

Bill Boyer: Why I chose JMU

Professor was both encouraging and challenging BY GENE C. FANT ('84), PH.D.

During the spring of my junior year of high school, my family encouraged me to narrow my college choices by visiting the schools I thought I might like to attend. We made our way across the state from our home in Hampton to tour three campuses.

I made a special point to meet with faculty members from my proposed major, anthropology. At one of the universities, the faculty member was pompous and aloof. At another, the professor was somewhat engaging, but he really didn't seem to care whether or not I chose his university.

Ah, but the third professor was Bill Boyer, in JMU's anthropology department. His bushy mustache framed a quick smile and reinforced his easy-going temperament. He was both encouraging and challenging.

I struggled with my choice, but finally settled on JMU in large part because of Dr. Boyer, so I was delighted to be able to take one of his courses during my first semester. On the opening day of the class, he brought in some sort of strange object and had us try to figure out what it was. We made all sorts of

guesses, and he just smiled and sipped his coffee. After a while he told us what he thought the object was. He was introducing us to a foundational skill in archaeology: object interpretation.

I didn't know it back then, but that moment was a central teaching moment in my life. At the same time, Clarence Geier, then chair of the anthropology department, challenged

About the Author: In addition to his B.S. in anthropology, Gene C. Fant, ('84), Ph.D., earned four graduate degrees. He chairs the English department at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and has published nearly 100 articles, poems, essays and reviews. He is a frequent contributor to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and has written or contributed to seven books.

About the Professor: Bill Boyer served on the JMU faculty from 1979 to 2005 and continues to teach part time in JMU's General Education Program. An unceasing advocate for the importance of liberal education as part of a university education, Boyer helped develop JMU's Interdisciplinary Social Science program and was an active participant in the design of the Freshman Seminar. As head of JMU's Sociology and Anthropology Department from 1993 to 1999, he contributed significantly to the creation of the current General Education Program.



"I chose JMU because of Dr. Bill Boyer, whose quick smile reinforced an easy-going temperament. He was both encouraging and challenging," says Gene C. Fant, ('84).

me to learn how to observe people; and Jean Cash, a professor in freshman English, cultivated my love for story. Those three professors subtly joined together to shape my eventual career in writing and college English teaching.

People often ask me how I made the transition from anthropology to literature, and the answer is pretty easy. I simply went from interpreting artifact to interpreting text. I also write poetry and fiction, both of which depend on keen observations of people and their interactions. At every turn, I find that my training in anthropology expresses itself in my work, whether I'm writing, teaching a story, or even managing my colleagues as an academic department chair.

Now that I'm a college professor, I have a special passion for helping to recruit prospective students. I have students and their families in my office almost every week. Very few of these meetings pass without me remembering when I was the student in the professor's office and Dr. Boyer was inviting me to change my life by attending JMU. So I smile at these prospective students, and I wonder if they will think of me in 25 years the way that I think of him.

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Mixed Media

BOOKS | MUSIC | FILM

{Books}

Desiring Women: The Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West

BY KARYN Z. SPROLES; 2006 UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS INC. ISBN 0-80209-402-3



On Sept. 23, 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote to Vita Sackville-West: "If you'll make me up, I'll make you." In *Desiring Women*, Karyn Sproles argues that the two writers in fact "made" each other. Woolf and Sackville-West produced some of their most acclaimed work during their passionate affair. Through examining the works that the authors produced at the time, (essays, criticism, novels, poems, biographies and personal letters) Sproles demonstrates how this body of work was a collaborative project — a partnership — in which they promised to reinvent one another. Sproles contends that in all they wrote during their relationship, the pair struggled to represent their desire for one another and resist the social pressures that would deny their passion. *Orlando*, Woolf's biography of Sackville-West, is used to demonstrate the discussion of gender and sexuality. Amazon.com's *Editorial Review* says, "Sexy and provocative, *Desiring Women* re-imagines Woolf and Sackville-West as daring, funny, beautiful and bent on resisting the repression of women's desires." Sproles is an English professor and associate dean of University Studies at JMU.

The Red Flannel Rag: Memories of an Appalachian Childhood

BY PEGGY ANN SHIFFLETT ('69); 2004 COMMONWEALTH PRESS ISBN 0-9759648-1-1



Peggy Ann Shifflett ('69) earned the 2005 Elmer Lewis Award for preservation of Shenandoah Valley folklore for her book, *The Red Flannel Rag*, which shares the fascinating lives of her family and neighbors eking out a hard living in Appalachia. Many works on Appalachia are analytical or told by observers, but Shifflett's characters are real people. Readers will feel as if the Hopkins Gap folk are part of the family. "From birth customs to death customs, and through virtually every rite of passage in between, Shifflett takes the reader on a journey of remembrances," says Radford University professor Grace Edwards. For example, readers experience "the collaboration, cooperation and camaraderie of the butchering process — all the sights, sounds and smells that take us from hog on the hoof

to the pork on the plate." Shifflett, a retired department head from Radford University, also wrote *The Fundamentals of Sociology* (2003).

The Dittohead's Guide to Adult Beverages

BY BRITT GILLETTE ('99); 2005 REGNERY PUBLISHING; ISBN: 0-89526-012-3



Britt Gillette ('99) started listening to *The Rush Limbaugh Show* at the age of 12. With the help of Limbaugh's irreverent humor, Gillette offers a recipe book full of "adult beverages," a favorite in the Limbaugh lexicon. Millions of "dittoheads across the Fruited Plain" lacked an authoritative source for the best adult beverages. Gillette's guide features 125 humorous recipes, including such notables as the Rio Linda Rouser, EIB Ecstasy Elixir and Club G'itmo Guzzler. *Human Events Online* says, "Gillette captures the essence of the Dittohead experience and the result is a humorous look at the American political landscape that only fellow Dittoheads can truly appreciate."

The World's Cheapest Destinations: 21 Countries Where Your Money is Worth a Fortune

BY TIM LEFFEL ('86); 2006 BOOKLOCKER.COM INC.; ISBN 1-59113-936-8



A new and improved edition of *The World's Cheapest Destinations* shows travelers that they don't have to save up for years or be a lottery winner to travel overseas. "By simply choosing a less pricey destination," says Tim Leffel ('86), "overseas travelers can easily cut their travel costs by more than half." The revised edition highlights 21 countries where vacationers can find deals like \$10 hotel rooms, \$2 restaurant meals and \$1 pints of beer. *The Boston Globe* says, "Leffel uses colorful and sometimes blunt language to describe 21 countries worth visiting where travel is cheap." Leffel has dispatched articles from five continents and is a regular columnist at *Transitions Abroad*.

{Music}

All My Rainy Days

VICTORIA PATCHEN ('99) AND LUCKY DAY; 2006 ARTIST RELEASE

Lead singer Victoria Patchen ('99) and her band, Lucky Day, released their debut EP, *All My Rainy Days*, in concert at Vienna's Jammin'

Java in April. The D.C. pop/rock band's new song was an editor's pick at Smother.net before it was released: "Victoria Patchen spews forth vocals that are beautifully melodic and with additive harmonies that tie the germane angular guitar hooks and undercutting bass grooves together neatly ... the resulting pop-rock amalgam is cheerfully catchy." *All My Rainy Days* reached No. 4 on The *Washington Post's* MP3 site on Nov. 11, 2005, five months before its official release. Patchen minored in music and studied classical voice under the direction of JMU professors In Dal Choi and Brenda Whitmer. Give a listen at www.luckydayband.com/.

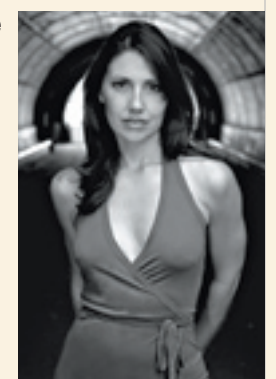


Coming Alive

JOY BELLIS ('95) 2006 WHITE BUTTERFLY MUSIC

Joy Bellis ('95) released her debut CD, *Coming Alive*, in March in conjunction with White Butterfly Music, owned by Jeff Haas ('96).

Coming Alive is an eclectic mix of selections from the American songbook, Brazilian tradition and contemporary pop. Bellis, whom *All-about-jazz.com* compares vocally to Nora Jones, is an experienced performer who has headlined New York City clubs for seven years. Fans may not know that she started out as an investment banker as a vehicle to get her closer to NYC's performance venues. Bellis studied jazz standards and Latin (especially Brazilian) rhythms with jazz singers and vocal coaches Carol Fredette and Maura Ellyn. *Ejazznews.com* says, "Bellis attempts to deliver her music with a certain smoothness and quality, while at the same time offering an interpretation that appears more dramatic and interesting than anyone else's version." Check out her vocals at www.joybellis.com.



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Climbing down the corporate ladder

After life with the 101st Airborne and GE, alumnus chronicles the discovery of real fulfillment bringing Christianity and medical care to Afghanistan BY ROSS PATERSON ('90)



Border crossing, Spin Boldak, Afghanistan, Feb. 15, 2002

Our team was edgy as our Toyota microbus pulled up to the immigration control office at the dusty border town of Spin Boldak. We were well aware that we were about to enter one of the world's most perilous and mysterious countries. To add to our apprehension, several men came out of the office compound holding Kalashnikov assault rifles. Some of the men wore military uniforms, while others were dressed in the traditional Shalwar kamis consisting of loose baggy pants held up by a drawstring and a long shirt covering the body past the knees. A few wore dark, meticulously wrapped turbans and had long beards that we associated with the recently overthrown Taliban regime.

My teammates and I exchanged silent glances. What had we gotten ourselves into?

Instead of simply logging our passport numbers into a book as had been done on the Pakistani side of the border moments before, we were ordered out of the van and led into the compound. The guards took us to the headquarters building and motioned for us to take a seat. The room was small; the only light came through dark and dusty curtains that covered every window. Our team was noticeably nervous, but the Afghan doctor Rahimullah, who served as our interpreter, told us everything was fine. Moments later the director of the station entered, smiling and exchanging greetings. Rahimullah explained what we needed.

The director was elated to see Americans not associated with the media; none had come through his crossing in a long time. He ordered his assistants to bring in some tea. Thus, what would have been an impersonal, clerical transaction in America became an important first glimpse into the people, the culture and the country we felt called to help.

An hour later we were traveling north through the Rigestan Desert, and a mild sandstorm intermittently reduced our visibility to as little as 50 feet. We had changed vans because our Pakistani driver and guards could not go past the border. An Afghan driver and one of the soldiers from the immigration office became our new escorts. The road — I use that term very loosely — was lined occasionally with nomadic Kuchis and their children, who appeared like ghosts in the sandy fog. With outstretched hands, they begged for handouts from the vehicles passing only a few feet away.

In most places, four to six alternate traffic lanes had been carved into the desert by cars and light trucks capable of maneuvering off the main, heavily rutted gravel road. Dry riverbeds had become bouncy bypasses so vehicles could avoid backups on one-lane, war-ravaged bridges. I watched in disbelief as large cargo trucks straddled their wheels across bomb holes in

Ross Paterson ('90) has spent several years in Afghanistan bringing Christianity and medical assistance to the war-torn nation. He is trying to replace the country's poverty and war with peace and prosperity. "We've been met with optimistic anticipation" and "welcome, thankful" attitudes, says Paterson, who (center) shares in refreshments with his Afghan hosts.

the bridges where steel-reinforcing cables hung down like spaghetti.

After a couple of hours of bouncing, we stopped in the middle of the desert for a break. Rahimullah, a former freedom fighter, or Mujahideen, asked the guard for his Kalashnikov rifle. There, in the desert, he commenced to give us all shooting lessons with the old, poorly maintained rifle. After shooting a few rounds, we could now be considered men in this gun-focused warrior culture — we had fired the legendary Soviet-made rifle that has been too large an influence in Afghanistan's recent history.

This was my introduction to the wonderfully complex, intriguing and desperately needy nation of Afghanistan.

I spent four days in the southeastern city of Kandahar on this first trip. The fresh devastation from the American-led intervention three months earlier was nearly indistinguishable from the previous decades of destruction. Whole city blocks were flattened, and unrepaired bullet holes scarred many walls. The tallest building in the city, a Russian-built hotel, had been condemned. The many battles fought in and around the structure had left large holes on every side of the building, and mangled antennae on the roof leaned at odd angles.

The people in the city were amazingly unfazed by the destruction, almost accustomed to it. Kandahar has the same hustle and bustle of many Third World cities. The roads are congested all day. German buses (donated for public transportation), cars, trucks and vans compete for space with small motorcycles, bicycles and even donkey carts. Drivers manage to speak a whole new language through their incessant horn-blowing, gestures and yells.

Aspects of the strong tribal-based culture with its heavy emphasis on family were evident in all that we saw. Because construction of family dwellings begins with a wall and a gate, glimpses into everyday home life are rare. The women, though free from the Taliban's oppression, continue to wear blue burkhas that completely cover their bodies, except for a small mesh opening for their eyes. But there are signs of progress. We witnessed an all-girls school, forbidden under the Taliban, dismiss classes for the day. Dozens of girls emerged from class in their traditional black dresses with white scarves tied loosely over their hair.

We checked into the Nur Jan hotel, just west of Martyr's Square late the first night.

'The work our military is doing — getting rid of those who thrive on war, fear and oppression — is only the tip of the iceberg. The war on terrorism will ultimately be won when we create a new generation of hope.'

It was much better than we expected — beds with sheets and blankets, a bathroom and shower down the hall, and at least intermittent electricity.

Our first meal that night was very traditional Afghan fare — beef kabobs roasted on an open flame, served with a white yogurt sauce for dipping. Like almost all Afghan meals, it was accompanied by palau, a rice dish with raisins and carrots cooked in a sweet-tasting oil, and nan, a delicious flatbread baked against the inside wall of a fire-fed oven. Most Afghans would eat from a communal plate with their hands, but our innkeeper was kind enough to provide some forks for his American guests.

'America has brought us freedom, not bombs.' — Yusuf Pashtun, governor of Kandahar region

He also gave us our first glimpse into the minds of the majority of the Afghans we would meet on this trip. He was excited about the partnership that was forming between Afghanistan and America, and very positive about the prospect of prosperity and peace replacing poverty and war.

On this first trip into Kandahar in February 2002, two paradigm shifts radically changed me from the inside out. First, the people and their story were not at all as I had expected from the portrayals in American media. If you want to find corrupt leaders and trouble, inevitably they will be found. We can find them in any country, including ours, for that matter.

The vast majority of the people I have encountered on subsequent trips welcome the American intervention, are thankful

for the security provided by our armed forces and are desperate for a new future of peace and prosperity. Engineer Yusuf Pashtun, the minister of reconstruction for the Kandahar Region, welcomed us the second day in Afghanistan and told us in perfect English, "America has brought us freedom, not bombs."

He then added that freedom was not worth much without food, water and medical resources to keep people alive. The survival and success of the new government was going to be tied closely to the ability to deliver results in these key areas. In the three years since my first trip, Pashtun has become governor of the Kandahar region.

The second realization that tugged at my soul was the extreme desperation in this impoverished and war-scarred land. Consider the life experience of a 29-year-old male in Afghanistan today:

- He was born one year before the Russian invasion and has known nothing but war.
- Out of an average of eight siblings per family, two died before age 5 — a 25 percent mortality rate for preschool children.
- He is well past middle age with a life expectancy of only 42 years.
- Drug lords tempt him to produce poppy with the limited resources available in the devastated agricultural infrastructure.
- If he can read and write, he is in the top 10 percent of Afghans.
- He and his family do not have access to basic health care.

During our four days in Afghanistan, I walked the floors of the Mir Weis hospital — the worst medical facility I had ever seen in my life. Later I was stunned to learn that it was the only hospital facility available to support a regional population of over 1.5 million.

We met with the next generation of leaders at Kandahar University and saw more of the same optimistic anticipation that we had seen in our innkeeper the first night. We visited Afghan refugee camps in Chaman, Pakistan, and heard stories that reflected the deep tribal divides that had kept the country in a perpetual state of war for more than a decade after the Russians withdrew. After seeing all this, I remembered the challenge from Pashtun. We had asked him, "What can we do to help?" His response, arms in the air, was, "Pick a place; pick any place; just do something to help."

The work our military is doing — getting rid of those who thrive on war, fear and

oppression — is only the tip of the iceberg. The war on terrorism will ultimately be won when we create a new generation of hope: children who can read, write, and learn to think for themselves; a new generation of doctors that turn the tide on child and maternal mortality rates; people who know peace, prosperity and hope.

Some may argue that is way too big a job; but, I knew I had the power to do something. It was as if God had given me the unique gift and experiences to handle this work in a tough land. How could I walk away and do nothing?

My life at JMU (1986-90) was very focused. I attended Madison on a four-year ROTC scholarship and eventually went on to command the cadet battalion and the school's elite Ranger group. All I wanted to be was an infantry officer, and I was blessed to spend six years in infantry battalions around the world. I culminated my military career as a company commander in the 101st Airborne Division.

After the military, I set off for new challenges in the business world. I was hired by General Electric and spent the next seven years working in GE's widely varied manufacturing businesses all over the country. I built locomotives in Erie, Pa.; refrigerators in Decatur, Ala., at the amazing rate of 5,000-plus per day; and spent my last two years as the business leader for a joint venture called GE Sports Lighting Systems LP. During my time in the sports lighting business, we designed and built everything from four-pole, 12-light systems for Little League ball fields, to major stadium projects, including the San Diego

About the Author: After attending Madison on a four-year ROTC scholarship, Ross Paterson began a military career that culminated as a company commander in the 101st Airborne Division. He then spent seven years with General Electric before deciding to move down the corporate ladder. "My drive for success has been replaced with a drive for significance," he says. As a founding organizer of Glocal Ventures Inc., an international nonprofit development organization, Paterson is trying to fight terrorism in Afghanistan by reconstructing hope. Paterson's former roommate, Tom Rogers ('90), collaborated on this article.



The school and medical clinic that Ross Paterson and his team helped build sits at the bottom of the mountain behind Malimjaqoob, a Mujahideen fighter against the Soviet Union. "Malimjaqoob was telling us war stories, and we were taking pictures of the area where we hope to build more schools and clinics," says Paterson.

Padres' new field and the reconstruction of Soldier Field in Chicago.

However, my business career never had the same feel as my military service. I never had the congruency between my work, life and passions. I was never able to get into the elusive "zone." Despite my rowdy, airborne-Ranger life in Harrisonburg, I dedicated my life to being a follower of Christ as a second lieutenant facing the first Persian Gulf War. As I have grown and matured in my faith, my life and priorities have been transformed. The drive for success that I possessed as an infantry officer and business leader in GE has been replaced with a drive for significance. It all comes down to the basic Stephen Covey principle of "begin with the end in mind." At the end of my time, what do I want my legacy to be?

In the year that followed my first trip to Afghanistan, a team from NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, including senior pastor Bob Roberts Jr., put together Glocal Ventures Inc., a nonprofit organization. Glocal, a combination of the words global and local, works to form partnerships to transform communities and touch the world. I became more and more involved in their Afghanistan project as a volunteer. Eventually I started working my way down the corporate ladder so that I could devote more time to Glocal efforts. Within two years, I was working full time in the nonprofit world, developing strategy, funding and networks to continue the work in Afghanistan.


Afghanistan 2006

In Afghanistan, our teams and programs have made an impact on millions of lives. Our purpose is to create a network of faith-based partners to show God's love to the people of Afghanistan. Our vision is to reconstruct hope in Afghanistan by rebuilding sustainable medical, educational and agricultural infrastructures that will be the foundation for a future of peace and prosperity. Glocal Ventures and partner organizations have helped rebuild irrigation canal gates and locks to boost the region's agricultural economy and assisted in building schools and medical facilities in the poorest villages.

We have recruited and funded development workers from other Asian countries who have boldly moved to Afghanistan with their families. This allows them to integrate with the community and influence the culture more effectively than Westerners. Within these families are skilled doctors, dentists, agriculturists, teachers and computer specialists who are developing long-term programs to build a future of hope.

Our results in Afghanistan have created new opportunities for us to get involved in other countries as well. Glocal Ventures and our partners are now engaged in emerging works in Indonesia, Nigeria, Algeria, Vietnam and Egypt.

Now, after stepping out of my American Dream comfort zone, I believe that everyone should have a life project. The bigger, the better. Something that is nearly impossible to change, but worth giving a life for; a mission that awakens the senses and moves you into your zone of top performance; a vocation requiring every ounce of your skills, gifts, and passions; a calling that stretches you past your current capabilities and makes an impact on a world larger than the one you now know.

A decision to move in this direction demands adjustments in one's current definition of success but pays dividends that are unimaginable. If you are having trouble thinking of somewhere to invest, you are welcome to join us on our next trip. 

Helping build a free press

Alumni assist Ukrainian TV station counterparts BY MARISSA HANKINS ('02)

Two JMU alumni working in Roanoke's CBS affiliate WDBJ7-TV traveled halfway around the world to help television colleagues build a fledgling free press in the former Soviet bloc.

WDBJ and Vezha, a television and radio station in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, spent a year working together through a U.S.-funded program facilitated by the nonprofit International Research and Exchanges Board. Staffers at the two stations traded two team visits. The first group from WDBJ visited Ivano-Frankivsk several months before the highly charged 2004 presidential election (between Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko) and the ensuing political crisis that brought Ukraine international headlines. It was clear that the country was facing an important crossroads. While the station and its employees were wrestling with the tension between their journalistic ideals and the desire to take sides in a critical national debate, they worked hard to reflect a variety of viewpoints in their political coverage.

The second trip for WDBJ was slated for November 2004 and included two JMU alumni. As research director, I joined Kelly Zuber ('81), promotions and public affairs director, and Greg Brock, account executive. Weeks before we were about to depart, peaceful political protests broke out in response to the corrupt presidential campaign. Ukraine's Orange Revolution was plastered all over the news, thus postponing our trip until March 2005.

When we finally arrived in Kiev and made a quick stop at the U.S. Embassy, we were taken to the Hotel Ukraine to stay until we departed for Ivano-Frankivsk. We immediately recognized the hotel from the news because it overlooked the square where 100,000 Ukrainians had set up tents and gathered for the protests that had taken place only months before.

Our arrival in Ivano-Frankivsk was met with cold weather but warm hearts, as three Ukrainian friends who had visited WDBJ just six months prior greeted us. After being treated to the best Ukrainian hospitality, Kelly, Greg and I settled in to begin our week with our Vezha counterparts.

The first thing we noticed as we entered the Vezha studio was that the news set and logos were changed to orange to show support for the Orange Revolution. Since an overwhelming majority of the area supported the revolution, Vezha was excited to show they were a reflection of the people and not of the once corrupt government.

Vezha's equipment was not what would be considered professional grade, but it was better than expected. The staff used computers to edit news stories and play them on the air. They had a

About the Author: Marissa Hankins ('02) is research director for WDBJ7-TV. In April, she hosted the second exchange team from Vezha, driving them to Washington, D.C., and making a stop in Harrisonburg to see an American college campus and sample some American cuisine from Buffalo Wild Wings.

basic studio and functional control room that allowed them to produce a variety of popular programs.

The operation had a few quirks, though, like the day the computer crashed as staff members assembled a newscast. As we eyed the clock on the wall, the staff continued to work methodically until everyone was ready. We were in shock as the 6:30 p.m. start time came and went. The program finally went on air at 6:38.

There are so many differences between American and Ukrainian television that we had to be very flexible to work with the Vezha team. Current Ukrainian TV is comparable to American TV in the 1960s (but with modern equipment). Weather reporters hold up products

for advertising after their reports. Commercials vary in length and are basically as long as the advertiser feels like making them. Newscasts are not live. They average 15 minutes in length and are recorded and then run from the computer.

I spent most of my visit discussing how market research could help Vezha and local businesses. In the United States, stations have ratings systems so we know how many people are watching our news and entertainment programs. In Ivano-Frankivsk, they have no clue if viewers are watching Vezha or one of the other local stations.

This presents problems in creating appropriate content and selling advertising time. So we discussed the ins and outs of putting together a research study in the region to address this problem. American research principles are hard to adapt in an area such as Ivano-Frankivsk because two of the main ways market research is conducted: via phone and mail. Neither of these systems is well developed in Ukraine. Internet usage is also quite low, so that eliminated another medium.

Through interpreters, I learned that the Vezha staff faces many similar problems that American TV teams face. We swapped stories about difficult clients and sales strategies and laughed at how similar things are. After many days of discussing issues at Vezha and some of the problems facing local businesses, we created some research strategies to help Vezha and its advertisers.

Our visit was chock full of sessions on different aspects of the TV business, but it wasn't all work. Ukrainian hospitality is unmatched, and we were treated to the most delicious and plentiful meals during our stay. Of course, no meal in Ukraine is complete without a shot or five of vodka. Toasting was a big deal at all meals, and we were expected to participate and offer toasts ourselves. With the help of our interpreters, we toasted our new friends and their wonderful hospitality.

The night before we were to head back home, Kelly, Greg and I were walking through the downtown area and stopped at a street vendor who was selling Orange Revolution paraphernalia. Greg wanted to buy a flag and didn't have enough Ukrainian currency left for it. Recognizing we were from the United States, the man said in choppy English, "You have. Ukraine, America — friends."

And we are. 



Front row, seated: WDBJ7-TV staffers Marissa Hankins (orange shirt), Kelly Zuber ('81) and Greg Brock take time for a team photo with Vezha TV staffers.



Helicopter parents

Swooping to the rescue via new technology, even with the best of intentions, may be barmy rather than helping students BY DAVID ONESTAK, PH.D.

Don't trust anyone over 30." This motto provided the psychological backdrop as the young adults of the late '60s and early '70s left the homes of their parents to enter the worlds of college and work — and some other experiences. Many of these children of the Greatest Generation had concluded that they did not want their lives to be governed by their parents' styles and values, which they viewed as antiquated and overly rigid. They demanded the separation and independence they felt they needed to fashion their own lives, journeys and destinies.

Fast-forward a few decades.

Those young adults have now become the parents of young adults. Surely these parents are prepared to extend to their own progeny the same opportunity to separate from their parents, autonomously make decisions and solve problems, and begin to shape their personal and professional futures.

Well ... not exactly.

Instead, the unwillingness of many in the current generation of parents to provide their offspring the space and freedom required for a healthy transition from adolescence to adulthood has generated a new term on college campuses: helicopter parents. Newspapers like *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have chronicled how these well-meaning but hyperinvolved parents hover above their students, searching for any sign of problems. When their exquisitely sensitive emotional radar detects even a blip of struggle on the part of their students, they swoop to the rescue, providing answers and solutions, often nudging the students aside and assuming responsibility for resolving the issues. A few parents go as far as to fill out college applications for their students, dictate majors and class schedules, and demand that professors change grades they judge to be unfair. Some students, all too happy to avoid the demands of young adulthood, collude with their parents by freely relinquishing their responsibilities.

In the final analysis, it is not what you do for children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.

— ANN LANDERS

As the director of the JMU Counseling and Student Development Center, I probably get to hear more helicopter-parent tales than just about anyone on campus. Faculty and staff members often call to consult with our center when they are experiencing a troubling situation that they do not know how to navigate, and an increasing number of these contacts concern challenging experiences with over-involved parents. My position provides me an excellent vantage point from which to consider both the factors that encourage this particular parenting style and its impact on student development.

Let me say that most parents do a good job balancing the somewhat paradoxical needs that students have for both continued support and increasing levels of independence. Effective parenting is not an easily achieved goal. As a parent of two children, I have firsthand experience with the daily ambiguities and struggles inherent to parenthood; and I thoroughly empathize with the parental desire to shield one's children from life's sharp edges.

That being said, over my 15 years of experience at four university counseling centers, I have noticed an increasing level of parental involvement in the academic, emotional and social lives of students. During most of this time, I welcomed — at times even solicited — the increased support parents were providing. However, as once noted by a sage who suggested that the four most important words in the English language might be "up to a point," the new millennium has ushered in a wave of parental involvement that now often stunts the development of students. A growing minority of parents is so extreme that I think of them as Apache attack helicopter parents who are on heightened alert to launch parental Hellfire missiles at any problem that might stand in the way of their student's immediate happiness and success.

Why are so many well-meaning parents behaving this way?

A number of cultural factors seem to be at play. For one, a drop in the fertility rate in the decades following the 1950s caused family size to shrink. With fewer children in the home, parents have been able to focus a greater level of attention and energy on each individual child. New societal expectations of what it means to be a "good parent" have also emerged. Good parents are presently expected to attend every athletic and other extracurricular event, a standard that would have seemed radical to previous generations.

Expectations also changed regarding the type of personal relationship and emotional connection parents should

have with their children. The parents of today's college parents, having survived the searing experiences of both the Great Depression and World War II, were generally less inclined to express their affection for their children (although likely feeling it just as deeply), and obedience to parental authority was considered more important than a nuanced understanding of a child's emotions and motivations.

In my opinion, the childhood experiences of today's parents have much to do with the rise of helicopter parenting. Having felt a lack of support and understanding from their own parents, these young adults, upon becoming parents

Breaking Out of the Holding Pattern

Avoid the "empty nest syndrome." When children leave for college, changes in the parent's role can lead to a type of identity crisis. Parents can ease their transition by refocusing some attention from their student to their own personal interests and desires, many of which may have been ignored while fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

Convey your confidence in your student's ability to be successful ... even if you aren't sure that they can. Expressed parental support and encouragement are much more important than students will typically acknowledge. Students need to know that their parents believe in their ability to handle the new challenges college will bring.

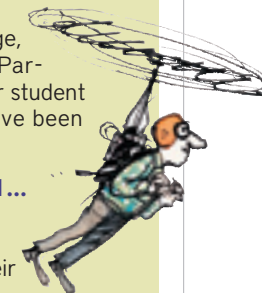
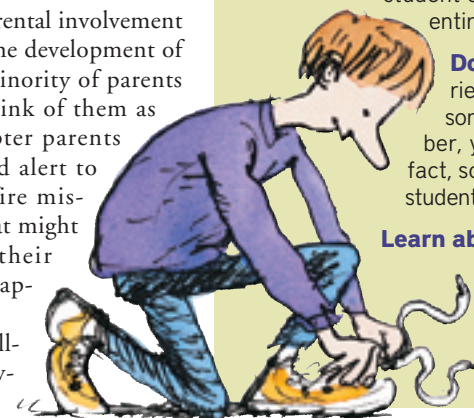
Avoid rushing or pushing your student into a major or career. On average, students change their major twice before finally deciding upon an area of study. Confusion in this area is normal, especially during the freshman and sophomore years. Rushing the decision to select a major or pushing a student into a career in which he or she has no interest is an almost certain recipe for academic disaster.

Keep the lines of communication open. When parents respond too harshly to a student's mistake or failure, the student often becomes defensive and will no longer offer important information. As a result, minor problems that could be easily solved with a little parental guidance may become major crises.

Talk about finances, especially credit cards. Clearly let your student know what you will and what you will not contribute to college expenses. Based on this, help them develop a monthly budget to determine how they will make ends meet. A student should have no more than one credit card and pay off the entire balance at the end of each month.

Don't rush in and solve problems. Students need the experience of solving problems on their own because valuable lessons are learned and confidence is built in the process. Remember, you will not always be there when a problem comes up. In fact, some of the most empowering words a parent can utter to a student are, "What do you think you should do about this problem?"

Learn about on-campus resources available to your student. Take advantage of the years of experience Madison faculty and staff members have working with students in all areas of college life. If your student tells you that there is no one to help, don't believe it. He or she probably has not looked hard enough.



themselves, decided, "I'm not going to do it that way." Unfortunately, reactions to emotional life experiences are often extreme. The pendulum swings too far, creating unintended problems of its own.

Many parents seem to believe that they can, should and need to be all things to their children and that everything is riding on how well they perform. A wonderful theatrical depiction of this belief can be found in the movie *Parenthood*. Steve Martin's character experiences two sequential daydreams that exaggerate his potential impact on his son's future. In the first, his son is the valedictorian of his college class and delivers a speech that credits his father with doing everything right and making him "the happiest, most confident and most well-adjusted person on the face of the earth." In the second, his son is shooting at people from the college's bell tower and screaming that his father "made me play second base!"

There are other emotional issues that can set the blades of helicopter parents whirling. Some parents live out their own dreams and ambitions through their offspring, often appearing to be more interested in the success or failure of their child than the child himself. (If you want to observe this in all its glory, visit your local Little League Baseball field sometime.)

Making the decision to have a child — it's momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body. — Elizabeth Stone

At very selective schools, such as JMU, students often come from highly successful families in which parental expectations for academic and professional success are heightened, sometimes to the point that students' journeys toward these goals are sullied by their parents' demand that they be obtained at any cost. Other parents

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foster dependency in their students to maintain the parents' identity as important, valuable contributors to the lives of their children. Still others, burdened by work demands and other responsibilities, solve students' problems because it seems more efficient and safer than the alternative (i.e., examining the problem with the student, helping to identify relevant factors, deciding on a process, anticipating and overcoming setbacks, trusting the student will follow through, etc.).

But perhaps the most important reason for the accelerated involvement of parents in the lives of college students is the simplest: Because of technology, now they can be. A few decades ago, there was usually only one telephone for the entire floor of a residence hall, long-distance costs were prohibitively high, and the U.S. Postal Service delivered most communications between parent and student. Under such conditions, the intentions of even "Apache attack helicopter" parents would likely be frustrated.

The once-a-week phone call or letter that characterized parent-student communications a generation ago has been replaced by daily contact and the expectation of immediate replies from both parties ("Where were you? I left a message over an hour ago!"). On today's college campus, the slinging of book bags onto students' backs is accompanied by the flipping of cell phones to their ears. E-mail is checked religiously, and an instant message is never far from students' fingertips. Parents have cell phones and computers, too, and a combination of wires, cell-phone towers and satellites all fuse into an extended electronic umbilical cord that continuously connects parents and students. Advances in technology have also spawned a 24/7 media cycle that highlights every possible individual and societal danger, further increasing the centripetal forces binding parents and students together.

What impact do all of these influences have on the development of students into healthy, functioning adults? Up to a point (remember that phrase?), increased parental involvement has caused students to feel cared about, supported and reassured that they will not face life's challenges alone. However, more parents are now going well beyond this point, resulting in insufficient boundaries between students and their parents, and the inability

of these students to cope with the normal problems of young adulthood.

For example, student clients of the Counseling and Student Development Center who are struggling with self-confidence and decision making frequently make statements such as "I tell my mother everything" and "My father is my best friend." Students offer these as high praise of their parents; and I, too, can easily fall into a Steve Martin-like fantasy in which my own son and daughter speak of me with such reverence. As a college mental health professional, however, I know that such statements often indicate that parents are not providing these students with sufficient space to develop their own lives and that, if changes are not made, dependency on parents will triumph over healthy independence.

Further, parents who swoop out of their hovering flight patterns to solve problems deprive their students of the practice and experience that we all need to learn to cope with the vicissitudes and struggles that characterize daily life. This is especially unfortunate, as college provides students with a wonderful training ground filled with challenges and decisions (e.g., a roommate who is not a good match, choosing a class schedule, the ending of a romantic relationship) that develop the mind-set and skills required to navigate the truly significant issues they will face in the future (e.g., marital problems, choosing a career, the deaths of others close to them). Thus, the powerful parental motivation to protect their students from anxiety and harm ultimately denies their children the opportunity to work through difficult situations and emerge better, stronger individuals.

Don't handicap your children by making their lives easy. — Robert A. Heinlein

Ultimately, the larger message helicopter parents send to their children is that without intense parental involvement their students are incapable of embodying the goal of the JMU mission statement: "... educated and enlightened citizens who will lead productive and meaningful lives." How distressing and ironic it would be if the central lesson that the present generation of parents bequeaths to their college students is, "Don't trust anyone under 30 ... especially if they're your son or daughter." ❧

Honesty works!

How to resolve the hidden cause of painful problems at work and home BY STEVEN GAFFNEY ('85)



We have all been there: In the midst of a conversation with a coworker or a loved one, we've had something pressing to say — and then held back. Or maybe we debated offering an idea or advice and fretted, "Should I say it or not? Ah, forget it; it will probably just cause an argument. It's not worth it."

Next time you're in that situation and before you decide whether bringing up your concerns is worth it or not, consider these statistics:

- An average employee loses seven weeks of productivity every year because of troublesome and unresolved communication issues.
- Lack of open, honest communication is at the root of 80 percent of problems at work.
- Nearly 75 percent of employees who leave their jobs do so because of communication issues with their boss — not money.
- The No. 1 factor that drives employees to be engaged in their job is their relationship with their boss.
- The divorce rate is still 50 percent.

Now, put those statistics aside and answer this question. Sharing something or keeping it inside, which takes more energy? If you are like most people, keeping things inside is more stressful. When you finally share it with someone the outcome usually is not as bad as you feared.

Having been "in the trenches" working with thousands of individuals from organizations of every size for more than a decade, we have discovered that the root cause of most problems is a lack of honest communication and the subsequent withholding of issues, information and ideas.

How often have you said to yourself, "If they had just told me what was bothering them and what they wanted, I could have done something about it." Or, "If I just had all the necessary information to do my job, I could have made a better decision in a fraction of the time and done it so much better." Recently, a participant in one of my seminars shared that his wife of more than 25 years told him she was unhappy and wanted a divorce. The worst part about this is that he never saw it coming. He never knew she was unhappy.

Honesty is not only about telling the truth vs. telling a lie. That's just what everyone talks about. Honesty is about saying what needs to be said and not withholding information and ideas.

Most people are unaware how much simply not being honest hurts relationships, curbs teamwork, stunts innovation, wastes millions in productivity and restricts the ability to generate new business. Unfortunately, some people think hoarding knowledge means power, while the reality is withholding can be toxic to every relationship at home and at work. Here are a few costly results of dishonesty: