I truly learned to collaborate while working as an artist. We seldom accomplish what we wish without others. As an artist, I am a part of the conversation of what has come before and what will come next. My most challenging and rewarding tasks as dean are achieved through creative collaboration. We walk a line now through a time of momentous transition. Alaska’#s economy is singularly dependent on oil revenue and its recent precipitous decline has put our university under significant pressures. During uncertain times, it’s vital to continue doing what we do well at the highest level possible. The College of Liberal Arts will continue to work towards quality education and student achievement. We bring human perspective to all fields of study. CLA is the largest college at UAF. We teach to and learn from our students; problem solving, ethical reasoning, effective communication and intellectual flexibility create a solid base for all our studies. We prepare students for the many realities and challenges of our world.

The CLA employs artists, social scientists and scholars of human culture, among others. CLA’s disciplines and its people are passionate, committed, complex and diverse. Our mission is to bring the human perspective into every field. We have multiple collaborations in our education facilitates students’ abilities to problem solve, communicate and build intellectual flexibility. A good education gives students the tools they need to negotiate, adapt and work toward goals in order to succeed. A liberal arts degree prepares students for the realities and challenges of the work world. A liberal arts degree helps individuals grow into productive citizens and active participants of our global society and economy. The liberal arts are a strategic investment in our future.

The best liberal arts educators and staff surround me — people whose creativity, passion, diligence and integrity are essential both in the classroom and in the administration. We will maintain our core academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels as we preserve the long-term future of CLA. We continue to teach our students to be resilient, adaptive and creative, as we put these same skills to task advancing classroom and in the administration. We will maintain our core academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels as we preserve the university and communities where we practice in our fields and create connections and develop meaningful networks.

Critical thinking is the foundation of education that CLA offers. Education isn’t job training. Any business can teach tasks. A liberal arts education facilitates students’ abilities to problem solve, communicate and build intellectual flexibility. A good education gives students the tools they need to negotiate, adapt and work toward goals in order to succeed. A liberal arts degree prepares students for the realities and challenges of the work world. A liberal arts degree helps individuals grow into productive citizens and active participants of our global society and economy. The liberal arts are a strategic investment in our future.

The lasting impact of an exemplary educator.

- Todd Sherman
The word stanza comes from the Italian word for room. A poem can be like a house. You walk through the house of the poem.

You are invited. The house/poem wants you to come in. Be impertinent and gracious. Look through the medicine cabinet and admire the decorations. In poems, images and meanings are created with words. Things like repetition, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, give emphasis and texture.

A poem is like a message in a bottle. It’s this thing that’s built and then sent out into the world for someone to find and then you find it and you are the intended reader.

Poetry takes up space. It’s the words as they appear on the page and the sound when you read them. Read poems out loud. Take your time. Be attentive. Be curious.

Words are housed in dictionaries and all the other books and in our heads and in our mouths. The poet takes time to put them together and craft these things we call poems, it’s like building a ship in a bottle.

Poetry is verbal art, the connecting of words, sounds, details, and images, to make us feel that thing described. The thing can be something familiar made unfamiliar, a new perspective. Or it can be the unknown from long ago or far away brought up close. Sometimes poetry gives voices to the disappeared and lost things. Other times it says what we already know and the words are like friends.

“Poetry is about empathy… there is someone assumed to be saying these words. We have to give ourselves over to the words for a moment and walk in that speaker’s shoes. This is someone talking to me and I have to try and see the world the way they do for a moment.”

A poem can have more than one voice. Eric Parker’s “Over-ripe” gives voice to a body struggling to come to terms with its death but also gives speech to a tapeworm desperately urging the author, or authorities, for a speedier end — showing poetry can be self-conscious. The beautiful visual shape framing pretty words like “lassoed/ and leashed by a perfume, / creep on night tread and tendril” force the gruesome scene into feeling natural. While the empty space before “I get that/ anybody who really needs to know already does” is restful because it tells us the speaker doesn’t need anyone to know anymore.

Poems aren’t puzzles or riddles with only one answer. Poems want you to both play and explore.

Vicki Michele Frasieur’s poem, “carlsbad caverns” makes observations and comments on a personified earth, “her acidic water/ excavations uplift regions, carve celestial symmetries/ untroubled by facts and fussing/ of method, structural meaning and artifice.” The repeating “s” and “c” sounds are a latticework that the images climb to draw the audience in. She also mixes architectural language and natural language to draw attention to the conflict between human-made and nature-created.

Sean Hill is a visiting professor in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He is the author of two books of poetry and recent recipient of the Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

www.seanhillpoetry.com

Over-Ripe

By Eric Parker

Twin foxes
with muzzle
furls of hedge
hog spines, lassoed

and leashed by a perfume,
creep on night tread and tendril
from bryophyte dens in the back yard. And past a door, ajar find me.

Their tongues file away at the softest parts, and my tapeworm screams: Help this has all gone on long enough call the author ities. But the foxes drink on and get joined

by the neighbor’s tom
cat, slugs, rats, throngs
of ants and roaches and I get that

anybody who really needs to know already does.

carlsbad caverns

By Vicki Michelle Frasieur

driptstone meters time slowly; the precision of liquid fusing
equadrant sanctuaries formed
of air and icycle trussing.
limestone serpentines deep
with Earth- her acidic water
excavations uplift regions,
carve celestial symmetries
untroubled by facts and fussing
of method, structural meaning
and artifice. for no reason this,
or non that we can fathom-
centuries she preforms this
natural sorcery creating herself,
dressing  undressing
undisturbed by enterprising hands.
a uniform principle is at work
here. practical flowstone ribbons
glistened beautifully unseen
by our stunned eyes for epochs-
we are silent.

we are silent in her pristine cathedral
not knowing how to pray.
not knowing.
The poet “is trying to talk about the unexpected things using metaphor, that’s how we try and talk about things we can’t really explain.”

Poetry can show up this way and surprise us. Heather Warren’s poem, “Broken Hearts Are Not, Actually, Broken,” is a prose poem that positions the title next to an experience in a way that celebrates resilience. The title tells us she is speaking of heartbreak, but the body of the poem is about earthquakes. The poem exists on the bridge the audience has constructed between the two experiences. When you place an emotional heartbreak next to the physical occurrence of an earthquake they work together to create meaning.

“I think poetry is an experience. A poem is not necessarily a static thing... these verbal artworks invite us to experience them. It’s like having a conversation—when you sit down to talk to someone, it’s a real conversation. It’s not just communication. It’s an actual experience and it changes you in some way.”

A poem doesn’t exist by itself. It needs your reaction. The interaction between the words and the audience is where the poem lives. The poem depends on the images your mind creates and the word relationships you’ve built with a lifetime of experience. Reading poetry is enjoyable, but it can be challenging. A poem thanks you generously for your time—it gives you words for what our language doesn’t have words for yet and lets you see the places you can’t go.

Broken Hearts Are Not, Actually, Broken

By Heather Warren

I was told by someone (I cannot remember who) that when an earthquake hits, I should hide under a table or a doorframe but every time an earthquake hits, I never hide under a table or a doorframe because earthquakes don’t scare me and they don’t last that long.
We often think social workers help the marginalized segments of our society, but childhood trauma affects roughly 46 million of the 76 million children in our nation, according to an ongoing ACE study. This study, including more than 17,000 participants, is one of the largest ever conducted to explore associations between childhood treatment and later health and well-being. This research helps us understand that trauma disrupts many aspects of daily life and health—not only mental or emotional health, but physical as well. The above population figures represent two out of three people in our population, and yes, this is a health care crisis. For example, if a teacher has 30 students, he or she can expect 20 to have experienced trauma. Childhood trauma can defy social stratification, disregarding gender, race, class, education and economic lines.

LaVerne Dementieff (LD), clinical assistant professor in the Social Work Department, explains that social workers are advocates. “Why talk about the problem? We are addressing it because, most importantly, when we talk about trauma we are bringing the issue to light so we can move on to healing, hope and possibility. Social workers are trained helpers, working with individuals to understand the problems, and then utilizing their strengths and abilities to work toward finding solutions.”

Naomi Horne (NH), a UAF social work alum who gained her B.A. in 2006, addresses a common problem. “We are quick to judge people because we don’t understand the problem, and then utilizing their strengths and abilities to work toward finding solutions.”

A Strength-Based Perspective is:

the practice of emphasizing people’s self-determination and strength, based upon what people are already bringing to the table, instead of focusing on what isn’t there. A strength-based perspective is the foundation of social work.

LaVerne and Naomi sat down to talk with Tia Tidwell (TT) of Clarity magazine about trauma-informed care and why changing our perspectives is critical.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE) CAN INCLUDE:

- Emotional and physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional and physical neglect
- Domestic violence
- Single-parent homes because of death, divorce and separation
- Substance abuse
- Incarcerated parent(s)
- Parent(s) suffering from untreated mental health illness

LaVerne and Naomi sat down to talk with Tia Tidwell (TT) of Clarity magazine about trauma-informed care and why changing our perspectives is critical.

TT: Can you talk about the ACE study?
LD: The ACE study began when two doctors came to recognize that when children experience trauma, it impacts social and physical health later in life. More trauma in childhood was leading to higher chances for heart disease, addictions, diabetes, cancer and early death. We aren’t saying that because a child experiences something adverse they will get heart disease, but, when we are talking about the entire population, statistically we are facing a public health issue. Understanding the profound connection between trauma and health is critical. It could be as big as the discovery of vaccinations.

TT: And now that we know, what do we do?
LD: Part of being trauma-informed is really understanding how trauma affects the body. A lot of that has to do with brain development. Our bodies are self-healing and our brains adapt to all kinds of situations to keep us alive. Experience shapes our brain. We adapt to post-traumatic situations, but we also need to acknowledge how our brains react and adapt to negative and frightening experiences as well. When we are living in a state of constant fear our brain releases toxic chemicals. These chemicals are depriving our brain of certain things and then our brain loses the ability to react properly to situations.

It’s fascinating to think about how our brains are working to keep us alive as a species. We have a part of our brain called the amygdala, it functions like a smoke detector, and, when it experiences a threat, it alarms and tells our body to be mindful and vigilant. The amygdala, when activated, is powerful enough to kick our cognitive, thinking part of our brain offline for a bit, which is also the rational part of our brain that thinks about consequences. The amygdala is also connected to the hippocampus, which stores and retrieves memories. If we experience trauma, the hippocampus stores the memories and context, and if we find ourselves in a similar context again, the hippocampus relays that information to the amygdala, setting off an alarm telling our body we may not be safe and triggering a fight-or-flight response until our cognitive brain comes back online, letting us know that we are safe. This is why social workers studying brain development is critical to our understanding of human behavior.

There are so many implications. When you feel stress, your body goes from zero to 100, and the ability to think about the consequences can go out the door. If we offer help to the classroom scenario, and you have a child acting out in an extreme way, they could be behaving in reaction to their altered brain chemistry. ‘This isn’t the time to ask a kid, ‘Why did you do it?’”

NH: Exactly, they wouldn’t know. It isn’t a conscious decision. When a brain is reacting to trauma, it’s just like any muscle that is used too much, it can get tired.

TT: Why is it so important for us to understand how to be trauma informed?
LD: Sometimes people’s behavior is linked to things we can’t see. Instead of reacting with negative judgment, as a culture we need to learn how to react with caring. The good news is that coping mechanisms can be taught and encouraged and programs can be modified to support individuals in a highly emotional state to come back into balance and continue on with their day. We don’t have to discard kids and adults by kicking them out of programs, isolating them or giving up on them. Once you understand how trauma works in the brain, you can adapt to the person and create solutions for them to be successful.

NH: This is important for the health of our society. We imprison more people in our nation than any other country. A majority of those who are locked up have a trauma history. A lack of trauma awareness has fiscal consequences. These parts of our society are linked, even if they aren’t always linear. If we just took the time to provide trauma-informed care in times of crisis, we could change whole lives, whole families, whole communities.

LD: Understanding that we exist in a society where two thirds of the population has experienced trauma and changing the way in which we as social workers respond is the beginning of a strength-based perspective. Programs and institutions under-utilize principles of trauma-informed care. As service providers, trauma-informed care would mean first acknowledging the relationship between trauma, the body and actions. Strength-based means helping people identify and build on existing capabilities.

NH: Culture starts small. Especially in Alaska, we can forget that because we are so spread out, but you are where culture starts. We need to cultivate a culture of trauma awareness that because we are so spread out, but you are where culture starts. We need to cultivate a culture of trauma awareness that can see. Instead of reacting with negative judgment, as a culture we need to learn how to react with caring. The good news is that coping mechanisms can be taught and encouraged and programs can be modified to support individuals in a highly emotional state to come back into balance and continue on with their day. We don’t have to discard kids and adults by kicking them out of programs, isolating them or giving up on them. Once you understand how trauma works in the brain, you can adapt to the person and create solutions for them to be successful.

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The menu at the Stone Soup Cafe can’t always be anticipated. That’s because the food is donated to the Fairbanks non-profit from various sources, not all of which are predictable. When I asked the cook, Matt Davis, if preparing meals with surprise ingredients was difficult, he said, “Some people would freak out; but I like the challenge, it’s like getting a mystery box every day. I make it taste good, but in the back of my mind I also know I need to make it nutritious and hot. For a lot of people who come here, this might be their only meal of the day.”

The cafe is a warm place with the welcoming smell of soup in the air. Carolyn, a volunteer, had been going to Stone Soup for a few years for meals before she got the urge to give back. “My heart goes out to them, you know? I am where they are. I know the people. I’m glad I get the privilege to serve.”

Another long-time volunteer, Dan says, between the many hugs he gave to cafe visitors before they headed back into the 40 below weather, “The smell of food makes it feel like home, but how we treat people is as important as the food we give out. My mission isn’t the food, it’s the people.”

Operating out of different places for the last thirty-years and familiar to some as Bread Line, Stone Soup now has a permanent home at 507 Gaffney Road, across from the Co-Op Market Grocery and Deli. Every weekday, the cafe serves a hot meal and a sack lunch, alongside a smile and a kind word.

CLA alum Jennifer Jolis is the cafe’s executive director. CLA Assistant Professor of English Sarah Stanley serves on the board. “Feeding people — enriching lives” is their core purpose.

This nonprofit depends on community collaboration. CLA faculty from the Music, Art, English, and Political Science departments provide much-appreciated volunteer energy. The cafe’s annual Soup Off in January 2015 was a huge success, raising more than $24,000. That will allow Stone Soup to provide over 12,000 meals at a cost of $1.95 per serving.

CLA’s ties to the community

The UAF Social Work program introduces students to topics such as trauma, brain development, and the strengths-based perspective foundation. Classwork is paired with real-life practice as a student’s senior year practicum experience. This internship-like experience places a social work student directly in a helping agency and allows them to interact with individuals, groups and communities.

LaVerne Demientieff headed back into the 40 below weather, “The smell of food makes it feel like home, but how we treat people is as important as the food we give out. My mission isn’t the food, it’s the people.”

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The people of the Arctic experience an intimate relationship with the physical environment—which is impossible to ignore. A personal connection to place is something inherent to Emily Russell's research. A third-year master's student at UAF, she is investigating potential threats to fisheries and subsistence resources posed by increased shipping through the Bering Strait off Alaska's northwestern shoreline.

As a resident of the North who uses such resources herself, Russell directly relates to these issues.

"Catching my own fish and picking my own berries has given me a sense of place I have never experienced before," Russell says. "That is something that I am interested in protecting. The connection we have to the land.

UAF's Arctic and Northern Studies Program in the College of Liberal Arts gives Russell this unique opportunity.

The expansion of ice-free water in the Bering Strait and Arctic Ocean is a canary in the coal mine indicating a warming planet. The shrinking ice coverage makes Russell's research timely, says Mary Ehrlander, a professor of history and director of the Arctic and Northern Studies Program (ANORS).

"For good and for bad, it's melting, and that creates both concern and excitement," Ehrlander says. "The opening of the Northwest Passage could mean shorter transportation routes and access to non-renewable resources offshore. But melting sea ice threatens coastal and non-coastal communities. Much of our infrastructure depends on permafrost. When that ice melts, buildings and roads start bearing. Alongside new opportunities comes risk."

Russell's studies focus on the potential risks. No vessel traffic regulations apply in the Bering Strait, a 50-mile-wide channel with strong currents and unpredictable weather. The closest Coast Guard facility is more than 1,000 nautical miles away, on Kodiak Island, so the region has few government resources to help with accidents or oil spills.

"Despite strong currents and sea ice, the U.S. just doesn't have infrastructure to support increased shipping in a safe way," Russell says. "There is time. Shipping may not rise exponentially in the next 10 years, but the region is sure to experience significantly increased traffic as ice continues to recede in the decades to come. We have time to put together a management strategy to protect commercial fisheries and subsistence resources. We should do it now."

Researchers and policy makers need to respond to evolving environmental conditions as a consequence of climate change. Ehrlander says Russell's ideas fit into the broader perspective. "We can wring our hands about the inevitable, point fingers at those we blame—or be proactive and prepare for the future," she says. "We can mitigate harm in the case of the Bering Strait so we aren't always reacting to disasters. We need to accept that this is what's on the horizon and proactively plan for protecting our environment."

Russell's research is one example of the way the Arctic and Northern Studies Program contributes to our understanding of the Arctic.

The program offers structure and academic expertise to those interested in researching Arctic and environmental policy, northern history and many other topics embedded in the social sciences and humanities. The inter-disciplinary curricular spotlight the relationship between northern and Arctic peoples and the environments they inhabit.

"We are very focused on the human experience in the North," Ehrlander says. "People of the circumpolar North have common interests and challenges that foster a unique worldview. Those challenges bridge indigenous and non-indigenous populations and cultures, she says, so "we can learn from each other's experiences."

"Our identities are shaped by where we live," Ehrlander says. "The immersion into place is a key strength of Arctic research conducted at UAF. However, people in the United States don't always recognize the opportunity that exists in Alaska, Russell says. "Unlike Denmark, or other Arctic nations, such as Canada or Russia, the U.S. doesn't identify as an Arctic nation, but hopefully that will soon change."

The U.S. has very few Arctic-centered master's degree programs with a humanities focus. After spending a semester abroad at a college in Denmark, Russell knew she wanted to study Arctic policy and UAF's Arctic and Northern Studies Program was a natural choice.

The program offered her a chance to be part of the group in mainstream education bringing the human perspective to Arctic research, a perspective emphasized by the program's placement within CLA. The options open to students are broad, and the program attracts students with diverse interests and backgrounds. Nevertheless, their interest in the region unites students taking courses across a wide range of disciplines. This community of researchers highlights connections and emphasizes a sense of place within various fields of study.

To better define that community, the former Northern Studies Program recently included the word "Arctic" to its name. "Adding Arctic to Northern Studies is "vital," Ehrlander says, "there is so much interest in the Arctic. People are recognizing the changes happening here. We came to realize that Northern Studies was too vague; people weren't sure what north we were talking about. Adding Arctic to our name leaves no doubt as to the region we address. It's crystal clear. We needed heightened internet viability for potential students looking to study the Arctic.

This transition spotlights UAF's distinctive proximity to its area of focus—the Arctic.

"I recently typed in 'Arctic studies' into Google, and UAF didn't show up," Russell says. "My search brought me to a Wikipedia page providing a list of Arctic studies programs. I did my first ever Wiki edit and now we are on the map!"

"There has long been a mystique and a romantic fascination with the Arctic—that has survived," Ehrlander says. "Now, the intense buzz is not just romantic. It's based on an understanding that there are critical issues, opportunities and challenges in the Arctic. The changes taking place in the Arctic relate to the rest of the world."

The well-being of the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of the Arctic depends on their environment. According to the U.S. Governmental Accountability Office, flooding and erosion affected eighty-six percent of the 213 Alaska Native villages in 2003. Focusing on the human perspective and the relationship between people and place are critical to what UAF researchers are bringing to Arctic studies.
to any one of these funds at any time—you support makes a world of difference in our endeavors. Making a gift is easy and there are two ways to make it happen:

Online: Visit http://www.uaf.edu/giv/ing/gift-giving-form/schools/ CLA/ and type in the fund from this section that you would like to support in the gift designation section before clicking submit.

Telephone: Call CLA’s advancement office, Naomi Home, at 807-474-6464. She can take your gift information over the phone and answer any questions you may have.
Several years ago, two men were watching football early on a Sunday morning in the bar at the downtown Hilton hotel in Anchorage. Dave Brown was playing the Minnesota Vikings. A mix of locals and hotel guests crowded the bar. It was Halloween, and fake spider webs interspersed the orange and black streamers.

One man turned to the other. “You’re cheering for the Broncos? Where are you from?”

“Colorado. You?”

“I’m from Colorado, but originally from Minnesota, so I can’t lose.”

“What part of Colorado?”

“Colorado Springs.”

“Yeah, me too. I went to Colorado High.”

“Really? Me too, that year you graduated?”

“1983.”

“Daryl? Is that you?”

“Three thousand miles from where they had grown up, the two men realized they knew each other. Now, once again Jim Perrizo and Daryl Farmer find themselves living in the same town: Fairbanks. Alaska.

Jim has been a partner at Fairbanks Sand & Gravel for 15 years and has worked as an operations supervisor for FSG Redi-Mix the past two years. Daryl is an assistant professor in the English Department. Jim and Daryl quickly discovered they had another thing in common—a shared passion for stories.

“Some of the best literature discussions I have ever had have been with you,” Daryl says.

Since their chance meeting in the bar, the two men have combined their energy and resources to support the Midyear Series. The series brings published authors to UAF for craft talks and public readings of their works. Last fall, Jim and Daryl’s teamwork brought the acclaimed American literary figure Thomas McGuane to Fairbanks for a public reading to kick off the 2014 series. Jim had mentioned wanting to see what it would take to bring McGuane—a favorite author for both men—to Fairbanks. Daryl’s response was, “I don’t think our pockets are that deep.” Jim set the wheels in motion by contacting McGuane’s publicists and then contributed money and airlines miles to bring the literary icon to Alaska.

Jim’s work with the Alaska chapter of the Associated General Contractors connects him to a number of UAF graduates. Kent knows that the opportunities for higher education are small programs such as the UAF Communication Department Poll.

English Department Poll

Teachers, Faculty, and Students

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever lived in a dry cabin?</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you vote to legalize recreational marijuana?</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever caught your own dinner?</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would your wilderness skills help you survive post-apocalypse?</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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English Department Poll

Teachers, Faculty, and Students

Understanding the impact of a good education led Kent to start a fund which supports students in CLA’s communications program. Kent looks back fondly on the time he spent earning his undergraduate degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and he wants to help today’s students.

“I received a really good education there,” he says. “I had classes with every department member at the time, and they were all great teachers.”

Kent, who went on to earn master’s and doctoral degrees, believes that something unique comes from a liberal arts education. Now an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma, he seeks to teach his students more than just technical skills.

“Anyone can learn how to use Photoshop,” he says. “I believe in teaching students critical thinking. I want them to question things. This creates better critics.”

Kent knows that the opportunities for higher education are becoming more scarce because funding is difficult and education is expensive.

“The school I teach at now charges more in student fees than my tuition was when I was in school,” he says.

Small programs such as the UAF Communication Department face restrictive budgets. So Kent gives back—contributing his own money and also reaching out to his graduating classes, energizing and advancing fundraising efforts. As of this printing, the Communication Student Support Fund that Kent started contains $14,040. Twelve donors have made 263 individual gifts.

“I grew up in a trailer park in Fairbanks,” says Michael Kent, a College of Liberal Arts alumnus and donor. “I know how much education means to creating a better life.”
1. Title: "Untitled"  
Artist: Sonya Kelliher-Combes  
Alum

2. Title: Vouloir Arbes  
Artist: Mary Webb  
Current Student

3. Title: Fall Feathers  
Artist: Hannah Foss  
Alum

4. Title: "Untitled 36"  
Artist: Mariah Henderson  
Current Student

5. Title: Captive  
Artist: Jaden Nethercott  
Current Student

6. Title: "Untitled 6"  
Artist: Mariah Henderson  
Current Student

7. Title: Fish on Spirit  
Artist: Kathleen Carlo  
Alum

8. Title: Polar Voices  
Artist: Hannah Foss  
Alum

Selected CLA Visual Arts
Joseph Thompson was an associate professor at UAF when he passed away in August 2014. The meaning that Joseph Thompson gave to his own life taught those around him how to give meaning to their own lives. His legacy of living intentionally is one which will endure because of those he touched. “He was charismatic,” said Associate Professor Trina Mamoon, Joseph’s wife. “He was a man who had magnetism. You have good teachers, you have dedicated teachers. He was all of that, but there was something electrifying about him.” Joseph devoted himself with such passion to the study of philosophy and worked tirelessly passing this precious foundation of knowledge to the next generation.

Those who knew Joseph remember him first as a teacher. The time before Joseph’s terminal cancer diagnosis was a happy time in both his and Trina’s life. He had received tenure and promotion a year earlier, and they were together in Greece, where Joseph presented a paper at a conference on his favorite philosopher, Nietzsche. And just a few months before his passing, he had just been recognized with the Usibelli Award for Excellence in Teaching. (The Usibelli Awards are the highest honor UAF bestows upon its faculty.) Trina remembers Joseph speaking about his students during that time: “By giving meaning to my students’ lives they are giving meaning to mine.”

Trina said, “It was a mutual thing. I thought it was beautiful.”

Joseph was the kind of teacher who knew when to listen and how to guide. “He was a man of very strong opinions,” Trina said. “Sometimes as a husband and wife, that got us into some heated debates, but that livened up our relationship, too! Even though he was a man of strong opinions, he was very open to other points of view, and that I respect a lot.”

“The reason his students liked him is because he listened very carefully, and with attention to what others were saying,” Trina said. “He always learned the students’ names — he had large classes. They were not just students to him. They were individuals, people whom he wanted to help. He contributed to students’ education, not only developing their critical thinking skills, but also in how they thought about themselves.”

Much more than just a teacher, Joseph was a mentor for his students at critical junctures in their lives, sometimes guiding them during times of personal crisis, and always impressing his love for education onto many.

The memorial scholarship fund, which was announced during his on-campus memorial service in October 2014, reached $31,000 by Dec. 31. Endowments are given for five years to meet the required minimum of $25,000, and that his fund reached this amount in a few short months speaks to the many lives Joseph touched. Funding will be available for College of Liberal Arts students as soon as the fall 2015 semester and also for the Joseph Thompson lecture series. To Trina, that this money is available now means “Joseph lives on. . . For a student to get a scholarship in his name, to me personally, it means his legacy is then continued. To me that is very meaningful. It is something that would have made Joseph very happy.”

After Joseph learnt of his illness, he confided in his wife that he would miss teaching. “He regretted that he wouldn’t be able to teach his students,” Trina said. “That is how much they meant to him.”

Speaking of what Trina would tell Joseph now, she said “Joseph taught us all to teach. Those of us who teach, we carry on Joseph’s legacy in us because he taught us to be good teachers and we learned from him. That is what I would tell him: your teaching is continuing on, and the students remember you and others will carry on your work for you.”

There was beauty in Joseph’s life that will endure. Within beauty we find resilience, which is both comforting and hopeful. In his last lecture to his students when he bid them goodbye, Joseph addressed time, time which can be measured in terms of fullness.

“By giving meaning to my students’ lives they are giving meaning to mine.”

Joseph believed philosophy was life enhancing. He wanted to give that to other people so they could appreciate life more — to the fullest. Impact on others. For Joseph himself it was the quality of the life lived, not as much the length. I am quoting a friend here who noted upon hearing of Joseph’s passing that he was a ‘brightly shining light of most unusual, remarkable quality. His light was so intense that it did not have the energy to sustain even fifty years of its brilliance. ’

Joseph lived passionately and with intention, inspiring younger generations to live a meaningful life. This is the gift that Joseph left us.”
Beauty is the word we use when we want to talk about being hailed by the experience of it. Aesthetics then comes from the study of the experience of beauty. Our perceptions of beauty are different because we each exist within the world differently. The ways we perceive are then filtered through the imprint of our time and encounters with life. When we talk about beauty, what we are talking about is the similar experience we undergo when we meet beauty.

The word beauty suggests that we want to communicate this experience. The exhaustive way the word has been used in our language comes both from our desire to define and understand. Like all language, which is versatile and changeable, the word evolves and bears the imprint of the individual and thus the collective. The resilience of beauty is unexpected. It can bring pleasure and can also be found in pain. The word is then burdened with all of the ways we attempt to create and speak of beauty.

What is beauty? We can start by discovering what it is not. Though Alex presented seven thesis statements, we will discuss just a few here.

"Beauty is not cheesy" Beauty cannot be found in the cliché and overly romantic. We can attempt to contain the elusive idea by searching for its borders and oppositions. These polarities point to qualities which we can begin to exclude from its definition. To be cheesy is to be counterfeit or spurious. Because of this we know that beauty must be authentic. We’ve said what beauty is not. What then, can it be?

"Beauty is captivating." "Captivation is a rich concept," Alex says. "There is a difference between captivation and obsession. Captivation, like obsession, is a state of enthrallment or infatuation but where obsession is about fixation, I think captivation is more about curiosity. Captivation allows for a willingness to let go despite the fact that you are drawn."

Obsession is born out of a desire to possess, which we cannot do without causing an inherent change to the subject of beauty. If there is freedom and fleetingness to beauty, fixation necessarily takes away from our attraction to the impermanence of beauty, leading to ruination. Curiosity and captivation are an acknowledgment of wonder without the compulsion to keep.

"Beauty is time plus desire." When speaking about this mysterious statement, Alex said “beauty can be defined as a desire to see something that is unsustainable endure. To see something which you know will leave and which you want to stay. Beauty is a lived thing. It is something which happens to you.”

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If beauty is fleeting, the time we have to both search out its meaning and be hailed by beauty is fleeting also. It is both the questioning and the search which lead to meaningful connections with others. “Why is the peculiar, almost surreal combination of words in Wallace Stevens’ ‘As a calm darkens among water-lights’ or Hart Crane’s ‘The mind is brushed by sparrow wings’ so utterly beautiful? You’ll notice that neither really mean anything — paraphrasing the lines, or explaining their meaning, or putting the thought another way are out of the question. One may be able to say nothing except that a feeling has been voiced.”

Everything written, said, and communicated in our search for the meaning of beauty, what it is to be hailed by beauty, can be argued for and against in a myriad of thoughtful ways. Ways appearing incompatible only stretch the space the idea of beauty is able to inhabit. This discussion, the agreement and disagreement, is valuable. The importance lies in our conversation around the communal and individual search for the meaning of beauty and meaning within beauty. The importance lies in our inherent desire to want to voice our perceptions of the beautiful. In this way beauty takes us away from self and leads to thoughtfulness and a desire to connect and share with each other.
Let’s talk about failure.

The most significant failure of my 31 years is this: I abandoned the worthwhile and achievable dream of moving outside of Alaska because I fell in love with a boy. This experience is not just a story; it is a failure I am proud of. Let me tell you why.

The first time I boarded a plane to leave Alaska, I was 13. My grandmother had passed away very suddenly at only 54 years old. My father was overseas at the time, so my mother and I flew to Michigan alone. The sadness of losing my grandmother didn’t thwart my joy at finally flying in a real plane, and I remember making a list of things I wanted to do and see. From then on, all I thought and dreamt about was leaving Alaska. I wanted to get out so bad. I poured over maps and job postings for the next five years. I intended to leave as soon as I graduated high school.


Falling in love is weightless. The forces working on me were both pulling and pushing me toward him and somehow cancelled each other out, leaving me suspended. I followed him to UAF, taking classes while still in high school, even though being a college student wasn’t something I had ever considered.

The very first course I took at UAF was Political Economy, taught by Professor Mary Ehrlander. I also took History 101 with Professor Terrence Cole and Sociology 100 with Professor Judy Kleinfeld. Oh my. I was falling even farther now. Professor Ehrlander was the nicest possible professor on the planet. She took great pains to encourage us to raise our hands, and her articulate, engaging nature drew me in. Then there was Professor Cole. He scared the crap out of me. We had to read three books the first month and attend study groups with his TAs. Missing even one lecture was the kiss of death. Declarative and intimidating at first, I soon picked up his charismatic humor and found myself smirking like a cynical college senior in no time. Then came Professor Kleinfeld, a woman who, to this day, still remembers my face. She was soft-spoken and didn’t make us read as much as she made us think. Critical essays were followed by in-depth and controversial classroom discussions about topics I knew very little about. I was intrigued. She made me think about the world outside of myself, outside of my house and life, and about the larger sufferings of the world. After another semester, my declared major was social work.

Another year after that and I found myself working three jobs and supporting that guy I loved. After a few years together — we broke up. I felt like I had failed. I remembered wanting to leave Alaska, and I remembered staying — for him. I had failed at leaving Alaska and then I’d failed at relationships. Awesome.

Despite all the heaped up failure, I decided to go ahead and finish that degree any way. I received my B.A. in social work in 2006, and I’ve since fallen in love again. I married a fascinating Southern-born ex-Army man whose character and love remind me every day to be grateful for my failure to leave the state. My life has been very different than I imagined it would be, and I’m probably never leaving Alaska after all, but I’m alright with that. Failure changed my life, and now I’m the first woman in my family to graduate college. CLA gave me a new start, right here in my hometown, and I wouldn’t change that for anything.

I hope I fail again.

Please enjoy this edition of Clarity and all of the engaging lessons and faces within. Embrace your personal failures and, above all, never forget the opportunities right here in your back yard. You’re never too old, too tired, too broke or too much a failure to take a class or finish that degree. Welcome home. Kinda.

- Naomi Horne