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**MAGISTER**

For more than 40 years, John Wickstrom has breathed life into medieval history for countless students. He and some of his former students reflect on his long tenure at "K."

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**RED ROVER**

A Space Grant launched our MAKE STUFF-founder into a memorable (and Mars-focused) internship at the JPL.

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**VOYAGER**

Mark White '80 is circumnavigating the globe. Feels like old "K" times.

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**MUCH INVOLVED**

Two majors and a whole lotta co-curricular doings make "K" the perfect place for senior Eric Aiken.

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The new women's tennis coach boasts an impressive pedigree, complete with a Hornet connection.

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Writer-in-Residence Di Seuss and 17 "K" students publish poems in the *TSP*.

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**ARE WE THERE YET?**

For three freshmen (children of "K" employees) the long journey to college is a neighborhood walk.

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**EXTRAORDINARY RESILIENCE**

Psychiatrist (and former "K" student) Kristen Welch has served as a trauma counselor in Rwanda

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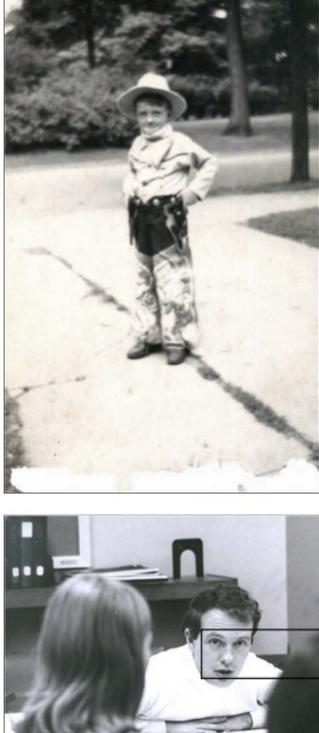
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## MAGISTER

by Zinta Aisters



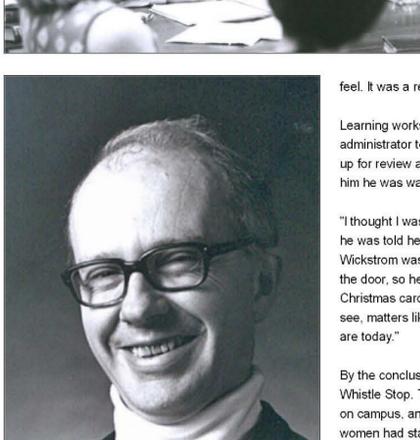
A drop in the stock market, recession in Michigan's auto industry, rising inflation, and falling enrollment in colleges and universities. Today's news headlines? Nope. This was the status quo of the 1960s, when a young new history instructor began his career at Kalamazoo College.

John Wickstrom, professor of history and, until 2007, chair of the department, was, in 1966, a young Yale ABD, barely into his twenties, hired to teach classical and medieval history. By some measures, little has changed since then. History, it is said, repeats itself. By other measures, almost everything has changed.

In 2009, Wickstrom sits in his corner office with photographs and quirky cartoons and medieval drawings taped to his door. And a sign: "Daily Confessions. 5 - 7" invites just that from the students who seek his advice, or simply drop by to exchange, well, confessions.

Wickstrom confesses to the occasional twitch of nostalgia. When he began his 43-year career at Kalamazoo, Weimer Hicks was president and the "K Plan" was bringing the college national recognition for its new-fangled pedagogy - sending the student out into the world rather than trying to fit the world into a classroom. By 1968, chapel services had become more secular activities, and attendance was no longer mandatory. For the first time, female students were allowed to wear slacks to class, and their dormitory curfews (exclusive, and unfairly so, to their gender) were eliminated. The campus was growing up.

"When I first began to teach at Kalamazoo," Wickstrom muses, "some 20 or so of us [faculty] used to meet for coffee regularly. We would eat lunch together most every day, and on Fridays, we'd troop down to The Whistle Stop for drinks. And yes, now and then, we'd get ourselves thrown out."

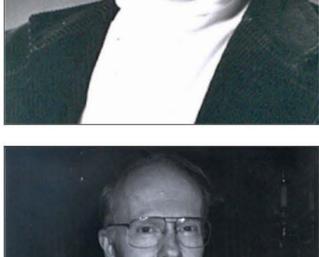


It's apparent from Wickstrom's delicious chuckle that he enjoyed those days. Now, he brings them up not only as a memory of a good party among colleagues, but as an illustration of a camaraderie he feels is somewhat lost in today's Kalamazoo College. "We were a tight-knit group, and we got a lot of business done during that socializing."

Some things, however, needed changing. The first pop of the "K bubble," as Wickstrom terms it, was provided by the women's movement. Wickstrom admits now, "I didn't realize how male-dominated our campus felt to women. It was only during a recent lunch gathering at which I was one of two males among some 15 female faculty that I got a real sense of how that must feel. It was a revelation."

Learning works both ways. Teacher to student, student to teacher. Sometimes, from administrator to teacher, too. Wickstrom would face another revelation when he was up for review after his first year at the college. The provost called him in and told him he was wanted at the president's office.

"I thought I was doing well," Wickstrom shrugs. But called to President Hick's office, he was told he was not. He was told instead that his contract would be terminated. Wickstrom was caught by surprise, but no one seemed to remember to show him the door, so he kept going to class, kept teaching. "Three years later, I got a Christmas card from the president, telling me I had been awarded tenure. So, you see, matters like retention and tenure were handled a bit more informally than they are today."



By the conclusion of the 1970s, faculty had stopped going to what was then The Whistle Stop. The gatherings became ever sparser. There was a changing dynamic on campus, and part of it, Wickstrom says, was the split between genders. More women had started teaching at Kalamazoo College, and among them, Gail Griffin, English professor who brought an awareness of women's issues to the campus.

The two long-timers, both now icons of "K," would sometime circle each other with opposing views, one leaning traditional, the other leaning liberal, but the respect was and remains strong and mutual. "Achieving diversity can be tough," Wickstrom admits. And then there was technology. "It has a way of isolating people. Today, instead of meeting over lunches, we have microwaves in our offices to warm a meal, and we eat alone, looking at our computer screens."

Nevertheless, however much the College changed, Wickstrom states, being at Kalamazoo College, you knew you were always at an unusual, different kind of place. The "odd" calendar of four quarters, he says, was eventually a financial drain on the College, but it was always "intellectually great." Freshman maintained a concentrated focus, while older students were out exploring the beyond, testing their intellectual prowess in the world. There was a freer, informal atmosphere of the summer quarters, Wickstrom says, with fewer faculty and mostly upper class students on campus.

"We are still known for our study abroad plan," he says. "Although today it is a less novel approach." As for the students of yesterday and today, Wickstrom has high praise. "Our students today are sharper than ever. They are independently minded, eager to go places. Granted, some don't seem to be trained as well on how to write academically when they first come in - missing the footnotes, short on the research - but by the time they are writing their SIPs, they are very good. Many as good as students I taught at Yale, some even better. I am very happy with current students' level of excellence."



While still teaching many of the same topics as when he began - mostly medieval and early modern history - Wickstrom feels it is the approach to history that changes. He subscribes to the thought that one must understand where one has been to move forward. "We do best when we keep a connection to our past. It builds continuity. This is a time when we need to reflect on where we have been. We need to understand our past so that we know how to talk to future generations. The past itself, of course, does not change, but how we present it changes tremendously. Cultural contexts have changed, cultural issues, agendas... it's gotten very complicated. You can't teach history in an unconscious way. History must be taught to be relevant today."

For instance, Wickstrom explains, when he decides what to teach and how, he considers the question of authority. It could be argued that history is an opinion, after all, a changing perspective, depending on the point where one stands in time. "People however, don't want to hear an opinion about history; they want to hear the truth. There are, of course, cultural suppositions and personal bias in how we approach anything. Still, I believe in the possibility of, if not truth, at least a greater 'fullness' in apprehending the past. At some point, you have to respect authorities that have established themselves as trustworthy. Being a professional matters. Peer review matters. Learning and teaching in a free country with freedom of expression matters. All these help us approach the past with integrity and sensitivity."



It is at this place of deciding on which authority to trust, in fact, that Wickstrom finds the greatest value in a liberal arts education. He explains: "The value of liberal arts is to be broadly enough educated that you have learned how to filter truth from opinion, to sort through information and recognize what to accept as truth."

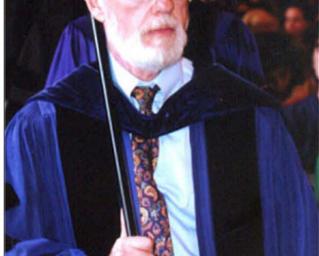
And Kalamazoo College, too, Wickstrom says, must remain aware of its history. "The ethic at Kalamazoo College is to make the world a better place. In order to accomplish that, we must understand, through history, what this College is and how it came to be what it is about. We need continuity here, too. When we encounter a new idea, we have no trouble trying the new if we have a strong connection to our past. We've changed our identity at Kalamazoo College; we are no longer a Baptist College for training teachers and preachers. Our rather swift transformation into a secular liberal arts College surely helped us survive and prosper. But whether we have replaced that original mission with an equally well-defined identity that will secure our future I am not so certain."

Wickstrom suddenly recalls a student in his classroom, perhaps some 20 years ago, illustrating this very concept - "the need for reflecting on what has been learned in the past before moving forward. "A bright student, but quite troubled," he says. "I wasn't sure if he would make it here. The class was taking an exam in Greek history, an hour and a half, and this student sat and sat, gazing into space, lost in thought, while the others wrote from the first moment. He seemed in no hurry whatsoever, only sat and stared. And then suddenly he was writing - feverishly. To this day, that was the best exam I have ever read."

Wickstrom expresses little regret, if any, at his one-foot-still-in, one-foot-already-out retirement. Despite the seismic changes in thinking about history, there is still a certain repetition to teaching any subject, after all. So he muses on spending more time on academic work, research and writing. He is letting go little by little, no longer teaching full-time, but retiring "gradually."

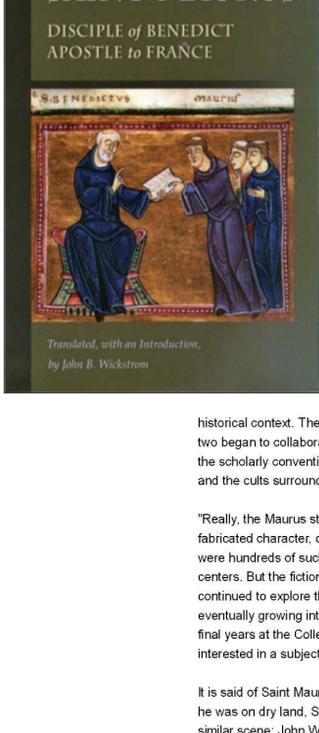
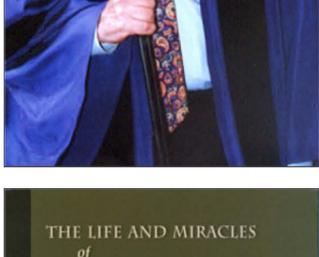
"If I am feeling any disappointment now," he says, "it is that I wish our academic atmosphere in the classroom would permeate into philosophy conversations more. Now and then I hear students discussing a point in philosophy or an idea for a history paper in the Dewing hallway rather than just plans for the weekend. That gives me hope."

And he muses on another memory: his painstaking scholarship, some recently to fruition with publication of his new book - *The Life and Miracles of Saint Maurus* (December 2008). During sabbatical some 15 years ago Wickstrom sat in on an art history class at The University of Michigan. A medieval painting portraying Saint Maurus engaged his imagination, and Wickstrom wrote about the work in an historical context. The professor was enthusiastic about Wickstrom's first foray into art history writing, and the two began to collaborate: Wickstrom helping the professor with Latin translations while she helped him with the scholarly conventions of writing art history. He then began publishing scholarly work about Saint Maurus and the cults surrounding the Benedictine monk.



"Really, the Maurus story was all a pious fiction" Wickstrom smiles. "Saint Maurus is probably an entirely fabricated character, created by an ambitious abbot who needed a famous founder for his monastery. There were hundreds of such stories about saints that were made up, just to build these connections and create cult centers. But the fiction can tell you a great deal about the art and the culture that produced it." Wickstrom continued to explore the stories, fiction or fact, woven around the saint, a paper for an art history class eventually growing into a book, and the book eventually growing into a seminar Wickstrom would teach in his final years at the College. "My discovery of St. Maurus is what I hope my students can experience: Get interested in a subject and then follow it through, wherever it leads."

It is said of Saint Maurus that he miraculously saved a fellow disciple, Saint Placid, from drowning. Thinking he was on dry land, Saint Maurus walked on water and pulled the disciple out by his hair. One imagines a similar scene: John Wickstrom, pulling the placid student from drowning in intellectually-slack indifference, then setting him on solid (and demanding) academic shores.



"History is a living re-imagining of the past. Your perspective changes depending on where you find yourself," she says. "History is our Rorschach test, revealing us today as much as it reveals about our past."

Elaine fondly recalls small but savory details of her professor-husband's past: the batches of his famous chocolate-cherry cookies he bakes each quarter for his students, and classes invited to the house for a historical debate and discussion. "He has his zealous fans, his groupies," she says, herself included.

She's also a fan of liberal arts. "It's the best educational approach," she says. "Its breadth of understanding makes better citizens. Everyone needs the perspective of the self within history to understand who and what you are. Kalamazoo College, and John, do an exceptional job of providing that perspective."

### Tributes

**Vicki Szabo '92**

"I think what I appreciated most about Dr. Wickstrom was his seriousness of purpose. There was a sobriety about his presence, but also a soft-spoken wit. Class felt like an event to me - I began to really look forward to the certainty of new discovery. I felt like we were privileged to be there (given his seriousness and clear passion for the subject). There seemed to be a real importance to what we were studying."

**Dr. Wickstrom**

"Dr. Wickstrom made me a better student because I had to rise to the occasion. His classes were fascinating and relevant. I developed a real passion for history beginning with his classes. That passion is what I think I am best at communicating to my own students."

**He put up with my silly youthful fascinations with Arthurian Britain, but moved me ever so steadily from popular conceptions of history into serious ideas of what history is and what historians do. Rather than quell my passion and naysay my research ideas, which were a bit flighty, he suggested more challenging and serious topics, including monastic history and archaeology.**

**"He encouraged me - very thoughtfully and wisely - to pursue archaeology. This shaped my research. My research skills, gained at Kalamazoo in history, and in the field as an archaeologist, got me into a PhD program at Cornell and helped me stand out in the job market thereafter.**

**"He inspired me and encouraged me to become a medieval historian, a decision I didn't make lightly - I went into this discipline with my eyes open, because of him. I realized the difficulty, but also the rewards. I will also hold him up as the archetype of a historian and medievalist.**

**"I still keep in touch with Dr. Wickstrom (still can't call him John; and always Dr. Wickstrom) now and again - mostly because I know he is furiously busy, as am I with teaching and work. We e-mail once and a while, and I was sorry to hear of his upcoming retirement, but I know this will only mean retirement in a symbolic way. I know his work will continue." [Szabo is associate professor of ancient and medieval history at Western Carolina University.]**

**Josh Boggs '07**

"My first class with Professor Wickstrom was 'History of England to 1688,' which I took in the spring of 2004. I knew very little about medieval history, and spent much of the time in half-fear of the professor, whose Viking appearance and dry wit (especially regarding tardy classmates, inept kings, and the weather) bespoke the sort of academia to which one aspires. At any rate, I was a business major, and mostly interested in early American history, so this class was more of a curiosity for me."

**"Two years later, I had taken more courses with Professor Wickstrom, and had become fascinated with medieval history. He had a remarkable ability to discover revelatory tidbits within the vast field of medieval studies. Because the medievalist must teach a period of over a thousand years, it is a business of painting vast landscapes while researching the minute strokes. Many times Professor Wickstrom would interrupt his own lectures to point out a new idea which had suddenly occurred after many years of teaching the same subject. Do you see what I'm saying," he would ask as he explained the idea, inviting us into one of those little revelations that make history so vital.**

**"This patience, or willingness to accept inspiration as a product of due diligence, is what I chiefly recall when I think of Professor Wickstrom. When a student approached him with some new idea or trivial fact, he would carefully listen, and often smile. 'Oh yes, I see.' As my SIP advisor, he would likewise hear out my thoughts or read through my drafts, offer some reflection on the subject - more encouragement, really - and send me back to the books, saying 'Well, go forth.' In that same understated way, he helped me find a program and make the decision about grad school - and then casually offered many of his own books to me and a fellow classmate - something for which I am forever grateful. I am quite sure that I would never have had the courage to seek out a career in history without his quiet encouragement."**

**"We do best when we keep a connection to our past."**

**Linda Ketelaar '69**

"I attended Kalamazoo College from 1965 through 1969. My major was medieval history. I have spent the bulk of my post-K work in IT. An MS in information science from Drexel University led me into this career."

"I still recall the lecture Dr. Wickstrom gave on Caligula, Claudius, and Nero as being so enthralling - beyond facts and figures - that I was inspired to learn more history and specifically from Dr. Wickstrom. This led me to craft a course of study with Medieval History as the focus associated with complementary courses in literature, art and music."

**"Dr. Wickstrom's interest in the subject and continuity with expressing this interest inspired a number of classmates in my years at Kalamazoo to continue pursuing history in post-grad settings. I have retained my fascination with ancient and medieval history to this day - an acknowledgement of having an inspiring professor 40 years ago!"**

**Elizabeth Leigh Platte '07**

"I graduated from Kalamazoo College in 2007 with a major in Classical Studies and minors in Latin and History. Since then, I have been a student in the PhD program in Greek and Roman History at the University of Michigan. When I started at Kalamazoo in 2003, I knew that I would major in Classical Studies. My focus on ancient history came about largely from the impact of Dr. Wickstrom."

**"In my first quarter I took his course 'The Fall of Rome and the Early Middle Ages,' which inspired my interest in Late Antiquity, the period from 300 to 600 CE and the focus of my graduate studies. While I was in the course, Dr. Wickstrom became my advisor, and, as such, had a huge influence on my experience at 'K.' He was a caring and considerate advisor who not only pointed me in the right direction, but also pushed me to go further than what was comfortable - and this was essential to my accomplishments.**

**"Writing papers for Dr. Wickstrom was always an ordeal because I knew that he demanded high standards. I was always able to write on a topic that was important to me, so I was encouraged to produce quality papers for my own benefit, which was something that Dr. Wickstrom's courses introduced to me. Perhaps his most significant impact on my academic experience was the guidance he provided while I was applying to graduate schools. Without him, I would have been lost during the process.**

**"Now that I am in graduate school, I've gained a deeper appreciation for Dr. Wickstrom as a professor. He prepared me well for a graduate curriculum, especially through the medieval history seminar on hagiography that I took with him. I continue to do research on topics which he introduced in that class and have recently been in contact with him about one of my current projects which deals with the Dialogues of Pope Gregory the Great. Dr. Wickstrom is also working on that text, which we discussed in the seminar I took at 'K,' and I hope to have more conversations with him about it as my project progresses. Now that I am a graduate student instructor at the University of Michigan, I find that Dr. Wickstrom, as well as other excellent instructors I encountered at Kalamazoo College, are models for me in the way I present material and interact with my students."**

**Kyle C. Lincoln '06**

"Rarely does a teacher provide the sort of guidance that Dr. Wickstrom has given me over the brief time I've known him. 'Magister's' (as he has taken to signing himself in his e-mails) guidance has already taken so many different forms to me. Best among these cases was his advice for a paper on the Inquisition: 'Just find a part of it that turns you on and go with it.' Other examples would come quick and fast, the measure exactly enough to get me started and never too much to keep me from figuring something out for myself in the end."

**"His love for his subject is evident in his classroom style, from describing the Germanic invasions as 'biker gangs kicking ass,' to using a still shot (appropriately censored) from the movie *Caligula* as a variety of ways. Twice I've been part of a class he's invited to his house for a movie night (always topical). It's that connection to students which I think sets Magister apart from other professors. Perhaps even more impressive is his ability to make history come alive, whether it be a critical analysis of the opening scenes of the movie *Gladiator*, or a comic aside about Charlemagne's 'beer gut,' or simply coming to life in his commencement robes and being 'a medieval professor' for a day. That dedication creates little flocks of disciples every year, students that take every Wickstrom class, even if their major is math or economics."**

**Robert Stauffer, Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Anthropology**

"John and I are the same age, but he came to Kalamazoo College seven years before I did, and my first sense of him was of a brooding and even intimidating intellectual. The thick turtle-neck sweaters and dark glasses - his style at the time - contributed to this impression, as did his equally dark office and abstrac (as it seemed to me then) wit. Frankly, I was a little scared of him, yet at the same time found myself attracted to his breadth of classical learning, obvious commitment to his teaching, and - a bit later - extraordinarily literate and clever minutes of faculty governance meetings, invariably signed Scriba (Latin for 'the secretary')."

**"But it really wasn't until the early 1990s that I felt I got to know John well and came to think of him as one of my most valued colleagues. We both were involved with the seemingly endless discussions related to the curricular reform of that era, as well as with the somewhat chaotic campus politics of the time, and I came to see the true depth of John's commitment to the well-being of the college and the remarkable wisdom that informed this commitment. Probably no one else at the college has as strong a sense of both the value and the currently precarious state of a broad and deep general education in the liberal arts, and certainly no one is as courageous as John in publicly asking hard questions when such education is challenged by contemporary intellectual and pedagogical fashions. Indeed, I'd say that most of the actually serious discussions that occur in full faculty meetings are a result of penetrating questions John raises. Often (and I think unfortunately), John's position doesn't prevail (faculty are powerful forces), but even when it doesn't, I sense that most of his colleagues nonetheless recognize and respect John for this forthrightness, insight, and integrity. When John speaks, the conversation deepens, and I know that I am not alone in recognizing that."**

**"On a more personal level - and especially with regard to the last decade: when I needed advice as department chair or as a committee member - or simply needed help in making sense of developments at the college - I invariably turned to John. Even settling into his office, no longer so much dark as issues elegant, is comforting. And John's generous and careful listening, his wit, and his ability to see issues in nuanced and imaginative ways are all unfailing. (I sometimes wonder if his rich analytic imagination stems, at least in part, from his lifelong quest to make sense of the complex and "foreign" culture of the European Middle Ages.)**

**"A final point: Given John's age and perhaps even his disciplinary focus on the distant past, one might have expected a certain reluctance to join the digital age. (I know this has been true of me!) Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. John not only regularly uses digital technology in his classes - partly because he draws significantly on art in exploring the culture of the Middle Ages - but he also has become thoroughly engaged with and quite accomplished in this technology. I find this both fascinating and admirable. And as one more illustration of John's generosity, I personally have benefited enormously from his expertise and patience when, as I clumsily struggle to negotiate this brave new digital world, I turn to him for help. The help is always forthcoming, and in this too, he is a fine colleague and teacher."**

### Pictures

A young specialist in the history of the American West?

John Wickstrom through the more than four decades he devoted to Kalamazoo College students.

Wickstrom's special field of interest is hagiography, the study of medieval saints' lives and what they illuminate about the communities and cultures from which they spring. The two "Lives of Maurus" he translated were written in thorny, idiosyncratic Latin and had never before been translated from their 9th-century originals.



## RED ROVER

Junior Noah Klugman loves technology - especially after his 10-week summer Space Grant at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California, where he helped design test software for the next Mars rover.

But he also finds deeply gratifying this fact: the rover will make its way to the Red Planet by looking at the stars around it - a simple pre-tech practice as old as human wonder.

"Guided by blips of starlight passing over a sensor," Klugman ponders, shaking his head. "No matter how sophisticated your technology, the best way to get someplace is by observing your environment."

At JPL he worked under the mentorship of one of the mission managers for the current Mars rover - current, meaning that it's crawling around up there right now. That is, when it's not stuck, which it was during Klugman's internship. He witnessed the team try to get it unstuck - remotely, of course - by modeling the problem here and developing a solution.

"Very, very cool," says Klugman. Although those words do scant justice to the ineffable JPL experience. At the very least, one needs to add "crazy" and "insane," so Klugman does. Conversations about 15-foot robots or human habitats on the moon are, well, typical. "Everyone is on the edge of exploration," he says. "They have a responsibility to keep moving the edge by taking on more risky and ambitious projects. Very cool and very crazy!"

Perhaps only a newbie adventurephile like him would volunteer to write a computer script that would auto-generate a specific type of software test. If successful, the project would automate certain types of busywork and redirect hundreds of hours of human labor toward "moving the edge." Sounds great, but the "old hands" at JPL were skeptical that Klugman could do it. When he did, he was promptly offered a one-year co-op position, which he immediately accepted. Unfortunately, expanding edges are budget tethered, and the position was lost to cost reduction measures.

Klugman hopes to return to JPL next summer and then stay for a year. "You don't turn down that offer," he smiles. This plan depends, in part, on changing his Kalamazoo College major from computer science (a four-year program) to 3-2 engineering, under which a student spends three years at Kalamazoo College and two years in an engineering program at another school (usually University of Michigan or Washington University at St. Louis), afterwards earning degrees in physics (Kalamazoo College) and engineering (the other school).

If Klugman successfully switches majors, the year at JPL would fall between the three and the two. Betting against him might suggest a poor understanding of probability, not to mention his passion and persistence.

"I've been bothering everyone I can," he smiles. The change of major would mean giving up study abroad, but Klugman lived in India for three months after high school. He also managed the information technology needs of an Santa Fe-based environmental law firm, so he's had a varied career internship experience.

Should this turn out to be his final year at "K," it will not be solely occupied with change-of-major matters. Enter (or, more accurately, re-enter): *Make Stuff*, the student organization Klugman founded that employs its

"K's a place of a hundred SIPs. I've done many already!"

hands to earn its name. Last spring the group "eight or more math and physics types" made and launched a high altitude hot air balloon. It's successful maiden voyage (and swansong) ended in nearby Marshall, Michigan, but not before it reached its near space altitude goal of 90,000 feet and rendered some extraordinary aerial photography.

This fall the group (so far mostly Klugman) is making a remote controlled model airplane with the abilities to stabilize itself in the air and travel to GPS coordinates. Klugman had hoped this *Make Stuff* project would attract a more diverse group and include, say, artists who wanted to make plane-project-related art, and writers who wanted to smith project-related words.

"Anyone who wants to make things would come together," he says. "We'd have a centralized budget and run the club like a company with different project teams. What a way to mesh disciplines!"

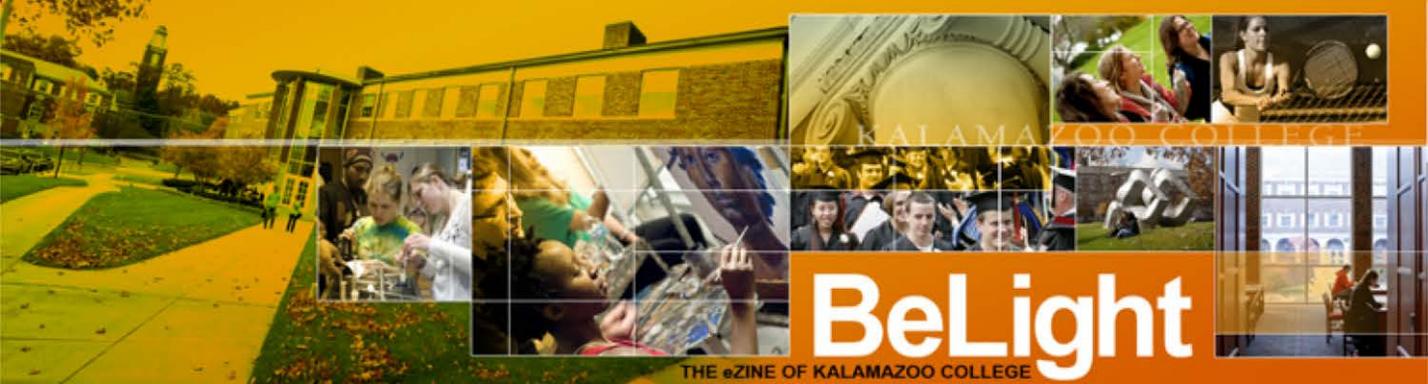
Alas, like JPL, *Make Stuff* copes with budget exigencies. At Student Commission's student organization budget advocacy session some expressed skepticism about how *Make Stuff* might be perceived by students.

Says Klugman: "One commissioner wryly wondered what we'd do if a student showed up who wanted to make a hotdog, and I thought: 'Wow, redesign or make a new hotdog...how cool would that be!'"

"When you use your hands and mind you get to experience small successes," he adds, "and then you gain confidence to make something more challenging."

Gee, won't he, especially, miss the SIP if he leaves at the end of the year?

"K's a place of a hundred SIPs, and not just in the senior year. I've done many already. Experiments galore."



## VOYAGER

by Chris Killian

Kalamazoo College graduate (1980) Mark White is sitting in a high-backed chair, cushions the color of deep lime, in the front room of a faculty lounge at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, one of the few U.S. colleges older than his alma mater. Behind him are several windows that look out onto "The Lawn," one of UVa's signature areas (not unlike our Quad), and a massive door that requires - believe it or not - a skeleton key.

The air is thick with the past. In front of White, old paintings of historical figures line the walls; a massive, soot-stained fireplace seems to beg to glow again; and old furniture - the kind you're sure must be leaking springs and would never dare use for fear of ruining a bit of history - bespeaks a more innocent time.

Of all the artifacts in this room - each of which might hold a secret about the university or its famous founder Thomas Jefferson - White's attention is seized by the one piece that seems to shout: "Kalamazoo College!"

It's an old globe, a bit dusty, sitting on a table. Perhaps the associate professor of commerce (at the university's McIntire School of Commerce) had better take it. White might need it because he's set to lead a voyage of grand proportions, one requiring a really big boat. Sounds like old times at "K."

This spring UVa hosts the Semester At Sea program, celebrating its 100th voyage, with White at the helm as its academic dean. Some 700 students from more than 200 colleges and universities around the country will participate in the 15-week adventure, which set sail January 17 and will return in early May. The journey launched from Mexico and will travel 20,000 nautical miles around the world, visiting 10 countries along the way.

No problem; White's been working on his sea legs since his matriculation to "K."

"I didn't want to go out of state for school, and if you wanted to study abroad, 'K' was the place to go," said the Rochester (Mich.) native. "I guess you could say that 'K' opened-up the world for me."

His love affair with traveling began with his study abroad experience in Germany, where he lived with a host family. A 90-day Eurail pass enabled him to travel to every country he wanted "except for Portugal," he said. And for the past 10 years, White has been passing that torch of travel.

He's led student trips to South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and Europe.

"It's life changing," White said of his students' study abroad experiences. "But besides just that, (the students) go into the world to change the world for the better. They acquire a unique set of skills that they can apply to so many issues."

Several of his former students have taken their desire to improve the world into their work after graduation. One took a position at the World Bank and helped finance start-up businesses in impoverished nations. Another student is consulting with [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org), an Internet-based organization that lets people invest their money with small start-ups around the world in the form of no interest loans.

"To travel is to realize just how much we have here," White said. "To those who are given much, much is expected. We want the

**"You could say that 'K' opened up the world for me."**

students on this voyage to see what the rest of the world looks like and learn along the way by developing and implementing

solutions to the problems they see."

Even though finance is a primary part of his academic life (many of his courses focus on corporate and international finance), White also loves the environment (he has a master's degree in ecology from Michigan State University to complement his "K" biology major) and courses examine business's relationship with the natural environment. He believes that business and the natural world must be symbiotic, and travel helps students see how people in other countries approach environmental and economic sustainability. He spent a year in Augsburg, Germany as a Fulbright Research Professor studying business' responses to environmental challenges.

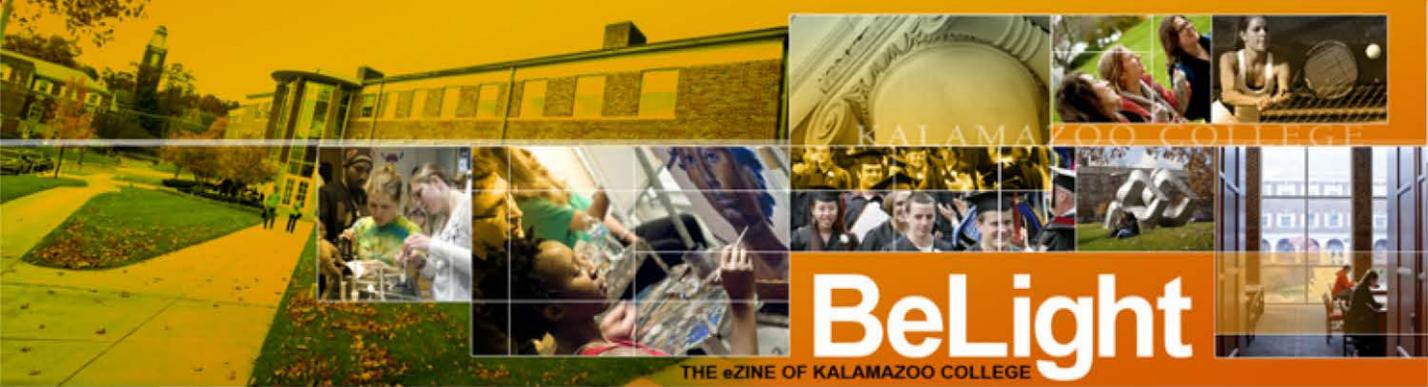
His current research focuses on the valuation of ecological capital, a topic melding his expertise in financial modeling with his interests in environmental conservation. He's taught courses in the past with titles like "The Business of Saving Nature" and "Investing in a Sustainable Future."

Getting nations around the world to learn a lesson he was taught while a student at "K" would serve them well, White said, especially as the need for a move toward sustainability in all facets of life becomes more and more pronounced.

"Kalamazoo College is a small school," he said. "We all had to work together, think together, and live together in order to succeed. I think there is a lesson there, too."

You can check out White's travel blog [here](#).

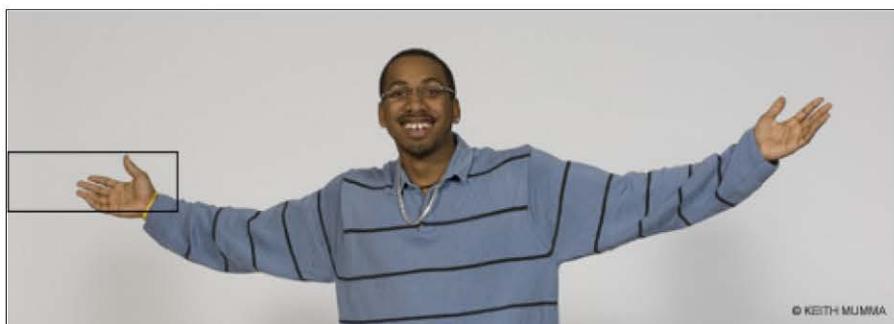




## MUCH INVOLVED

by Chris Killian

After a high school career chock-full of academic achievement, athletic prowess, and student activities galore, Eric Aiken came to Kalamazoo College looking to kick back and relax a bit - at least in terms of co-curricular activities.



Boy, was he wrong.

After whittling the places where he wanted to pursue a higher education down to three schools - the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Eastern Carolina University and Kalamazoo College - he arrived on "K's" campus. It didn't take long before he made his decision.

"As soon as I stepped in the campus, I knew this was where I wanted to go," said Aiken, a 21-year-old senior. "I didn't even need to take the tour. It looked a lot like my hometown, except for all the snow."

Aiken came to "K" in 2006 from Gastonia, North Carolina, a city of about 70,000 people in the western part of that state. While in high school there, he lettered in four sports, was president of his student body, and volunteered in many activities both at school and in the community.

"I didn't think I'd be so involved when I got here," he said. "But I'm a leader, and people like me don't want to be uninvolved. Everyone has something important to say. You can't deny yourself."

"K" provided Aiken with all the opportunities he would need over his college career to make that desire to be involved a reality. Since he matriculated, all the double major in art and sociology has done is: serve as a residence assistant; become president of the Black Student Organization; volunteer with the Heartbeat program, a once-a-week program that helps high school students find their literary and poetic voice; and serve as a waterfront director/lifeguard, a fellow from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and admissions assistant.

He was one of 17 Kalamazoo College students to be given a Sharing Time and Resources (STAR) Award by the Kalamazoo Gazette and the Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo for his work with the Heartbeat program.

He even played football for a year, even though he was supposed to play soccer at the college. His soccer coach said he was "a little too aggressive," Aiken said, but the football coach took interest after watching him maneuver about the pitch. He spent his freshman year playing strong safety for the Hornets.

"In many ways, Eric exemplifies the coming to fruition of the potential that exists in the *K-Plan*," said David Anderson, senior associate director of admission. "He used the *K-Plan* as a catalyst to move forward in so many ways. It's just fantastic to see someone go in so many different vectors, to take advantage of so many things.

"We hate to see students like him leave," added Anderson, "but we know he is on to even better things."

The road leading Aiken into the future can go in many different directions. Maybe the Peace Corps. Maybe graduate school, either at home or abroad, with a focus on higher education student affairs. Right now, he's not quite sure.

**"'K' lets you see your true self."**

But what he is sure about is knowing how he got to this place in his life. It wasn't without a lot of help from a loving family and supportive friends. And it wasn't without overcoming adversity.

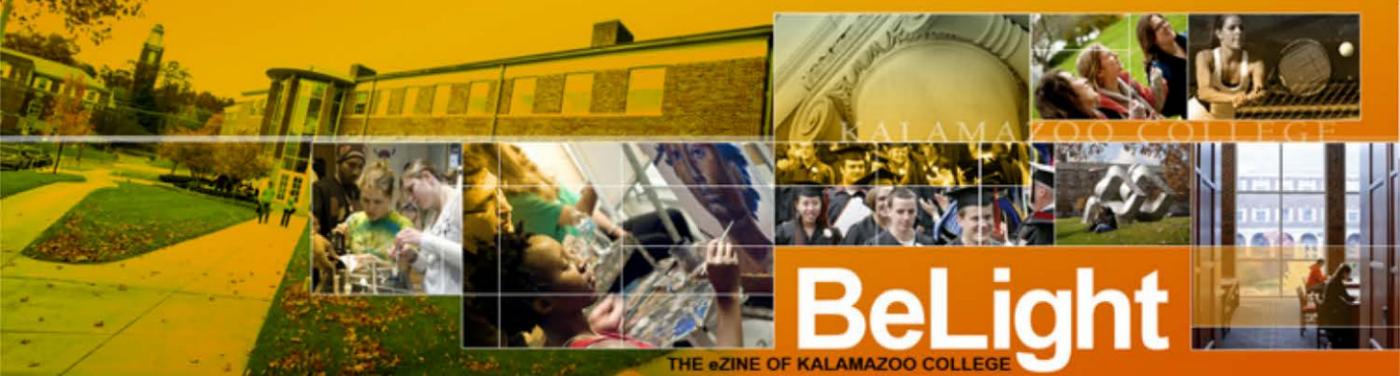
His best friend in high school came from a family that didn't like African-Americans, he said. He would encounter people in his hometown that would smile at him, but then say derogatory things behind his back. He's felt the pain of racism.

So coming to a college like "K," where African-Americans represent 4 percent of the student body, Aiken knew he would be what he called "an extreme minority." But it didn't faze him one bit.

"I know who I am," he said. "Everybody's real respectful around here. There are always going to be areas where things could be better, but the school does a good job listening to minority students. There's just a certain vibe around here. People always say hello to you, the teachers, students, janitors and the grounds crew. Help isn't handed out, but it's given on request."

Aiken remembers an outgoing senior telling him his freshman year: "You will make it through here if you remember where you've been," he said.

"'K' lets you see your true self and a lot of people are afraid of that," he said. "But if you want to find out about yourself, really challenge yourself and find out who you are and what you're made of, then 'K' is the place for you."



## THE RACE TO ZERO

by Jillian McLaughlin '09

Forty to reach zero. Or, put another way, Kalamazoo College plans to be climate neutral by the year 2050.

Some two years after President Wilson-Oyelaran signed the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), the Board of Trustees has set the midpoint of the 21st century as the target date for the College to eliminate its net emissions of greenhouse gasses.

It's an ambitious and important goal, and few aspects of life at "K" remain untouched and more will be transformed in the upcoming years as the College community works to meet interim goals.

Reaching carbon neutrality encompasses a wide variety of strategies from behavioral changes and conservation initiatives to energy retrofits of buildings.

In October, the Board of Trustees approved recommendations to achieve a 25 percent reduction in annual carbon emissions by 2020, based on the emissions generated during the fiscal year 2007-2008. After 2020, the College will develop new strategies for achieving the remaining reduction, based on new technologies now being developed.

The Sustainability Task Force, chaired by Richard Yehle '68 and composed of trustees, faculty, staff, and students, has developed a Climate Action Plan, publicly filed with ACUPCC this month. The plan, which was endorsed by the Board of Trustees, includes funding for sustainability projects, energy efficiency standards for new construction and major renovations, and limited use of offsets to achieve carbon neutrality.

The Board of Trustees authorized the use of an annual revolving fund to complete energy conservation projects in campus buildings over the next 10 years. The revolving fund will rely on future energy savings and existing discounts and rebates from Consumers Energy. Revolving fund expenditures are expected to increase annually (as energy savings accumulate) to \$200,000 in 2015 and remain at that level through 2020.

The Board also approved incremental increases to construction budgets in order to achieve the Plan's efficiency standard for building projects. For major projects this increase will represent funds up to 3 percent of the budget and will be used to include additional energy efficient technologies and systems in the new or renovated facilities.

Marcquel Pickett '08 was a senior when Wilson-Oyelaran signed the commitment. He remained at "K" after graduation as sustainability coordinator, overseeing new environmental initiatives and programs under Director of Facilities Management Paul Manstrom.

"The Presidents' Climate Commitment set the tone and gave students and faculty who wanted to incorporate sustainability into the life of Kalamazoo College a solid platform to do just that," said Pickett.

### Operations

The Department of Facilities Management has completed several energy retrofits, replacing lighting in the Markin Racquet Center, the Dow Science Center, and Biggby Coffee in the Upjohn Library. Other improvements include the transition to green cleaning methods, expanded recycling operations, and an Energy Star purchasing policy.

Even the residence halls look different. Students now use Energy Star washers and dryers to do their laundry and signs remind students to turn off the lights in common areas. The lifestyle changes extend beyond the residence halls and into other aspects of campus life. Collaboration among different sectors of the college has been essential to the introduction of new sustainability measures.

Last year, in order to conserve energy and reduce water use, Student Development approached EnvOrg, the student environmental group, with the idea of removing trays from the cafeteria. EnvOrg agreed to take on the campaign and collected data, designed procedures, and educated students. Cafeteria staff and management worked together, and the campaign successfully eliminated trays from the cafeteria.

"The tray-less campaign was a near-perfect example of collaboration between different parts of the college on an issue of sustainability," said Rob Foley '09, a student organizer for the campaign.

### Education

Sustainability also influences nearly every sector of a student's education. Professors have developed new senior seminars focused on the topic. The architectural firm Tower-Pinkster has established a sustainability scholarship for students, and faculty members have received grants for environmental research. Twenty-three students are currently pursuing concentrations in sustainability, and six students are completing senior projects in that area.

Annie Weir '10 exemplifies the greening of the College. She received the Tower-Pinkster Sustainability Scholarship this year and will complete a concentration in environmental studies. She is writing her SIP on environmental economics and completed an externship with the Department of Energy working with the Office of Biomass.

Professor Kim Cummings' "How to Change the World" course incorporates innovations in environmental education. He started the course in the winter of 2007 to train students to become environmental leaders. Each year the class adopts a project to improve sustainable practices at the college. The class lobbied other students to conserve energy with its "8 in '08" campaign, which achieved a successful reduction in residence hall energy use by 8 percent. The college then used the energy savings from that campaign to purchase 8 percent of campus energy from renewable sources, said Cummings.

Last year, Professor Cummings' class tackled emissions generated by commuters, educating students and faculty about public transportation options and initiating a ride-share program on the Internet.

### Resource Conservation

The Climate Action Plan includes a section that calls for changes in the way that the College manages storm-water run-off and potable water conservation. Both relate to campus landscaping and green space.

"K" has been prominent in several categories in the annual Recyclemania Competition, a nationwide effort to improve recycling and minimize waste generation.

### Beyond "K"

Kalamazoo alums are already applying their education against global warming on an international scale. Aubrey Parker '08 was one of two "K" alums who traveled to Copenhagen for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December. She traveled with nine other engineering students from the University of Michigan, where she is studying chemical engineering. She worked as a journalist during the conference, blogging for the *Detroit Free Press*.

"Kalamazoo teaches you to go in and evaluate the situation from all angles, not just from one specialty," Parker said. After the conference, an NPR affiliate in San Francisco interviewed Parker for one of its pieces about Copenhagen, praising her for innovative journalism.

This month Parker will bring the lessons of Copenhagen back to campus when she speaks at an event EnvOrg has planned. She also belongs to the Sustainability Guild, a group that connects alumni, students, faculty and staff around environmental issues.

The Kalamazoo College Climate Action Plan can be found at the [Orange Black and Green website](#) or on the [ACUPCC site](#).

### Photo

The Kalamazoo College Sustainability Task Force includes (l-r): back row-Helen Etkin '76, Roger Brownell '68, Prospect Research Assistant Jane Hoinville, L. West Nelson '81, Professor of English Bruce Mills, Provost Mickey McDonald, Director of Facilities Management Paul Manstrom, front row-Dick Yehle '68, Jillian McLaughlin '10, and Chris Hutchinson '10. Not pictured are Gail Raiman '73 and Jon Stryker '82.



"The tray-less campaign was an example of collaboration on sustainability."



### HORNETS TAP A KOHAWK

Kalamazoo College's new head women's tennis coach (and director of tennis facilities) is a Kohawk with a Hornet connection.

Mark Murphy joined Kalamazoo College after 11 years as associate head men's and women's tennis coach at his alma mater, Coe College (Cedar Rapids, Iowa). He also had been the assistant director of Coe's Clark Racquet Center since 2005. Murphy played and coached at Coe under Eric Rodgers '79, a Kalamazoo College graduate and member of two of Coach George Acker's NCAA III National Championship teams.

"We are excited to welcome Mark to the Kalamazoo College community," said Kristen Smith, Kalamazoo College's Director of Athletics. "He has extensive coaching experience with nationally ranked teams at Coe, he played under and coached with a "K" alum, and his experience managing tennis facilities ensures that Stowe Stadium and the Markin Racquet Center will continue to operate as the finest collegiate tennis facilities in the country."

In his 11 years as associate head coach at Coe, Murphy helped guide the Kohawks to nine conference team championships (6 men, 3 women), six conference second place finishes (4 men, 2 women), and eight NCAA III Tournament appearances (6 men, 2 women). He has worked with a combined 93 All-Conference selections, 10 ITA/NCAA All-Americans, and eight conference most valuable players.

"I am looking forward to the opportunities at Kalamazoo College," said Murphy. "Kalamazoo has superior academic programs, excellent tennis facilities, and supportive faculty, staff, and alumni. Kalamazoo College has all the necessary components for a national level program."

In addition to his duties at Coe, Murphy has coached at the USTA Competition Training Center in Cedar Rapids, served as chair of the Iowa District Junior Competition, and taught private lessons as a USPTA (United States Professional Tennis Association) certified instructor. He also was voted as the Most Outstanding Contributor to Junior Tennis in Iowa in 2006.

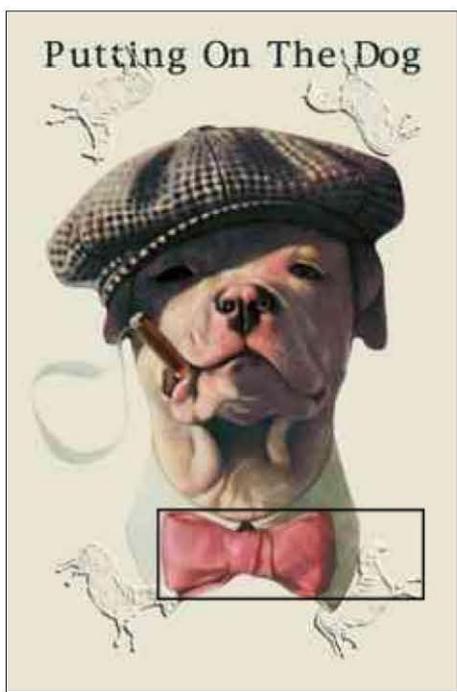
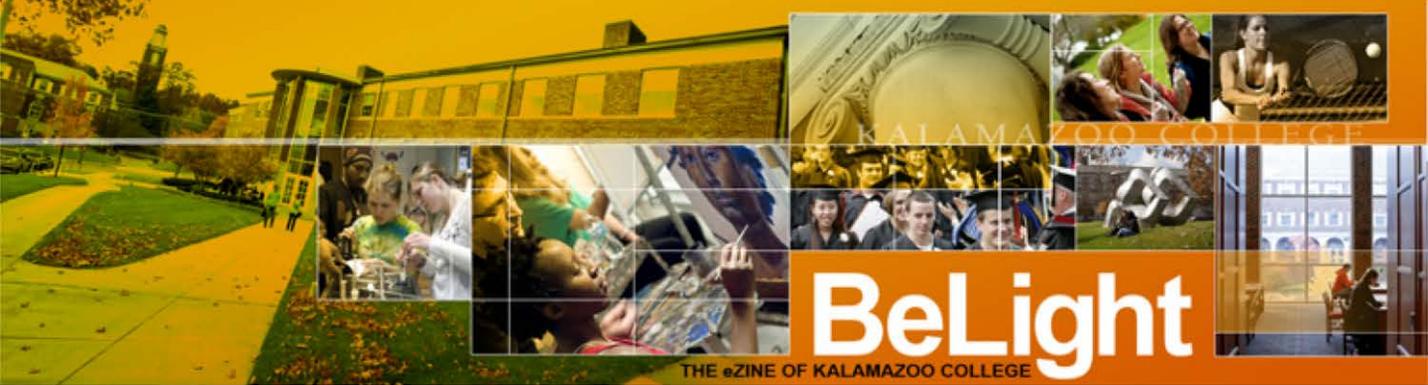
"'K' has all the necessary components for a national level program."

Murphy graduated from Coe College in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in political science and business administration. He was a three-year letter winner for the Kohawks and member of two Midwest Conference championship teams.

"I want to create a fun, challenging, and exciting environment for student-athletes to be successful on and off the court," said Murphy. "We expect to be competitive regionally and nationally."

The Kalamazoo College women's tennis team has a long history of success. The Hornets have won 39 MIAA championships, more than double the amount of the next highest total. Kalamazoo finished third in the nation in 1986 and ninth in 1994.

The full-time women's tennis position was created during the summer of 2008 and is funded in part by the Tish Loveless Women's Athletics Endowment. Full-time coaches allow the College to better meet the needs of student-athletes on and off the field. Find out more information on the Tish Loveless Women's Athletics Endowment [here](#).



## THE SMOKING POET ON VITAMIN K

by Zinta Aistars

I call it my Vitamin K. On a regular basis, for good health of mind and spirit, I need a dose. It's been more than two years since I sat in an office in Mandelle Hall, writing stories for *LuxEsto* and pitching news about Kalamazoo College to the media. After nearly eleven years at Kalamazoo College, it was time to move on to new challenges, but oh, those good memories lingered, and I was not ready to let go entirely. I still need that occasional shot of Vitamin K in my lifeblood at a healthy level.

One of my creative passions is a literary e-zine called [The Smoking Poet](#). The e-zine (an electronic version of a magazine) was born on a business trip to Austin, Texas in early 2006, on a journey to meet and interview [Dominic Smith](#), an alumnus of Kalamazoo College who had at that time just published his first novel, *The Mercury Visions of Louis Daguerre*. *LuxEsto* printed the story of Dominic, but the story of *The Smoking Poet*, inspired by the creative atmosphere Dominic brought to my Austin visit, well, that's stayed with me ever since.

Vitamin K continues to nurture and nourish good things in my life. Now beginning its fifth year of publication, I am proud of *The Smoking Poet* and all the literary voices we have spotlighted over the years: Dorianne Laux, Dominic Smith, Ingrid Hill, Sue Miller, Lynn Stegner, Bonnie Jo Campbell, Tish Cohen, Pamela Erens, and many, many more.

The Winter 2009-2010 Issue, however, is extra "K" special. Every issue (we are a quarterly) features a poet or novelist extraordinaire. This issue that extraordinary voice belongs to Kalamazoo College writer-in-residence, Diane Seuss. [TSP interviews Di](#), includes a full page of [her lush poetry](#) - it's Diane Seuss through and through. And then - we devote a page to her [Kalamazoo College creative writing students](#). Di's creative offspring include: Maggie Baillie, Paloma Clohossey, Rachel Dallman, Jared Devitt, Claire Eder, Natalia Holtzman, Maghan Jackson, Marianna Johnson, Jeanette Lee, Takira Lytle, Jessica Maas, Ada McCartney, Jordan Rickard, Joseph Schafer, Jenneva Scholz, Natasha Sharam, Alice Thomsen. What better evidence of a terrific teacher than to gather around her the poetic voices of her students?

How does she cultivate those voices? "I designed a developmental approach to teaching creative writing in my teaching practice. Introduction to Creative Writing is multi-genred. The focus is less upon the subtle craft points of a given genre and more upon loosening up, having fun with language, experiencing the imagination as it rises to the occasion when faced with the limitations of time or form or subject, *remembering* our intuitive connection to language, the connection that is often severed by the time people reach young adulthood. My teaching begins with a funky combo of freedom and profoundly limiting assignments, moves into apprenticeship and the opportunity to broaden one's repertoire and word palette, and ends with individuation."

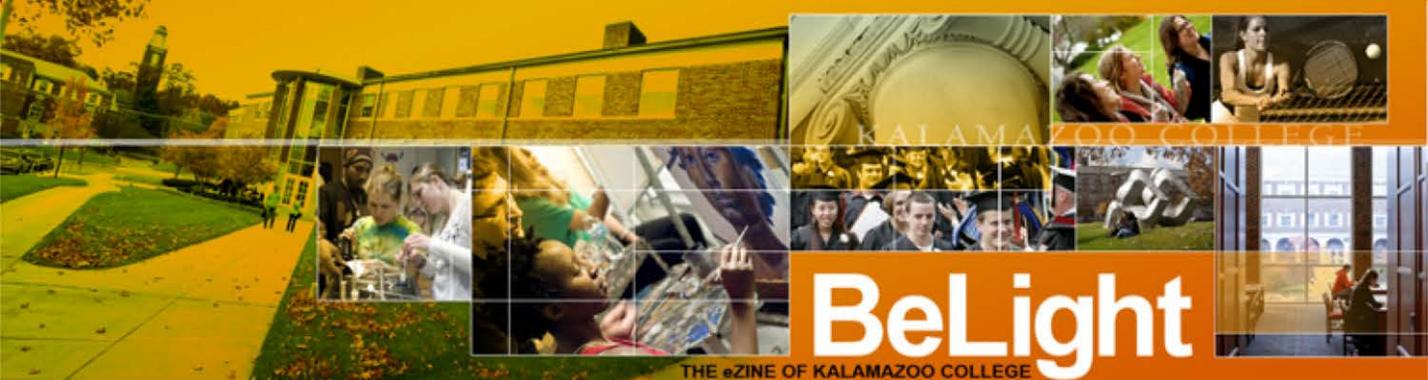
From poetry to food activism and sustainable farming: our nonfiction page called ["A Good Cause"](#) is an essay by Kalamazoo College alumnae, [Nicolette Hahn Niman](#), who was on campus during Homecoming to promote her book, *Righteous Porkchop: Finding a Life and Good Food Beyond Factory Farms*. Nicolette writes about "Eating Right and Righteously." Her essay is followed by my review of her book. It's not just a love story between a vegetarian and a cattle rancher. It's about how to vote with your fork for a sustainable future, a cleaner environment, better treatment of animals, and better health.

"For good health of mind and spirit, I need a dose."

There is nothing like that moment of CLICK, when a new issue of *The Smoking Poet* is launched. It takes a lot of work - calling for submissions, promoting and marketing, sorting through the submissions and responding to each contributor, editing the best ones for publication and working with writers from many points across the globe, then preparing the template for the Web, proofing, and proofing again. Until it begins all over again. Then it struck me. I could really use some help. Why not establish an internship with Kalamazoo College students who are creative writers but also computer savvy? Someone who knows a good turn of phrase, but also enough html code to make the poem look good on a Web page? Diane Seuss and I are now talking about just that - bringing a student or two to the masthead to help launch the next issue. Another "K" connection is born.

Visit [The Smoking Poet](#) to enjoy the many voices of Kalamazoo College - and keep coming back. We post new book reviews throughout the season, and later in this issue, you'll see a book review of yet another alumnus, [Jothy Rosenberg](#), who has written a memoir called *Who Says I Can't*.

Not me. With a little Vitamin K, all things are possible.



## ARE WE THERE YET?

by Zinta Aistars

Words Jeremiah Duncan, Ben Dueweke and Joe Barth never got to say on their way to college: "Are we there yet?" The three friends had to walk hardly more than a block or two to reach the Kalamazoo College campus. As incoming freshmen of the class of 2013, the campus was already like a second home.

The parents of all three freshmen are not only long-time friends; all also work for the college. Jeremiah's mother, Teresa Denton, is associate director at the Mary Jane Underwood Stryker Institute for Service Learning. Ben's mother, Anne Dueweke, is the director of faculty grants and institutional research (and a 1984 alumna). And Joseph, or Joe, calls Eric Barth, associate professor and chair of mathematics and computer science - Dad.

"It is rather a strange experience, sending your child off to college knowing he is physically present at the same place you are on a daily basis," says Teresa Denton. "My experience is even more surreal because our family lives two blocks away, so Jeremiah grew up in this neighborhood and Kalamazoo College was his playground."

All three boys grew up in the neighborhood and attended elementary, middle, and high school together. Ben and Jeremiah actually knew each other before that: they are companion preschool grads.

"All of the parents were pleased that all three of our sons chose a college literally in their backyard," Teresa says, then smiles: "Of course, all were relieved because all three are here on a Heyl scholarship."

The Heyl scholarship is awarded to students majoring in one of the sciences or mathematics. Jeremiah hasn't declared a major yet. He loves to draw and is passionate about kicking a soccer ball around, but he expects he will probably choose biology. Ben hasn't declared a major yet either, but he knows it won't be math. Joe has his eye on health sciences while peering over the brassy gleam of his saxophone, his compromise between the practical and the wonderfully impractical.

"My decision was between Kalamazoo College and music, someplace like Juilliard," Joe says. "Then I realized I didn't have to choose. I can take part in the New York Arts Exchange Program. Maybe do an internship in music. Health sciences is about my career. Music is my love."

"I call it the Proud Dad Alert when I listen to him play the sax," Joe's father, Eric Barth says. Between solving math formulas, Eric plays the sax, too, and his father, Joe's grandfather, a medical doctor, plays the piano. The family also includes a cellist and a singer.

Anne Dueweke is glad that her son Ben is on campus, particularly so because it's the College's pilot year of the new curriculum. Like Eric Barth, she serves as a student advisor and sees firsthand how students can shape their curriculum for a bright future. "It's a great time for Ben to be starting at 'K,' with so many great things going on," she says. "And I'm glad he'll have the flexibility of the new curriculum."

The new curriculum provides students more flexibility than ever to explore their interests and connect on and off-campus experiences while reflecting on their experiences in seminars and senior individualized projects. It will make it possible for Joe to play his sax while working on calculus, Jeremiah to play on the soccer team while studying biology, and Ben to enter his education open to the world and all it offers.

"Study abroad was definitely attractive to me in my decision to come to Kalamazoo," Ben says. He applied to other colleges and universities, too, but Kalamazoo won out with its offer of the Heyl scholarship, a study abroad program like none other, "and smaller classes for a better learning environment," he adds.

"You can make Kalamazoo College as far or as close to home as you want it to be," Joe says. "I visit Dad's office as much as I like. He's there for advice when I want it. Sometimes I don't see him for days, but then I know," Joe grins, "all the professors have their eye on me."

Eric Barth mirrors his son's grin. "Sharing the Kalamazoo College experience with my son seemed like a very natural move, a logical choice. For me, this is my dream job. For Joe, these are four years that are a crucible. I believe in the 'K' experience."

Seeing Kalamazoo College through his son's eyes, Eric says, adds a new perspective. As a professor, he sees the schedules, the grading of papers, the assignments. As a father, he notes the stresses of homework and awaiting grades, and the hopes of a father for his son's education. "I have a new appreciation for what a student goes through," he says. "It's made me a better advisor. These are very busy students."

Teresa Denton has made a special effort to stay anonymous and out of her son's pathway on campus. "We almost never see each other except on Jeremiah's weekend visits down the block - at home," she explains. "For a relatively small campus, there is a lot of room to live your own life. When I attended parent orientation at the beginning of the academic year, I didn't identify myself as staff to other parents. I wanted the parent experience. Do I worry less about my son with his being here? I can't say it makes a difference in terms of distance. I worry less because the campus is smaller, because people here know each other, and watch out for each other."

Anne Dueweke says, "As far as having Ben go to the college where I work, it's mostly good. We don't run into each other much at all, and he seems to be making Kalamazoo College his own instead of a place where his mother works. It's nice to see him from time to time. It's convenient for him to stop by my office for whatever reason. I worry about him a bit more than my other son who goes to Beloit College because, as an academic advisor, I know what he's probably dealing with as a first-year student at 'K.' I have too much information, not about him specifically, but about the experience generally - for many students, the amount of work they have to do takes them by surprise. But I know I'll worry less as he gets established here and I get better at letting go."

The crucible of college years, it seems, is one for parents as well as students. Yet all three parents have one other thing in common by sharing a campus with their sons.

"Really, there is one great advantage," Ben says. "I can always go home to do laundry."

"Yeah," Jeremiah nods. "Although Mom makes me do the laundry myself."

"Once a week for laundry, yes," Joe says.

The advantages of a shared campus for all seem to outweigh any disadvantages. It all comes out in the wash.

### Photo

Employee parents and student offspring share a "K" tie. From left: Eric Barth and son Joe, Anne Dueweke and son Ben, and Teresa Denton and son Jeremiah Duncan





## EXTRAORDINARY RESILIENCE

by Chris Killian



Psychiatrist Kristen Underhill Welch, M.D., has counseled people who have endured extreme suffering and survived humiliating torture. But she hadn't experienced anything like what she saw in Rwanda. Welch attended Kalamazoo College in the late 1970s, during which she studied abroad in Sierra Leone. She completed her undergraduate study at University of Michigan.

More recently, in 2008, through contacts she had made with Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, a Chicago-based human rights organization, Welch traveled to Rwanda with another psychiatrist to consult with WE-ACTx, an HIV/AIDS treatment program for women and their families which provides medical services and trauma counseling, on the introduction of psychiatric treatment into their services. She worked to find out how primary care physicians were dealing with the psychological needs of the many persons who required help.

"Those physicians were incredibly busy," Welch said, adding that many of Rwanda's doctors died in the genocide. "It wasn't working for them to provide psychiatric care as well." With only three psychiatrists in the nation working to help a large population of survivors of incredible trauma, it's not hard to understand why.

During three months in 1994, one of the world's most vicious, swift and efficient genocides took place in the tiny African nation. Between 800,000 and 1 million persons are estimated to have lost their lives. The majority Hutus, who made up more than 80 percent of the population, killed Tutsis and moderate Hutus, often with machetes and other hand-held weapons. More than 2 million Rwandans fled the country to seek refuge in neighboring nations.

During the genocide, more than a quarter of a million women were raped, many by men who were purposely trying to infect them with the HIV virus. More than 70 percent of the women raped were infected with the disease and thousands were left pregnant with so-called "children of hate."

That's a lot of trauma to deal with for the scant corps of mental health professionals in Rwanda. Only one psychiatrist in the country is a native Rwandan, Welch said, and there is no faculty of psychiatry at the nation's only medical school.

Fifteen years on, the pain endured by so many - often at the hands of neighbors and even family members - still seeps deeply across generational and familial lines all over the small country, where victims often live in close proximity to their victimizers.

In the United States there is often a focus on the need for a victim to come to a place where he or she can forgive an assailant in order to fully heal, but that isn't always needed or necessary - especially in a situation as intense as was seen in Rwanda, Welch said.

"I'm less focused on forgiveness than understanding the resilience of people," she added. "It's just amazing to know someone who moved through that experience and into a new reality. People are getting on with their lives."

"Study abroad has been the backdrop shading and coloring to everything I've done."

Of the experience, Welch said: "It deeply moved me, deeply. It still haunts me."

And even though there are no agreed upon best practices to deal with the trauma in Rwanda, there is hope and healing emerging from the pain and suffering.

"Research still needs to be done going forward," she said. "There are no great conclusions yet and many questions remain: which theories would best be used and what about the cultural components? There are more questions than answers."

Welch saw some of the many small support groups that have arisen across Rwanda as a way to provide victims with a place to speak openly about their experiences. Village tribunals called the *gacaca* system are taking the weight off the country's huge backlog of criminal cases dealing with the genocide and are providing a sense of justice. Children orphaned by the genocide are being adopted, sometimes even by poor families.

"There is a pull toward surviving and resiliency," she said. "People are carrying on."

Although she didn't graduate from "K," Welch credits her study abroad experience as one of the best things she has ever done.

"There is no question it was a formative experience," she said. "It has been the backdrop shading and coloring to everything I've done."