

YORK

APRIL 2007



Big Shot

'Kenny vs Spenny' star Spencer Rice is an international TV success

PLUS

How a York Prof Stirred Up Local Politics
Way Off Campus with York International
Rez Gourmet: An Undergrad Cookbook



A chemist sees $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$.
An environmentalist sees Costa Rica.

A law student sees gross negligence
and unreasonable danger.

QUESTION EVERY ANGLE. STUDY EVERY ANGLE. RESEARCH EVERY ANGLE. WELCOME TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY. A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS NEEDS AN EDUCATION WITHOUT BORDERS. AT YORK, WE BREAK DOWN TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES AND BRING TOGETHER THINKERS FROM EVERY DISCIPLINE TO TACKLE REAL-WORLD ISSUES. WE DON'T JUST SEE THINGS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT, WE SEE THE LIGHT IN ITS ENTIRE SPECTRUM. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY, VISIT YORKU.CA.



INSIDE YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF KIRK

4 Editor@YorkU Joining the Grid. BY BERTON WOODWARD

5 Leading Edge Diversity in action. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

6 Universe

Pipa Maestra...What They're Reading...Grumpy Old Achievers...Blowing Good...Critical Math...Green and Wise...Pioneers at the Bar...Rufus Returns



COVER

OPPORTUNITIES

12 Big Shot

'Kenny vs. Spenny' star Spencer Rice is a global TV success – and a worrier. BY ANDREW CLARK

16 Travelling Way Off Campus

Through the innovative programs of York International, students are having life-changing experiences overseas. BY MICHAEL TODD



ENGINEERING

22 It is Rocket Science

York's space engineers work at the cutting edge of spacecraft design. BY DAVID FULLER



CUISINE

24 Rez Gourmet

Jessica McIntyre's cookbook helps student chefs go beyond Kraft Dinner. BY MICHAEL TODD



RESEARCH

26 Stirring Up Local Politics

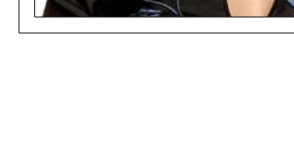
Political scientist Robert MacDermid injected a whole new element into the municipal election campaign by "following the money". BY DAVID FULLER



IDEAS

28 What's a Canuck?

Alum and former Rhodes Scholar Irvin Studin provides 43 different views in a new book that will benefit York. BY MICHAEL TODD



SUPPORT

30 The Bridge to My Dreams

A successful professional tells how York's Bridging Program helped her escape a life of despair. BY AMY MCNALLY

34 Giving

Finance Prof. Chris Robinson helps support student nurses.

35 York People

Ex-refugee Marika Kemeny...student filmmaker Ryan Knight...karate champion Nassim Varasteh

38 Back Talk

What I learned from my super-tough Spanish prof. BY ELISA BELFORD-DE LOS RIOS

APRIL 2007

Joining a global community. BY BERTON WOODWARD

On the Grid

HELP DEFEAT CANCER. That straightforward headline was gliding around on my computer's screensaver recently. And the cool thing is, I *was* helping to defeat cancer. My computer, which is one of approximately 50,000 or so under the command of people at York, is hooked up to something called the World Community Grid. It's a global effort spearheaded by IBM to make use of the downtime of your computer for massive processing projects – such as cancer research. York is the first Canadian university to join the Grid, and the University is encouraging everyone – students, faculty, staff – to get involved, via home, office and, eventually, lab computers, as part of the “York University Research” team. Several of us are doing it here in Publications, and we've become fascinated with what we see on our screens.

The Grid uses the idle time of PCs and Macs all over the world to help carry out these huge computing tasks, and the software always tells you what your processor is working on. The details can be impressive: “Your machine is systematically sifting through the multi-dimensional features of imaged cancer specimens to unveil the underlying protein and molecular patterns of breast, head and neck cancers.” The next day, it was AIDS research.

To get involved, go to yorku.ca/wcg, which explains how to download the software and join the York University Research team. Make sure you join this team, so that York gets to count you as a member.

York's involvement in this project



highlights its commitment to research, and to international collaborations of many kinds. In this issue, we look at another of its global initiatives where it is a leader in Canada – the amazing opportunities offered to students by York International. We've also been talking to York's researchers, this time to people involved in two of York's diverse strengths – space and social science. The rocket scientists led by Prof. Ben Quine are looking towards Mars, while political scientist Robert MacDermid may be the most feared man in municipal politics, for all the best reasons.

We have features, too, on York's alumni achievers, including Rhodes Scholar Irvin Studin, Bridging Program beneficiary Amy McNally and a special favourite of mine, our cover guy Spencer Rice. His comedy show with co-star and close friend Kenny Hotz, “Kenny vs. Spenny”, is a huge success, at home and internationally. But often it's the aggressive Hotz who gets the lion's share of attention. Thus Rice was especially pleased to be featured in a *YorkU* article where, he said, “Shithead is not in it, calling me a loser.”

It takes all kinds to make a world community – on TV and on the Grid. ■

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to editor@yorku.ca.

YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 4

EDITOR Berton Woodward
bertonw@yorku.ca

MANAGING EDITOR Michael Todd
mtodd@yorku.ca

ART DIRECTOR James Nixon
jamien@yorku.ca

STAFF WRITERS David Fuller
dfuller@yorku.ca
Martha Tancock
mtancock@yorku.ca

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR Cindy Wilce
cindyw@yorku.ca

COPY EDITOR Marie Kopf
mkopf@yorku.ca

CONTRIBUTORS

KC Armstrong, Elisa Bedford-de los Rios, Steve Carty, Andrew Clark, Tony Fohse, Sophie Kinachtchouk, Jeff Kirk, Lindsay Lozon, Amy McNally, Rsquared

YorkU is published bi-monthly, five times during the academic year, by the Marketing & Communications Division of York University. All issues circulate on York's campuses. The October, February and Summer editions are also sent to alumni, for a total circulation in those issues of 180,000 each.

CHIEF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER
Richard Fisher

PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR
Berton Woodward

ADVERTISING
Tel: 416-736-5058
E-mail: editor@yorku.ca
See rate card and back issues at yorku.ca/yorku

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40069546
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

Marketing & Communications Division
West Office Building, York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3
Tel: 416-736-5979
Fax: 416-736-5681

Address changes: alumni@yorku.ca
or 1-866-876-2228

Ideas and opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the University or the editors.

ISSN 1708-4512

PRINTED IN CANADA



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

As a new president is named, we celebrate who we are. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

Diversity in Action

Walk through the Colonnade into Vari Hall and Central Square, or across the courtyards of our campuses, and you will see the coolest, most contemporary crowd of Canadian students you can imagine. I'm told we're known as a fashion centre among campuses and there's no question that the undergraduates are on the cutting edge of their generation – in their ideas, their attitudes, their engagement and their looks (and the looks they give each other).

But once a year our students delve into the deepest of their roots. York is U, the student spirit group, created Multicultural Week to take place in February, the nadir of winter. In every way during this week, students demonstrate their allegiance to their ancestors, their languages and the many manifestations of the cultures into which they were born. It began in 2003 with



Canada's sharing of

group tables in York Lanes laden with food, maps, symbols and the art of their heritage but this year the events spread to the Accolade East Building and the Underground. There was a fashion show, music, dancing, food and a great sense of shared joy in this festivity.

All of us have our spirits boosted by this unique Canadian talent for being, on one hand totally Canadian in values and global in knowledge, while on the other hand, able to celebrate the precise cultural heritage of our family origins together with others. This sharing of identities and differences is the envy of most other countries. Many visitors come to find out how Canadians do this. Serious scholars study the phenomenon.

To York students it comes naturally. We have students, faculty and staff from over 165 countries of origin; routinely we hear scores of languages spoken on campus. Among our student organizations are dozens of ethnically differentiated groups. These students study, work and live together, argue, explore differences and often agree to disagree. Although it is

Lorna R. Marsden is York's president and vice-chancellor.

a secular University, many different religions are practised on our campuses and are respected as they do so. There can be no cultural or political isolation at York.

identities and differences is the envy of others. To York students it comes naturally.

York was founded to reflect the new Toronto and we have been faithful to that vision. We have been transformed over the years – new buildings, new Faculties, new programs, new research – and we will be again as we celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2009. This transformation occurs through people – students, staff and faculty – who bring new ideas and commitments to the academic experience. They change and enrich the University.

As I leave a changed University after 10 years as president at the end of June, I pass the responsibilities to a marvellous successor. Dr. Mamdouh Shoukri is an eminent researcher and engineer, currently a vice-president at McMaster University. He will be York's seventh president and the first scientist to hold this post. He will bring with him his ideas and memories from his childhood in Egypt, his emigration experience in coming for graduate studies, his work as a mechanical engineer and his leadership in research. He and his family will add to the multicultural dynamism that will change York during his presidency. As he joins us in July, everyone – students, faculty, staff, governors and alumni – will be exuding that York is U spirit as they say to him, “Welcome. York is Us.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY MIHALIUK

UNIVERSE

MUSIC

Pipa Maestra

In the world of the Chinese instrument,
Wendy Zhao is a major player

The pipa, a four-stringed, pear-shaped instrument made its first appearance in China about 2,000 years ago in the Han Dynasty. It was, like the European lute, a descendant of the Arabic *ud*. Wendy Wen Zhao, 40, who teaches pipa in York's world music program, hasn't been playing pipa for two millennia – only since the age of seven – but her virtuosity is nevertheless internationally recognized.

Zhao tours regularly with Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, has appeared at music festivals all over the world and was featured in a CBC television world music documentary, "The Four Seasons Mosaic". Her pipa career was heavily influenced by her mother. "She believed girls who played it looked well-posed, educated and classical," laughs Zhao, who joined the Chinese National Children's Orchestra during the Cultural Revolution.

The pipa is one of China's most popular instruments, she says. "Its name is made up of two Chinese syllables, *pi* and *pa*. *Pi* is to push the index finger of the right hand from right to left, and *pa* is to pull the thumb of the right hand from left to right."

Philip Glass has composed for the pipa, and the California rock band Incubus has used it on their recordings, but most of the repertoire is centuries old. Zhao will be breaking some new pipa ground soon. "My recital in May at the Toronto Music Gallery will be my first time collaborating with the European lute in an 18-century Baroque European lute duet piece." To hear samples of Zhao's playing on her latest CD visit wendyzhao.com. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG



BOOKS

What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table

Cynthia Archer
University librarian

The Diamond Age

By Neal Stephenson

"A future world made resplendent with nanotechnology is capturing my imagination. Neal should be required reading for all new library science grads.

In *The Diamond Age* he creates a totally interactive story book that smells and feels like paper. Life is so serendipitous. While reading this book I attended a presentation by inventor Ray Kurzweil, who predicts that in 10 years nanotechnology will extend our life span significantly. I love science fiction, where more often than not libraries, archivists and librarians have esteemed roles in society."

J. Andrew Wilson
Campus planner

Light Action in the Caribbean: Stories

By Barry Lopez

Planet U: Sustaining the World, Reinventing the University

By Michael M'Gonigle and Justine Starke

"The common thread in these books is our relationship with nature. Nature is always a character in Lopez's writing, often the main character. In this collection nature is offered as a silent context for human interaction. In *Planet U*, M'Gonigle and Starke argue that it is, in fact, the university's mission to nurture and guide our intellectual development in a way that encourages a relationship with each other, and nature, that moves beyond the nihilism that Lopez portrays so affectively."

PSYCHOLOGY

Grumpy Old Achievers

Researchers find 'disagreeable' seniors may be more mentally alert



York psychology PhD candidate Thomas Baker and his colleague, psychology Prof. Jacqueline Bichsel of Baltimore's Morgan State University, have found the personality trait generally described as "crotchiness" could be a positive factor in contributing to some seniors' mental alertness.

Baker and Bichsel looked at three age groups in terms of how personality styles might be predictors of intelligence. First was the "young" group (ages 19-60), then a middle group of older adults (61-89) who were cognitively comparable to the younger group as a whole and third, a group of older adults (61-89) who were cognitively superior to both the first and second groups.

"Previous research found relations of varying strength between personality factors and specific cognitive abilities [e.g. fluid reasoning or comprehensive knowledge]," says Baker. "But those studies focused mainly on samples of young adults."

Baker's study differed in that he examined personality-intelligence relationships in both younger and cognitively healthy older adults, as well as how a group of cognitively superior older adults could be characterized in terms of the personality-intelligence relationships.

Subjects were administered the "Big Five" Personality Inventory test and a cognitive abilities test. Cognitively superior older adults (61-89) outperformed both the younger adult group and the cognitively comparable older adult group on every aspect. Baker found that the personality trait of "agreeableness" was a significant negative predictor in the cognitively superior older adults for what psychologists call "crystallized ability" – which is an ability associated with a person's breadth and depth of knowledge. "The results suggest a 'disagreeable' nature may foster intellectual achievement that in turn may lead to cognitive vitality in old age," Baker says. ■

RESEARCH

Blowing Good

An interdisciplinary look

Why is a York atmospheric scientist studying the wind in Sudbury? It all started when a fourth-year biology student, Andrew Tanentzap, in York Prof. Norman Yan's lab noticed that a small lake near the city, once dead, was now coming "alive". Yan studies invasive species in freshwater lakes, and wind is known to affect lake turnover – a good thing.

Peter Taylor, an atmospheric scientist with the York Centre for Research in Earth & Space Science, says the student also noticed weather data showed a decrease in wind speed over recent decades. Taylor was called in to investigate why that was so. One of Taylor's specialties is using computers and mathematics to model the atmosphere's one-kilometre-thick "boundary layer" as it flows over topographic complexities such as hills, buildings etc.

Taylor found that a 34 per cent reduction in wind speeds from 1975 to 1995 appeared to be a result of significant

changes in the "surface roughness" of Sudbury's surrounding area. At one time, the Sudbury area suffered huge environmental damage from sulphur dioxide emissions, and one aspect of reclamation was planting eight million trees. Taylor's modelling – taking into account natural features and roughness of snow, grass and trees – turned out to match wind speed data gathered at the Sudbury airport. Cause?

"Reforestation is likely the reason for dropping wind speeds over the last few decades," says Taylor. "The finding is important because it has economic, social and ecological implications. Wind speeds have an influence on economic decisions such as the placement of wind turbines. Wind also loads buildings and other structures and subjects them to stress, and it affects home heating costs too. It may also influence the biology of small to medium size lakes." ■

There are athletes – and then there are "mathletes". And each year York does its bit for the latter group – the best and brightest high-school math students in the community – by hosting an outreach event in the shape of a week-long "training camp" for mathletes vying to compete at the International Mathematical Olympiad.

York's camp, sponsored by the Canadian Mathematical Society (CMS), is designed to give promising math students a chance to meet and learn from professors in the field, says Tom Salisbury, a professor in York's Department of Mathematics & Statistics and current CMS president.

This year's camp, which took place in January, was coordinated by York mathematics Prof. Neal Madras. "The Winter Math Training Camp brings together 15 top performers in high-school math competitions from across Canada," says Madras.

What do students study? Well, they hear about new methods useful in solving contest problems, says Madras. "That might be geometry, or combinatorics, or algebra, or inequalities, or other material. What they learn here is outside the curriculum. The presentations are often about a specialized topic or problem-solving technique they would not see in high school – maybe not even university.

"It's a great opportunity for talented students to get together and learn new things – not just from professors, but from each other," says Madras. "It's great to watch them tackle a challenging problem and come up with an elegant solution even the trainers hadn't thought of." ■



SUPPORT

Critical Math

How York helps up and coming mathematicians shine

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BRENDAN QUINE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

When it comes to going green York has gone a long way to lessen its ecological footprint. How? Well, by conserving energy and putting less garbage in landfills. In fact, in 2004-2005, the University diverted 284 tonnes of newsprint from landfills. York also recycled 221 tonnes of cardboard and 148 tonnes of fine paper, along with 227 tonnes of concrete, 202 tonnes of organic materials and more than 102 tonnes of plastic, wood and yard waste.

In 2006 York embarked on a program to reduce overall energy consumption by 20 per cent at both the Keele and Glendon campuses by 2009 (York's 50th anniversary). Meanwhile two York cogeneration plants have already been saving energy mightily, by burning natural gas to produce electricity and steam which are both needed for campus operations. The turbines now produce enough electricity to supply 60 per cent of the Keele campus's needs (York buys the rest). And the steam from cogeneration is used to heat York buildings during winter, produce domestic hot water (the water you wash with) and heat Tait McKenzie's swimming pool.

Green roofs are also part of York's sustainability and energy savings plan. So far, the University boasts two green rooftops: one on the Computer Science & Engineering Building and the other on Pond Road Residence. They save on heating and cooling costs, and help reduce stormwater runoff.

Currently, the University is asking the campus community to do its part as well, by turning off lights and computers or getting coffee in reusable mugs, not to mention taking public transit. Check out the Yorkwise campaign at yorku.ca/yorkwise. Mother Nature likes small footprints. ■



CONSERVATION

Green and Wise

York is determined to reduce its 'e-footprint'

Female lawyers and judges seem unremarkable today. But until relatively recently, women worldwide faced huge obstacles to gaining positions in the legal profession. For instance, women in Quebec couldn't become lawyers until 1941; Harvard Law School didn't admit women until 1950; and a woman was not appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada until Bertha Wilson joined the bench in 1982.

A new book, *The First Women Lawyers* by Prof. Mary Jane Mossman of York's Osgoode Hall Law School, relates these facts and many more, including fascinating personal stories of some of the earliest women to enter the legal profession worldwide.

"It's comparative research," says Mossman, "so I've been looking at women lawyers in Canada and the US, but also in England, New Zealand, India and Western Europe. It's taken a long time because I've had to go to all these archives to find these women's stories, but it is amazingly exciting to be reading the letters that were written by them in the 1890s – about their experiences as 'the first women'. Some are confident, others experienced major setbacks. There's real anguish to many of their lives."

The First Women Lawyers explores the lives of some of the women who first initiated challenges to male exclusivity in the legal professions in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Those challenges took place at a time of considerable optimism about progressive societal change, notes Mossman. "My book reveals how a number of quite different women engaged with ideas of gender and legal professionalism at the turn of the 20th century." ■



LAW

Pioneers at the Bar

A new book explores the lives of the first women lawyers

UNIVERSE



WILDLIFE

Rufus Returns

A York researcher helps boost the number of red wolves

It's not always the case that your PhD research contributes to helping save an endangered species, especially when the species in question has been persecuted nearly to extinction. But that's just what doctoral candidate Karen Lockyear's work is about.

Lockyear studies wolves. More specifically, the red wolf. *Canis rufus* is distinguished from the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) by colouring and size. It's a bit bigger than its close cousin, the coyote (*Canis latrans*), but smaller than a grey.

Due to hunting, red wolves' numbers plummeted so drastically that they were declared endangered by the late 1960s, and extinct in the wild by 1980. US wildlife officials rounded up the remaining few, and scientists established a captive breeding program to save the last vestiges of the species. Lockyear's research is contributing to the ongoing efforts to bring red wolves back in healthy numbers for long-term conservation. The hope is that free-ranging populations can be re-established (one already

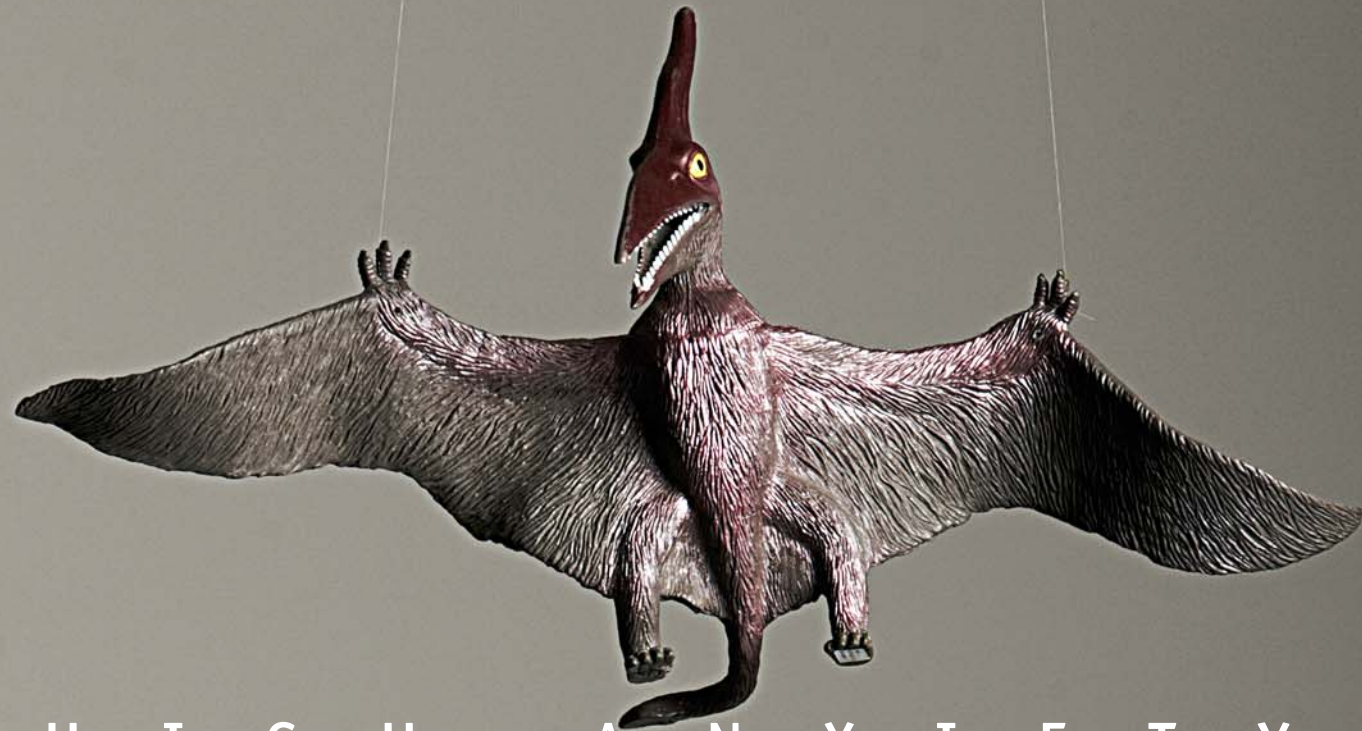
has been in North Carolina).

"My study, which I've just completed, looked at whether changes in inbreeding levels – which are inevitable given the small number of founding animals in the program – and age are affecting reproductive potential or fertility of individuals," says Lockyear. She looked at breeding success, litter sizes and fecal hormone patterns in males and females (indicating individual fertility and when the best time to breed animals might be), and also worked on improvements in assisted reproduction techniques, including cryopreservation of sperm and artificial insemination (AI) of females.

"Fecal hormone monitoring is a great non-invasive way to determine the optimum time for AI. But it must be very precise," she says. "This study represents the first documented case of successful artificial insemination of a red wolf using this technology. It's encouraging and it might be useful with other wild canid species." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BARON CRAWFORD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED



H I G H A N X I E T Y



**'Kenny vs. Spenny' star Spencer Rice
is a global TV success
– but he's still a worrier.**

BY ANDREW CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

OUTSIDE, IT IS A BRIGHT SUNNY MORNING and shoppers scurry up toward Bloor Street's posh shops, but inside a deserted café the atmosphere is a tad more pensive. Seated at a table, a bottle of water before him, comedian Spencer Rice shifts uncomfortably as he recalls a difficult moment: the day he says his best friend Kenny Hotz slipped LSD into his drink. "That was horrible," he admits. "It was a horrible, horrible thing. Being stoned was fun for a while but then it wouldn't go away."

Nor will the memory, stoned or not: it will always be available on DVD. That's because Rice is one half of television's "Kenny vs. Spenny", the reality-comedy hit series in which two lifelong friends share a house and ruthlessly battle in inane competitions to win the right to humiliate the other. These struggles run the gamut from "Who can stay naked the longest?" and "Who can win a beauty pageant?" to "Who do old people like more?" and "Who can sell more Bibles?" The LSD stunt was an attempt by Kenny (the evil one) to win the "Who can wear a dead octopus on his head longest?" competition. Kenny convinced the hallucinogenic Spenny (the do-gooder) that the octopus on his head was leaking toxic chemicals and causing him to lose his mind. Racked with anxiety, Spenny succumbed, removing his deceased cephalopod, and lost the challenge. His punishment? To eat sushi off Kenny's buttocks. They called it "tushi."

"There is some degree of sacrifice," says Rice, who has two York degrees. "No one forces me to do the show. But there is a part of me that looks at that episode and sees that it is a really unique opportunity we have to make shows that are this insane." Rice stops himself for a moment, as if revisiting all the terrible consequences that could have ensued. Ever the worrier, he adds: "Of course, if as a result of the drugs I had turned into

a vegetable or had a permanent speech impediment that would be a different story."

The story so far, however, is one of major success in the difficult world of TV comedy. "Kenny vs. Spenny" has been airing its third season on Showcase Television and is seen around the world. There is a British version of the show called "Ed vs. Spencer" and a German version called "Elton vs. Simon", both of which pay royalties. The show's deft blending of reality series mainstays (challenges, punishments) and the classic comedy duo equation (the Montreal *Gazette* dubbed them "Whine and Shyster") is arguably the most original series to come out of Canada in the last decade. Fans of buttoned-down humour may blanch, but Kenny and Spenny are merely surfing the same wave of shock comedy ridden by hit comics such as Britain's Sacha Baron Cohen (a.k.a. Borat) and the American "Jackass" pranksters. With a bit of the cleverness of TV's "Malcolm in the Middle" thrown in.

Rice is an only child born into a Jewish comedy family; his cousins include the late Marjorie Gross (a writer for the series "Seinfeld") and journalist and comedian Jonathan Gross. He grew up watching vintage Chaplin and Marx Brothers movies, appreciating comedy as an art. Rice and Hotz met at age six – their fathers were friends – and their childhoods were characterized by the kind of silly competitions (who can throw a rock the farthest, who can hold their breath the longest) that would eventually form the bedrock of their series.

"Spencer is one of the heirs of the Woody Allen, self-doubting tradition of comedy," says comedy impresario Mark Breslin (BA '73), owner of the Yuk Yuk's nightclub chain and an associate producer for "Kenny vs. Spenny". "It's a sophisticated tradition." Breslin believes this mould was formed during Rice's adolescence. As a teenager, he attended an upper-class



Toronto private school but found that his sense of humour was “lost on the WASPy suit-and-tie set.” He began playing hockey at Forest Hill Collegiate, the public school Hotz was attending, and “there my neurotic jokes and insights were laughed at and that was amazing.” He transferred and picked up his collaboration with Hotz. After graduating, Rice worked at jobs ranging from a summer spent making erotic chocolates to a stint in real estate and another in a blues band.

Though he can’t recall precise dates (“my brain doesn’t recollect years”), Rice says sometime in the mid-1990s he enrolled in York’s Film & Video Program as a mature student. “I was there to meet chicks and learn about film and TV,” he recalls. (It was actually 1990, and he had already completed a York BA in English at Glendon in 1987.) The program provided an opportunity to delve into the film business and to develop an aesthetic. “I had a professor named Evan Cameron, a really great prof, and I remember him showing *Triumph of the Will*, the [1935] Leni Riefenstahl film, and he was describing the opening scene and he was very enthusiastic. Class finished, we left and I realized that I’d forgotten my knapsack. I went back and there was Evan: he had restrung the reel and was watching it again, alone. That stuck with me; it told me a lot about loving the work, and about being a student of the work. I mean he must have seen the film a hundred times and yet he was still floored by it. He was still mesmerized.” (Cameron, for

his part, says that Rice got one of the few As in his documentary class.)

While at York, Rice produced *Telewhore*, a documentary about a 300-lb phone sex worker, which was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and on Britain’s Channel 4, as well as a short comedy entitled *Something Anything*, which won a Telefest Award for university-made films. After graduating with a BFA (Spec. Hons.) in 1993, he found work as a production assistant and pursued his partnership with Hotz. The pair produced *It Don’t Cost Nothing to Say Good Morning*, a short film about a local homeless man, and co-wrote a number of feature screenplays. These led to *Pitch*, a 1997 feature-length documentary chronicling their attempts to sell a script. The film included cameos by stars such as Al Pacino and Neil Simon and won Hotz and Rice acclaim and credibility. “We saw audiences laughing at us, and we understood that we had a classic comedy duo dynamic that was fresh because we weren’t actors,” says Rice. “Someone approached us, asking ‘Have you ever thought about coming up with TV show ideas?’”

The result was “Kenny vs. Spenny”, which debuted as a kids’ show on the CBC in 2001. The series combined reality television and comedy and featured Kenny as an unscrupulous devil who would stop at nothing to defeat Spenny, an anxious moralist who never found a high road he couldn’t take. Spenny

plays the straight man to Kenny’s manic attention-seeking, Abbott to Hotz’s Costello. Breslin sees it as a comment on the nature of male competitiveness. The show’s outcomes are not predetermined, though both Spenny and Kenny are given time to plan their strategies and the crew is kept in the loop in order to capture the action on tape. The on-screen animosity is real (Breslin recalls halting fist-fights during story meetings) and was a tad too risqué for the CBC. The series was picked up by Showcase in 2005 and has since become far more adult.

“Kenny says that I am naturally funny and he tries to be funny,” says Rice. “He is always trying to make jokes and I am always setting him up. I think that Kenny is a Machiavellian figure, he’s Enron, he is a personification of the me, me, me, screw-everyone-else person.” Rice maintains that conflict is the essential ingredient. “People getting along does not make for good comedy. People who are comfortable and happy do not

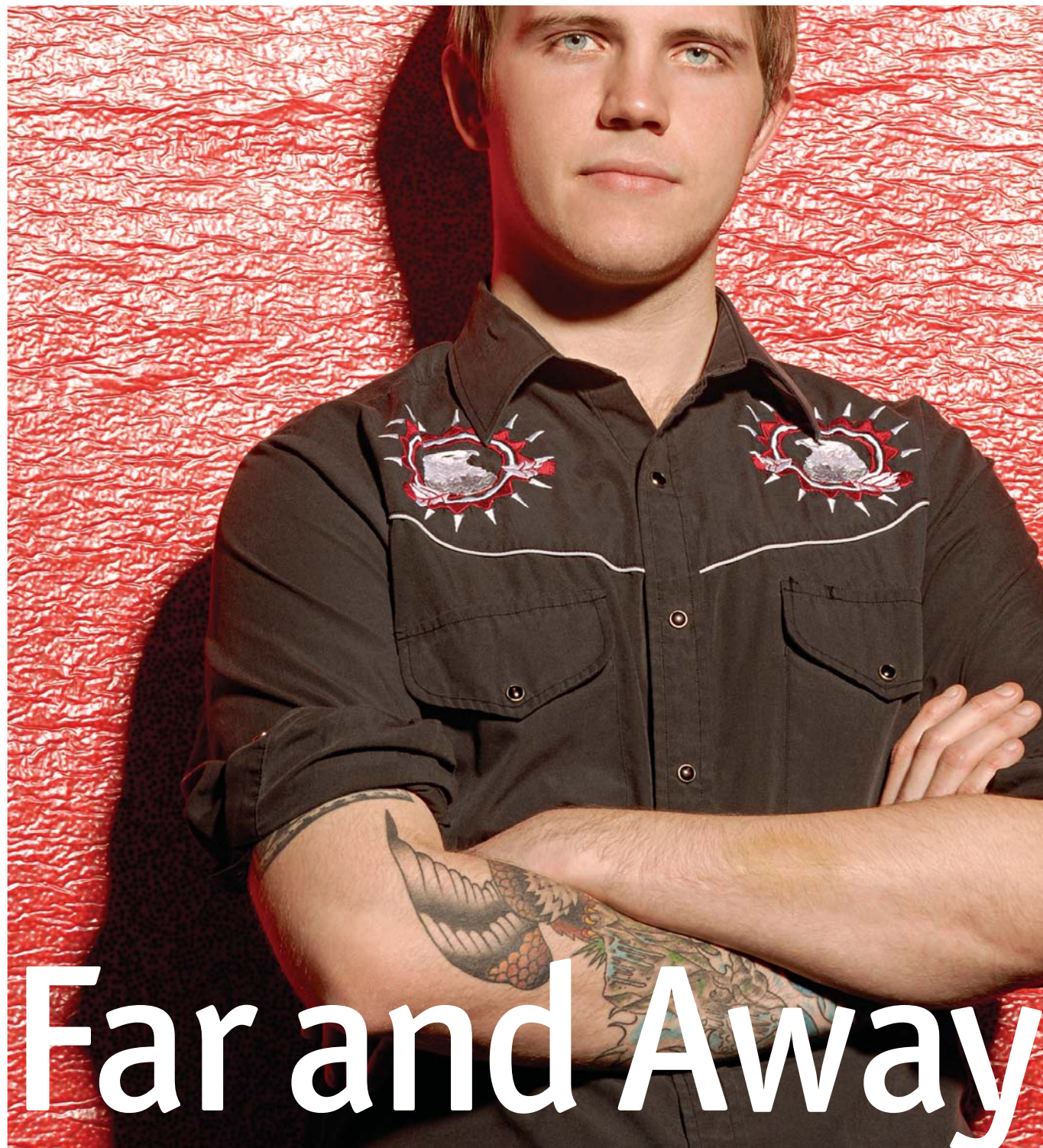


SCREEN RIVALS: Hotz and Rice

people don’t care anymore,” says Rice, who now splits his time between Los Angeles and Toronto. “The thinking is: ‘If you can get away with it, do it.’ Within the stupidity and idiocy of what we do there is a sort of lesson. My biggest fear is that the lesson is: ‘Yeah, cheat and you’ll win.’ So, if someone comes up to me and says ‘Kenny is a real asshole,’ then I am doing something right.” ■

make for good comedy. Suffering, neurosis, anxiety, all that stuff – that’s what makes good comedy.”

Such “good comedy” has positioned both Hotz and Rice for bigger forays into the TV spectrum. Rice shot a pilot episode called “Stump” for Family Channel based on his experience of playing in awful high-school bands. He has written and stars in an independent movie about a porn addict that is currently shooting, and he’s working on other screenplays. He is also gearing up for season four pitted against his lifelong nemesis.



Far and Away

THE ANCIENTS KNEW THE VALUE OF TRAVEL for both the mind and spirit. According to Seneca, “Travel and change of place impart new vigour to the mind.” St. Augustine famously said, “The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a Page.”

In many ways, travel is a bit like getting a “BA in life”. Living and working with other cultures is a great way to add to an already expanding store of experiences if you’re a student working on your degree. Just ask York students Anastasia Shesterinina and Elliot Pobjoy, who travelled to Moscow and India

respectively. They obtained summer internships there via York International (YI). For both students, YI footed the bill for travel and living arrangements, as it does for all internships and longer-term placements (up to a certain limit).

The broadening aspects of international work and experience are something the helpful people who staff YI (located on the first floor of Vanier College) understand well. That’s why they’re eager to match students with all sorts of opportunities abroad. If you’re a current student, the York International Internship Program may be the perfect opportunity to learn



OPPORTUNITIES

Through York International, students like Elliot Pobjoy and Anastasia Shesterinina have had life-changing experiences overseas.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

BROADENING: Pobjoy (opposite) and Shesterinina

some new life skills while also picking up some great knowledge of cultures other than North American.

Adrian Shubert, associate vice-president international, notes that “internationalization” has always been a leading priority at York, closely tied into academic priorities. “Internationalization as a concept at York, of which York International is a part, is consistent with the University’s commitment to social justice and equity,” says Shubert. “It’s also part of our tradition of interdisciplinarity. Most Canadian universities recognize the value of international, but York has become a recognized leader in providing

opportunities for students. We feel international experience can only benefit students, including improving their career prospects in many fields.”

Shubert says there’s no single YI experience. Instead, YI provides a great diversity of services and programs (check out international.yorku.ca), in which connection to “the international” aspect is always the starting point. Some experiences give students a chance to study or work outside Canada (such as the internship program and York’s many exchange programs); others, such as the Emerging Global Leaders Program

OPPORTUNITIES

and Language Links bring together international students and domestic students for their mutual benefit.

Although it's probably not well known, YI is also involved in curriculum development, says Shubert. "We have worked with faculties like Science & Engineering and Arts, for instance, to pioneer new degrees such as the International BSc and the International BA which bring the normal degree requirements for the discipline together with language study and international exchange."

IF THERE WAS EVER AN EXAMPLE of "internationality" personified, it would have to be Anastasia Shesterinina. The third-year political science and European studies major speaks five languages (Spanish, French, Russian, English and Ukrainian) and originally hails from Ukraine. Shesterinina, who works part time at York International, had the opportunity of combining her academic interests with a YI internship while working for Oxfam in Moscow this past summer. It wasn't her first time in Moscow. Before she came to Canada, she had attended the Moscow Theatre Academy where she studied acting and directing for two years. "I definitely switched gears when my family immigrated to Canada," Shesterinina says with a laugh.

Her Moscow experience with Oxfam Russia, however, was quite different from her previous student days. "I'd heard about Oxfam and knew they had a program in Russia. They had plans to attend the G8 conference there last year and offer recommendations on what the big eight could do about reducing global poverty.

"The important thing about my internship in Moscow was the issues that Oxfam works on; they paralleled my studies at York. When you apply for internships through YI you have to indicate three choices, based on your interests, your academic strengths etc. My interests, which are similar to Oxfam's, are working on reducing poverty by way of debt relief on a global level along with development of entrepreneurship to empower people locally. Oxfam works on

developing government-civil society links and policy-making that promotes sustainability of livelihoods, ensuring access to basic human needs such as health care, housing, education, and employment for everyone despite social status. Oxfam's also active in peace building in war-torn countries. I was interested in all that."

While in Moscow, Shesterinina often found herself in the role of translator, putting together position papers for Oxfam Russia (some of which were later presented to leaders and ministers of the G8 conference and were read by President Vladimir Putin himself). She also wrote articles based on conversations with Mikhail Kalashnikov – inventor of the AK-47 rifle. Kalashnikov, now in his 80s, never made a penny from his (unpatented) weapon and continues to attend arms fairs around the globe speaking out against the arms trade. "It was amazing to work on Kalashnikov's statement against the illegal spread of weapons, later published in the *Moscow Times*," says Shesterinina.

How did she feel overall about her experience? "Our projects, and being involved in drafting civil society recommendations, really changed my perception of politics and the part I could play in it. Individuals can make a difference." Shesterinina will continue to do so: this year she is going to the Netherlands on an academic exchange through YI to focus on peace research.

ELLIOT POBJOY HAD HIS LIFE changed by his recent internship in India, he says. The fourth-year student majoring in international development and history landed a position in the southern city of Bangalore this past summer working with an NGO called the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (JCCD).

"The process was pretty simple," says Pobjoy. "I got several references from York professors and staff and selected three positions from a list of opportunities on the YI Web site. Later I had an interview. Most of the questions surrounded my work experience, my intentions career-

wise and academically, and my suitability for international travel."

Shortly after his interview Pobjoy got notice from JCCD that he'd been selected. "I was delighted since India was my preference," he says. Coincidentally, Pobjoy ended up on the same placement as his friend Adrienne Johnson, a York political science major with a minor in international development studies. "Neither of us knew that the other had put down working with the JCCD as first choice," says Pobjoy. "We didn't find out until later we were both going to the same spot. Anyway, once we landed in Bangalore we spent the week getting to know our neighbourhood, eating too much delicious food and generally realizing the beauty and warmth that is India."

Pobjoy and Johnson's job at JCCD was to redesign its citizenship awareness program. "The program was designed to introduce community members – students and business leaders – to the principles of janaagraha, which roughly translated means 'people power'. JCCD itself is devoted to enhanced local democracy, accountability and good governance. We had to define the program's content, the emotional impact we desired and our delivery methods. We also had to figure out how the program could be delivered by anyone, since plans were for it to expand greatly after we left. About 1,000 new trainers were going to be hired to deliver the program over two years. We figured the best delivery method was to maximize use of information technology and participatory education techniques."

So what kind of life skills did he and Johnson learn during their months away? Well, definitely the kind of things that don't usually get taught in the classroom. Says Pobjoy, "We made hundreds of friends from all walks of life – from local street kids to the police chief's daughter – enjoyed weekend trips to palaces and ancient temples, had our apartment infested with thousands of cockroaches, took a trip through the Himalayas and, generally, experienced huge culture shock when we got home!" ■

AFTER DECADES IN BUDGETARY LIMBO, interplanetary space exploration is heating up again. It's a great time for space research and, like Neil Armstrong when he first stepped onto the surface of the moon – four years after the first space scientist came to York in 1965 – the University has taken one giant leap to boost its standing as one of Canada's leading space research centres. The five-year-old Space Engineering Program, the only one of its kind in Canada, has doubled its expertise with the arrival of three faculty members with industry experience in spacecraft design. The three – engineers Hugh Chesser, George Zhu and Jinjun Shan – joined colleagues Jim Whiteway, Richard Hornsey, Wayne Cannon and program director Ben Quine last fall, and two more will be hired next year.

Long known for its work on environmental research instruments carried on satellites such as WINDII, SCISAT and OSIRIS, York will take centre stage in Canada again in August when NASA's Phoenix Scout Mission to Mars launches with a package of instruments aboard designed by York scientists. Whiteway, Canada Research Chair in Space Engineering and Atmospheric Science, specializes in the design and use of laser remote sensing (lidar) instruments to measure atmospheric conditions here and on Mars. Quine heads a consortium that is trying to put an unmanned vehicle on Mars. Together, they teach students how to build satellites that will take instruments, and eventually people, into space.

It's the future of human space travel that captivates everyone's imagination and poses quite a number of engineering challenges. "There's a little secret to space flight," explains Quine. "It makes people very sick." Although space travel will be 50 years old this year, it's still a trick to keep spacecraft right side up when there is no "up", and functioning properly while traveling at 25,000 km/h in zero gravity and frigid temperatures.

For example, on China's Shenzhou 5 spacecraft, which uses solar panels to power some of its systems, engineers discovered an unforeseen vibration problem that prevented the huge, flexible panels from rotating properly towards the sun. Shan, who teaches courses in payload design and space vehicle dynamics, helped develop a motion-control system using motors to counter the vibrations while he was a member of the Chinese space program. "There was no theory to guide the design," explains the graduate of China's Harbin Institute of Technology. Shan first became enthralled with space when he read about Armstrong and the Apollo 11 mission and nursed a childhood dream of becoming a space engineer. He says he is particularly pleased to

join the York space team, which stresses interdisciplinary research.

Controlling spacecraft in flight is another challenge. It takes a deft hand to steer a fast-moving spaceship into a docking port not much bigger than a manhole cover. Zhu, who has a PhD in naval and ocean engineering from China's Shanghai Jiao Tong University and a second doctorate in mechanical and industrial engineering from the University of Toronto, designed vision-based robotic controls to dock passenger bridges to aircraft during his 11-year career in Canada's aerospace industry. Zhu's current research interest focuses on a space-based tether propulsion technology – a giant space sling that could catch flying spacecraft in low orbits and swing them to higher orbits or even other planets.

Getting to space on a rocket can be bumpy, and once there, it's cold outside. Chesser's expertise in spacecraft engineering gained from his years working for some of North America's leading space firms will help engineering students learn how components can be made to survive the rigours of a space mission. Chesser has a master of applied science degree from the University of Toronto and more than 15 years' industry experience. One of his priorities is to help introduce the use of state-of-the-art computer-aided design and analysis applications into York's program. His experience at U of T includes participating in the design, build, test and launch (from northern Russia in 2003) of the MOST micro satellite – a.k.a. Canada's "humble" space telescope.

The Space Engineering Program makes up one third of York's School of Engineering and is looking to earn accreditation as a space program – no easy task in an already rigorous process when there are no others like it. York's entire program focuses on the design, manufacture and integration of space systems, including satellite communication systems, remote sensing technology and scientific payloads, as well as the design and management of complex hardware and data systems. Although the program is still relatively small, with about 70 students, Quine says it gives York a practical capability to support its space science research and groom young engineers for the next half-century of space exploration.

And not just by NASA. As Quine points out, the day is fast approaching when governments won't be the only ones funding human flight space programs. "That model is unsustainable," Quine says, noting the increased interest among private firms in space travel and exploration. "We're beginning to see the commercialization of space." ■



EXPLORERS: Chesser (left), Hornsey, Quine, Zhu and Shan

It is Rocket Science

York's space engineers work at the cutting edge of spacecraft design.

BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

Rez Gourmet

Jessica McIntyre's cookbook helps students go beyond Kraft Dinner.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

BUDGET-WISE: McIntyre

HERE'S SOMETHING to sink your teeth into: a new cookbook by York sociology student Jessica McIntyre. It's designed specifically with university students in mind, especially those who are stuck in dorms and don't have access to a Jenn Air (more likely a toaster oven).

Playing off the American slang for the supposed weight gain on entering university, McIntyre created *The Freshmen 15*, a book of easy-to-make 15-minute meals. It was both a labour of love and a necessity, she says. "I wrote it when I was at Georgian College [studying business administration] and I was sick of eating Kraft Dinner and peanut butter sandwiches in rez. I had to do something!" she says with a laugh.

To create it, she called family and friends and

gathered together favourite recipes that were easy to prepare using blenders, hotplates, toaster ovens and a minimum of cooking utensils (what you need is outlined in the book).

Only \$10 (order through thefreshmen15.com), it's a cleverly-designed book with recipes, ingredient lists, food prep (and safe storage tips) outlined on spill-proof, laminated 5x8 cards held together with a metal binder ring so you can easily detach a recipe and prop it up beside your chem book. Each card/page features colour photos of the dish.

McIntyre has kept an eye on students' budgets as well as their waistslines. "Meal ingredients are costed out to come in under \$5," she says. "The book emphasizes tasty, healthy eating."

Now that's food for thought. ■

All Day Omelets *What can you do with 1 Egg and 1 Piece of Toast?*

1. Mix...

- 2 eggs and 2 tbsp of milk
- Salt & Pepper
- Mixture of Vegetables (onions, peppers, tomato...)
- Sliced ham or chicken, cut into pieces

2. Cook...

- Spray non stick spray in pan
- Pre heat frying pan on low/med. heat
- Add mixture and cover with a lid

3. Eat... With an apple and a piece of toast you have a great energy meal!

When you get comfortable enough cooking, feel free to mix and match your ingredients. You could add onion powder, mushrooms, or garlic. Be creative.

Eggs really go with everything!

Dippy Egg

1. Boil egg for 3 mins
2. Put boiled egg in a shot glass
3. Cut off top of egg
4. Cut toast into fingers
5. Dip toast fingers into egg and enjoy!

Egg Sandwich

1. Boil egg for 10 mins
2. Remove egg from shell
3. Place egg on one half of toast
4. Cut up egg and fold toast over
5. Add salt or pepper

- Eat -

What to do with those great Leftovers!

MENTION YORK PROFESSOR Robert MacDermid's name to a local politician in the Greater Toronto Area these days and you'll get a reaction. Which is odd, since mild-mannered academics, even if they are political scientists, seldom rate much notice from those caught up in the frenetic scramble for votes. For MacDermid, a professor in York's Faculty of Arts, that all changed in the spring of 2006, when he presented his latest study on election campaign finances at the Congress of the Humanities & Social Sciences held at York's Keele campus, just as politicians were gearing up for Ontario's municipal election battles. What he wrote made front-page news in the *Toronto Star* and sent candidates falling over each other trying to get on the right side of what his research revealed.

As the covert whistle-blower "Deep Throat" said in the 1976 Watergate film *All the President's Men*, the way to find out what's really going on is to "follow the money". MacDermid eventually reached the same conclusion as a political scientist. "I was brought up as a person who looks at polling data, and then I got interested in TV ads," he recalls. "When you realize how expensive the ads are, you begin to wonder, well, where does all the money come from?" During the 1998 provincial election campaign, MacDermid began studying lists of campaign contributors that were available online for the first time and noticed that many of them were developers. "I began to connect companies together and you quickly get a picture," he says.

In 2003, MacDermid was approached by members of VoteToronto, a grassroots organization that tracks politicians' voting records, who were interested in putting data he compiled from the 2000 election on their Web site. MacDermid's list of contributors to candidates for mayor proved a hit with Toronto journalists, who referred to the information in their coverage of the 2003 campaign. That election, which saw David Miller elected as mayor, turned on concerns about corporate influence thanks to the MFP computer licensing scandal and a push by pro-development councillors to build a bridge to Toronto's Island Airport.

Flash forward to the 2006 campaign and MacDermid's Congress paper. Journalists were by now accustomed to calling him for comments on election finance, so he guessed the media might be interested in an advance copy of his latest study, "Funding Municipal Elections in Toronto", in which he looked at the 2003 data on contributions to candidates for mayor and regional and local councils in 10 GTA jurisdictions – most of

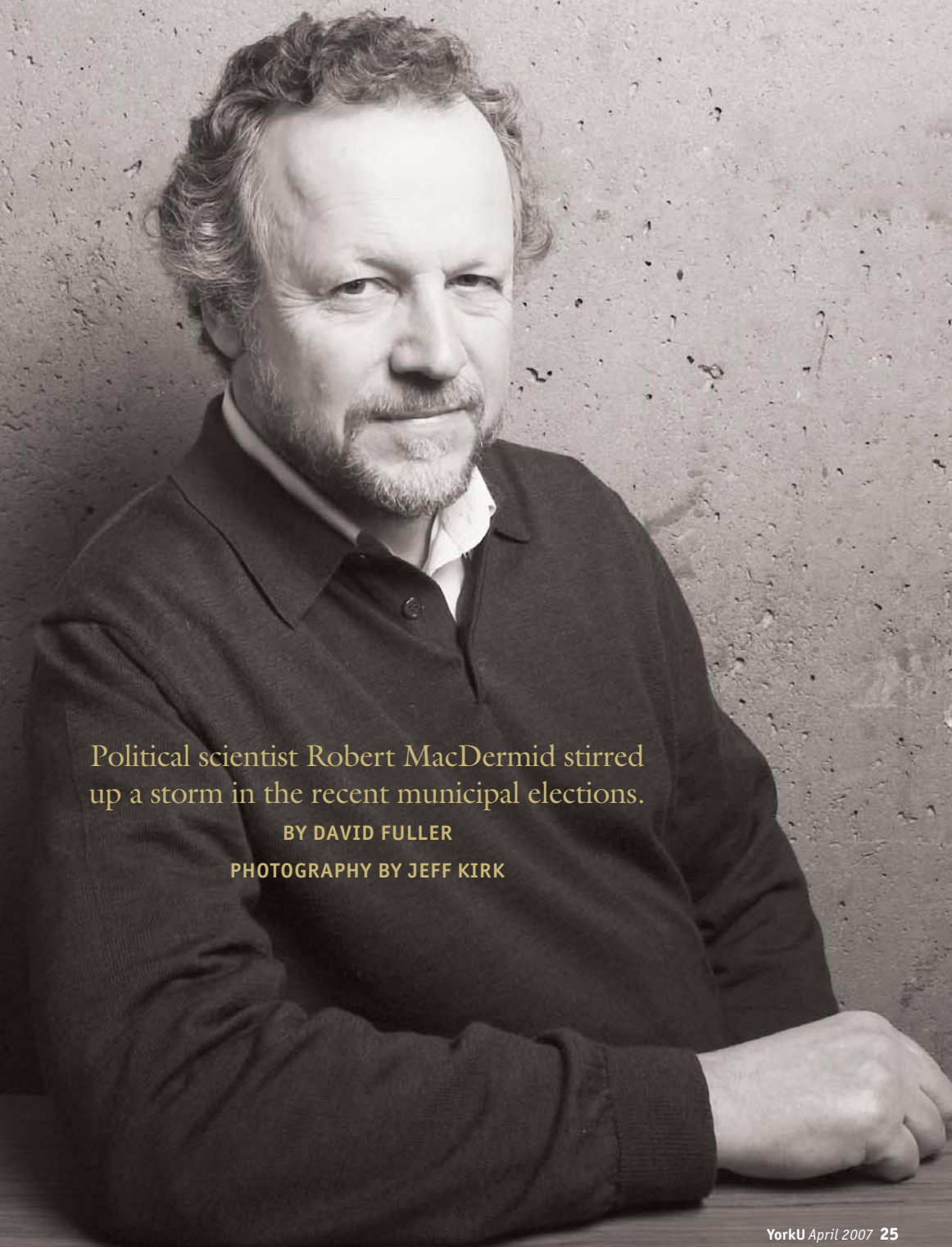
which were located in Ontario's threatened greenbelt. "They put it on the front page, for heaven's sake," recalls MacDermid, with a chuckle tinged with just a hint of mischief. And, like the proverbial cat among the pigeons, the study had political feathers flying as candidates rushed to explain why they had accepted campaign funds from the development industry.

The study was particularly telling in Vaughan, where both candidates in that city's bitter contest for mayor – Michael Di Biase and Linda Jackson – made it onto MacDermid's top-20 list of corporate favourites. Di Biase's campaign was funded 93.5 per cent by corporate donations, according to the study, compared with 77.3 per cent for Jackson's. As MacDermid points out in his study, the value of a developer's land bank is directly tied to political decisions on how it will be used, so there's powerful incentive to back your local developer-friendly politician. It's an imperative that offends MacDermid's sense of political fair play. "I mean, who would care if [the developers] spread the money across everybody, but, of course, they don't," he says. "They very specifically give it to candidates who are pro-development and, when they do support them, they tend to win overwhelmingly."

The kerfuffle over his research and the obvious boost it gave to progressive candidates' morale, if not always their vote tallies, might cause some to wonder if MacDermid is just a tad more than professionally interested in all this. After all, this son of a federal civil servant grew up in Ottawa, where politics is part of the air you breathe. He was a riding president for the NDP in his area and is now on the board of VoteToronto. But he dispels any notion that he is a career activist. "I started off in geography and geology, studying rocks," he says. Years later, when a friend won the local nomination for Bob Rae's NDP and asked MacDermid to run his campaign, he initially declined, explaining "academics don't do practical things like that." His interest in election data stems partly from an affinity for computers and the growing number of statistics he can crunch as he examines the wellsprings of power. But it also comes from a yearning to be relevant. "Academics often write about theory; they sometimes miss reality," he explains. "It's something I've never been happy with."

His professional detachment notwithstanding, MacDermid shows no sign of discomfort over being drawn directly into the political fray and plans to "follow the money" in future campaign studies. You can just hear the collective groans from city hall. ■

Following the Money



Political scientist Robert MacDermid stirred up a storm in the recent municipal elections.

BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK



What's a Canuck?

Alum and former Rhodes Scholar Irvin Studin provides 43 different views in a new book that will benefit York students. BY MICHAEL TODD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY FOUHSE

MAYBE IT WAS THE FACT HE COULD SWEAR “in about 20 different tongues” that made Irvin Studin the Canadian he is today, or perhaps it was that “typical” Canadian childhood of his, spent playing competitive hockey and soccer and reading books. Whatever it was, Studin, editor of *What is a Canadian?* (in which high-profile Canucks, from Bob Rae to Mark Kingwell to Roch Carrier, address the question), says he had an ordinary Toronto upbringing in suburban Thornhill and the Big Smoke, but never got a satisfactory answer to questions about his own “Canadian-ness”, a problem which seemed to preoccupy him even then. “Identity questions are endemic to immigrant families,” says Studin (BBA Spec. Hons. ’99). “My family background doubtless played some role in the genesis of the book. My father and I certainly debated the subject countless times during my childhood.”

Studin’s arrival in Canada, like that of many immigrants, certainly wasn’t “typical” – if it ever is. His parents, détente Jews from the former Soviet Union (today’s Ukraine), came to Canada in the mid-1970s. Studin – who would eventually go on to become York’s fifth Rhodes Scholar and be listed in *Maclean’s* 2000 feature “100 Young Canadians to Watch” – was born en route in 1976 in Rome.

He says the GTA’s multiculturalism was the perfect backdrop against which to consider what being a Canadian meant. Says Studin: “The question [What is a Canadian?] was a natural one in such a non-monolithic environment. And it was continually posed during my formative years in Toronto – in family discussions, among friends, at school. The answers were always typically ‘Canadian’ – rarely direct and therefore not satisfactory.” Like? “Oh, usually abstracted into simplified and politically correct discussion about Canada or things that were considered typically ‘Canadian’ like hockey, cold weather or goodness – Canadians are not famous for directness.”

His psychic quest for something more concrete led him to capitalize on an idea that David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, had tackled in 1958 when he published answers in book form to the question “What is a Jew?”. “When I went to study at Oxford and the London School of Economics I happened on *What is a Jew?* by accident. It was a French translation of a set of ‘responses’ Ben-Gurion had commissioned from 50 Jewish ‘sages’ from around the world and within Israel. It was

on the question of Israeli citizenship in the context of mixed Jewish-gentile marriages. I read that book with much excitement because it evidently hit an identity nerve with me. I resolved to ask the same blunt question – What is a Canadian? – of 50 Canadian ‘sages’ or great thinkers, both within Canada and in the Canadian diaspora.”

At a launch party for the book at the Schulich School of Business in September, publishing executive Douglas Gibson recounted how he met with the youthful Studin about the ambitious project, then never expected to hear from him again. But he reckoned without the determination of Studin, who served in Canada’s Privy Council Office in Ottawa for several years after his studies. Studin promised his prospects that the major portion of the book’s proceeds would go toward the creation of scholarships in Canadian studies at four Canadian universities, including York. (He is also married to a Yorkie, the former Alla Varenboud [BA Hons. ’02], and in January they added a new identity of their own to Canada, son Noah.)

In its final form, *What is a Canadian?* comprises the answers of 42 Canadians who responded to the statement “A CANADIAN IS...”. Every answer in the book is different, and every answer is a fascinating insight into how we define Canadianness for ourselves. Contributors include such luminaries as academic Thomas Homer-Dixon, political pundit Hugh Segal, novelist Joy Kogawa, humourist Allan Fotheringham, journalist Roy McGregor and York’s own President & Vice-Chancellor Lorna R. Marsden (along with Atkinson Prof. Saeed Rahnama and former Osgoode dean Peter Hogg). Then Studin gets his say, as No. 43.

“My plea at the end of the book is that Canadians need to constantly be cognizant that the Canadian only exists in virtue of the political system that defines him or her,” he says. “In essence, this is a defence of our political system – which has, in the aggregate, yielded great fruits for its citizens – and a warning that we must continue, whether ‘fatigued’ or not, to address threats to the existence of that system (i.e. to our existence as Canadians), the most continuous of which is the threat of Quebec secession. No Quebec, no Canada. No Canada, no Canadian. The rest is commentary.”

Does Studin think his book will be the last word on the subject? It seems not. “Canadians aren’t unique in their search for self-definition. Ours is just a little more endless than other peoples’.” ■

The Bridge to My Dreams

A successful professional tells how York's Bridging Program helped her escape a life of despair. BY AMY McNALLY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

In 1981 York University initiated an innovative pre-university "bridging" program designed for women over 21 who may never have believed a university education was open to them. The program helps participants upgrade their writing, speaking and analytical skills – and often boost their confidence – in preparation for university entrance. Over 2,000 women have graduated from the Bridging Program, run by the School of Women's Studies, and many have gone on to pursue postsecondary and graduate degrees.

To celebrate the program's 25th anniversary, the School of Women's Studies published You Can Get There From Here: 25 Years of Bridging Courses for Women at York University, edited by women's studies Professors Ruby Newman and Andrea O'Reilly. Included in the book (available from the school for \$19.95) are essays by graduates, and few are more dramatic than the story told by Amy McNally, who completed the program in 1999. McNally graduated from York with a BA in sociology in 2004, went on to pursue a degree in social work and is now a children's service worker for the York Region Children's Aid Society. But as she reveals in this account, reprinted from the book, her life used to be very different.

I STILL REMEMBER THE INSTRUCTOR'S VOICE in my first class in the Bridging Program. I sat in a quaint room with worn couches and coffee tables, barely able to breathe, as she said, "This class is like entering a nice warm bath, instead of jumping into a cold Olympic swimming pool." Somehow the anxiety that I had fought just to get myself in the building was released. Her analogy of the bridging experience to that of warm water was enough to calm my fears and allow my mind to open up to begin to learn and grow, and eventually to fulfill my long-held dream of attending university. This dream had previously been clouded by years of experiences that held me stuck in life, in a job I despised and with a sense of self that was, looking back, very low.

The year was 1999 and I was dealing with clinical depression as a result of 10 years of life experiences that included the death of my mother, my father's mental illness, and a resultant bankruptcy that led us from a stable middle-class family life into poverty and homelessness. Within a few short years I had gone from a high academic achiever to an adolescent full of new responsibilities: caring for a younger sister, a father, and surviving. Although I managed to graduate from high school,

math class was the one subject that my mother used to help me with. After she was gone, I was frustrated. I remember crying in the class when I asked my teacher to drop me down a level from advanced to general mathematics. He insisted I speak to the guidance counsellor who said, "If you do this, Amy, you will never be able to attend university." No supportive advice, no offer of a tutor, just a basic glance in his eyes that labelled me a failure.

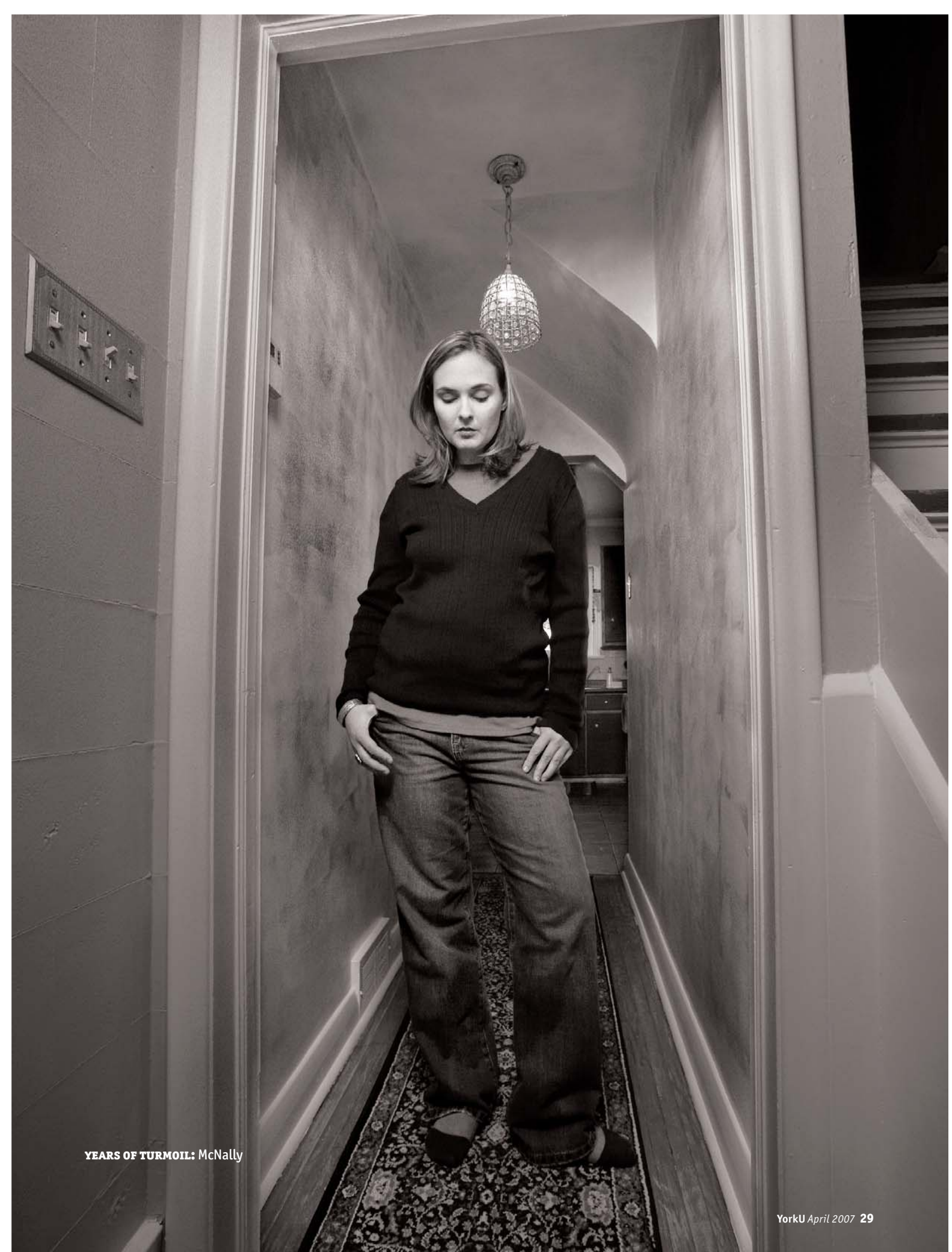
Night after night, all through high school, home was a place of turmoil. My father's nightly grief caused him to seek my comfort. I did not sleep. My sister's nightmares had her run to my room for comfort. I did not sleep. After my dad remarried, nighttime became a place of further anxiety as he was constantly fighting with a woman who was violent, unstable and determined to disrupt. A lock on my sister's door was not enough to make her feel safe; again she came to me while I lay awake listening, wondering and worrying, anger seething out of control. Each morning, barely able to keep my eyes open, I would wait for math class so I could go to the office, sign a form and sleep in the nurse's room. It was easy to pass a general math course without ever having to attend.

The turmoil from my father's new marriage ended when his wife left him after we moved from Toronto to the east coast, but he worsened. He joined a right-wing religious sect. He proclaimed that he had found God and if I were to live under his roof I must do likewise. So I did.

Shortly after my father's dramatic conversion, the television, radio and anything deemed worldly was put into the garbage, along with all of my favourite clothing. He was taught that "proper" women wore long modest dresses, and never cut their hair. They did not wear makeup or any adorning jewellery. All of my mother's precious jewels that I had kept were sold for the cause of preaching the gospel.

I felt isolated and confused, and that was only the beginning. It was the early 1990s and we were in a recession. My father's business went under and he claimed bankruptcy. He was told it was the will of God. He did not even try anything to save our income. We lived without heat and hot water for three months while I worked at a daycare centre – the only thing I was qualified for – until the sheriff came and forced us out of our home. Anything tangible left to connect me to my mother's memory was auctioned off and we had nowhere to turn.

On my \$5-per-hour wage we rented a small room. My sister



YEARS OF TURMOIL: McNally

I remember the other women, the faces, and the expressions of hesitant hopefulness.

moved into a school friend's home and I waited. All the while my father prayed as he had been told God would restore our lives back to normal if we only had enough faith. A month passed and he worsened. The day we went to retrieve my sister he cried and threatened to take his own life. He had a severe depression. My sister had trimmed her long tattered hair and he truly believed she was damned to eternal judgment as this, in our church, was seen as an act of rebellion. I fled. I saved enough money for a one-way ticket back to Toronto, the only place that held good memories for me.

Once there, I visited all the family from my mother's side that I had been missing. There was shame in their eyes over the fact that I was not succeeding, that I was uneducated and poor, and this made me feel more isolated and embarrassed. Still in survival mode, I accepted a job as a nanny. All I was qualified to do was domestic work. But that job helped me regain some sense of normalcy. To be a part of a family allowed me to begin to think again. I still attended my father's church as I felt it would pain him if I did not. I wanted him to live.

I could not keep up with my 60-hour work week as the sleeplessness continued. My sleep cycle had been turned upside down. I began to have chest pain. For the first time I sought medical attention, which was frowned upon in our religion. Prayer was the way to heal the body; sleeplessness was a result of guilt, they said.

The doctor asked me about my life. I was not expecting that as I had only come to see him about the pain in my chest. He asked if I had been sleeping. I laughed. I told my truth for the first time and it was received with empathy, wisdom and a prescription for sleep. This was the beginning of regaining control over my nights, my pain and my ability to think without exhaustion clouding my thoughts.

Another nanny spoke to me about the Bridging Program and handed me a flyer. It was a key to potentially unlocking a door that had been stolen from me. Slowly I exited the church, again losing the only circle of people that I knew and who knew me.

This summary of the 10 years of my adolescence helps explain some of the anxiety I felt upon entering the room where the Bridging course was being held. Apart from my job, I had not been connected to anyone outside the realm of our religion. I was afraid of everything.

I still remember the instructor's voice as she spoke of warm waters. I remember the other women, the faces, and the expressions of hesitant hopefulness. I read books about women who faced incredible odds. I wrote essays without pressure or fear of failure, for the instructor said I could re-do all of my work until it was right. Nowhere had I been given this much grace. I was encouraged to try and try again, with support and reassurance. I finally started to regain confidence

in my abilities. I felt hope and hung on tightly.

A representative from the University came into the class and helped me fill out the required application for attending my first class as a university student. During that week, my sister called from the east coast. She had gotten married within the church to a man who abused her. She had no hope, no key and no tools for escaping. I faxed her a copy of an article from the Bridging course. It was called "The Office". I told her to read it and that if she could at least do this, she could see how easy it was to begin her own journey of education.

She and her daughter moved in with me and she too took the Bridging course. She too felt hope and has been in school pursuing her dreams. I am proud, and thankful to York University for providing this "bridge" for me and for others to walk over darkness, fears and all the barriers that keep us from discovering our potential.

I attended all of my university classes at night school through Atkinson College. I continued to work a 60-hour week and was tired. But each night around 8pm my brain became engaged. I got new energy and fed off the enthusiastic lectures from professors determined to make us think. My first class was with a professor who challenged me, and we became friends. I cried in the very first lecture as I sat listening. I had really made it. I was living my dream. That week my grandfather, my mother's dad, called me from British Columbia. He was dying and we both knew it was to be our last conversation. I was proudly telling him that I had begun school. I have hung onto his words ever since – they keep me focused. "Do not let anyone or anything keep you from fulfilling your dreams," he said.

After I exited the church, my father stopped calling. He would send a card for my birthday, but only to remind me God was waiting for me to return. Our relationship was strained for years. My sister invited him to my university graduation. I reminded him about a day long before our pain when he had told me he would be proud if I were the first McNally to get a degree. He did not remember but he came and he sat and he watched me graduate.

That night when I came home after receiving my first degree in sociology, I walked into a darkened living room. Everyone applauded and yelled congratulations, including my very first university course professor. She was proud. My father in his own way was proud and he said he knew my mother would have been proud too. I do not have words to express the joy I felt that day.

I went on to a second degree in social work, which enabled me to become employed in a field of work that not only interests me but also allows me to use my experiences from my past, and my pain, to support and assist others. Without the York University Bridging Program, I know none of these dreams would have been fulfilled. ■■

GIVING

Making Money Dance

Finance Prof. Chris Robinson helps student nurses

CHRIS ROBINSON KNOWS a thing or two about money – how to make it, how to lose it and how to give it away. The outspoken York finance professor is making news for his controversial opinions about the sky-high rates charged by payday lenders – and for his generous gifts to York’s new Faculty of Health. Both stories, he says, are the result of his own good fortune in life and in business. “It’s mostly the parents we are born to and the society we live in that determines how successful we are, rather than our own brilliance or efforts,” he says. “I got lucky.”

That same good fortune, Robinson says, is responsible for a financial savvy that has helped him win big both on the stock market and in the classrooms of York’s Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies, where he is a personal finance instructor and coordinator of wealth-management programs. “I can make numbers dance,” he says matter-of-factly. “I make money easily.”

Now Robinson is using those skills and 25 years of teaching and research expertise to help others in need. The professor is centre-stage in challenging Ottawa over a proposed law that, he says, will abandon federal regulation of payday lenders like Money Mart and Cash Money. “Payday lenders are exploiting the business in Canada. The only solu-

tion is to regulate their fees more tightly and force banks and credit unions to offer competitive, short-term loans.”

Robinson is also making a difference closer to home. In 2006, he donated \$125,000 to create three endowed student awards through the York to the Power of 50 campaign, the University’s \$200-million fundraising effort pegged to its 50th anniversary in 2009. The Frances and Frederic Robinson International Bursary and The Frances and Frederic Robinson Undergraduate Nursing Award will be awarded annually to an undergraduate nursing student and an internationally-educated nurse returning to school for re-qualification to work in Canada. The Marcia Byrne Nursing Practicum Award will help support a

nursing graduate student pursuing a patient-centred care practicum.

Robinson’s donation will be matched through the government’s Ontario Trust for Student Support to create endowments totalling \$250,000. The awards honour Robinson’s aunt – a retired nurse – and his late mother and father. “Both Mom and Dad died in hospital surrounded by nurses,” Robinson explains. “I realized then that it wasn’t just about the care, but also about an ability to manage new health technologies. We need educated nurses in our society.”

There’s a practical side to his philanthropy, too. As a financial planner, Robinson knows that a gift to any one of York’s campaign priorities (in addition to student awards, York is seeking funds for academic talent, infrastructure and programming) will result in a charitable tax receipt and positive returns on his annual tax bill. But he says the real reason for helping others is always Lady Luck. “My wife and I continue to be successful in our careers and in life. We’re lucky and we have an obligation to do something about that.” ■



‘I GOT LUCKY’: Robinson

YORK PEOPLE

Marika Kemeny
Communicator, ex-refugee

Remembering '56

ON THE COVER OF HER SELF-PUBLISHED MEMOIR about growing up in Budapest before the 1956 Hungarian revolution, Glendon communications officer Marika Kemeny, 62, wears the same grey sweater embroidered in red her mother knitted. That sweater kept her warm against the December chill 50 years ago when she and her parents piled into a produce truck and fled to the Austrian border to escape invading Russian tanks. A cosseted 12-year-old at the time, Kemeny still has nightmares about crowded refugee trains chugging through dark, unfamiliar landscapes. She ends her memoir waving goodbye to Europe from the deck of a ship with 1,000 other Hungarian refugees sailing towards a vast Canadian unknown. The wrenching exodus became the “defining moment in my life,” writes the York alumna (BA Spec. Hons '82, from Glendon) in this little family history produced as a wedding gift for her daughter. “I wrote this account to give my children and grandchildren a connection to the past I left behind. I hope they will grow roots through these stories.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

Ryan Knight
Student filmmaker

War and Spielberg

WHAT DO A PORCELAIN VIKING DOLL, First World War cemeteries and a stuffed toy dog named Oscar have in common? They are all subjects of films by Ryan Knight, an award-winning fourth-year student in York's Faculty of Fine Arts. *The Viking* earned him and his co-producer second place in a 2005 competition. Knight then won the high-profile job of National Film Board English-language cinematographer at ceremonies in France commemorating two First World War battles. While writing his thesis and working part-time at a Toronto production company, Knight found a spare couple of days to make a five-minute film for a contest organized by Steven Spielberg and Mark Burnett for their new reality TV show "On the Lot". He's hoping his semi-autobiographical short, *All About Oscar*, will earn him a spot on the show and a chance to win a \$1-million film deal. It's just one of several plans he has for furthering his career as a filmmaker. "I've been able to develop a pretty good resumé while at school and I'm going to just keep working at it," he says. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE CARTY



Nassim Varasteh
International champion

Karate Queen

NASSIM VARASTEH HAS THE REGAL PROFILE of Egyptian Queen Nefertiti and spars like Bruce Lee. Few know the fourth-year York psychology student is Canada's karate queen, the country's most decorated karate competitor and one of its elite athletes. Coached by her Iranian father, himself a champion, from age six and competing since 13, Varasteh has won 12 Ontario championships, 11 Canadian titles and five Pan-American golds. In October she made history as the first Canadian female to win a medal – silver – at a world karate championship. "I came so close to achieving my childhood dream," says Varasteh, now training relentlessly five hours a day to win gold in 2008. "After that, I'm going to retire." But not from the sport. "Karate is a way of life," says the 25-year-old who grew up in her father's Toronto dojo and intends to make a career as an instructor and a coach. "Being a role model for kids is really important to me. The lessons that you learn in karate – respect, discipline, humility – can translate to your whole life." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

What I learned from my super-tough Spanish prof. **BY ELISA BELFORD-DE LOS RIOS**

Gracias, doctora

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED to send my second-year Spanish professor a thank-you card. Not because she stands out in my mind as the “nicest” professor I ever had – in fact, it was just the opposite: Prof. Roxanne Marcus, or “doctora” as she preferred to be addressed, was the toughest instructor in my academic career. Prone to humiliating quips and a look that could stop your heart in mid-beat, doctora demanded nothing less than excellence in her classroom. Initially, this was a great source of anguish for a girl who was banking on Spanish as her

She was relentless,

“easy” course.

Spanish was one of my electives. I thought it was fun, and I had always been able to do okay without too much effort. Carrying a full course load, a part-time job and a freshly brewed cup of coffee, I walked into doctora’s class on that first day with the intention of continuing my usual *modus operandi*. Doctora, however, had other plans. As her intense brown eyes bore down upon me, I felt like a deer in the headlights. She promptly had me dispose of my coffee, lectured me on its distraction and then cross-examined me and every other student in the room, *in Spanish*.

The next few months of Spanish were anything but easy. Doctora was relentless during oral practices. She systematically extracted information from our brains, like a dentist pulls teeth in order to make room in your mouth. Just when you thought she was finished and you could relax a little, she’d probe a little harder, a little further. My brain was beginning to hurt!

My brain wasn’t the only part of me that suffered in those early months. On more than one occasion, my ego had taken some bruising. For example, I can distinctly recall being told by doctora how well I was doing, especially since I seemed “so out of it” at the beginning of the year. I was, of course, mortified at the time, but I didn’t have the nerve to defend myself by telling her that I suffered a mild stroke each time she called on me to speak in class.

Elisa Belford-de los Rios (BA '92) lives in London, Ont.
Prof. Roxanne Marcus continues to teach in the Faculty of Arts.

In addition, our instructor was infamous for having us explain to the entire class, in detail, why we didn’t have the homework assignment completed. Having had the pleasure of regaling the class with my own excuse, I remember feeling resentful.



I was an adult with greater priorities than Spanish class. Why should I have to explain myself to her? What did she care?

It seems she cared a lot. And she proved it to me one autumn morning when my car broke down on the way to my Spanish midterm. I was a wreck calling doctora from a pay phone on the side of the road in order to tell her I wouldn’t be writing the midterm. How cliché! I was certain she would not believe me. Much to my surprise, however, she did believe me. She even told me that because it was me, she knew it was true. It was then that I realized that my professor trusted and cared about me. Maybe, she even liked me!

I was both relieved and shocked at the outcome of the situation. I believe I had an epiphany at that moment, and I’m reminded of it whenever I’m not giving something my best effort. Until that moment, I had been working out of a fear of humiliation or a bad grade. I had been so proud that I was blind to the efforts of someone who wanted to see me succeed. Doctora wanted me to strive for excellence, not settle for mediocrity. To doctora, it didn’t matter that Spanish was not my major. In her class, you gave it all or you gave nothing. No excuses.

I learned a lot about the Spanish language that year. It served me well in the workplace, as my employer owned facilities in Spain and Mexico. My manager was impressed with my knowledge of the language. It also came in handy when I met my husband, whose family happened to be from Spain! Today, ironically, I am pursuing a career as a Spanish professor. Most importantly, however, I learned a lesson about life which has also served me well: never settle for mediocrity or apathy within myself. This is my credo, and I carry it with me wherever I go. Gracias, doctora. ■