates that 59 percent of endometrial cancers could be prevented by being at a healthy weight and physically active (though, as Professor Ridenour notes, even women who are careful about diet and exercise can develop this cancer).

Remember, any vaginal bleeding after menopause should be evaluated. It can save your life.

– Dr. Mary Buchwalder
UD Health Center

For more information concerning ovarian cancer as well as other cancers, please visit:



The American Cancer Society
cancer.org

American Institute for Cancer Research
aicr.org

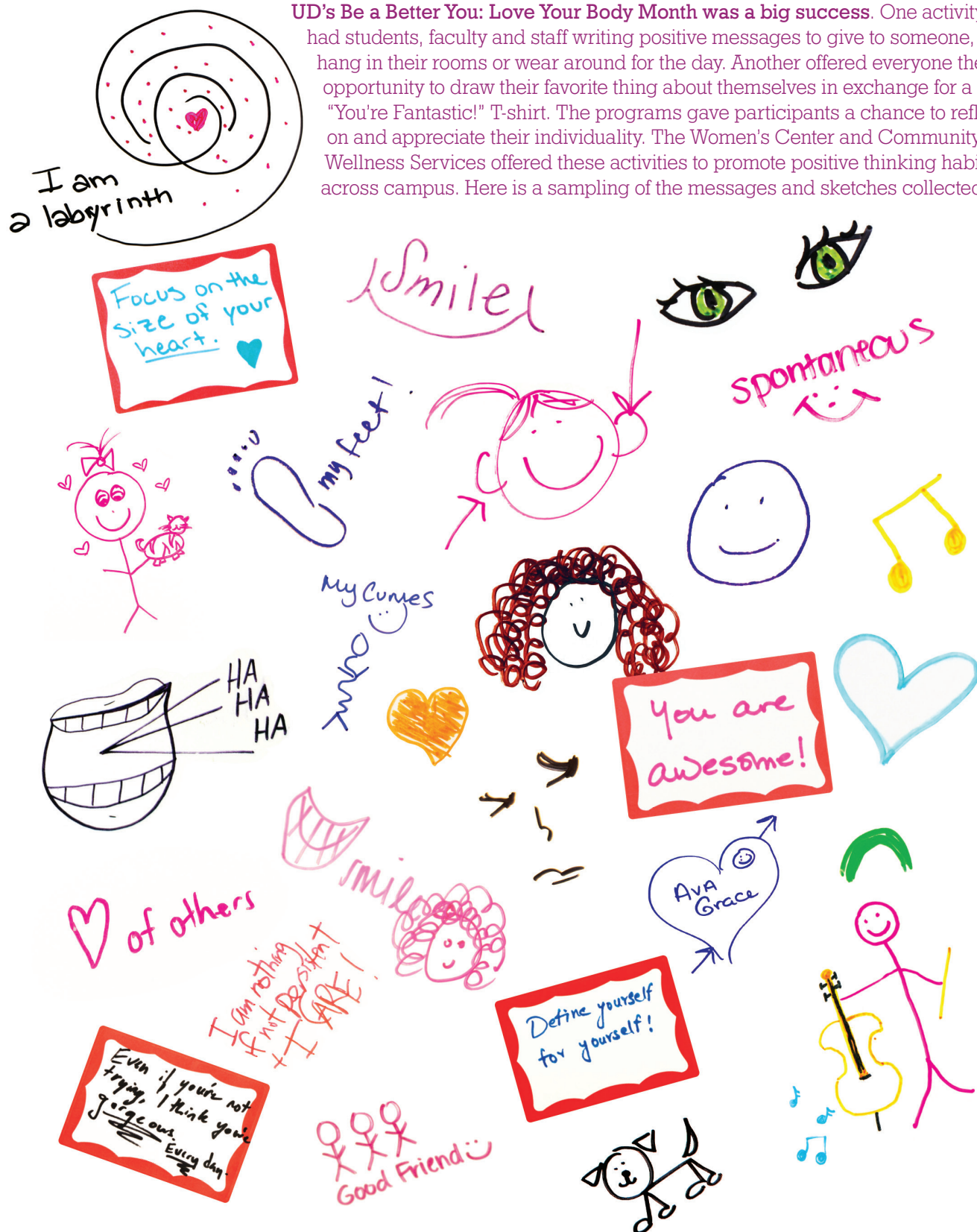
AMERICAN INSTITUTE for
CANCER RESEARCH



Susan G. Komen for the Cure
komen.org

VOICES HEARD

UD's Be a Better You: Love Your Body Month was a big success. One activity had students, faculty and staff writing positive messages to give to someone, hang in their rooms or wear around for the day. Another offered everyone the opportunity to draw their favorite thing about themselves in exchange for a free "You're Fantastic!" T-shirt. The programs gave participants a chance to reflect on and appreciate their individuality. The Women's Center and Community Wellness Services offered these activities to promote positive thinking habits across campus. Here is a sampling of the messages and sketches collected.



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Lisa Rismiller and her friends Nick (left) and Gary.

Like other UD volunteers, I signed up for the Center for International Programs' International Friendship Family (IFF) Program to do my part to welcome and assist our international students. My "family" consists of two young Chinese men, Qiyuan (Gary) Sun and Xiaoqi (Nick) Guan. Both are MBA students with bottomless curiosity about American culture and desire to experience as much of it as possible before returning home to live and work. Over lunches at the Dayton Greek festival, my favorite taco joint and a trip to the local Asian market, we spent many long hours discussing a wide range of topics. Where we were on 9/11 and how it impacted us. They had many other questions. What motivates American volunteerism and

charitable giving? Why are so many Americans overweight? How do you order in an American-style restaurant? What is a cupcake? How do American parents relate to their children's significant others? Where should they go to get their hair "cleaned up" (i.e. a haircut)? Why do Americans eat such tiny carrots? I have undoubtedly learned as much about Chinese culture as they have about America. Our discussions forced me to reflect on aspects of my life that, frankly, I've never given any thought. Explaining my culture definitely requires me to think about the "why" of daily American life in new ways and keeps me on the path of lifelong learning that is central to Marianist teaching. Gary described a similar experience: "The most useful thing we learn is about how to be a good student. In [China], you should be the top of your class or your school to be called a good student. But my family program adviser, Lisa, told me doing your best is the best way to reflect you are a good student, which made me surprised and changed my learning style."

I hope Gary, Nick and I continue our mutual learning and growth long after our formal IFF commitment ends. Nick captured it well when he said, "[because of IFF] we can learn some American culture, and it is important and beneficial for us. I [now] know some American thoughts on things, therefore I can broaden my horizons and change my thoughts."

My horizons have been broadened too, young friends, thank you for that. And thanks, CIP, for giving us this opportunity.