


GONZAGA

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People for others

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DALE HAMILTON

ON A MOONLESS NIGHT, HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH STARS TO COUNT FIRST? LIKEWISE, SO MANY GONZAGA ALUMNI LIVE OUT THE JESUIT MISSION IN REMARKABLE WAYS. HOW TO PICK AMONG THEM? EVENTUALLY, WE SIMPLY CHOSE ONE, THEN ANOTHER AND ANOTHER.

JOK NHIAL ('09) This resilient young man has come a long way. A long way from the farm on which he was born and raised in a tiny village in South Sudan. A long way from the “atrocities after atrocities” he experienced as a child in that war-ravaged region.

“I was separated from my family at the age of six. The government troops and their proxy militias killed anyone they could find. Everyone had to run for their lives. I took my own way and joined thousands of other children running for safety. I didn’t know where we were going, but I kept walking. It was the beginning of a long journey” – one that would bring him ultimately to Tacoma, Wash., in 2001 as part of a resettlement initiative that granted asylum to about 3,500 (of a total 27,000) Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan.

Despite these hardships, Jok arrived at Gonzaga three years later. He graduated in 2008 with a double major in political science and sociology.

Today Jok lives in Federal Way, just 12 miles from where he first was resettled. But it is under completely different circumstances. There he heads the Liliir Education Project, a charitable organization that he founded to enhance literacy and education in South Sudan.

The project undertakes grassroots action to address educational inequality in South Sudan. Liliir is laying the groundwork for a primary and secondary school. Much of Jok’s time is spent seeking sponsors and participating in fundraising events.

“We subsist entirely on donations,” he says. “We have started funding scholarships for two students who will start college this year. Upon completion, they are required to go back to their village to teach for at least one year.”

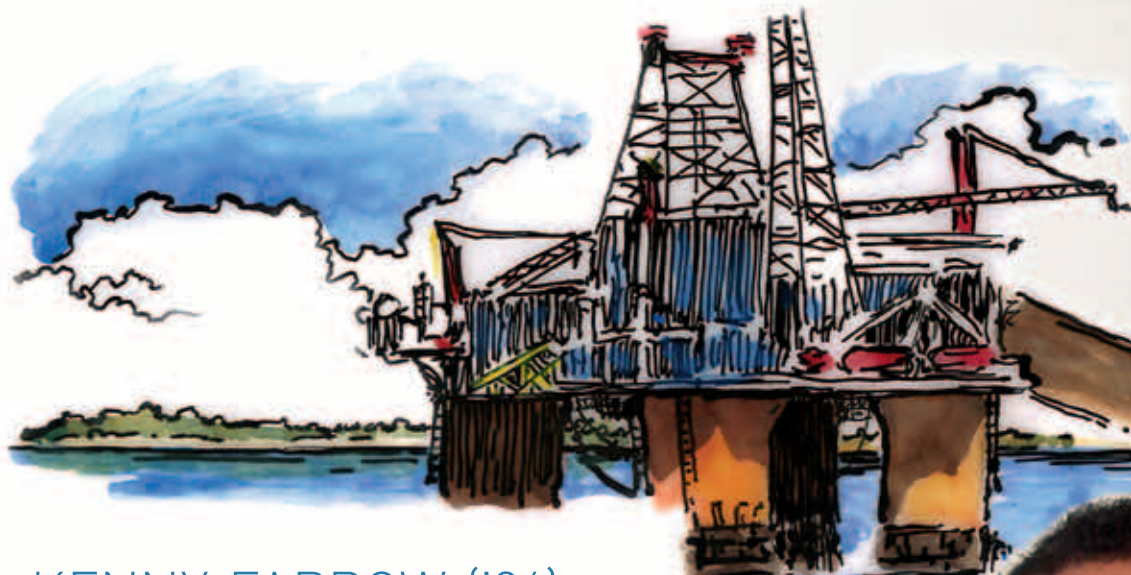
One personal experience reminds him of the importance of his work. He recalls going to school under a tamarind tree with a makeshift blackboard nailed to the trunk. One day, he and his young classmates were caught in a downpour in the middle of class. Sodden and cold, he swore off returning to school.

“I want to help build classrooms for children in remote rural villages who are still being taught outside,” he says. “When I am carrying out my work, I think of educating the next generations to build up a strong nation. Education can help people make an informed decision to elect public officials who will serve their interests and deliver services – all with transparency so that there is accountability.”

Fortunately for Jok and those whose lives he is now working hard to improve, his mother made sure he knew that, no matter how rain-soaked he got, quitting school was never an option.

– E.J. Iannelli

{ JOK NHIAL IS A ‘LOST BOY’ OF SUDAN WHO
HAS FOUND HIS PURPOSE. }



KENNY FARROW ('96)

As an engineer for Stress Engineering Services, Kenny Farrow expects the unexpected. The nature of his work is found right in the firm's name. Stress Engineering handles the design and analysis of structures that are subject to powerful forces of nature like earthquakes and ocean currents. A Gonzaga civil engineering major, Farrow started with the Texas-based company in 2004, three years after finishing his doctorate in structural engineering at Notre Dame on a National Science Foundation fellowship.

"During my studies, I had the wonderful opportunity to live in Japan for a summer as a visiting researcher at the University of Tokyo and I traveled to Turkey to study structural damage from the 1999 earthquakes," he says. He spent time in Copenhagen learning about probabilistic design. And with recent projects in the North Sea and Malaysia, his career can take him far from home. But his work revolves around a common theme: safe offshore drilling. Few events highlighted the importance of that more than the explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010. Within hours of the accident, Farrow and his colleagues received calls asking for assistance on this unprecedented problem.

"We worked all hours, some people through the night without much sleep, to find solutions as quickly as possible," says Farrow.

That emergency qualifies as one of his higher-stress work situations; but Farrow finds more eco-friendly ways to get an adrenaline rush. Endurance bike racing is his game.

"I've done races like Primal Quest, a 10-day expedition race, similar to Eco-Challenge; Leadville 100, a 100-mile mountain bike race in Leadville, Colo.; and Ironman," he says. Pushing himself to perform to the last mile in these grueling races is reflected in his engineering philosophy.

"I try to translate these achievements into my work life," he says. "Improper engineering design can lead to catastrophic failures and cost the lives and livelihoods of many people, so I step back and remind myself of the implications of not doing my due diligence on even the smallest projects."

— E.J. Iannelli



NICK SENGER ('88) First in his family to attend college, Nick Senger has built his profession around Catholic education. He is a celebrated teacher at All Saints Catholic School in Spokane, the author of a respected book on reading skills and editor of a blog on Catholic K-12 education.

Born in Long Beach, Calif., “I didn’t originally plan to go to Gonzaga,” says Senger. “But when my guidance counselor asked me where I would go if money was no object, I named the most prestigious school I knew of. Several months later my parents were driving me to Gonzaga, a place I had never even visited before.”

There he graduated with a bachelor’s in history, went on to earn a master’s in teaching and met Brenda, now his wife of 21 years. And there Senger discovered how much he loved acquiring knowledge and sharing it with others. “At Gonzaga I learned how to think, how to study, how to communicate and how to respond to God’s call,” he says.

For the past two decades, he has taught at All Saints, in 2001 winning the National Catholic Education Association’s award for Distinguished Teacher of the Year, Region XII. He attributes the praise he has received to the special relationships he forges with his students.

“One year, just after “Toy Story” came out, I was teaching a grammar lesson on gerunds, infinitives and participles. At the end of the class, as the students stood up to leave, a girl named Meghan pointed to the door and shouted, ‘To infinitives... and beyond!’ That is exactly where I want my students to go – to infinitives and beyond.”

In 2008, Nick founded the online Catholic School Chronicle. “I noticed there were no blogs or websites specifically devoted to Catholic education,” he says, “and I thought I could help fill that void.” He has also self-published a book on developing reading skills. His stake in Catholic education as a whole is rooted in the concern he has for each individual student long after they have left All Saints.

“Each day I pray for the All Saints alumni, especially those who have passed through my classroom. I wonder what they must be doing – continuing their education, getting married, raising families, looking for work, struggling with loneliness or addiction, caring for sick relatives, perhaps even teaching their own students. I place their needs before God and ask that their day be blessed in a special way that brings them closer to Him.”

– E.J. Iannelli



FIND “HOW YOUTUBE CAN INCREASE STUDENTS’ AWARENESS OF GOD” AND MORE AT NICK SENGER’S BLOG, “CATHOLIC SCHOOL CHRONICLES.”