12-9-2015

Pacific Portraits: The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University (Volume One)

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Pacific Portraits: The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University (Volume One)

Description
When a dormitory toilet is clogged, who's the guy charged with fixing it? Who assures that benefits and work-study monies are paid and accounted for on time? And who is tasked with ensuring Luau goes off without a hitch or that students from Saudi Arabia know how to navigate the cultural idiosyncrasies of an American university? Meet the people who work behind the scenes at Pacific University—the community of staff and faculty—as captured by Pacific's own creative writing and photography students. Their jobs and lives are varied, but their dedication to ensuring a dynamic educational experience in all its varieties is common between them. This book strives to capture and share their stories through the creative efforts of the students their work serves.

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Photography

Publisher
Bee Tree Books

ISBN
978-0-9884827-6-0

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This book is available at CommonKnowledge: http://commons.pacificu.edu/beetree/2
The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University

VOLUME ONE

PACIFIC PORTRAITS
Pacific Portraits: The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University (Volume One)

Photographs by Cailyn Andreasen, Bronson Barretto, Malia Bartolome, Stephanie Bultman, Chloe Chambers, Cameron Chow, Anastasiya DeWolf, Emily Farnham, Caleb McGee, Emily Miller, Mahla Nelson, Carrie Ann Randolph, Marie Rewick, Lauren Tierney.


Cover and interior design by Emily Coats
Interior layout by Pacific University Students

Published by Pacific University Libraries 2015

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ISBN-13 978-0-9884827-6-0

Pacific University Libraries
2043 College Way
Forest Grove, Oregon 97116

www.pacificu.edu/libraries

Published in the United States of America

Bee Tree Books
An imprint of the Pacific University Libraries

Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature [...] honey gatherers of the mind.
Friedrich Nietzsche

The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jim Flory and Brent Johnson would like to thank the following people for their help and cooperation for this collaborative project between our two classes. It was a great deal of work scheduling all of the meetings, classes, interviews, and photography shoots with all involved. Thank you very much to all of the staff members, photography and writing students, Emily Coats, Isaac Gilman, Marita Kunkel, and Eva Guggemos.
“Never be afraid to live out your passions.”
—Yashica Island, Director of Student Academic Inclusion

“If I can help the staff, it lets them help the kids even more.”
—Tracy King, HR Generalist/Benefits Administrator

“At a university, I believe everyone, not just faculty, are here to educate the students.” —Jerry Rice, Lead Supervising Safety Officer

“Art for me is connecting with people. I’m not looking for fame and fortune. I’m looking to inspire someone to pick up a brush—to know they can, whether they’re ‘the best’ or not.”
—Joyce Gabriel, Creative Director, University Advancement

“I love that I’m able to dip my hands into multiple levels of the university. One minute I’ll be speaking with the President and the Board of Trustees, the next I’m helping a student simply log into Moodle.”
—Al Weiss, Director of Educational Technology and Curricular Innovation

“We try to create an environment where students can become autonomous and figure things out on their own.” —Jean Flory, Housing Staff

“I like realizing that a little bit of what we do here is helping give students the tools to be confident.” —Scot Dobberfuhl, ELI Program Coordinator

“Guys, what did you flush down here? Water seeped down three floors from those flushes. If that didn’t cost six grand, I’d be surprised.”
—Dave Cookman, Plumbing/Boiler Specialist

“Whatever comes up, you just do it!”
—Leah Bagley, Administrative Assistant, Arts Division

“I try to understand where the person is developmentally, and try to meet them where they are, and help them figure out how to make the next step.”
—Will Perkins, Associate VP of Student Affairs and Dean, Student Life

“That is my true purpose. Making sure the student is a successful person in society.” —Edna Gehring, Director Hawaii Outreach and Programming
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When the idea of this project was still in utero, we sought a way to bring the artistic talents of our students together (Jim’s students in Artst 356: Color Photography & Brent’s students in Engw 209: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction) in the form of a book that held purpose. That purpose arrived when we began imagining portraiture of Pacific staff members. Their work and their lives, to us, are quietly lived day to day, without the fanfare that faculty and students often receive, but are essential to keeping the university healthy, running, and moving forward as an institutional wonderland we often take for granted. It seemed to us a noble pursuit to capture the narrative of their work at Pacific and how it contributed to the educational vision we all share as Boxers. So, we charged our students to photograph, interview and shadow certain members of the Pacific community with the intent to retell what they do on campus. But, as the idea grew, it seemed one-dimensional to snap a portrait only at work, as few would say they are defined by their jobs. We knew there was a second curtain to pull back, one that revealed something personal about our portraits, and so our students asked them about a passion they held, hit the record button and sat back to hear their tales.

What we found behind the Pacific scene is a cast of characters who collect Spiderman comics, who fashion wooden instruments by hand, who ski, and hike, and compete in drag car races. They knit and raise chickens and children—O, my, the children—both of their own and those registered as students. ‘Ohana is family, and for many staff and faculty at Pacific, the lines between work and home blur, seeing how their titles as parent, guide, security officer, club organizer, etc. merge into one regardless of their proximity to campus.

Each portrait within this book is a combination of words and photographs based on a collaborative team effort. Each profile reflects the work of student writers and photographers attempting to capture first a Pacific community member’s work and then a passion he or she holds. As with the life of any project, it traveled from childhood bliss to the trials of puberty before settling into a type of wisdom gained from it all. Coordinating busy schedules, finding time to meet, and matching visions between team members requires adaptability, flexibility and patience. As the parents of this project, we learned a great deal, too, about setup, planning, and how to let our baby go while keeping a close enough eye. In the end, what you have here is a communal effort to spread word about the community itself. We hope you enjoy a candid peek behind the scenes of the lives we find extraordinary and essential to the Pacific family.

Jim Flory, Assistant Professor of Art
Brent Johnson, Associate Professor of English
Leah Bagley enters the coffee house in a graceful manner. Her petite figure and soft demeanor is felt in her smile. As she walks towards us, a short strand of her hair falls in front of her and she proceeds to run her fingers through her short hair. A youthful gesture, one of many she makes leading us to question her age. Her demeanor is happy and relaxed, but we can tell that she is also poised, collected, and in control.

We shake hands, her grip startling me. It is so firm for such a small lady, but her smile softens the shock. Her lavender scarf highlights her soft features along with her kindness as she begins to express her gratitude for our meeting. A genuine soul indeed. After our introductions, we begin discussing the main objective of our project. Her smile widens, and her soft blue eyes seem to brighten.

“So,” I say with a slight pause, “tell me about your work. What exactly do you do here at Pacific?”

She takes a deep breath before beginning. “Well, there are a lot of things I do, actually.” She’s been here at Pacific for fifteen years, throughout which she has established herself in a positive way. She’s held different jobs at the university, including a web manager and Executive Assistant to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Sometime later, she became Administrative Assistant for the School of Arts and Humanities. She explains how her current job is a bit of a pay cut from the previous job she had, but to her, it doesn’t matter. “Sitting behind a desk for so long, it was a different kind of stress. The job I have now is much more satisfying.”

Her love of seeing students succeed from freshmen to seniors is a reward in itself, and that love stemmed from something greater: teaching. Before life at Pacific, she was an elementary educator in Hillsboro. She taught for a number of years, but eventually decided to work in the college atmosphere. “It’s so gratifying, especially being a part of the arts and media
aspect.” While her job label says “Administrative Assistant of Arts & Humanities,” it doesn’t give credit to the larger list of things that she does on a daily basis. She slips her dark rimmed reading glasses and peers at her job description on the computer screen in her office: attend meetings and coordinates if needed, handle financial aspect, do letters of agreements, help with web management, assist in press releases, and input information in regards to the media and arts program for faculty and for specific major information.

Our eyes widen. Her chin dips down as she peers over her glasses at us, and calmly says, “I’m not done yet.” Schedule meetings for faculty and students, one of the most important details she is responsible for: keep the Taylor-Meade [Performing Arts Center] up to date as far as remodeling and meeting the student’s needs, help with pacesetters, and handle formal wear for the students. Finally, at the bottom of the list it says: “must also have the ability to multitask and jumble tasks in a calm manner.”

She glances at both of us, and giggles. A scare with osteoporosis was all it took for Leah to gain an interest in what has now become one of her passions: exercising. “I exercise every morning,” she says, adding that it’s frightening to see her friends battling health issues. She is in impeccable shape, her lean figure in a Columbia brand jacket to fight off the cold outside, sitting on her hands in an effort to warm them up. She has various exercise machines in her home, including an elliptical and a rowing machine. She mentions other hobbies she likes as well, such as backpacking and fly-fishing, an interesting choice as she’s wearing earrings in the shape of fish during our first meeting.

Leah speaks fondly of her family, jumping up animatedly from her computer chair when she remembers she has photographs of them in her office. She hands us picture frames adorned with photos of members of her family: her son in Japan, her daughter that lives in Corvallis, and one with her two oldest daughters smiling into the camera, just to name a few. She also shows us photos printed out on a word document, saying she wants to make a collage with them at some point, excitement and pride shining bright in her eyes as she points to individual squares on each page.

Living on ten acres has enabled Leah and her husband to have a variety of animals. She speaks of steer they plan to slaughter—one cheekily named Hamburger—taking us by surprise since she had introduced them in a way that suggested she saw them as part of her family. They also have two cats—Scout and Ranger—although Leah is more of a dog person herself. She tells us how one of her cats, Hunter, disappeared one day. To this day, she doesn’t know what happened to him. “I think the coyotes got him,” a sad laugh escaping her lips.

She goes on to tell us how her chickens aren’t sleeping in their coop and instead have cooped up on the back porch of the house. She and her husband found them one
night and didn't think very much of it. Their initial thought was that they had moved back there since one of their lights illuminating the back field during the nighttime was pointing almost directly towards the chicken coop. But this continued for numerous nights after, and the chickens have since begun to lay their eggs on the back porch and make it their home.

During a tour of the Taylor-Meade Performing Arts Center building, Leah swiftly moves through the halls, pointing at different areas to explain to us what they are and whether she has a role within them or not. She shows us the lockers that can be rented out to students to place their instruments in. We pass the Bump Music Lounge, in which she had a hand in renovating this past year, ordering the furniture and deciding what color to paint one of the walls. Her voice is laced with enthusiasm during our tour, and at its end in her office, she has a seat in her chair, the computer screen glowing bright behind her filled with her day's work.
“I love hanging out in bathrooms. I have the best conversations there.” The dark blue beanie sporting PARR Lumber on the front shields the “hair follicle-ly challenged” plumber that is Dave Cookman—Plumber Dave to the children at the Early Learning Center. In the boiler room of Scott Hall at Pacific University, Dave smiles and slaps the 1.5 million BTU boiler lovingly, like a heifer that’s been providing milk for years. Even after a half-century, its warmth is reliable to the building as well as the man hugging its 4’ diameter. Dave has served eight trips around the sun at Pacific University. He places a clean plunger on his head twice a year for the preschoolers at the ELC and he has evacuated at least a mammoth’s worth of hair from the various shower drains around campus. This unsung hero can get anywhere on campus and has taken a path down every which way to get there. As some of the teachers on campus have commented, Dave is the plumbing superhero.

But sometimes even superheroes can’t save the day when faced with unknown objects that are flushed by college students. “Guys, what did you flush down here?” Dave asked when the snake could not unclog a toilet that shouldn’t clog to begin with; a baseball could be flushed and it wouldn’t clog—Dave tested it himself. Eyes evaded, the college students could not gather up the courage to admit a washrag had made its new home in the plumbing. “That was one of the worst days. Water seeped down three floors from those flushes. If that didn’t cost six grand, I’d be surprised.” But this is part of having a hands-on job, and Dave is thankful daily.

Another common part of Dave’s job is removing masses of hair from shower drains. “Do you really want a photo of that?” a half-grin is pasted on Dave’s face as he poses for a photo with a clump of hair at the fingertips of his blue, 99% effective latex gloves. There’s more than just
hair that tangles under the drain plug of a college woman’s shower; gel, some mud from last night’s slip, conditioner that promised to eliminate tangles but remained burrowed in a lump of hair, and the many effects of moisture provided gobs of texture to the forgotten strands dangling from the grasp of Dave’s fingers. This is the most common task on his list of daily chores.

Small, socially acceptable wrinkles form at the corners of Dave’s eyes as his cheekbones rise and his mouth rests slightly agape. His body is hung back, filling the armchair, limbs spread to invite peace and patience to the interview. Fingers rise out of habit rather than conscious effort as the conversation shifts from us asking questions, to him answering; they tap the leather hard enough to make a noise, but with a gentle intention as to not disturb the air before he can speak. He likes to “face the day smiling,” regardless of what it brings. His eyes are just as oblivious as his lips to the looming silence of an empty office building; Dave is a man of stories.

One of those stories is that of his passion: drag racing. The exact moment the gas pedal falls will determine Dave’s success as a drag racer. Too early and he’s denied a winning slot at the finish. Too late and he might as well never start. Mastering this moment is one of
many steps for Dave to fly down the drag strip. Dave loves driving fast but likes staying safe while doing it; a fire suit covers his body and a parachute is attached to the center steer's rear. He has wanted to drag race since he was a child and his racer neighbor was placed on top pedestal. He has wanted to drive a center-steer car since he was in the first grade.

Dave started working towards his passion by scavenging for the parts he needed to build his first car. Countless rods, sheets of metal, and hours are dedicated to the craftsmanship of each vehicle waiting patiently to bolt to the finish line. Knowing this, Dave leapt at the opportunity to build his from scratch. He works on it constantly when life provides him an opportunity to do so. It only takes the right tweak of the right part to get to that checkered flag faster. Dave strives to always make that tweak.

Those who are part of Dave’s life know the special place racing has in his heart. This year alone, Dave has only missed two races—one for his mother’s wedding and the other when his daughter was in the hospital. Six years ago when his dad died, Dave’s close friend Fred, a coworker, organized Facilities to buy him a new racing helmet in lieu of flowers. “That was one of the few times I’ve been speechless,” Dave tells us. “I still use the helmet today and will until it expires.”

The illusion of the stationary wheels when racing mimics the family that Dave finds at the track—ever-growing yet never changing. Along with his passion for racing, Dave is also an ordained Chaplain and officiates as such at the racetrack. He leads prayers before races and helps to facilitate after the unfortunate event of an accident. He supports the families and will even transport them to the hospital if necessary. Dave has even performed weddings for members of his racing family. “If I ever had to choose between racing and being a Chaplain, I would choose being a Chaplain,” if the future puts forth an ultimatum with Dave’s passions on either end, his heart will overpower his adrenaline rush. But there’s no law against Chaplains still attending drag races and praying with the racers, so Dave can continue leaning into a racer’s car, his hands folded in prayer, just before the car zips down the track at heart-stopping speeds and then get behind the wheel himself.
At first glance I think Scot Dobberfuhl looks like the type of guy that caber tosses on his free time. He is about 6’3, with a head of brown hair. He moves carefully, like a giant in a dollhouse. Scot was born and raised in rural Wisconsin. When he was a junior in high school he went to Norway as an exchange student in a small coastal village: “If I could point to one time, that was the it.” Thirty five years later he is still in touch with his host family. He was so moved by his stay that he pursued a job in international affairs. Scot is a program coordinator at the English Language Institute of Pacific University.

The stack of purple folders on his desk are all applications from international students. Scot must go through every one and decide which attend Pacific University, and which
don’t. The international students that get to attend Pacific, but don’t meet its English requirements are put into Scot’s class, where he helps them figure out tasks that can seem menial to English speaking students: “The campus community isn’t really aware of how difficult it is to negotiate some very simple things. Requesting a transcript, paying your bill, whether you want to use block meal or declining balance.” These can all pose as great challenges to someone whose first language isn’t English, for instance, showing his international students how to use easily accessible tools like Google translate to help with roommate applications. Anyone who’s lived in a college dorm can respect the value between a good roommate placement, and a bad one.

When exchange students do conquer these otherwise trivial tasks to English speaking students, it not only greatly improves their stay here at Pacific, but also grows into more: “Often when students gain the confidence to go do those things, they build on that and they will go to New York, or Disneyland. I like watching that and realizing that a little bit of what we do here is helping give students the tools to do that.”

When I ask Scot what’s most challenging about his work he gives a good-natured laugh, and takes a sip from his coffee mug. He goes on to share a recent experience with his international students, “So, I ask about their weekend and they said ‘oh we had some friends over’ and they pulled out their phone and showed me pictures of the meal they had prepared. A Middle Eastern meal. A plastic tablecloth spread out on carpet, the food had been poured directly onto the plastic. You didn’t have utensils because people ate with their fingers. It was a reminder for me that when I’m thinking dinner and they’re thinking dinner, it can be really radically different. We can attempt to communicate, but we are not always connecting. That’s frustrating, but rewarding when we do connect.”

First walking into Scot’s office it is clear what his passion is. Framed international airline posters decorate most of his walls. His bulletin board, which is mostly covered in items from his three daughters, is
home to his model plane calendar. When we ask Scot about aviation he lights up like a kid at Christmas. Before our eyes, the tall, intense man shrinks into an excited little boy who just wants to talk to us about his model planes. “I’m fascinated by anything having to do with aviation.” Carefully taking his calendar off the wall, he presents it to us like a proud father. “These are my friends, and they’re airplanes.” There are not many jet planes in Scot’s collection. He likes to make older planes with propellers that are constructed out of balsa wood, paper and rubber bands.

In our second meeting, our group reveals that we all have been up in noncommercial planes at least once before. Scot’s eyes fill with excitement as we all share our stories. He tells us about meeting his father-in-law for the first time. Like most first meetings Scot was nervous, but the nerves quickly went away when his father-in-law took him up for a flight. “I remember sitting there and thinking, this could go really well for me.”

“Lately, I’ve been doing woodworking, so making musical instruments from wood.” He says quietly, as if this is an easy task. Scot makes kanteles, which are a kind of lap guitar or harp. They are flat, with a triangular shape. Scot doesn’t like being confined to one kind of wood for his kanteles. “These are pretty simple to make, so I use whatever looks nice. They always take longer to make than I think they will.” He answers with a grin. Scot can never be sure how long they will take because each kantele is different and presents its own challenges during construction. The time and care that Scot puts into his instruments is evident when you look at them. The angles have to be just right so that the base is constructed correctly. He also has to oil the wood multiple times. With each oiling, the grain of the wood shines through and gives the kantele personality.

Scot doesn’t make the kanteles for himself. He tells us that he’s sending one to his the host family he stayed with in Norway, and another is going to his parents. He will be keeping the largest kantele for himself when it is done.

I ask if I can play one, and he nods remarking that they are relatively easily to play. I do my best impression of how I imagine the instruments are used, which only produces a couple off-key notes that distinctly pain my listeners. When I give up, Scott’s fingers brush a short song out of the strings. Scot then carefully swaddles the strung kantele in a blanket, placing it lightly away in his Ikea bag with the others.
It’s Friday morning, and I’m sitting across from a woman wearing a singular maroon-colored scarf. Delicately coiled around her neck, it’s adorned with little black beads that look like eyes, rows of amphibian eyes peering from a dark pool. The woman I’m speaking with is Jean Flory, a housing specialist going into her tenth year at Pacific. Her Clark Hall office is tidy and compact and—dare I say it—cozy, with family photos peppering her work desk and papers stacked neatly in a bin near the door. Outside the office window, the sky is white cut with gray, the lawn slick from another bout of rainfall. Light filters through the window and alights on her hair—soft and feathered, silver, framing the contours of her face in a chin-length bob.

I’ve just entreated Mrs. Flory to tell me all about her job—no easy task—and she obliges, speaking slowly and deliberately, like she’s mustering up every detail. That level of precision is vital when you’re assigning rooms to over a thousand students, both new and returning; one error there, and some poor kid could be left homeless for a semester. Besides managing student housing arrangements and accounts, Mrs. Flory helps maintain the housing webpage and oversees room-and-board meal plans and billing. Right now, she tells me, her typical day consists of reading through scores of emails and responding to scores of student questions about housing. As the holidays approach, she must manage the application process for staying on campus over the coming break; she has to keep meticulous track of which students are leaving for the winter holidays and which are remaining at Pacific. As she runs through the logistics of her profession (enough responsibilities to make my head spin), she does not sound rushed or harried. Her speech remains slow and deliberate, her voice level in pitch. She doesn’t gesticulate wildly, either; she keeps her hands clasped on the table before her, small and white, like two doves nesting on a stoop. I find myself feeling calmer just from being in her presence.
At a lull in the conversation, I bring up the scarf that caught my eye at the very start of our meeting. She made it herself, she tells me; it took about two months to knit and do all the beadwork. There’s a spark of pride in her eyes, behind her violet-rimmed spectacles. She’s been knitting for years, I find out—not only for herself, but for her spouse, her children and grandchildren. And apparently, artistry runs in the family; her husband, Jim Flory, has taught photography at Pacific for over twenty years.

But somehow, that creative flair seems incompatible with her current work, with the minutiae of housing arrangements for a bunch of rowdy kids just leaving their teenage years. Are we worth it? “My work is out of necessity,” she tells me, with the quiet authority of an adult who’s been out of school, out in the real world for many years. “But I like my work environment to be challenging and interesting,” she adds. “And most of the time, this job, this position does that for me.”

What she finds most rewarding is “when… the housing department has done a good job of communicating with the residential students, so they can navigate… processes, like the housing lottery.” The spark of pride returns; I can see it in her eyes, behind her glasses, their clear transparent lenses. “We try to create an environment,” she emphasizes, “where students can become autonomous and figure things out on their own.” Of course, there are also students who find it hard to do things by and for themselves, their first time—a minute percentage, but not insignificant. She spends extra hours helping those undergrads, which can be a challenge.

But that doesn’t seem to faze her. There’s a satisfaction in her low, gentle voice, in her firm grip as we shake hands. The dim office light reflects off her hair, the mass of silver strands, before bouncing off the beads of her hand-knit scarf; the beads flicker and wink like myriad eyes in a dark pool, as we say goodbye for the day.

Later, Jean and I meet up to take a short drive to visit her close friend Margaret, a lover of anything Celtic, where her passion for knitting makes a second appearance. “I need handiwork and to multitask.” She knits many of her own scarves and hats, and has books on how to create different patterns and pieces of clothing. The shawl she made for Margaret was a challenge to create, but a challenge well worth it. The design is beautiful and eye-catching, and fits in seamlessly with the worldly decor in Margaret’s home. The circular design that borders the outside of the shawl, she explains, is called a Celtic knot. It is a deep grey and intricately woven—a piece of art that would take great skill and years of practice to create.

The next time we gather as a group, we ask about Jean’s family, and know immediately from her response that they are her passion, and every other passion she has—whether it be traveling, baking, or knitting—inevitably stems from the associations it has with her family. “Family is a
high priority for me,” she says. She defines herself through her family, and tells us that her role as a mother, wife, and “Nona” (the Italian word for grandmother) is the most important aspect of her life.

Every year, Jean and Jim make an effort to take a camping trip with their three children—Jeff, Elizabeth, and Bryce—and three grandchildren. During their trips, they love to hike, ride bikes, and swim in the lakes. The goal, she tells us, is to recreate the trips they took when her children were young. Jean and her family have traveled all over the country—from Alaska, Minnesota, Hawaii, Montana, and North and South Dakota. They’ve also taken international trips. When her children were young, they traveled across Europe to Holland, France, Austria, and Germany. “My kids still talk about it,” she says with a smile. She recounts memories of visiting museums and galleries across the continent fondly. She’s loved to travel since she and Jim were first married, and took long road trips together. “Road trips were always a chance to eat Cheetos and drink Coke,” she laughs, although she says now that she’s lost her taste for Cheetos. Her office is filled with pictures that Jim took while they were on their trips. One canvas, which she tells us is her favorite, displays a bright yellow vintage Chevy, a sight seen on one of their road trips through Southern Oregon. She tells us of a time the two of them took a trip to Alaska, where she lived at one point. As it was Jim’s first time visiting, they rented a car in Anchorage and bought tin foil to block out the constant light and air mattresses from K-Mart to create a makeshift RV. She recalls her favorite memory as the time that Jim saw his first moose while they were in Alaska. “He just went bonkers!”

Family, traveling, knitting—all of these passions meld together to create a special bond for Jean, not unlike the interwoven pattern of the complex shawl.
Even if she had not said it, it is easy to tell that Joyce Gabriel is an artist by the articulate movements of her fingers and impeccably well-coordinated, spunky outfits. Sometimes her right index finger and thumb come together as if holding an imaginary brush or pen, illustrating her words. As she sits upright, legs crossed, her purple tights add a pop of color to her muted, brown dress. “I’ve been here since 2000.” In that year, there were only three people working in the department. By the year 2008, there were ten.

Joyce Gabriel is Pacific University’s Creative Director of Marketing and Communications. Her digital designs have made it onto the covers of Pacific magazine. She works to enhance the visibility of the university, as well as oversee the “look and feel” of all of Pacific’s branding. The department provides templates, “a whole slew of templates” that faculty, staff, and students can use for brochures, newsletters, flyers, and/or Powerpoints.

Joyce grew up in South Dakota and graduated with a degree in Art and Home Economic Education. However, “I decided I wanted to do something a little different than teaching. I wanted to be the one who does things, produces things.” After trying interior design, working at a fabric store, and then a small ad agency, “I realized I wanted to work in graphic design.” Security Pacific Bank was a client of the small agency in Portland, “they liked my work so much that they hired me to be the bank’s full time graphic designer.” Following the ad agency, Joyce was employed at a few other places before she saw the opportu-
nity to work at Pacific. “I thought it sounded like a good fit.”

A typical day for Joyce actually begins the night before. She takes time to organize and develop her plan for the following day. When she gets to work, she checks her email and calendar. She completes miscellaneous tasks, attends a meeting or two, and becomes aware of any upcoming deadlines. Her glasses, though they appear ordinary enough at first glance, have a subtle crackled look on closer examination; chic statements framing lively blue eyes. “I think what is rewarding about this job is that it is always changing. Things happen in cycles through the year and the longer you work here, the more you understand the cycle.” In addition, “The students become colleagues and they change things up quite a bit.”

When conversing with Joyce, we notice how her hands sit patiently over her knees, becoming animated when asked to explain her art or the process of using a letterpress. Sometimes, they simply attend to the paisley shawl gently draped over her body. Looking around the office, you’ll see an array of art pieces that surround her workspace. Above her desk hangs a mobile that holds artist trading cards—like little fairy-sized pictures. As she begins to introduce her artwork and graphics, it is easy to realize where her profession and passion intersect.

One week later we are in Joyce’s home. My name is Joyce. I am 8 years old…My favorite subject is Art, declares a handwritten sign displayed in her first-floor art studio, which is filled with original illustrations; small, whimsical watercolors with predominant palettes of blue and green.

“Art runs in the family,” she says, selecting two pieces from a bookshelf. “I was surrounded by it, whether it was mom cooking, dad woodworking, or my grandmothers stitching and sewing.” Now Joyce and her husband, Tim, who forges finely wrought metal creations out back, continue the legacy. Each year they host an open house for others to enjoy their work. “Art for me is connecting with people,” says Joyce with an easy smile as she shows us a close up of a pink flower and a self-portrait in oil paint. “I don’t want fame and fortune. I want to inspire someone to pick up a brush—to know they can, whether they’re ‘the best’ or not.”

For a challenge, Joyce does “inktober,” posting one illustration per day on Instagram (@gabrielglimpse) for the month of October. One year she completed fifty-two illustrations and made a deck of cards. Amidst the eclectic variety of subjects—from snails to pencils—are quite a few pears.

“When I don’t know what to paint, I go back to pears,” she explains, browsing a sketchbook. “They center me. I think every artist needs something like that.” She opens to a page full of salt and pepper shakers. “This series is a travel diary. I’m not good at jour-
naling, so this was a way to keep track of where I’d been.”

Recently, Joyce added letter-pressing to her repertoire. “Don’t let Scary Larry the monster get you!” calls Tim as we descend into her second studio in the basement. She laughs and flits around, turning on bare bulbs. With a left turn, we’ve entered “Studio 57.” Sky-blue walls separate it from the rest of the gray basement. Some newer pieces, combining old type and Joyce’s illustrations, dangle from exposed pipes, creating an art-meets-industrial vibe.

“My favorite font, Helvetica, was made in 1957,” explains Joyce, donning a lime-green apron. “I was born in 1957, and got this press, which Tim repaired, when I was 57. The name just fit.”

Joyce works the machinery, her right hand deftly spinning the ink plate, while her left hand pushes down the lever, pressing the cards. The clanking of the gears becomes music in the studio. Each card says Just Write beneath a blue typewriter. A previous run carries the message, Slow down. Capture the moment.

When we ask about this phrase, Joyce clasps her hands and turns her eyes upward. “When I was a kid, I’d say to my mom ‘I wish it were Saturday.’ She’d tell me, ‘Don’t wish your life away—enjoy where you are today.’ My advice is enjoy simple pleasures; enjoy the process. Don’t compare yourself to others. Your passion will pull you through.”
EDNA GEHRING

narrative by Ricky Ridela and Max Medrano
photographs by Bronson Barretto and CarrieAnn Randolph

From her corner offices in Clark Hall Edna Gehring watches as students leave the Pacific Campus and enter the world away from school. Her brown wavy hair flows with a spray of gray, as she sits poised with a bashful smile. On campus “Auntie” embodies the maternal figure that is nurturing and familiar. “That is my true purpose,” she says. “Making sure the student is a successful person in society.” “Auntie,” as she is known, is the Director of the Hawai’i Outreach and Programming Office. “I finally have one title.” After over thirty years at Pacific University, “Auntie Edna” has had many titles: Director of the Underserved in Sight Health Careers Opportunity Program for the College of Optometry, Director of Multicultural Services and Learning Support Services (LSS), and Nā Haumāna O Hawai‘i (NHOH).

In Hawai‘i calling someone “auntie” or “uncle” and having no relation to that person is customary. She serves as a mother-like figure to the students from Hawai‘i, as well as the Director of the Hawai‘i Outreach program. She not only deals with kids from Hawai‘i but she also helps with the LSS center helping students who really needed it. She is also very involved with the football team and its players. When a football player for example breaks his hand or needs help doing their assignments she’s there to help.

Her spirit fills the room as everyone she encounters kowtows and shows respect to the highest of council. The Hawai‘ian word, ‘Ohana, or family, truly exemplifies what she offers to Pacific’s community. “Auntie” not only shares the Hawai‘ian culture with the university, but also offers the encouragement, which fosters
individual success within our school’s community. Since 1983, “Auntie” has assisted with the NHOH program. As most of the students are thousands of miles from their actual families, “Auntie” is there to offer her love and support.

With a soft smile she speaks to some of the NHOH club officers to talk about the upcoming events such as Thanksgiving, and Lu’au. Pacific’s annual Lu’au is the biggest event of the year for the school and brings in family from all over the world. The amount of preparation and time spent to make the event possible is year round. It is Auntie Edna and her group student advisors that make this possible. Her passion is to help students succeed in bringing some of that “Aloha spirit” to Pacific University. In the meetings Auntie speaks only when spoken to and only when she needs to. As the planning commences, it is the students discussing the programs that are going to be happening for the weekend and the drivers for these events. Auntie gives the students the power to make the event their own, and illustrate to the student the influence they have on the project. “Auntie you are going to the football game in Washington anyway, and we need a driver?” A student says with a chuckle. Auntie leans in from the side of the table and states “See if anyone can drive and if not, maybe I can drive.” Auntie near the head of the table, smirks and smiles with pride as each student stands with their own individuality.

Auntie Edna can come off as the nicest lady you’ll ever meet but if you don’t listen to what she tells you she can really chew your ears off. Just like a mother who scolds their kids for being bad or like a coach scolding their players to pick up the pace. She yells and scolds because she cares and wants the students to do well and see them succeed. Edna not only served as a council for these young adults but also as someone to help challenge them and help them to grow and mature into fine members of society. She knows most every student from Hawai’i’s background and takes ownership of his or her well-being.

A step in to Auntie Edna’s office in Clark Hall is like stepping into a home in Hawai’i. Her office is furnished with all sorts of old family photos and various Hawai’ian printed decorations. She is a part of the true Pacific family, a Pacific graduate herself, along with her husband and daughter as well. “My daughter was raised in this. She even was dancing in Luau when she was little.” The pictures of Auntie in years past are breathtaking. Almost like royalty, her hair so grand and beautifully done up. Her smile shines bright as each picture seems to be happier than the next. In over thirty years the Pacific grad has seen it all; she tells us about stories about bailing some students out of jail and even having to go to court for them. Like a mother goose looking out for her flock she appreciates each one. “I love them all. The good students and the bad ones; my gray hairs are from the bad ones.” Going out of her way to help students in need really shows
the genuine love and support she has for them. Aunty Edna really is “always there” for the students here at Pacific. She takes pride in what she does helping any student in need. Her connection to her students continues long after they have graduated she frequently is invited to weddings of old students.

Most of the time you can see her, a small brown skinned older woman with ashy, wavy hair up to her shoulders, walking around campus representing the NHOH in the club’s jacket or t-shirt. She is very kindhearted and soft spoken. Aunty is the type of person who will make anyone feel relaxed and at ease. Almost like connecting with a really good friend, Aunty is easy to talk to. She instills the values of family, allowing the students to take center stage and illustrate the assets they offer to the community. Never the one to want to be the spotlight Auntie shines brighter as a reflection of all the lights she illuminates.
YASHICA ISLAND

narrative by Josie Kochendorfer and Jack Lloyd
photographs by Chloe Chambers and Anastasiya DeWolf

Automatic doors part. Yashica Island walks into Scott Hall with slow, methodical grace, traversing with purpose as she leads us toward the conference room. Literary magazines and stubby pencils cover the table; one of her strong hands pushes an old newspaper out of the way as she sits down.

“My hair looks cute, right?” Pacific’s Director of Student Academic Inclusion and Success grins, her teeth bright.

Conversation with Yashica is even and relaxed. Though she is initially soft-spoken, we find her quick to excite: thirty seconds into the interview, her hair and her personality are locked in a vicious battle over which will occupy more space in the room. When she laughs, she laughs with her whole body. “Have you guys seen that old movie Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? I ain’t talking about the Bernie Mack and Ashton Kutcher one, either.”

She’s sociable and hip—welcome behaviors that are not often cultivated amongst staff. What Yashica may lack in orthodox methodology, however, she makes up for in compassion and all-around positive energy. Far from simple aspects of her personality, these traits are the tools that supplement her daily work as Director of the Tutoring and Learning Center and head of the Pacific Leadership Academy.

As a facilitator of mediation—both between students and the administration as well as their respective internal members—Yashica is responsible for large degrees of communication and the like. It comes as no surprise, then, that she is easy to talk to, incredibly forthcoming, and trustworthy. A typical day for her comprises of various meetings and conferences, in which she is responsible for communicating students’ needs to administrators through creative and amicable solutions. Preventing common misconstructions is another of her priorities she mentions, her hands...
folded atop the desk. “The administration doesn’t always see the students’ needs as needs…that’s where I come in.”

It’s not a job she can leave at the office at the end of the day, and a commute totaling three hours eats into her relaxation time, but Yashica couldn’t possibly be more suited to her role and the demands it places on her, both in the office and at home. She is genuinely concerned with her students’ well-being regardless of the time, be it an eight o’clock appointment or a post-dinner debate. This ethos is obvious through her quick correspondence—whether it is an individual struggling with writing concepts or a group of interviewers on a busy Wednesday—and, of course, the way she glows when she discusses the positive change involved in her work.

Yashica’s eyes widen and she leans forward at the mention of her cultural work—a voluntary extracurricular of hers. She is responsible for facilitating awareness and acceptance of diversity throughout campus, mentioning that one of her long-term goals is to work with a variety of cultural groups in the interest of giving them the visibility they deserve. Indeed, though Yashica has quite a few claims to fame—even if you forget about her hair for a minute—her revival of the Black Student Union (BSU) may be the most meaningful one to date.

On her own personal passions, her face lit up, smile forming across her face, as she utters the word: “food.” For Yashica, food is a way of bringing people together. “I value food. A good meal, the quality of meals, great restaurants. I love to travel to experience foods in other places; different ethnic dishes. I love to travel. I love to eat.” Her face brightens, her smile showing every one of her teeth. “You can tell, I keep on the weight,” she says, sporting a deep belly-laugh. There is little she values more than a hot, hearty, home-cooked meal, which she experiences every night when she sits down to eat with her six-year-old son, Jamear.

“My son gives me one-hundred hugs every single day when I get home from work,” she states, wrapping her arms around her own body. “I don’t mind a three hour commute, because I know that I’m doing this all for my son.” She loves to cook soul food. She favors chitlins and smothered oxtail, both foods I needed to google after her mention of them. Chitlins, or chitterlings, are the intestines of either a pig or a cow. They are cleaned, stewed, and sometimes fried. Oxtail on the other hand reminds me more of barbecued pork. When she doesn’t cook, her favorite take out is anything Asian and spicy. “I like my nose running when I eat!”

I imagine the two of them, Yashica and Jamear, sitting down at their dinner table, pots and pans over hot-pads, opening the lid of a pot revealing a steaming stew of chitlins, oxtails, and various vegetables. The comforting smell of stew would envelop the whole house. Jamear is a strong motivator for Yashica; it is her goal to give him, and others,
what she never had growing up. “I never was able to have the luxury of experiencing life to its fullest,” she starts. “As I get older, I’m able to be in a career that allows me to experience life in a way that I never have. I wanna share that.” Yashica’s dream is to get her son, as well as students, to find their passions regardless of expectations, to find happiness over the material life.

Bellies and hearts full, her love for food and culture is clearly projected into her work at Pacific University. Every year, the BSU puts on a home-cooked meal night, where people gather to eat the comfort food that they cook. Here, the BSU shares their experiences and outlook on life. Yashica creates a safe space where students can share how they feel, while also being respected by their peers and faculty. She uses her own childhood as a primary motivator to ensure that each student is their own agent — that they put themselves first, and feel respected. She leans into the table, hands up close to her face. “Never be afraid to live your passions,” she says, hands emphasizing each syllable. Yashica notes that heavy societal and familial expectations are passed down and projected onto children — the need to represent the family, and how that leads people to go down a poorly-suited career path. Yashica encourages everyone to live life for themselves and not for other people.

After our meeting, she sheds her jacket, revealing a classy black-and-white woven top. She sits down on a vintage, light-blue upholstered chair and laughs out the words, “so do I get a real photo-shoot now, or what?”
Tracy King is seated with a regal posture, her fingers knitted together in her lap after finishing an email. We are welcomed by Tracy and we sit with her at her desk near the front of the office. The desk is piled with paperwork and her computer has two screens to facilitate her work. Around us is the quiet commotion of any office, one employee is speaking boisterously to a man with a question, two others are having a conversation back and forth over their desks. Amidst this hum, Tracy tells us why she’s here and how she got to Pacific University in the first place.

Originally from Jamaica, Tracy grew up in New York and then moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Eight years ago she moved to Oregon and began working here five years later. This August marked her third year as an HR Generalist, handling the benefits for the staff and faculty. She enjoys this work, especially since for-profit employers were always too focused on making money and not about making a difference, and that naturally led her to Human Resources.

“I originally wanted to be a teacher,” she says, “seeing a kid’s whole life change... you can’t put a price on that.” This love of children, and her drive to help them, is what led Tracy into Human Resources. She echoes the sentiments of social work majors the world over, the pay is some of the lowest available but the difference she makes is what keeps her going regardless. “If I can help the staff with this stuff, it makes their lives easier and that lets them help the kids even more.”

Her posture remains formal throughout our meeting, but her speaking is relaxed in comparison. She is quick to smile and even quicker to use the word “stuff” if it will get her point across. Tracy is dressed in vibrant colors when we meet, standing out against the beige of the office walls. Her hand motions are efficient while she speaks, and she uses them to accentuate her points and help emphasize certain ideas. Her
eyes continuously dart about as the conversation develops, focusing on every relevant person or thing as they come up.

As the HR Generalist, Tracy’s normal day consists of work on the computer, especially email. A lot of this communication is to ensure the seamless entrance of new employees and in general trying to make the lives of the faculty and staff less frustrating overall. This may not seem like a lot of work, but with new staff being added all the time, “It keeps me busy,” she says in response. She even seems to be understating this, judging by the amount of paperwork on her desk and emails in her inbox. And as we leave, the sound of her slender fingers returning to the keyboard is barely audible over the sounds of the office.

When we visit her a second time, she is carefully looking over a small magnet. Bright pink manicured nails accented her long fingers. The maroon and black rectangle had Southridge’s basketball schedule in white lettering. Her twelve year-old son Jordan, illuminates her desktop screen in a cool football stride. With a laugh she says when not working she’s chasing after her son, whisking him off to football or basketball practice or another school function. Jordan would be playing this upcoming weekend at Aloha High School. “It’s gonna be a big game! Well big for these little guys,” she chuckles. “My son’s team will be playing for the league championship!” her eyes grow bigger, full of pride, eyelashes fluttering furiously. She even invites us to come watch the game to see her son in action.

Between work and being a mom, Tracy also manages to find time to workout five days a week, explaining her lean, gazelle-like physique. Listening to live music is something she really enjoys. In a bumper sticker-esque way, she claims she would drive for music. That’s one of the things she misses about Atlanta and New York. Many of the big name artists that she loves bypass Oregon. “My favorite artists to see in concert are Eryka Badu, KEM, R. Kelly and Jay Z,” she tells us. One of the most memorable shows she’s seen? Jay Z and Kanye West in Seattle. “Unbelievable show,” she says in awe. I can only imagine the energy of two super stars like that packed in one arena, would’ve melted anyone’s brain. She’s working on seeing Janet Jackson perform in January. “There’s just a whole other vibe and life in the city that’s not here” Tracy says, “but I like it here. It’s beautiful. Oregon is a really good place to raise a family.”

With her husband being so involved in sports through work, she loves to tag along when she can and attend football and basketball games. They attend the Super Bowl every year and was still heartbroken over the Seahawks’ most recent loss.

I ask if she had a completely free day, what would she do. Tracy paused, her hands cupping her face in thought, “I could be at the beach all day. And the beach, not the coast,” she emphasizes, having noticed how Oregonians distinguished the two.
At the coast, you sit and play in the grey, somewhat dirty-looking sand. You dance around the edge of the frigid water, but never go in.

She leans back in her chair slightly, imagining the warmth of the sand and the sound of the ocean. “I wouldn’t have to swim or get in too. I could just sit and listen to the ocean all day, relaxed. I think the ocean is the best sound.” Her eyes look off, as she calmly reminisces. Maybe to a beach at home in sunny Jamaica. With her vibrant appearance and personality, Tracy brings life to what would seem to be a mundane job. She wholly embraces the emails and computer work, hoping to give faculty and staff peace of mind and less stress so they can focus on impacting others. Wading through stress and paperwork, Tracy brings a soothing calm to the Human Resources office much like the ocean brings her.
Will Perkins, Dean of Students, walks into our interview in tan slacks and a white button-down, one hand in his trouser pocket, the other wrapped round a red Starbucks cup. Against his minimalist appearance, the bright pop of color looks almost out of place, but he is relaxed as he takes a seat with us to begin the first meeting of many he will have today. He has a wide, friendly face that strikingly resembles Kevin Spacey, if Kevin Spacey were an average American suburban man—think *American Beauty* but without all the disturbing connotations. He gestures mildly as he speaks, his voice a mellow tenor. The red cup sits unattended on the table.

Perkins oversees everything under the umbrella of Student Life here at Pacific University, supervising sub-departments like Housing and Residence Life, Learning Support Services, Graduate Support Services, and a whole host of miscellaneous committees and subcommittees. “The way I boil [my job] down for a lot of people is that I help students who are having difficulties, or causing difficulties,” says Perkins. Along with meeting with students individually to help them find solutions to problems that are jeopardizing their success at Pacific, he also serves on a myriad of committees and works closely with all facets of Student Life to help make Pacific a better environment for students to live and learn. For Perkins, graduation is the most rewarding part of working at Pacific, when he is able to see students he has worked with reach their goals. “I see their name pop up [in the program] and I’m like, ‘you’re graduating, that’s so amazing!’” Perkins says, his eyes lit up with pride.

Most of his day is spent in meetings, many of which take place in his office in Clark, the center of his working life. In the middle of the
room is a massive oaken conference table, at the head of which he can be found working on paperwork, or on his laptop, glasses perched on his nose; his desk is too far from the window, he says, and too often piled with things to be done—a graveyard of vitamin water bottles and empty to-go mugs.

Before coming to Pacific, Perkins received his doctorate in counseling—his diploma from Arizona State is displayed handsomely in his office—spent many years as a therapist, took a jaunt as a police officer, and worked his way from Director of Student Services in the Optometry Department up to his current position, which he has held for the last three years. With his counseling background, he is able to work easily with students from all walks of life, applying to his work a personal philosophy centered on connection and understanding.

“I think when you’re talking about the growth of people, to me university is about helping people grow intellectually, but also in other ways. The philosophy is similar to when I was working with kids and families, and that is to try to understand where the person is developmentally, and trying to meet them where they are,” says Perkins.

And with that in mind, when we ask him about a passion outside of his
work, his comment, “My life is pretty crammed,” makes perfect sense.

When pressed for further answers, Perkins delves into his busy life as a parent of two heavily invested children and how when he does have time it’s usually spent with family. Though he used to play soccer when his kids were younger, their activities now take up a large portion of his time. With two preteen kids involved in extracurricular activities everywhere from basketball and band to Lego robotics, their family time is spent on the go as well, leaving few enjoyable passions such as cycling available to him. Perkins even says, “So most evenings if I’m not doing stuff like helping my son or daughter with their homework, I’m actually working at home, and on the weekends, sometimes, I’m doing work stuff, too.”

His dedication to his family and work are an apparent driving force in his life, as one can see looking around his office and noting the homemade foil World’s Best Dad trophy and porcelain Dalmatian. Work and family often meld together with his wife also working on campus, and the times his daughter sells Girl Scout cookies in the UC, something he hesitates to enjoy as his five foot eight daughter can pass as a student at Pacific quite easily.

When we ask if we could expand upon his life outside of work, his knee jerk response of “I would like to, too,” had us all laughing followed by a long pause and deep thought on his part. His hand tucks under his chin as he ponders his answer, which was ultimately more work, though in this case, the domestic
kind, meaning chores. After a little more thought though, he adds that if he had a true free day, he’d probably go for a bike ride, but not in the rain, his Arizona roots make that a bit too much for him. Laughing for a moment, he continues “I rarely go to downtown Portland, so I might go downtown, just do some stuff down there.” Family nights are a more common occurrence, “Sometimes we’ll hang out and play a game, or have a movie night or something like that.” A few years ago he and his wife even went to Hawaii, something that’s more difficult nowadays with his work and his kids’ schedules.

All in all, Perkins’ statement of “I can’t remember the last time it was just, ‘Gee, I’m just going to do whatever I feel like today,’” sums up his busy life. And yet, his devotion to his family, in conjunction with his work create a dynamic and well-rounded man, who occasionally pulls up Kevin Spacey photos online to compare himself to in presentations and interviews.
Jerry Rice

narrative by Bruno Gegenhuber
photographs by Stephanie Bultman

Outside of the Campus Public Safety building, the officers argue over who would win in a fight—Spider-Man or Batman. Jerry Rice, the supervisor, wearing the standard CPS jacket with a badge stitched to the fabric, stands against the brick wall and shoots pretend webs from his hands. The other officer pulls his Kevlar vest down to show us a Batman t-shirt underneath—his secret identity just one layer deep.

Earlier, in the CPS headquarters—a one-room trailer drenched in beige paint from linoleum to ceiling, blinds drawn, cobwebbed baseball player bobblehead neglected atop a cabinet in the corner—Jerry tells me his origin story.

“Ever since I was a teenager, I always wanted to be in law enforcement.” He relaxes his shoulders into the chair, sips on a protein shake. “Due to different factors, that didn’t happen, but this job did. And this is kinda the best of both worlds because you get to help people.”

Jerry has been working in campus safety at Pacific University for over fifteen years. Every day, he wakes up, makes the two minute walk to work from his home on University Avenue, updates procedures and officer schedules, orders supplies, attends impromptu meetings—mostly about parking, the “bane of his existence”—and solves crises, such as an FBI-verified security threat at a recent lecture on campus.

Before getting promoted to supervisor a few years ago, Jerry worked as a regular officer. He performed routine patrols around campus, acted as a visual deterrent against crime, and sometimes, put himself in danger for the safety of his students.

“Probably the scariest interaction was back when I was an officer. It was about five in the morning on a weekday, and someone was trying to get into the main entrance door of Walter Hall. It turned out to be a local community member, high on meth. He was really amped up and all over the place, mindwise,” Jerry says behind the desk.

But when I ask him about the challenges he faces in his job, he says...
nothing of the threat of danger, the fear of a particular violence that has scarred many colleges of late. No. The major challenge he faces stems from those he has sworn to protect — the students.

“Most people think of us as the bastard stepchild, the unnecessary evil, the guys who bust us, who don’t let them party, who don’t let them drink. But that’s part of our education processes. At a university, I believe everyone here, not just faculty, are here to educate the students,” Jerry says, his face motionless, his words detailed and careful like a police report.

All of this changes when he talks about Spider-Man.

A week after I met him, Jerry holds a framed cover art of Spider-Man fighting Carnage and Venom up to the light. The frame is plastered with retro comic clippings — acrobatics, punches, webshots, the words “Stan Lee Presents” sprawled along one side. We stand in the living room of his home. Stacks of comic books lay scattered across the coffee table as though he’d sifted through them the night before, handpicking rare issues from a collection that once numbered over 2600. Jerry points out all of the details in the Spider-Man cover art, how the original artist signed it for him at the Portland Comic-Con a few years ago, how his wife set it into the frame, pasted the comic clippings on, then wrapped the whole thing up as a Christmas present.

He smiles. “The thing that marks me outside of work is my comics. Basically anything Spider-Man. You had Amazing Spider-Man, Spectacular Spider-Man, Spider-Man Team-up, Web of Spider-Man.” After returning the frame to the wall in the center of the living room, Jerry removes the Scrabble box off of the kitchen table and starts to display the highlights of his comic collection. one by one a Watchmen anthology, Absolute Dark Knight, The Road to Civil War, Wolverine #1, Spider-Man #1 in both black and yellow covers, The World Around Us series, some Archie’s. His most valuable issue — Giant-Size X-men #1 — is estimated to be worth sixteen hundred dollars. He shows me his Manga — Soul Eater, Pumpkin Scissors, Blade of the Immortal. When he’s finished, the table is covered, and he still grips another stack of comics.

Jerry started collecting comics when he was eight years old. His first time in a comic book shop he spent over an hour assembling a thick pile of books that he presented to his mom with a “shit-eating grin” on his face. For the next month, he pored over the superheroes until their stories had been consumed, then begged his mom to return to the shop. When he explains this to me, I see something in him I had never seen before. A feeling in his eyes — the touch of soft paper to skin, the smell of a cover, memories of masked heroes defeating crime beneath the bedsheets.

“As a teenage boy, I could’ve seen myself as Peter Parker. Definitely a
geek.” Jerry smiles again at the frame on his wall. It’s the pride of his home. He places one hand over his mouth. “You know, Spider-Man puts on the persona of Spider-Man, but he’s actually Peter Parker. The old school Spider-Man didn’t even have web capabilities from his body because he was a scientist, an engineer, that sort of thing.” I stare at the silver badge stitched into Jerry’s jacket. It’s small, the size of a nametag, yet I can’t imagine its absence. It covers the heart.

After some time, we leave his home. Jerry keeps his collection on the kitchen table, on display for no one. In the cold, we cross University Avenue, past the Pacific welcome sign, past the throngs of students walking to class, their eyes mesmerized by cellphones, their own stories.

Where the concrete path splits off toward the CPS office, I shake Jerry’s hand. His face has hardened, that smile replaced with nothing at all. His eyes scan the lawn between McCormick and Walter, pausing on a flock of students, some vehicles parked across the street.

Again he’s an officer.

But if you stripped off that mask, you’d know how, on a work-study job, he encountered a ghost named Vera in Knight Hall, how he started as an Exercise Science student at Pacific but later switched to Sociology because he couldn’t pass Chemistry, how he reads Naruto and Watchmen and lives next to the party houses and owns an entire bookshelf of comics and defends Spider-Man over Batman in arguments with other officers.

Jerry crosses the path between Walter and McCormick. Hands shoved in pockets, shoulders hunched, weaving through students. Before long, I can only see the red and black pattern of another officer on patrol. The CPS badge on his jacket, the plastic earpiece jammed in his ear.

Then I watch the students, hoping for someone else to open his cover.
If you step into Library 107, the first thing you will notice is the huge Mac desktop computer screen that takes up half of the desk against the window. Let your eyes fall and you’ll see cords littered across the table-tops, as well as every electronic device imaginable: iPads, microphones, tripods, and DSLR cameras. The man behind the computer, Al Weiss, is tall and slender with medium-length grey hair slicked back into a low ponytail. His title is lengthy, but by no means a bore: he is the Director of Educational Technology and Curricular Innovation, and he is the Founding Director of the Center for Educational Technology and Curricular Innovation at Pacific University. With his plaid button up tucked in, and his hands wrapped delicately around a hot cup of tea, he is responsible for assisting with technological integration in the classrooms all across the board at Pacific.

“My typical day is never typical,” Weiss begins, “I get to see what everyone at every campus is doing in the classroom, and witness each technological breakthrough that we make at Pacific.” His days are spent answering emails, sitting in meetings, engaging in video conference calls, and teaching seminars to ensure Pacific’s faculty are up to date on methods of technological support in the classroom. “I love that I’m able to dip my hands into multiple levels of the university,” Weiss emphasizes. “One minute I’ll be speaking with the President and the Board of Trustees, the next I’m helping a student simply log into Moodle.”

Al moved to Oregon from Illinois in 2009 when he was hired by Pacific University. A major reward he’s seen since his employment began has been the growth of Moodle. “We’ve seen 30% more courses using Moodle across the institution,” Weiss mentions. “That’s done through student’s feedback. It’s my job to help faculty see that students want their grades to be posted to Moodle. It’s a line of communication from your professors.” The site is used by about 65% of faculty on campus today.
Al gestures with his hands, very animatedly, like a dancer. His palms open and welcoming, fingers parted to emphasize every word, only setting them down for a moment. When they rest, it’s always left hand over right fist, his golden wedding band reflecting the computer screen they work in front of. “The university doesn’t mandate that anybody use any particular technology in their classroom. Some people use Moodle, some don’t and that’s fine,” he explains. “It’s good. We want faculty thinking critically about the teaching environment—why they would use something and why they wouldn’t.” Weiss also holds seminars on programs like Google Sites and PollEverywhere, a site that allows students to answer questions on the board via their cell phones or laptop.

“If you want to engage, I’ll show you how to do it.” His eyes dance back to the computer screen briefly, as if anxiety has set in from being away from his technology too long.

When Al’s passion for his job is not in action, his passion is his family. His wife and three daughters—ages thirteen, nine, and six—are obvious joys in his life; when asked about them a wide smile transforms his face and he begins gesturing excitedly. Al’s giant Mac desktop on the right of the room woke when he wiggled the mouse with his fingertips and began searching through photos taken with his Nikon DSLR, trying to find the best picture of his daughters. “I’m the biggest hiker in the family; the kids aren’t that into it,” he says, still looking through pictures, his hand at home on the mouse. Al also skis with his family, he said, “My wife doesn’t ski…but my children all do.” Most commonly they enjoy the slopes of the Timberline Ski Resort and the Ski-Bowl on Mount Hood. Al is interested in water sports; when he lived in Illinois he kayaked and sailed—the wind and weather conditions were perfect.

Al and his family are also passionate about traveling. Last summer Al said he and his wife took their kids to Mexico and had a wonderful time; his hands were folded left over right fist while his face displayed a pensive smile. Traveling is important to his family because of his experience in the JET Program—a Japanese exchange and teaching experience—where he met his wife Sarah. Though Al spent several years in Japan and had become fluid in the language, he says with a dismissive wave of his hand that his skills are now “a little rusty.”

Al’s most recent hobby is Latin dancing. Around two years ago Al and his wife began taking Latin dance lessons. “We’d go out a little bit in the clubs, but we also got into performing,” he said. They mostly dance the social Latin dances Salsa, Bachata, Merengue, and Cha-cha-cha, but Al’s favorite is salsa. “It’s a little bit faster, a little more technical than some of the others,” he
says, explaining very simply the style of the dance. When he and Sarah dance, a large smile crosses his face and he looks at her with joy. His hands, clasped with hers only at the tips of their fingers, direct the dance, spinning Sarah and moving her through the steps. His hand has power over the feeling and rhythm of the dance, like it has power over his computer mouse; it directs the volume of the music they dance to—sounds like those he grew up to in the 70s. As she turns his hand moves with her, his other hand waits at his side for her to face him again, waiting to take her free hand and move back and forth with the music. “I feel that vibe,” he says with a smile and a wave of his hand. Al proves his ability to direct the symphony of his work life with technology and computers accompanied by his personal life and family, his hands creating and emphasizing his love for both things.
When a dormitory toilet is clogged, who's the guy charged with fixing it? Who assures that benefits and work-study monies are paid and accounted for on time? And who is tasked with ensuring Luau goes off without a hitch or that students from Saudi Arabia know how to navigate the cultural idiosyncrasies of an American university? Meet the people who work behind the scenes at Pacific University—the community of staff and faculty—as captured by Pacific's own creative writing and photography students. Their jobs and lives are varied, but their dedication to ensuring a dynamic educational experience in all its varieties is common between them. This book strives to capture and share their stories through the creative efforts of the students their work serves.