A year and still healing

Christopher Kernich & John White:
Their loved ones attempt to move on
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NATIONAL AWARDS – 2010
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Consumer Magazine Article: First Person
First Place, Fall 2009
Jinae West, “My Family I (Don’t) Have To Know”

Third Place, Spring 2010
Kelly Petryszyn, “The Best-Kept Secret”

Single Issue of an Ongoing Print Magazine: Design
First Place, Fall 2009
Adam Griffiths, art director

Single Issue of an Ongoing Print Magazine: Editorial
First Place, Spring 2010
Sarah Steimer, editor

Single Issue of an Ongoing Print Magazine: General Excellence
Third Place, Spring 2010
Sarah Steimer, editor

NATIONAL AWARDS – 2010
Blank Slate, 11th Annual Design Contest for College Students

Magazine Cover
Second Place, Fall 2009
Adam Griffiths, art director

REGIONAL AWARDS – 2010
Society of Professional Journalists, Region 4

Best Student Magazine
Third Place, Fall 2009

Online Feature Reporting
First Place, Spring 2009
John Hitch
“The Gulf Coast: The Long Road Back”
DEPARTMENTS

4 TRAVEL
Get out of town: Take a break from life in Kent and MapQuest your way to these destinations only a few hours away.

6 FOOD
Christmas dinner done fast: No stove needed. Just plug in your microwave and enjoy a holiday feast.

8 FASHION
Winter style: Chilly weather doesn’t mean you have to bundle up in sweats. Add a little flare to your winter wardrobe with these tips.

44
More than words: Follow veterans on their return to Vietnam through the lens of a Kent State photographer.
Photo by Laura Fong Torchia

Cover story

29 REMEMBERING CK & J.T.
The campus lost two students last year and some lost a son, boyfriend and friend.


FEATURES

15 LIFE AFTER COLLEGE
Students struggle to put their degrees to good use in a shifting economy.

20 KENT’S OWN INDIAN
Anthony Gallas gets signed with his favorite team.

52 KENT CONNECTIONS
A funeral director, frame shop owner, volunteer historian and architect share what makes them call Kent home.

38 DÉJÀ VU
Imagine trying out for American Idol and hearing the contestant in front of you sing the same song you planned to perform.
12 MOTHER NATURE'S DEADLY DESTRUCTION
Hurricanes and earthquakes hit too close to home for these students.

14 GIVING BACK TO HAITI
A group at Kent State is raising money for a tractor that may be the start to solving the hunger problem in Haiti.

18 SO MUCH FOR MAKING NEW FRIENDS
Society is increasingly hiding behind its gadgets to avoid face-to-face conversation.

23 SHOOT EM' UP
Writer Ashley Sepanski gets over her fear of shooting guns with a little help from her dad.

26 OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
Student Michael Moore's motivation to be independent outweighs his inability to see.

40 'EAT, PRAY, LOVE'
Writer Nicole Stempak takes her own spin on this popular novel.

48 RUGGER FOR LIFE
A shot to the eye couldn't keep this girl off the pitch.

BACK OF THE BOOK

55 USER CONTENT BLOCKED
Learn what it takes to job-proof your Facebook.

56 ROOMMATES FROM HELL
Have you ever had a roommate who just made you want to move out? These students have.

58 LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
From "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" to "The Brave Little Toaster," reminisce about classic movies with these oldies but goodies.

60 LAST SHOT

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I first met John White my freshman year. He was dating a girl on my floor in Olson Hall, Morgan Marucco. He was reserved, but when it came to sharing his opinion, he never held back. Over the next few years, I saw him in chance meetings and every time Morgan would be at his side. One day, I saw his name in a Daily Kent Stater article headlined “Police investigate assault on student.”

My heart skipped a beat, remembering that Christopher Kernich was assaulted in November and died days later from his injuries. I followed the headlines, continuously praying for John and those who were close to him. Then, on Feb. 22, the headline appeared that I never wanted to see: “Kent State grad student dies from January assault.” I read the paper walking into my morning class and felt numb the rest of the day. Questions clouded my mind, “How could this happen?” and most of all, “How are his loved ones feeling right now?”

The last question has been lingering in my head ever since Kent State lost John White and Christopher Kernich last year. This issue of The Burr explores the answer to that question, chronicling the past year in the lives of Christopher Kernich’s and John White’s loved ones. For those who never knew Christopher or John, hopefully these stories will give you a glimpse of who they were and how their deaths affected many people.

And for those who knew the victims, maybe these stories of healing will help close your own wounds and let you know that you are not alone.

This issue of The Burr delves into the topic of healing, because like the loved ones of Christopher and John, many of us are walking around with open wounds — hidden from the public eye but begging to be closed.

For some like Sarah Dobson, a rugby player who fractured her eye socket during a game, healing is physical. Read Dawn Einsel’s story about how Sarah made it back to the pitch after receiving the worst injury of her life.

For others, like Vietnam Tom, healing is psychological. Look through Laura Fong Torchia’s photos of his return to Vietnam and witness an attempt to make peace with a fight Tom felt uneasy about for years.

And take a break, because we all need one, with Christina Thomas’ story about her shot at becoming the next American Idol, or my own story about a blind student with dreams of helping others see. Try recipes from your dorm room, pop in a forgotten movie and escape campus with our getaways.

I hope these stories of healing remind you that life is precious. Take a study break. Spend time with friends. Enjoy Kent while you’re still here.

We all need these simple reminders. Working on this issue has made me realize that we are bound to encounter tragedy and all we can do to get past it is band together and heal.

In the words of Christopher Kernich: “Live every moment you have like you’re never going to get it back.”

To Christopher Kernich and John White:

Kent State misses you.

Kelly Petryszyn

About The Burr
The Burr is a general interest student magazine that strives to inform students about the issues, events and people of Kent State University and its surrounding communities. Readers are encouraged to send comments, suggestions and feature articles to the addresses on the opposite page. The Burr, formerly The Chestnut Burr, is produced by students at Kent State University twice per academic year. No part of The Burr may be reprinted without permission. © 2010, The Burr.
Break out of Kent

Written by Rachel Jones & Jackie McLean

Starting to feel stuck in Kent? After exhausting the local options, the weekends can begin to feel the same. Escape to these fun getaways within a few hours of campus.

FOOD

THE LOCKVIEW
207 S. Main Street, Akron
thelockview.com

The Lockview is known for its gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches. This small dimly lit restaurant also offers an eclectic array of imported beers and wines. The Lockview is the perfect location for an intimate date or a relaxing night out with friends.

MARY COYLE
780 W. Market Street, Akron
marycoyle.com

Visiting Mary Coyle is like stumbling into an Italian village. This family-run restaurant serves up a wide selection of classic Italian dishes with its six-time award-winning red sauce, including gnocchi and manicotti, as well as unexpected dishes like hot dogs, applesauce and chili. And they also offer delicious dessert options, such as homemade ice cream and a large selection of Heggy's Old Fashioned Candy.

ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM
1100 Rock and Roll Boulevard, Cleveland
rockhall.com

As visitors ascend the fourth floor escalator, a 38-by-22 foot brick wall, a replica of the one made famous by Pink Floyd's highly successful 1979 rock opera album, immediately comes into sight. This is just one of 18 permanent exhibits featured in the museum. Visitors can see music memorabilia from John Lennon's famous lime green Sergeant Pepper outfit to Michael Jackson's famed sparkling glove.

LINDA THEATER
1745 Goodyear Boulevard, Akron
rmmovietimes.com/movie-theaters/Linda-Theatre.html

A trip to the Linda Theatre is like going back in time. This old-fashioned theater has one screen and a staff that treats moviegoers like old friends. Tickets are only $5, and the refreshments are reasonably priced as well. Finally, a movie night that won't blow this month's rent.

FLOWER CHILD
11508 Clifton Boulevard, Cleveland
989 N. High Street, Columbus
flowerchildvintage.com

For shoppers who are bored with today's trends, Flower Child vintage shop has hundreds of treasures to shake up any wardrobe or home décor. With too much merchandise from the 1930s to 1980s for just one store, Flower Child has two locations. From a Pillsbury Doughboy cookie jar to groovy silk shirts, there are plenty unique items to be found.
ADVENTURE

MILL CREEK METROPARKS
Canfield

Ohio winters can be cold, but visiting Mill Creek Metroparks will make them feel peaceful and picturesque. Sled Hill on McCollum Road is a great location for snowboarding and sledding. For those interested in enjoying nature, cross-country skiing is offered on the bike trails and golf courses. Visitors can thaw out afterward in the Warming Room by a fire, enjoying treats from the snack bar or vending machines.

OHIO CAVERNS
2210 East State Route 245, West Liberty

During the late 1800s, people looking to explore the Ohio Caverns were lowered down by a rope into the underground caves with only a lantern as their guide. Today, a tour guide and stairs have replaced the lantern and rope, but the intrigue remains. Visitors can witness a variety of formations 103 feet underground, including the icicle-shaped Crystal King, which is the biggest formation found on the roof of a cave in Ohio and is 200,000 years old. Colors of pure white, blue, orange, brown and red-black are scattered throughout the cavern. The Ohio Caverns is open from Nov. 1 through March 31.

SHOPPING & ENTERTAINMENT

“LAST CALL CLEVELAND” AT PLAYHOUSE SQUARE
1501 Euclid Avenue #200, Cleveland

lastcallsketch.com

Comedians Mike Polk Jr. and Aaron McBride used to joke around at Kent State on their hit TV2 program, “The Twilight Show.” Now they are telling jokes at the 14th Street Theatre at Playhouse Square. Matt Zitelli and Mark McKenzie join them in the sketch comedy group, Last Call Cleveland. Their show, “Last Call Cleveland Saves Cleveland,” at the Playhouse Square is like Saturday Night Live catered to a Cleveland crowd. Bad wigs and fake mustaches allow the group to portray both real and imaginary characters. Most of their jokes play off different aspects of Cleveland, like the song the group made titled, “LeBron James is a B****,” criticizing his departure from the Cleveland Cavaliers. Each member of the group is so obnoxious, it is difficult to predict what they will do next. Catch the upcoming hilarious show Jan. 14, 15, 28 and April 1 and 2 at 7:30 p.m.

LOCK 3
200 S. Main Street, Akron
lock3live.com

The scenic Lock 3 featuring Ohio’s largest seasonal ice skating rink looks like a snapshot of New York City at Christmas time. It’s open from Nov. 26 until the end of January 2011 to celebrate its seventh annual Holidayfest and Chirstkindl Market. Skaters can even warm up with chef Louis Pripich’s popular bratwurst sandwich served at the nearby Chowder House Café. Admission is free, but rental skates cost $3 for adults and $2 for children.
Deck the halls from your microwave

Recipes by Rachel Jones
Photos by Brittany Ankrom & Jackie Smith

Can’t wait for Christmas? Try these recipes that are simple enough to prepare in your dorm room but hearty enough to tide you over until Dec. 25. Make them at home to show mom and dad what you really learned this semester.

HAM
This is delicious plain, but if you’re looking for a little more kick in your Christmas, try this glaze adapted from cookingnook.com.

**Ingredients:**
1. precooked ½ ham  
**Glaze:**  
½ cup brown sugar  
1 ½ tablespoons honey  
½ tablespoon mustard  
¼ teaspoon water

**Directions:**
1. Place the ham uncovered on a microwave-safe plate.  
2. Microwave for two minutes.  
3. Mix the glaze ingredients in a bowl and spread it over the ham.  
4. Cut several 1/4 inch-thick slices.  
5. Microwave again for four minutes.
**YAMS**
This recipe has always been my mom’s sweet way to sneak more vegetables into my family’s Christmas.

**Ingredients:**
1 can yams, drained
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 pinch brown sugar
1½ cups mini-marshmallows

**Directions:**
1. Pour the yams, vanilla and brown sugar into a microwave-safe casserole dish.
2. Press the ingredients with a fork until they reach the consistency of mashed potatoes, and spread them along the bottom of the dish.
3. Microwave for three minutes, thirty seconds.
4. Pour the mini-marshmallows evenly on top.
5. Microwave for two minutes. [Note: If marshmallows start to expand too high, it’s time to turn off the microwave.]

**GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE**
This classic French’s French Fried Onions recipe is modified for microwave perfection.

**Ingredients:**
2 cans green beans, drained
1 can mushroom soup
½ cup milk
½ teaspoon pepper
1 can French’s French Fried Onions

**Directions:**
1. Place the green beans in a microwave-safe casserole dish.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk the soup, milk and pepper until smooth.
3. Pour the soup mixture over the beans and stir until they are coated.
5. Microwave the covered dish for five minutes.
6. Top it with the remaining French Fried Onions before serving.

**MASHED POTATOES**
This is my spin on my dad’s cooking methods. Liven it up with one tablespoon of onion powder, garlic salt or paprika.

**Ingredients:**
4 potatoes
½ cup milk
3 tablespoons butter
salt and pepper to taste

**Directions:**
1. Cut the washed potatoes into bite-sized cubes.
2. Place them in a microwave-safe bowl with the milk, and zap them for eight minutes.
3. When the potatoes are soft, you can mash them with a fork or beat them with a hand mixer.
4. Mix in the butter until it melts. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**CHOCOLATE PEPPERMINT FUDGE**
This is my mom’s easy fudge recipe with a bit of peppermint added for a festive feel.

**Ingredients:**
1 bag chocolate chips
1 can sweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon peppermint extract
¼ cup crushed peppermint candies

**Directions:**
1. Mix the chocolate chips and sweetened condensed milk in a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Microwave for one minute.
3. Stir the ingredients until the mixture looks like chocolate pudding.
4. Fold in the peppermint extract and candies.
5. Pour the fudge into a square dish lined with wax paper.
6. Refrigerate for two hours.
7. Remove the fudge from the container and slice it into squares before serving.
Try on something stylish this winter

Written by Caitlin Restelli
Photos by Dana Beveridge

Bundling up during the chilly winter months seems simple. You roll out of bed, put on your comfiest pair of sweatpants and boots and top it off with a hat, gloves and a heavy winter coat. Many students choose this comfy look rather than putting an effort into dressing stylishly. But you can look both fashionable and comfortable this winter. Women, liven up your winter wardrobe with tips from sophomore fashion merchandising majors Brittany Casper and Megan Gooch, and men, look good all winter long with advice from sophomore fashion design major Frank Cameriatto.

WOMEN

Boots: Want boots that look cute in the snow? A pair of leather or pleather boots will not let you down. Try trendy over-the-knee boots. Remember not to wear suede boots in the snow. The salt will change the colors of the boots and your feet will be soaked by the time you reach class.

Scarfes: You can never go wrong with a scarf. Any color can go with a neutral coat. Colors add life to your outerwear. A trend on the rise is the infinity scarf, a style that loops around the neck. When sporting a plaid coat, solid scarves made of wool or cashmere are a nice complement.

Hats: The fedora hat is making a comeback. It’s simple but classy and can be worn with almost anything. Another popular style is a beanie with a brim. Wear this hat with a puffy North Face coat, and you have a sporty, cute look to show off while keeping yourself warm.

Coats: Invest in a stylish winter coat. Neutral colors are in this winter, such as plaids, grays, whites and camels. Opt for a knee-length style and be on top of trends this year.

Left: Jazmine Beidleman, Frank Cameriatto, Lauren Wynn
Above: Kaitlin Crowley
Above all else, let your personality show through your style. Brittany says her style is bright and fun, whereas Megan's is classy and chic. Frank's is an edgy Americana and urban cowboy.

MEN

Boots: A good pair of hard leather boots is highly recommended. Dr. Martens are tough against the snow and slush, providing a comfy feeling while trucking across campus.

Gloves: Fingerless gloves work well. They are a manlier style and allow fingers to breathe while keeping hands warm.

Coat: A black wool peacoat is the best way to look stylish and stay warm. Guys can pull off a leather coat, too. Although they are expensive, they are well worth the investment.

Shirts: Flannel shirts provide a fun way to layer up. Pair a plaid flannel with a T-shirt underneath. A western-style button up works best.

Hats: A hat is vital in order to keep your head warm. Two hats to look out for this fall are the beanie knit caps and the slouchier cap.

Scarves: The bigger, the better. There is nothing wrong with pairing a brown scarf with a black peacoat; however, lighter shades of brown on black work best. Avoid pairing navy blue on black because the colors clash.
Welcome Students
From The College of Arts & Sciences

Did You Know...?

......that 70% or more of employers recently surveyed* said they want colleges and universities to provide more education in:

• Science and technology
• Written and oral communication skills
• Critical thinking and analytic reasoning
• Complex problem-solving
• Teamwork skills in diverse groups
• Creativity and innovation
• Ethical decision-making
• Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)
• Applied knowledge in real-world settings

Where can you get all of these and more?

The College of Arts and Sciences

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From Anthropology to Sociology---Your Foundation For the Future!
http://www.kent.edu/CAS/index.cfm
Watch the Stater for More Information.

Lives touched by disaster

Written by Kristyn Soltis
Photos by Amanda Woolf

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, causing an estimated $81.2 billion in damage with a death toll still mired in dispute. The nation is still continuing to heal from the hurricane’s effects, and a full recovery seems distant.

Then came earthquakes in Haiti, China and Chile; floods in Tennessee; and volcanic eruptions in Iceland—all within the past 12 months.

Mother Nature’s destruction hasn’t hit northeast Ohio lately. But for some Kent State students, these natural disasters will have a lasting impact.

Fearing for family

Marie Pierrette-Wagner, 25, transferred from Kent State to the University of Akron to major in social work, but she was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Marie moved from Haiti to Cincinnati on her own when she was 16 years old, while the other 14 members of her family remained in the Caribbean city.

In 2008, Marie created a YouTube video with hopes to raise enough money to build her family a new home in Port-au-Prince.

"Six years ago, this is where I lived," she says in the video. "This place was home to me. Two rooms, one bathroom and seven other family members to share that with. Three to four people slept in one room. Think about it, four people in a room the size of an average American bedroom. In 2000, I was shot right in this place. You start to realize life is not great when you don’t even feel safe in your own home."

In the video, Marie talks about her aunt Jeanine, who cleans homes and makes homemade juices to provide income for the family. Marie says after all her aunt has done for her, she hopes to make Jeanine’s dream of living in a better location a reality. Marie raised $300, which is enough money for her family to build a new home.

Two days after they moved in, it was destroyed by the earthquake.

That Tuesday, buildings, national landmarks, hospitals and homes collapsed. Six-story buildings were reduced to rubble. All phone lines were down. Millions of Haitians, covered in debris, were suddenly displaced while they feared the worst for lost friends and loved ones. Hundreds of thousands were dead, buried beneath the debris,

Marie Pierrette-Wagner is originally from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and has family who were in the city during the recent earthquake.
while others awaited medical treatment.

Communication between Marie and her family in Haiti was impossible.

“I couldn’t even sit down to watch the TV because of the fact there wasn’t a way of getting in contact with them,” she says. “It was hard for me to listen to the news or watch anything about it.”

News stories streamed in with headlines reading, “Serious loss of life expected,” and “Haiti lies in ruins — Grim search for untold dead.” She anticipated the worst.

It took four weeks before Marie knew her family’s fate. One of her cousins in Port-au-Prince paid someone to use their phone and call Marie in Ohio with the good news. They were all safe.

“My cousin and my sister had some debris fall on them, but they weren’t badly injured,” she says. “But I lost some friends and one great cousin of mine passed away.”

Marie last visited Port-au-Prince in mid-August. “We went and raised money again and rebuilt the house,” she says. “This time, my parents in Cincinnati and I wrote a letter and sent it to people and kept passing it along. I guess people felt touched, and I ended up raising $2,000. My (adoptive) dad raised about $1,000. It’s a lot compared to the money I raised the first time.”

The “Katrina Class”

Before Bryan Read came to Kent State for graduate school, he was an undergrad at Tulane University. He was eager to move from Missouri to New Orleans and begin college in August of 2005, but his first semester at Tulane wasn’t what he imagined.

As Bryan was driving to Louisiana with his parents, he began to feel a sharp pain in his stomach.

“I was like, ‘This doesn’t feel right, I’ve got to go to the hospital,’” he says. “Everyone else was moving in to their dorm, but I was having surgery for appendicitis.”

While Bryan was laying in his hospital bed recovering in Louisiana, Hurricane Katrina was brewing in the Gulf. Bryan and his family heard news reports estimating damage and realized they needed to move quickly.

Bryan and his parents left the hospital at 10 p.m. By 3 a.m. they were at Jackson State with others from the incoming Tulane freshmen class and New Orleans natives, but they didn’t stay. “We were going to wait it out but once we realized what was going to happen we moved quickly,” he says. They returned to Missouri the next morning, three days before the category five hurricane smashed into the Louisiana coastline at about 155 mph.

Attending Tulane for the semester was out of the question. Because Bryan was paying Tulane tuition, he had the opportunity to attend any school that was a member of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. Bryan spent one semester at University of Missouri-Columbia and although the school was welcoming, all he wanted to do was return to New Orleans.

“I just really wanted to go back,” he says. “About 80 percent of the Tulane freshman class returned, and I think we all just thought it was important to be there and help any way we could.”

Bryan and the other students, soon to be known as the “Katrina Class,” returned to Tulane to find little damage to their school.

“I think the university was in a little bubble,” he says. “Everything in that bubble was fine, but outside of it was where you could see all the damage.”

Cars carried by the water lay strewn throughout the city. Boards and planks of wood with FEMA spray paint covered the doors and windows of homes filled with rotting food. Shops and stores were looted, and businesses remained closed.

As Bryan and his friends rode the bus around town, they heard stories from strangers about lost loved ones and returning home to find nothing left but rotten shrimp in the refrigerator. Although there seemed to be destruction all around, Bryan says New Orleans is a town that looks toward the positives and celebrates life, so the city managed to adjust.

To be sure the Katrina Class left the Big Easy with positive memories, Tulane recruited the help of Ellen DeGeneres, a New Orleans native, to serve as the commencement speaker at the 2009 graduation.

“So to the Katrina Class of 2009, I say congratulations, and if you don’t remember a thing I said today, remember this: You’re going to be OK,” DeGeneres says.
Sending hope to Haiti

Written by Kelly Petryszyn
Photo by Jackie Smith

Chris Rizzo will never forget the images of suffering he saw when he went on a mission trip to Haiti in February, about a month after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince. He saw babies sitting in baskets, muddied and naked. He saw a reddish tinge to their hair, indicating malnutrition. He saw the outline of their ribs jutting through their skin. And when he looked into their eyes, he did not see a sparkle or gleam of energy — he saw nothing.

“They even feed the children these cookies of mud with a little bit of sugar... that was very hard to watch,” says the director of horticulture facilities for biological sciences.

Rizzo fell in love with the students he worked with at Institution Univers, a private Christian school in Ouanaminthe, Haiti. While there, he visited the home of a student’s family. Upon entering their home, he was moved by how little they possessed. The visit brought tears to his eyes and a lump in his throat. He knew he had to do something to help.

But he also knew he couldn’t do it alone. When Rizzo returned to Kent State, he teamed up with George Garrison, Pan-African Studies professor, and Gary Padak, dean of undergraduate studies, who both felt compelled to help. Through Kent State United for Disaster Relief, they devised a multiple-part initiative, including a Haiti class, a possible service trip to Haiti and a pen pal program, which involves Kent State students sending letters to Haitian students.

They also wished to help the hungry in Haiti, so they started a campaign to raise $50,000 to purchase a tractor to send to the Haitian school Rizzo visited.

Institution Univers founder and director Hugues Bastien says a tractor will allow the school to feed its more than 2,000 students lunch daily at a small cost. Also, it could possibly mean the start of a farming culture in Ouanaminthe.

“We have to teach and train people that we can be productive by working the land,” he says, hoping to add farming to the institution’s curriculum. He points out that farming will make people more self-sufficient by eliminating the need for people to buy food from other providers at a high cost.

Recently, it has been challenging for the school to continue to pay food costs because it has taken in about 350 refugees from Port-au-Prince. The lunch program is crucial to the operation of the school. Rizzo says before the lunch program started many students were falling asleep in class because they did not eat.

A former Institution Univers student, Sony Ton-Aime, who received a scholarship to study at Kent State as part of the Haiti initiative, says that nearly every Haitian worries about food.

“The first need in Haiti is food,” says Sony, a freshman accounting major. Many Haitians start their day wondering if they will eat. A lack of food causes other problems like malnutrition or crime.

Padak has already secured a $10,000 donation from a Kent State alumni couple for the tractor fund. KSUDR has partnered with New Southern Rock Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., to raise money for the tractor. Collection jars have been placed around campus and have been slowly accumulating money.

The initiative also provided a scholarship for freshman biology major Florvilson Junior Marcelin, also a student from Institution Univers, to study at Kent State. The university has agreed to fund scholarships for four students over the next two years, Padak says.

Sony and Florvilson, who goes by Flo, have been enjoying different diets since they came to America. Sony says instead of rice and beans every day, they now eat foods like lasagna and chicken.

The abundance of food the students enjoy does not make them forget that their families in Haiti have little to eat. Flo says he feels guilty when he calls his family on a full stomach, knowing that their’s are empty. His family is comforted that he has enough to eat.

“Sometimes when you think about family in Haiti, it’s very tough,” Sony says. “In Haiti, I eat often at 6 p.m. because my mother has to cook after she came through the market. When I eat here (at) noon, I’m thinking about them; they don’t even have one meal.”

If hunger wasn’t an issue in Haiti, Flo says people may want to stay in Haiti and could think about other aspects of life, such as education or creativity.

A tractor might not solve Haiti’s problems, but it’s a start.
The weight to find a job

Kurtis Hoffman earned a bachelor's degree in humanities from John Carroll University with a 4.0 GPA in 2009. Immediately after, he attended Ursuline College and graduated summa cum laude with a master's in education in 2010. He was smart, determined and ready to provide for himself.
Buttwomonths after graduation, he was working at Starbucks.

"(l) was making minimum wage out of college, and it was a big slap in the face," Kurtis says. The job at Starbucks was actually supposed to keep him levelheaded and give him a break from his "full-time job"—looking for a full-time job. His routine was to go to the library every day for seven hours to research and apply for jobs.

After sending out about 300 to 350 resumes locally, Kurtis grew desperate. "I have all of this knowledge and ability and good extracurriculars," he says. "My resume is really long and relevant, and it still was such a challenge to get even an interview or a second look at my resume." He took whatever interviews popped up, including door-to-door sales positions, something he had no interest in doing. That's when he listened to his dad, who said, "Kurtis, you have a right to be a little picky and turn down those job offers." So he kept working and kept applying. After about a month and a half of working at Starbucks, Kurtis accepted a job as an operations analyst at a university in Cleveland.

On Sept. 15, 2008, the economy deteriorated with the collapse of Wall Street. By the end of the year, the nation was officially in a recession. Along with it came high unemployment rates, making it more difficult for everyone, especially college graduates, to find a job. The unemployment rate at press time, 9.3 percent, is the highest it's been since 1983, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. When it's combined with underemployment, or the rate of people who work part time, it's 18.4 percent, according to a recent Gallup poll. And while the numbers are discouraging, grads are figuring out how to make it.

Kent State's graduate enrollment made nearly a 9 percent jump between 2008 and 2009. Enrollment is also the highest it's been this decade with 5,494 students this semester, according to the Office of Research and Planning for Institutional Effectiveness. Mary Ann Stephens, interim dean for graduate studies, says the growth in graduate enrollment is both a Kent State and national trend. "It's a confluence of many factors," she says. "Some of which have been going on for a while, some of which are very specific to Kent State through the administrative emphasis and others that are being felt by the entire nation because of the poor economy."

Two colleges at Kent State that have consistently seen increases in graduate enrollment are business and nursing. Stephens has a simple explanation for that: "Those are degrees that lead directly into employment," she says. Registered nurses and business-related-careers have an "excellent" outlook on finding employment, according to US News & World Report. Returning for more education can make graduates more marketable to employers. "It's really a refinement in skills, knowledge and ability to think," Stephens says. "It makes it a very attractive degree for a lot of professional fields."

Alisha Williams had a plan when she graduated from Kent State in May 2009. Even though she described the economy as being "down the toilet," the visual communications design and information design alumna knew exactly what she wanted: a design job for a magazine in New York City.

So she interned while she was in school and continued after she was finished with school. Internship after internship provided experience, which hopefully would help get her a solid job. "That was my expectation," she says. And each internship was better than the last.

She interned at All You magazine in N.Y.C. the summer between her junior and senior year, produced by Kraft Foods. Hobson Hamilton, assistant director for Career Services, sees Kent State students, graduates and alumni who need direction in the job market on a daily basis. He encourages them to take internships. "The students have a chance to really gain some hands-on experience and firsthand experience, which is really good," he says. Combining experience from an internship and education from a university is better than looking for a job based on education alone. "I think the more experience that our students can gain, the better off they're going to be," Hamilton says.

And Rick Schroath, associate dean for the Graduate School of Management in the College of Business, also thinks graduates need more than just an education, or even experience, to find a job. "The one thing that I see really winning — and this is interesting and that's energy and enthusiasm," Schroath says. "I like what I do. I'm confident in who I am. I can be successful in a variety of situations." He says additional skills that make students stand out are "leadership skills, the ability to work independently, take the ball and run with it, lead a team of people to a successful project conclusion — those are the kinds of things that employers are really looking for."

Little signs are signaling that the economy might be improving: jobs are being created, the unemployment rate is slowly decreasing and Hamilton says 73 employers are registered this year for Kent State's job fair, compared to the 65 employers last year. "I think it's getting better," he says. "I think with our situation it just can't happen fast enough."

Kurtis also encourages college grads who are looking for jobs to not get discouraged. "We all have to go through it, and it really sucks that we do," he says. "It really just takes patience and self-confidence."

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**Hot—and not so hot—majors of recent college graduates**

The National Association of Colleges and Employers recently surveyed the class of 2010 to determine the majors of those who have found jobs, as well as those who have not. Here are the best and worst majors for recent hires from the 2010 graduating class:

### Top majors of those landing jobs

- Accounting: 34.8%
- Mathematics: 33.3%
- Computer Science: 32.6%
- Engineering: 31.8%
- Business Administration: 26.8%

### Majors landing the fewest jobs

- Education: 13.4%
- Visual and Performing Arts: 16.7%
- Physical Science: 17.5%
- Psychology: 18.1%
- Communications/Journalism: 19.1%

Source: Career Advancement Management
Best and worst cities for business and careers

The following cities have been named by Forbes as having "reasonable business costs, strong economic outlooks, and a solid quality of life" — making them the best places for business and careers. A list of the worst cities for business and careers is also provided. Visit forbes.com/bestplaces for more information about the complete list of 200 ranked cities. Source: Career Advancement Management

President Lester A. Lefton and The President's Office Staff would like to say...

"CONGRATULATIONS to all students involved in producing print and electronic media. Your CREATIVITY, INTEGRITY & INCLUSIVENESS make us proud."

Kent State Student Media—Excellence in Action
It happens on the bus, in the Student Center, at the library: We only acknowledge the people we already know. The ones ignored keep their mouths shut, their rigid arms crossed before them. Others silently contemplate their days, clicking away at their cell phones or blaring music from their bone-white earbuds. Even a smile is rare.
In an increasingly disconnected society, some say that Americans are becoming less likely to interact with strangers. Blame technology or blame culture — try telling me you haven’t noticed.

Even outgoing journalists like myself aren’t excluded from this trend. While gathering information for this article, I found myself feeling uncomfortable when approaching strangers on the street.

However, that doesn’t mean I’m afraid to greet people I know. Neither is sociology assistant professor David Purcell, who never fails to greet his students and colleagues.

Like most people, Purcell rarely speaks with strangers. He says it wasn’t always like this. In the “good old days,” people would greet strangers sincerely and without inhibition. It’s practically unheard of today. Though he recognizes that times have changed, he doesn’t believe friendliness is completely dead.

Our cultural norms make conversations with strangers uncommon. It’s not normal for us to speak with strangers and when we do, we often feel uncomfortable. Therefore, many people try to avoid it.

To test these norms, I approached Kate Stragishier while she was texting to a friend. It took two greetings to tear her away from the glossy screen. At first, she was put off, thinking I was asking her for the time.

“Usually, people don’t say anything when you walk past them, unless you know them,” says Kate, a junior marketing major.

She says people are less outgoing than they used to be. They have less time because they are in the midst of the hustle and bustle getting to and from class, work or home.

Purcell lists other reasons people have become less willing to speak with strangers: fear, diversity and technology.

When Purcell was a child, he would play outside until dinner, and then play outside some more until bedtime. His mother rarely knew where he was and didn’t really worry about him.

That is not the case today. Purcell says America’s “culture of fear” has caused us to worry more about our safety and that of our children. The media has taught us to expect danger around every corner. As a result, we question the intentions of strangers; the threat of pedophiles, murderers and rapists is a real fear today — especially when compared to 25 years ago.

Similarly, other aspects of our culture have changed. Areas have become more or less diverse through race, religion or other factors. More diversity means there is a weaker sense of familiarity. At the same time, less diversity can perpetuate stereotypes because a person is never exposed to a particular population.

In the echoing cloister of the Student Center, many students sit alone every day to work on homework or to eat between classes. Among them, freshman justice studies major Shelby Biddle scribbled away at her notebook while her iPod stilled the compiled voices of the other visitors.

When I approached, Shelby was uneasy until I offered a hand to shake and introduced myself. She says she wasn’t sure why she doesn’t speak with strangers often, but she was sure technology was at least part of the problem.

She suggests that if people would “put down their iPods” some time, they would start to realize technology’s effect on our social skills. Perhaps society would become a much friendlier place, she added. Once I left, though, I turned to see her place her earbuds back into her ears.

If I think about today, I realize how technology affects this trend. E-mail, text messaging, phone calls, social media and iPods — they all make friendliness with strangers more rare. As Purcell says, “Technology makes it easier to be in your own head in public.”

So what can be done to solve this problem? When freelance journalist Joe Kita noticed this trend, he spent an entire month greeting everyone who crossed his path — be it with a smile, a wave or a simple, “Hi.” He found that a simple “hello” has more benefits than many realize.

Kita says hello is “an acknowledgement of existence.” While we pass so many people on the streets we rarely think about those people having lives, families and friends as we do. When we say hello, we recognize that humanity in our recipients.

In order for this to happen, however, we need to put down our phones and our iPods, close our laptops and turn off our TVs.

It could happen on the bus, the Esplanade, the Student Center. It could happen in the classroom, a stairwell, a cafe. People could pass by one another, their lips curling into a warm smile as they pass a complete stranger. We’re a social species, so why is sociability so hard to come across?

A simple smile, a quick wave, a quiet “Hey, how’s it going?” is all it takes.
Indian summer

Written by Rachel Jones
Photos submitted by Anthony Gallas

When Anthony Gallas was 9 years old, his backyard, naturally shaped like a baseball diamond, was home to endless baseball games played with his two younger brothers.

Anthony would face his siblings, two-on-one, in mock showdowns between the Florida Mariners and the Cleveland Indians. His favorite of the two was always the Indians.

“You ask a little kid what he wants to be when he grows up and Anthony would say, ‘I want to play for the Cleveland Indians,’” explains his father, Jim Gallas.

Thirteen years later, his backyard is permanently scarred with “bases” left from years of playing and faded childhood memories. But Anthony has not given up on his dream, and the now senior business major is on the path to making it a reality.

The Strongsville native started playing baseball when he was 7 years old and fell in love with the sport at his first Cleveland Indians game two years later.

Although he went to games with his father and brother, Anthony says he would watch a lot of the games on TV. Most of his summer evenings were spent at his own baseball games or tournaments, so he didn’t have the time to make the trip out to Progressive Field.

Still, Anthony knew every player on the team, and he would pretend to be them when he played baseball with his brothers.

“He knew each player’s swing and would imitate them,” Jim says. “He’d look exactly like each one, too.”

But the dedicated fan took every moment of the season to heart.

“I remember a distinct time when I was younger, and the Indians lost the ’95 World Series,” he says. “I was watching it on TV, and as soon as it happened, I sprinted into my room and cried.”

As he grew older, Anthony continued to follow the Indians and played baseball for his high school and a series of club teams. He played football just as much, but he knew his future was in baseball.

The outfielder joined the Kent State baseball team in 2007, leaving a strong impression on the Flashes and Major League coaches.

“The thing that stands out about Anthony Gallas is how consistent he was throughout his entire career,” Kent State coach Scott Stricklin says. “He was reliable, he was a great leader and he helped us win a lot of great games.”

After Anthony reached All-American status his senior season, he was expected to get selected in the 2010 Major League Draft in June. But when
Anthony poses with his brothers Steve, left, and Mike, right, after a game this past summer.

He did not receive a phone call after 50 rounds, Anthony started to doubt himself and wondered if professional baseball was obtainable anymore.

“I didn’t know if I was going to play, honestly,” Anthony says. The Houston Astros called, but he told them he had to think about it.

By the time he called the Astros back, the offer had already expired.

“It was frustrating because we all thought he would get drafted,” Jim says. “It was painful, but God was definitely looking over him.”

A week later, the Indians called to sign Anthony as a free agent.

“It was weird that the Indians called,” Anthony says with a laugh. “I didn’t mind who I was getting signed for, but it was so much better that it was with the Indians. It kind of felt like it was meant to be.”

Anthony hopped on a plane to Arizona the next day to start playing for the Cleveland Indians’ affiliate team in the Arizona League.

The experience showed him a different side of baseball, allowing him to see how happy some of the foreign players were just to be out on the field.

He moved up to the Mahoning Valley Scrappers by the end of the summer, which “just reassured me that I made the right choice.”

One of his coaches, Travis Fryman, was one of the Indians players Anthony admired as a child.

“Growing up, I watched him on TV,” Anthony explains, star struck. “Then, I went in the dugout (at Mahoning Valley) and got to meet him. It’s kind of weird that he’s my coach.”

At spring training this March, Anthony will be chosen by a Minor League team, moving up the Minor League chain until he makes it to the Major League.

“He made the most of this summer, and I know he made a very big impression on the Indians,” Stricklin says. “He has as much of a chance as anybody out there (to get signed by the Indians’ Major League team).”

Anthony says he would be honored to play for any team, but the Cleveland Indians will always be his top choice.

“It almost makes me feel comfortable when I hear the (Indians’) announcers,” Anthony explains. “It’s that summer feel that brings me back to being little, playing baseball in the yard and having fun with my brothers. I get a warm feeling when I hear that, and the Indians remind me of that.”

So, what if he makes it to the Indians’ Major League team?

“I’d probably just start crying tears of joy,” Anthony says slowly, as if he were picturing the actual scenario. “I’m really motivated to get to that point, so that’s what I’m going to focus on for the next four years.”

The taste of playing baseball as an Indian this summer was an unforgettable moment in Anthony’s baseball career and life.

“It changed my life and outlook on everything,” Anthony says. “Before, I didn’t know who I was or if baseball was going to work out. Now, I am finally a professional baseball player.”

A grin spread across his face as he said the words aloud.

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**How To Get To The Major League**

- Complete three years on a college baseball team
- Get chosen by a Minor League team
- Move up the divisions of the Minor League
- Rookie (lowest), Class A Short Season, Class A, Double-A, Triple-A (highest)
- Major League teams can sign players at any stage
- Most players take four to five years to reach the Majors

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**Gallas’ Minor League Play**

- Played 50 games for the Arizona League’s Indians team in summer 2010
  - 185 at-bats
  - 23 RBIs
  - 51 hits
- Played four games for the New York-Penn League’s Mahoning Valley Scrappers
  - 17 at-bats
  - 3 RBIs
  - 4 hits
Want more?

Check out blogs, multimedia and stories on theburr.com.

Read a story about a Vietnam veteran recovering from homelessness, students who choose rare majors and confessions of students' craziest nights. Watch a slide show about a class's trip to perform a play in Toronto. Follow our daily blogs covering all topics from cooking to books.
.22-CALIBER DEATH MACHINE

Written by Ashley Sepanski
Photo illustration by Amanda Woolf

Bullets kill. Yet this fact alone was not enough to instill a lifelong fear of guns in me. It was the first time my father taught me how to use one. I was 12, and it was thunderstorming outside. Something in the expression on my face told my dad I should learn, and he asked me to follow him to his bedroom closet.

Curious, I followed, and he showed me where he kept my grandfather's .22-caliber rifle. Looking back, I realize I was looking at something slightly more powerful than a BB gun. What I saw at the time, though, was a rapid-fire death machine. He pulled some bullets out from underneath a blanket on a shelf, loaded the gun once and then removed the bullets. He told me in case someone ever broke into the house and something happened to him, I would know where the gun was and how to use it. He passed the gun to me. But I couldn't take it.

"Why not? I promise it's empty. You don't have to load it," he said.

Slowly and with delicate fingers, I reached out and held the gun. I felt terrified and made sure the barrel stayed pointed at the ceiling. It was completely empty and harmless, but his small suggestion put a terrifying image in my mind. Could I ever take a life if I had to?
locked and loaded

This summer, however, I finally broke down. I was 20 and the end of college was speeding toward me. Soon it would be my turn to live in a new city, alone and afraid on a stormy night. I still wanted nothing to do with guns, but I started to think ignoring them wasn’t the answer either. Someone holding me at gunpoint wouldn’t spare me for pleading, “Please! I’m anti-gun!” A shooting range wasn’t the police academy, but I finally felt ready to give guns a shot.

A few months later my dad, uncle and boyfriend hauled me into a shooting range. It was a warm summer day and the range, full of grassy hills surrounded by dense trees, reminded me of family campgrounds. As my macho, sneakered accomplices started unloading artillery, earplugs and ammunition from the car, I realized flats and a yellow blouse might not have been the best wardrobe choice.

As we put our gear onto a wooden platform, my dad trotted a few yards down a grassy hill to set up some targets. I felt a queasy twinge as I wondered how he could so nonchalantly walk in our line of fire. Soon he was back, my earplugs were in and I was sitting behind that dreaded .22-caliber rifle, loaded and ready to go.

“Go ahead,” my dad said while smiling, camera in hand. “Geez, he’s taking pictures?” I thought as I twisted my hands around the rifle’s frame. Attempting to ignore him, I lined up my rifle to aim at a target, took a deep breath and paused. Even though my uncle and boyfriend were shooting guns of their own, I could tell they were watching me. Everyone was waiting for me to take my first shot.

I squirmed a little and readjusted my position in my seat. The gun wasn’t heavy, but I felt awkward holding it. I wasn’t sure how to aim and look tough or like I knew what I was doing. I wasn’t sure I felt tough enough to fire period, let alone at a target. Finally the tension was killing me. I exhaled and aimed as well as I could. Frightened of the aftershock of wooden rifle slamming against my shoulder and collarbone, I delayed firing. My uncle cleared his throat and pretended to aim. Everyone was waiting on me.

As my dad shifted his weight, trying to be patient, I finally manned-up and squeezed the trigger. The shot that fired exited in one tiny vibration accompanied by a sharp “bang.” I almost couldn’t believe how little the gun shook. It felt like nothing.

quick draw mcgraw

Soon I was shooting with accuracy almost better than my dad. I couldn’t believe how far from terrifying it actually was. It was fun and challenging and even relaxing. My dad must have sensed my growing excitement, because after a few more rounds, he suggested we move on to hand pistols.

Hand pistols are an entirely different breed. They have a much bigger kick and pack a lot more power. They’re also a lot more work to load and a lot easier to fire accidentally. These scared me. At least with the rifle I could sit down and shoot. But with the handguns, I’d have to aim and withstand the aftershock all on my own; nothing could cover up for me if I made a mistake.

As we walked over to the short range shooting area, my dad reminded me to always count my bullets. I had to remember how many times I’d fired and then give the trigger an extra pull to make sure I’d emptied the round. There were all these safety precautions, and I was terrified I’d miscount and shoot someone by mistake.

He showed me how to load the pistol with a few bullets and then passed the gun off to me. I tried to keep the nose of it aimed at the ground as I loaded, but the bullets were small and slippery and the gun was heavy. I felt like a kid at school carrying too many books. One wrong move and I’d drop the gun and bullets and frighten everyone out who was already firing rounds at a line of targets.

Somehow I managed to squeeze seven bullets into the remaining available slots without letting the gun slip. Once my dad gave the nod of approval, shouting “Clear!” so everyone would know I was about to fire, I took a steady stance and aimed like a cop ready to shoot — two hands with an aggressive don’t-mess-with-me face. Everyone else was busy shooting, but I knew they were keeping an eye on me. Shooting handguns accurately is a lot more difficult than a rifle, and I knew they doubted my ability to aim. One deep breath, and I calmed my nerves. Two, and I was ready to prove everyone wrong. Three, and I fired.

Immediately I felt the gun rear back in my hands. It felt like someone had grabbed my wrists and snapped them backwards. A thrill of terror and excitement electrocuted my muscles. I was afraid but exhilarated at the same time. Once I adjusted to the firepower after a few more shots, I felt a surge of confidence like I’d never known. I felt unstoppable like a freight train and badass like Angelina Jolie in “ Wanted.” I was shooting at a stationary target on a pole, but it felt like I could have chased down criminals with Charlie’s Angels.

Three more rounds later, beaming with excitement, I was ready to check my progress.
Examination of my target revealed I'd shot close to the center with about five bullets and got a bull's-eye on a target I hadn't been aiming at. Not too bad for a rookie. We finished the afternoon firing a few more rounds, then packed up and called it a day.

Even though I was still buzzing about my progress, I was surprised to find something inside me was relieved to put the guns away.

HALFWAY THERE

Overall, I was proud of myself. I'd done the unthinkable, and it was pretty damn fun. The experience had not entirely convinced me to let go of my anti-gun feelings, though. I knew the real world was waiting for me outside the hills of the shooting range; and that world used a different kind of target.

I'd accomplished what I set out to learn: how to use a gun. It was life changing in the sense that, when not in mortal danger, shooting is a sport unlike any other — potentially safer than any other. It was for people of all sizes, interests and backgrounds. And it was fun. Incredibly fun.

But shooting at a target is still far from shooting at a person, and the dangers of shooting a gun still remain. Shooting isn't like soccer where if you stop paying attention you can get kicked in the face. Stop paying attention at the range, and you could leave with shattered bones and a gaping wound, or worse, in a body bag.

I'd had an unforgettable time and would definitely return to shoot another day, but I was still unresolved. Paxton Quigley, author of "Armed and Female," says in her book every woman should own a gun. And after my experience at the range, I agreed with her. Until I read an interview with her in Marie Claire, in which she tells the writer, "You have to know you can shoot. If you don't truly believe you can shoot, then you shouldn't have a gun."

And there was my exact problem. After the range, I'd felt more comfortable around guns than I'd ever imagined. I was so excited afterwards, I even considered purchasing a gun of my own. But deep down I wondered, just as I still wonder today, if I could ever use it. Life is so irreplaceable, and for that guns will always feel heavy in my hands.

I think through it all I've come to realize guns aren't scary. It's what they can do. I know if someone ever tried to hurt me, I could point a gun at him or her with confidence and tell him or her to back away. I could even probably shoot them in the foot if they didn't get the picture. But other than a foot, hand or limb of some sort, I don't think I could ever shoot somebody. And maybe that means I'm not ready for a gun after all.

Sitting in the car on the way home from the range, I ran my fingers over my marked-up target, my trophy. I looked into the backseat through the rearview mirror and saw my grandpa's rifle. Suddenly it didn't fill me with those images of murder and dread anymore. It didn't fill me with comfort either. Now I saw the rifle for what it had always been: a machine slightly more power than a child's BB gun. Yet still, a machine that could take a life.
Michael Moore’s 54-inch cane tapped in a zigzag pattern across Risman Plaza on a sunny September afternoon last year. Dressed in a striped shirt, blue jeans and Velcro shoes, the senior psychology major moved swiftly. His white eyeballs glowed beneath the sun. A smile spread across his face, just like every other day.

A few minutes later, the smile was gone.

Volunteers saw Michael approaching a rock climbing wall they had set up for the Black Squirrel Festival. Conscious the wall was obstructing Michael’s path, the volunteers led him around it. Michael asked if he could climb the wall. The answer was no.

I spent more than a year with Michael, and this was the only time I ever saw him get mad.

“Is it because I’m blind?” Michael automatically fired back.

“Blind people can do it just as much as anyone else could,” he said. The only difference is that someone needs to show him where the wall is and then he can start climbing. He has climbed the wall before — and made it all the way to the top.
It doesn't happen often, Michael says, but it bothers him when people hold him back because he's blind. He thinks they are ignorant of the fact that he can do the same things as everyone else.

And he can. But being Michael isn't easy.

I know.

One fall afternoon, he grabbed me by the hand and told me to close my eyes. I was temporarily without sight, and Michael was my guide to the university.

The second my eyes shut I could feel the stares. I could hear the footsteps scatter as I approached. I could picture them all whispering.

It must have been a sight. My eyes were tightly closed. My right hand was clinging to Michael's arm. My left hand was out in front of me, reaching for whatever I could feel. Every so often my feet would get tangled in Michael's rapidly moving cane as it tapped on the pavement in front of us.

I felt my cheeks color red as I fumbled to feel my surroundings. I listened to the sounds of the path beneath our feet as Michael instructed. But my senses failed me after I entered Smith Hall and slammed into a wall. Defeated, I turned around and stumbled to find the exit.

I wanted to give up. My frustration had reached its peak. I felt it get to me.
But Michael didn't give up. To him, being blind isn't a disability.

His father, Boyd Moore, and mobility and orientation specialist, Judy Harpley, have helped him memorize almost all 886 acres of campus. Every step, turn and elevation is etched into his brain. When traversing a specific part of the Esplanade he knows will hit this garbage can, turn right and then listen for the sound of a bus engine, which is a signal to continue walking straight. He has mastered the university so well that he enjoys taking walks in his free time. If people he knows are headed to a building, Michael will go out of his way to greet them. He even makes sure to open the door for ladies.

Michael can't see the screen, but he loves to surf the Internet. He just needs the screen reading system JAWS to scroll through Web pages in Braille display on his PACmate, which he describes as "a blind man's PDA." This system can be sluggish and even causes Michael to yell "go away!" at the computer, but the endless amount of information that becomes available to him is worth a little frustration. He enjoys being taken away by good stories he hears in online audio books. Michael even listened to the entire MP3 version of the Bible in about half a year.

For five years, he lived on his own in Leebrick Hall. During his stay, he would pull all-nighters writing papers, just like any college student. He perfected the art of microwave cooking and enjoyed holing up in his dorm room, which he dubbed "Mike's Place."

While he was staying in there, he met a friend, Sharetta Buckner. Over time, she has become inspired by Michael's abilities.

"Some of the things he does amazes me," she says. "He needs no assistance from anyone."

Every time Sharetta sees Michael, he makes her feel better about herself. She says his enthusiasm brightens her day.

"I just love everybody. That's what it is — I love everybody," he says. He tries to talk to people everywhere he goes, even strangers.

One day last fall, Michael caught Deb MacDonald's eye so she introduced herself. Michael playfully asked, "How old are you? 21?"

"No, I'm 54," the assistant to the director of advancement in the College of Nursing responded, noticeably blushing.

Michael ended the conversation with an enthusiastic "Goodbye!" He then grabbed MacDonald, engulfed her in a tight hug and placed a wet kiss on her cheek. A loud smack sounded. She walked away, mumbling something about how she can't tell her husband about that. After their chance meeting, the two became friends, and Michael still frequently visits her office.

Anyone who knows him will tell you Michael is a funny guy. He used to keep to himself be serious when he was younger, but as Michael grew up and more people accepted him, he has learned to have "more of a sense of humor about his disability," he says.

If he runs into an object when he is walking, he will joke and say, "Yes! That felt good."

It has taken work, but his parents, whom he "loves to death," encourage Michael to push past his disability.

"Being in a sighted world, we take everything for granted," Boyd says. His parents did everything they could to ensure Michael's independence.

His mother, Aggie Moore, didn't hesitate to put him to work. Growing up, he did the dishes, took out the trash and was even a barn hand on the family farm in Garretsville. It didn't matter that he was blind; she still wanted him to learn how to do everyday tasks. He learned from stimulation by sound and the senses other than sight.

Sometimes, he wanted to give up. He struggled with learning to do tasks that come easy to a person with sight, such as making change. But, he stuck with it and is thankful he did.

"He even said to me, 'Thank God you taught me to do different things, and I know how to do it,'" Aggie says.

She says he can do anything he puts his mind to. He may do it slower or differently, but he can get it done as long as someone shows him how.

The behavior of his visually impaired peers motivated him to become independent.

Michael participated in a personal adjustment training program for a few weeks in June and July 2003 and August 2004 at the Cleveland Sight Center. The program helps blind students learn independent living; however, Michael noticed the other students weren't on the same level of
independence he was. He noticed that a lot of the students sitting around and not interacting with each other. Some of Michael's friends couldn't even feed themselves.

Jeanne Colosetti, Michael's special education teacher at James A. Garfield Middle School, has worked with many disabled students. She says the more independent they can be, the better off they are.

Students, who aren't encouraged to live independently, end up being dependent and essentially helpless for the remainder of their life, she says. She stresses the importance of disabled people striving for independence early on.

Colosetti has hope. She believes Michael has what it takes to make it in the world.

Michael views his disability as a part of him that makes him different, just like the next person is different. He believes that God made him unique to fulfill a purpose: helping those without sight see the world.

In the summer of 2009, Michael volunteered at the Western Reserve Independent Living Center in Warren to help other visually impaired people navigate adaptive technology. He still communicates with a few people there, and would like to go back to teach people how to read and write Braille.

He wants to help children too. Michael gave a speech on independence to visually impaired children at Lawndale Elementary School in Akron. He assured them that college is an option. He emphasized that positive attitude is key to facing daily struggles and technology can make some struggles easier. At the end of his speech, Michael led the children around the nearby neighborhood. Cane after cane, they followed Michael.

Harpley, who teaches the children orientation and mobility weekly, says they loved Michael. The children still ask if he's coming back — and he gave the speech in 2007.

"Michael is ultimately what the kids want to become when they get older — an independent visually impaired person," Harpley says.

Michael took last semester off. He filled his time translating the Bible into Braille. He says many of the Braille Bibles have mistakes and he feels that visually impaired people deserve to read the Bible in its perfect form.

He hopes to translate the entire Bible by 2011, in time for the 400th anniversary of the authorized King James Version. He wants to make it available for download on note-taking devices for visually impaired people and maybe even in print.

Michael returned this semester to take his final class. Each time he is on campus, he tries to visit a few places to check in with familiar faces. Michael has to come to know a number of employees at the Student Center. He likes to stop in and say "hi!" even if they don't have time for a full conversation.

He can usually sense if someone he knows is close by. Earlier this year, Michael entered the library and heard soft music playing to his left. He quickly found the source: a friend sitting at a computer, wearing headphones. He immediately ran up behind her and surprised her with a hug. She sheepishly accepted. He briefly chatted with her, and before he left he embraced her once more and planted a wet kiss on her cheek.

Although Michael has been going to Kent State since 2004, he still runs into roadblocks while he is walking. This semester, Michael had to adjust to the renovated Risman Plaza. One brisk October afternoon, he was walking across the plaza and tripped up the stairs.

"Yes!" he yells.

As he reaches the top, he smacks into a ledge and again quickly recovers, this time shouting "oh Yeah!"

Michael says he taught himself how to maneuver the new plaza. It was frustrating at first, but he eventually got used to the changes. Soon he will have to go to a new place and learn the terrain all over again.

This December, Michael will graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology. After college, he wants to teach visually impaired people how to use assisted technology such as JAWS or a PACmate since many still aren't using the tools available to them. Only 12 percent of visually impaired children in school today can read Braille, according to the Braille Institute. Michael thinks visually impaired people can do so much more if they are able to use technology.

"I would like to give them tools to help them succeed," he says. "People are a lot of the times showing me stuff and now it's my turn to show them."

BELOW: Michael regularly visits Henderson Hall. He has befriended the staff in the nursing office and frequently stops in to chat and give out hugs.
Alyssa Stemley, Natalie Capellas, Maggie Conlin and Katie Fussner light candles in the shape of the initials “CK” and two hearts in front of the rock for a vigil for Christopher Kernich on Nov. 22, 2009. About 300 friends and supporters came to the short service. Photo by Daniel Doherty.

A year of healing

Last year, the unthinkable happened. In November, Christopher Kernich was assaulted on Main Street and days later died from injuries. Two months later, John White was assaulted at the intersection of Main and Water streets and fought his injuries for nearly a month before dying in February. When the news of these tragedies was released, many were speechless and wondering how this could have happened in the small and seemingly safe city of Kent. Today, many still are.

For their loved ones, the loss is a painful reality every day. This past year may have been the most difficult one they have ever endured. Some of their loved ones were students who had to go to class, continuing on with their daily lives, alongside constant reminders of the friends they lost. Others had to live in the city and pass by the scene of the crime that took their brother, boyfriend, son or friend. Now, nearly a year later, they are struggling to move on. Here are their stories of loss, healing and remembering Christopher Kernich and John White.
A life after CK's smile

Christopher Kernich's family and friends cope with losing the one who brightened their days

Written by Courtney Kerrigan
Photos by Kelly Petryszyn & Brittany Ankrom

Chris's mom, Sherry Kernich, holds a photo of Christopher and Joel, a friend from Fairborn High School.
The last time John Kernich saw his son, Christopher, was on Nov. 12, Christopher’s 23rd birthday. He told his son he would live to be an old man. Three days later, Christopher was attacked and beaten by Ronald Kelly and Adrian Barker on East Main Street in downtown Kent.

He was rushed to Akron City Hospital early Sunday morning, Nov. 15, and immediately placed in an Intensive Care Unit. It wasn’t until around 6:30 a.m. when John finally received the call that Christopher was in the hospital. After the “shortest, yet longest two and half hour” car ride of his life from Columbus to Akron, John arrived at Akron City Hospital Sunday morning. Christopher’s mother, Sherry, was working in Baghdad as a housekeeping supervisor when she got the call on her day off. Not knowing the severity of Christopher’s condition, Sherry told her company she would return in seven days. She still has not returned. It took a 24-hour plane ride and 50-minute drive from Cleveland’s airport to Akron before Sherry saw her son.

Despite a swelling brain, breathing tube and subtle message from doctors that Christopher was already gone, John and Sherry couldn’t accept it. Doctors ran more tests, tried different drugs and gave them five days to say goodbye.

Swarms of friends and family packed the waiting room and lobby the day Christopher arrived at the hospital. “The ICU still claims to this day they’ve never seen anything like it because virtually every visiting hours, the waiting room was filled to capacity and there were people downstairs,” John says. Senior marketing major Mckenzie Jackson, Kent State graduate Sara Syroka and senior fashion merchandising major Katie Fussner were among the many people who came every day. For a half hour every two hours, the group filed into his second floor room and prayed. Doctors said Christopher could hear and comprehend everything, so they whispered words of encouragement into his ear, telling him to get better and wake up. It became routine. They prepared themselves each time before going in, but it hit them again and again that Christopher was lying in a coma. “As soon as he passed, it was like, ‘we’re not going back in, we’re not going to see him again, so it was almost not real. It felt like a complete nightmare,” says Mckenzie, a close friend since 2008.

Christopher was pronounced dead Nov. 21 at exactly 4:30 p.m. — the day of the Ohio State-Michigan game. Ohio State football head coach, Jim Tressell, called Christopher the day before, encouraging him to wake up because the team needed him. As an avid sports fan, he would be happy to know he was surrounded by the game he loved when he left. Loved ones stood in a huddle and said the Lord’s Prayer waiting for a miracle. So when John came down the hospital stairs with a streak of tears down his face, they knew their friend was gone. Heads dropped into shaking hands and memories became cherished keepsakes.

Even after Christopher passed, he looked good as he lay in the hospital bed. He looked alive. His color was natural and his hands were warm, even at the end. John and Sherry will always have that as a last memory.

Christopher’s parents lost a part of themselves Nov. 21, and while a year has since passed, they still work toward healing every day. “Here it’s been almost a year and as a parent you fight the fact that people seem to be getting on with their lives and you don’t want that, but at the same time you don’t want your kid to be forgotten,” John says. “That’s a real Catch-22.”

Christopher toured five other colleges with his parents before choosing Kent State. The people here attracted him to the campus, and John and Sherry liked it because they thought it was safe. Christopher was a business major who, John believes, wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps and get into business. In the last conversation Sherry had with her son, he was excited to graduate. He was torn between two girls, but ready to settle down.

The day Christopher died, no one wanted to leave the hospital. They didn’t know where to go, or even what to do. Sara and Mckenzie recall sitting in a nearby hallway with other friends sharing stories. CK, as his friends called him, was the guy at the bars every weekend wearing tight white V-neck shirts. He was the guy who would use Chipotle as an excuse to cure any bad day. He befriended everyone and was the person who held his group of friends together. Mckenzie always went to CK’s house before going out, but his roommates have since moved out of their Sherman Street house. “Now everyone’s just kind of split up and it’s not that house anymore,” she says.

Every time Mckenzie passes Sherman Street and thinks of Christopher. She remembers sitting in his room with his roommates after he died just talking about him, his belongings still scattered about. On the 21st of every month, Christopher crosses her mind. She still writes on his Facebook wall almost every day, sharing her day or just saying hey. When Mckenzie strolls through Satterfield Hall, where she first met Christopher, she remembers...
him pulling her chair out from under her during class. He always made her laugh. Christopher's infectious smile lifted anyone out of a bad mood. "People who didn't know him, I wish they could have met him," Mckenzie says. "Just the joy he brought to my life every day, that was enough. Everybody needs a CK in their life."

Sara, a close friend of Christopher, still has voicemails saved on her phone from him and listens to them from time to time — one just returning her call and the other to boast about the Bengals defeat against the Steelers. "I never want to see you wear a Steelers jersey or a Bengals jersey ever again!" his voice echoes. "I'm hoping in time it will be easier," she says. "For the first 10 months, I saw Chris everywhere." She would take walks with Christopher and pass through the archway on campus facing the corner of Main and Lincoln streets. They got caught in the rain once and ran to his house, laughing the whole way back. She has a tattoo on the inside of her lip, the same place Chris had a tattoo, she got the day he died with some of the friends who were at the hospital. It reads, "CK♥."

Sara, Mckenzie and Katie, along with other friends, leapt into action the week after Christopher died, organizing fundraisers and the candlelight vigil Nov. 22 at the rock on campus. They bought a bundle of candles and lit them around the rock, which read "Forever CK — 11-21-09." As 300 supporters gathered in remembrance of Christopher, they chanted "CK," getting louder and louder in hopes he could hear them. John and Sherry attended a fundraiser at the Brehouse downtown Nov. 24, and spent the next day cleaning out his room in Kent. Christopher still had cards and birthday cake in his room. "You don't really think about what's in your room, but when your parents are going through your room — every little thing is a heartache," Sherry says. "Even the little paper clips or his hair brush, the things you wouldn't think about it, it wrenched you."

Fairborn High School held calling hours and an open casket Saturday, Nov. 28. His viewing was scheduled for two and a half hours but extended to four. A line of people snaked through the hallways and out of the high school, all waiting patiently to give their condolences. Christopher looked like a china doll as he lay in the casket. John says. As cars arrived at Byron Cemetery, two miles down the road, cars were still leaving the high school parking lot, lining the street bumper to bumper. At the funeral, Christopher's friends placed flowers on top of his casket. "All the kids stood around his casket and started crying."

Friends and family have left behind mementos at Christopher's grave site in Fairborn, his hometown.

"LIVE EVERY MOMENT YOU HAVE LIKE YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO GET IT BACK..."

Christopher's gravestone is inscribed with a quote that he always said and lived by. He inspired others to live by it too.
A childhood friend left coins that spell out "CK" on his grave. Christopher used to throw coins at her window. From that point on, she would throw coins at him when she saw him.

for a good 40 minutes just staring because we didn’t want to let him go,” Sara says. “It was hard to get back in the car.”

“It amazes me when you look back,” John says. “The things that he did from the moment I brought him home and laid him on my chest to the point where I looked at him laying in that hospital bed — the point between, I swear to God, was outside the norm of any kid.”

As a father, John watched his son grow up in his sports — football, basketball and baseball. Most of all, he watched him grow through his humility and mannerisms toward others. Christopher couldn’t have made his parents prouder, and that shows in the four scrapbooks Sherry has filled with newspaper clippings and photographs of her son. It shows in the stories she tells. Her favorite is of her son at 16. After getting his first car, Christopher asked for spinners to “pimp around town,” as Sherry describes. So she saved up money and found cheap ones online, but Christopher lost them in the middle of Route 675. Sherry laughs as she describes him chasing them down and watching Christopher with his hood up, embarrassed, picking them up in the median. “He wasn’t perfect, no one’s perfect, but he was the best son any parent would want,” Sherry says.

The first thing John sees when he opens his worn in, leather wallet is a picture of Christopher. He can’t wipe the smile off his face when he talks of his son’s accomplishments and the seven people he saved as an organ donor. He is a proud father.

On Nov. 12, Christopher would have been 24. His son, Aiden, turned one. John says they first found out about Aiden during the trials and met him six months later. Although they were shocked at first, they look at it positively and want to get to know Christopher’s son. “It took a lot of hard work to make Christopher the person he was, and I just want my son back,” Sherry says. “Christopher had so much going for him. He was going to be such a good dad and he’s just been robbed, we’ve been robbed and Aiden’s been robbed too.” Friends and family gathered at Byron Cemetery to celebrate as they held hands and sang “Happy Birthday.” With CK spelled out in candles in front of his gravesite, 24 white balloons with CK written in silver floated into the sky as the sun set. And as the group left and headed out to Cadillac Jack’s to share more memories, John offered up the first round on his tab — just as Christopher would have done.

Editor’s Note: Ronald Kelly was sentenced to 15 years to life in prison for felony murder and felonious assault. Adrian Barker was sentenced to 15 years to life in prison for felonious assault, murder and tampering with evidence. Both filed for appeals.

Photo submitted by Sherry Kernich
When John Kernich first met Christopher’s son, Aiden, he did a double take. “I looked into that kid’s eyes and I swear I saw Christopher,” he says. Aiden recently turned one on Nov. 12 — on what would have been Christopher’s 24th birthday.
Morgan Marucco, John’s intended fiancée, plans to get the ring he never got to give to her reset in a pendant. She also got a tattoo to remember him. It means “this too shall pass” in Hebrew.

“\textbf{This too shall pass}”

John White’s loved ones move on by living life as he did

Written by \textbf{Nicole Stempak}

Photos by \textbf{Chris Wallis & Brittany Ankrom}

The phone calls came in on Jan 23. Ashley Tschekart’s neighbors called her around 6 a.m. asking if she could let out their dog. The family was driving to Akron City Hospital from Delaware, Ohio, to find out what happened to their oldest son, John White.

When Morgan Marucco woke up at 8 a.m., she realized her cell phone had died. She plugged it in, turned it on and saw that she had several voicemails and a text message from her boyfriend’s family saying, “Call us. J.T.’s had an accident.”

In the summer in of 1987, Ashley, 1, met John when her family moved in two doors down from the Whites. John, his younger brother Mike, Ashley’s older sister Alexis and Ashley are within five years of each other and grew up doing everything together.

Twenty years later, John met Morgan at Kent State in Fall 2007. He walked up and introduced himself to her. They began dating at the beginning of the spring semester and celebrated their two-year anniversary last January.

Less than a year ago, Ashley and Morgan hadn’t even met. They knew of each other through John but didn’t meet until after he died. Now they’re roommates. They are still in touch with the Whites. They have pictures of John, from
childhood to his college years, in the family room of their two-bedroom condominium to remember the person who shaped — and changed — both of their lives.

John Thomas White, still J.T. to his family, was a 28-year-old Kent State graduate student. He went out Jan. 22 to celebrate a friend’s birthday. There wasn’t enough room in the taxi they took home from the bars, so John opted to walk back to his basement apartment on Willow Street. John walked into an argument and was assaulted by Hallie Nuspl, 21, of Akron. Hallie’s friend John Ragan, 21, of Akron, punched John, whose reflexes that were impaired from alcohol couldn’t keep his head from smacking the concrete.

When Morgan arrived at the hospital, John was in surgery to relieve pressure from the swelling in his brain. She planned to yell at him for being so irresponsible. “His parents were already there, so they prepared me for the monstrosity of cables,” she says. “They said, ‘I just want you to know it’s going to be scary. It’s not just a leg brace.’”

Morgan walked into John’s Intensive Care Unit hospital room. She saw three or four machines with bags of fluid and a spider web of wires and tubes, IVs in his neck and arms, a breathing machine, a neck brace, a gauze head covering and a spark pluglike apparatus to measure the brain swelling protruding from John’s head. He was in a chemically induced coma to prevent further swelling. “Never had I thought about him being a fragile person until then,” Morgan says.

He had gotten a master’s degree in Library and Information Science and would have gotten his second master’s degree in Information Technology in December 2011. Morgan isn’t sure what John wanted to do after graduation or if he even knew. “He had things that he was very passionate about,” Morgan says. “Anything that he did, he did 110 percent. It sounds very cliché, but he did things to the extremes: He did it or he didn’t care about it at all, it wouldn’t be on his radar. And Library Science and Info Tech were both something he really cared about, wanted to get his master’s degree in, but wasn’t quite sure where it was going to take him.”

Before coming to Kent State, White had served a four-year tour in the Marine Corps, enlisting and rising to the rank of sergeant. He joined the military three months after receiving his baccalaureate degree in religion and a minor in philosophy and history from Ohio Wesleyan University. He never got a chance to use those degrees.

John’s parents lived in the nursing dorms for ICU family members at Akron City’s campus until the very last few days. They put their work, pets and everything else on hold to be close to their son. For five weeks they were in an unfamiliar city in strange quarters, waiting for their son to recover.

Morgan was also at his bedside nearly every day watching John’s progress — listening to the beeping of the respirator and ventilator. She even heard the machines at night in her apartment. Days ran together. “The whole month we were there became normal after a while, but it was still bizarre sitting there,” she says. “I was sitting there asking, ‘How did I get here? How is this normal?’” During those hours, she would catch herself wondering how she went from being a student to being there. “It just seemed so surreal to be sitting in a hospital room waiting for my best friend to wake up. Then I would go back to class because class still goes on.”

That semester, Morgan was interning in Cleveland in addition to taking 12 credit hours. She dropped her internship for three of the weeks John was in the hospital. She visited John during the day and sometimes brought her laptop to do online coursework. She sometimes went to her night classes but visited him afterward. “Those last six months are when you’re supposed to be preparing to get into your career, and I was spending it just trying to balance that, school, getting my internship done,” she says.

In the hours, days and weeks Morgan spent sitting in the hospital watching John, she thought about their relationship. She remembered she would walk over to his apartment for dinner after finishing work in Franklin Hall. She remembered he had only one skillet, which he would have to
John’s brain began to swell again, so the doctors did a surgery to remove excess fluid from his brain on Feb. 20. John’s family drove up for the surgery and went home at the end of the day to continue searching for rehabilitation centers.

Ashley celebrated her birthday on Feb. 21, a Sunday, because her birthday fell on the upcoming reply. She sat with John while she waited for his family to arrive.

John died from pulmonary embolism, or a heart attack, from the hundreds of tiny blood clots that traveled from his legs and went to his heart. The coroner’s report said the heart attack was highly unusual. The death certificate lists homicide as the cause of death.

Ashley is still coming to terms with John’s death. “It is never going to be something that we can get over or feel better about,” she says.

“It just seemed so surreal to be sitting in a hospital room waiting for my best friend to wake up.”

Wednesday. The family had just sat down to cut the cake when John’s dad called to say John had gone into cardiac arrest and they were headed back to Akron. Meanwhile, Morgan was at the hospital. She had texted John’s mom, as she did every time she went to the hospital, to say today was a not-so-good day. After a while, Morgan headed to the cafeteria for lunch. She was finishing when she got the phone call that she needed to go back to the room.

When Morgan returned to the ICU, the doctor and three or four nurses led her into the room she said for weeks she never wanted to be in. There was a box of tissues on the table. “He was gone,” she says. “It was really sudden.” John’s mom was texting Morgan asking, “Morgan, what’s going on?” Morgan couldn’t

Kate, John’s sister-in-law, asked her mom, “This is going to be the worst day of my life, isn’t it?” Morgan says, “We thought the day that we found out he had been injured was going to be the worst day. No, we’ve got a rank now.”

Before John’s family and Morgan went to the funeral home to make arrangements, Katie gave Morgan a little black box, which his parents kept after John and his dad picked it out the previous Christmas. Inside, was a diamond engagement ring that she now wears on her right hand. “That’s not the person I wanted to get the ring from,” Morgan says. “I would’ve said yes. Had he given it to me, it probably would have been a different story.”

Morgan and Ashley met later that day at John’s home. Now Morgan is moving into the extra bedroom of Ashley’s condo.

In July, John Ragin was charged — and pleaded guilty — to one count of involuntary manslaughter, a third-degree felony. He was sentenced to three years in prison. In September, Hallie Nuspl was charged with one count of assault and one count of falsification, both misdemeanors. She was sentenced to the maximum of 180 days in jail with each count to run concurrently.

In the eyes of the court, John’s death has been resolved; for Morgan, Ashley and the rest of John’s family, his death is still a raw scab.

“I’m going to be blatantly honest,” Morgan says. “It still sucks every day. He was a 28-year-old thinking about finishing his degree, maybe getting engaged, moving out from Kent eventually. He had plans. He had a life, and I had plans with him. They weren’t solid. We had no idea what we were going to do, but that’s right out of college. And now I’m back living in Columbus. It’s not something I had planned to do. I’m still picking up the pieces.”

“I know my sister and I have been saying from the beginning, we’ll go to the funeral and then it’ll seem real,” Ashley says. “Then it was, we’ll go and they’ll be trying and then it’ll seem real. We just keep waiting for some marker to say ‘It’s over, and we can start moving on.’ And it just hasn’t come yet. Now that we don’t have to drive up to Portage County every other week and deal with a court case, it’ll probably be easier.”

One thing that has made difficult situations easier is to ask themselves, “What would J.T. do?” “Well, he would do something absolutely ridiculous right now to make us all laugh,” Morgan says. “Some people think we’re nuts because why would they be laughing at a courtroom?”

Another way the family has coped is by relying on each other. “It’s not like we sit around and dwell on it all the time, drink all the time or sit around and cry, but it’s that if we need to talk or if we have a moment, there’s someone there who will listen and isn’t going to get awkward and leave
Ashley tries to not be overcome with grief. "There’s no point to avoid it or stop living because of it or walk around feeling sorry for ourselves because J.T. would have been pissed," she says. "He would have been pissed if we ever spent anytime crying of feeling sad."

or change the subject,” Ashley says. “So a lot of friendships, like ours, have gotten closer quickly because the stress of the situation necessitated you need people around who could support you.”

“I do feel like part of J.T.’s family now just because of everything we’ve gone through,” Morgan says. “It frustrates me because I’m used to being a person that chugs through something and just work my way through it. This isn’t something you can work through.”

In March, Morgan, Ashley, Mike and Kate got tattoos that had some meaning to John. John had tattoos on every single limb that symbolized a religious belief. “It’s something that none of us would have done,” Ashley says. “Mike and I were talking about it because J.T. had tried talking us into getting tattoos, and when he died it was like ‘Let’s just go do it.’”

“He finally got his way; we all got our ink,” Morgan says jokingly before becoming serious. “That was more meaningful to us than seeing anyone sentenced to jail, doing jail time or admitting to their guilt.”

Mike had planned to get a religious symbol until he saw a folder on John’s computer that had an image of a dinosaur riding a bicycle. Morgan and Ashley describe Mike as serious and his black calf-length tattoo was the opposite of Mike’s personality but was something he felt he needed to do for his brother. Kate got a Celtic cross on her shoulder, a symbol of John and her Christianity. Ashley’s is the hand of God with the eye in the middle. “In Jewish and Islamic culture, they use it as a sign of protection from evil,” she says. It was also a symbol on one of the books John sent her while stationed in Japan. Morgan’s tattoo is a small circle of words in Hebrew meaning “This too shall pass.” The phrase is a reference to a proverb where a king searches for a ring to make a sad man happy and a happy man sad. The ring he finds is simple and has the phrase inscribed on it. “While this stage of grief won’t last forever, the good things shall not be taken for granted either,” Morgan says. “I’m more cognizant now of what somebody goes through with the loss of a loved one. A woman came into the bank where I work to close all of her accounts because her husband died. I stopped and a lot of stuff I had kind of processed through just came back and hit me again. I wanted to come up to this lady and give her a hug, though she has no idea who I am.”

One thing Morgan is adamant about is that she does not want let the situation get to her. “I never wanted to be the victim,” Morgan says. “It’s not where I planned to be, but it’s not somewhere where I’m sitting. I sometimes hear what he would say in that situation like, ‘What’s your problem, stop thinking about it so much and go for it.’ Usually, it’s encouraging you to do something that’s a little more risky than you’d like to do or telling you to suck it up and go do it.”

Morgan is slowly moving into the condo. There are no decorations on the walls. The bed is unmade. A book lies upside down next to two CDs and next to them is a picture of John on his bicycle.

Editor’s Note: At press time, Nuspl was seeking an early release from her six-month prison sentence.
Hoping for a golden Ticket
One Kent State student tries her luck at becoming the next American Idol

Written by Christina Thomas
Illustration by Jason Rolf

Thirty seconds: that’s all I had. I was nervous, sweating from every pore of my body. My heart felt like some rabid beast trying to escape from its cage, ready to pounce out of my chest at any moment. My stomach felt like a stress ball and someone was squeezing it with all the strength they had; all around me about 10,000 people felt the same exact way I did.

Thirty seconds to prove I was “it,” 30 seconds to prove I was something special, 30 seconds to prove that I was the next American Idol. Yes, that’s right: I got sucked into the fantasy that I could be the next rock star and reality TV celebrity.

Singing has always been part of my life. I joined a youth chorus called The Singing Angels when I was seven and stayed in it until I graduated high school. I took voice lessons, participated in a few musicals and even had my own rock ‘n’ roll band in high school called The Jukebox Graduates. I loved every moment of it.

I wondered what it would be like to audition for a reality TV show. American Idol is now in its 10th season and trying to make it as the next big pop star is not as easy as it looks. You are not only competing against the best, but the worst and the most ridiculous as well. Getting onto the show is like trying to win the lottery.

I spent much of the summer debating whether I should go through with it. My friends and family told me many times I should audition, but I never took them seriously until my roommates got me hooked on season seven. As I sat watching David Cook, David Archuleta and the others, each week I began to daydream about how that could be me.

Even though I wanted to audition, the realist in me said “don’t waste your time.” I had other friends who were talented singers and didn’t even come close to performing in front of the famous Simon, Randy, Kara and Paula, so what could possibly make me the exception? That’s when I realized if I had a niche, something that made me stand out, I might have a chance. I’m a college athlete, and I figured that could be it. I could wear my Kent State Golf uniform, golf shoes and all, and they might realize that I’m a beautiful, talented, golfing songbird from Cleveland.

And with that, I made up my mind to audition in New York City.

My dad tried to be supportive. When I told him, he sighed and said it was like buying a lottery ticket — basically he was saying, “No way in hell, but I’ll humor you, honey,” and he agreed to pay for the hotel expenses. My mom, on the other hand, was already dreaming about being the next celebrity stage mom.

So on the first Saturday in August, my mom, my boyfriend Nick and I packed our gold Chrysler caravan and began our road trip to East Rutherford, N.J., to the Izod Center, where Fox was hosting the final location of the “American Idol” season eight auditions.

When we got to the hotel, my mother and I ran into an awkward situation. We had not planned on a third person coming with us and had booked a single room with one bed — we were making this dream a low-budget pursuit. We asked the concierge if there was another room available with twin beds, but it looked as if every hotel in a 10-mile radius was packed for the audition.

So there we were, packed like sardines, sleeping in the same bed — my mother on one side, my boyfriend on the other. Nobody moved a muscle for the 2 hours and 45 minutes we slept.

By 3 a.m., we were standing in line to register for the audition. Already about 600 strong, the line was dotted with tents and blankets, sleeping bags and lawn chairs. We brought nothing. Some people
"THERE WAS SO MUCH TENSION IN THE ARENA — SHAKY VOICES, SWEATY PALMS, ADRENALINE PUMPING THROUGH COUNTLESS VEINS."

around us were sitting quietly and resting, while others were gathering together and singing. I heard some amazing voices; then again, I saw a guy dressed up as a chocolate chip cookie. Everyone was waiting for registration to open at 8 a.m. on Sunday. It wasn’t until two days later that auditions actually began.

When I returned Tuesday morning along with about 10,000 other people, 14 tables were set up on the floor of the arena divided by black curtains, each with two chairs for the judges. Simon, Randy, Kara and Paula were nowhere to be seen because one must pass through about three rounds of auditions before singing in front of them. The judges at the arena are employees from local Fox network stations.

As I got closer to the tables, a man came around and said, “You four, to table 10.”

So I stepped into the line next to three other girls about my age. “Great,” I thought, “So much for standing out.”

The wait was unbearable. There was so much tension in the arena — shaky voices, sweaty palms, adrenaline pumping through countless veins; thousands of young people were waiting for their chance to prove they had enough talent to be the next Idol singer.

After what felt like 100 years, it was our turn. We stood at the white tape on the floor and waited for our 30 seconds. I was the last to go. I was shaking like a pair of maracas. I felt like I had just sprinted a mile, which was bad because I needed breath to sing. Then I looked down at my “fabulous” outfit and realized that unless the judges looked at my ridiculous golf shoes they would never think I was a golfer, because all our uniform consists of is a polo shirt and khaki shorts.

I was too focused on my words to pay attention to what the other girls were singing or what they sounded like, that is, until the girl before me stepped up. She started singing, “Left a good job in the city...” Out of about 10,000 people, this girl had chosen “Proud Mary,” the same song I was about to sing! What should I do? I had a back up, but I felt like this song was the one.

“Next,” called out the judge.

This was it, I was up and I was in shock. Without thinking twice, I began singing Tina Turner’s version of “Proud Mary.” I started too high; my voice was shaking like crazy. I knew I blew it.

After 30 seconds of singing, the judge signaled me to stop. He put his clip board up to his face, blocking himself and the other judge, a woman, so they had “privacy to deliberate.”

He looked up at us and said, “You all have nice voices but unfortunately you’re not what we’re looking for.”

And just like that it was over; we were ushered to gate C where I saw my mom and Nick looking anxious. I just shrugged my shoulders and shook my head. I felt the burning in my eyes, but I refrained from crying. They both hugged me, and said, “Oh well, their loss.”

I guess I won’t be the next American Idol, but at least we got a trip to the Big Apple out of it. And who knows? There’s always Survivor...
Eat. Write. Love.

Written by Nicole Stempak
Photos by Brittany Ankrom & Kelly Petrysyn

When I read, I fancy myself as captivating as Elizabeth Bennett, as feisty as Anne Shirley or as independent as Jane Eyre. But I had never read a book where I could really identify with the protagonist until I read a memoir by Elizabeth Gilbert titled “Eat, Pray, Love,” which is now a feature film.

The words reverberated within me because I lived them. One night, Gilbert realizes she no longer wants to live the life she created with her husband, so she files for divorce. During that difficult legal process, she realizes she must make great changes to learn what she needs and wants out of life. Two years later, she embarks on a yearlong journey around the world — more specifically Italy, India and Indonesia — to find pleasure, devotion and balance. What Gilbert ultimately found was herself.

Her courageous journey inspired me to take a long-overdue journey to find what is important to me. I experienced a new culture, explored my own backyard and made peace with myself. But before I embarked, I reminded myself of two things Gilbert does: She allows herself to indulge in whatever makes her happy and she finds a word that describes her. With that, I set out on my journey.
Eat sushi

Gilbert begins her journey in Italy where she eats her way back to health. The first thing she does when she finds herself in a new place is ask someone where is the best food. I begin my journey in Kent trying to find a good nearby sushi restaurant. I have never tried sushi. In fact, the idea of raw fish makes me shudder, but I must try it because I am starved for culture and new experiences.

I find a restaurant in Akron and recruit a friend to accompany me. Before we meet, I head to the Kent Free Library to research the sushi experience. I am fascinated by the history of sushi and the Eastern approach to eating. I scribble down some notes so I seem like less of an idiot at the restaurant. Of course, none of this information is helpful, and I have to improvise.

Once we arrive, I realize I'm not only starved for culture but also for food. I order a white wine, vegetarian roll, Philadelphia roll (smoked salmon with cream cheese) and tamago (sweet egg omelet).

When my meal arrives I admire its unadorned beauty for a few minutes before finally taking a bite. I can't handle it. It feels like I put a raw fish in my mouth that's oozing and sliding around, but my friend tells me to keep chewing so I can swallow. Nope, this one's not for me. Next, I try the vegetarian roll. It's a lot crunchier and has more cucumbers than I care for. It isn't awful, so I try another piece sans cucumber. Nope, this one's not for me either. Lastly, I try the tamago, the side I added to my order at last whim. I like eggs, but this doesn't taste like most eggs I've had before.

I finish the tamago because I am still hungry. While my friend eats some sushi off my plate, I debate ordering from the restaurant's Chinese portion of the menu or making a PB and J when I go home. I figure I've spent enough already, so I opt not to order a plate of sesame chicken.

I think Gilbert began in Italy because she needed to allow her body to physically refuel from the past two years before she could continue on her journey. Likewise, I began with sushi because I realize the damage I have wreaked on my body and want to start treating myself better. And sushi, so healthy and artfully prepared, was the perfect place to start, even though I didn't particularly care for it.

Explore Kent

I don't want to become like the people in “Fahrenheit 451” who move so fast that all the flowers and houses on the side of the road become blurs of color. I want to slow down and take in the scenery around me, so I decide to take a bike ride around Kent, the place I've called home for four years but have never really explored.

One pleasant September afternoon, I head over to Dunbar Hall to rent a bike from Flash Fleet, the university's new bike renting program. As I pedal past White Hall, I spot a brown squirrel nibbling on an acorn under a tree. I roll past Last Exit Books before deciding that any venture isn't complete without stopping at the bookstore. Then I hop back on my bike.

I never noticed the park or the graffiti beneath the Main Street Bridge. I never knew that gorgeous orange brick buildings on the corner of Main and Mantua streets was the Kent Masonic Temple, home of Marvin Kent, for whom our fair town and university was named. I'm no more than 10 minutes away from campus, but I feel so much farther away.

There are no college students to be found, just people going about their Saturday afternoon. I keep pedaling down the road until I pass a couple abandoned factories. I turn around and head back toward Kent until I decide to make a left at the last moment. I continue until the road ends and make another right.

I don't know where I am. All I know is that I'm at peace being lost and in no hurry to be found. I hear an announcer and cheers, so I search for the source — a football game at Davey Elementary School. I lean against the metal fence and watch the game for a few minutes before returning to campus.

The ride back is quiet except for the shh-ing sound of the bike and the occasional pop of an acorn beneath the tire. I pedal as fast as I can despite the increasingly uncomfortable seat and throbbing muscles I didn't know existed.

I returned my bike to Dunbar Hall two-and-a-half hours later with a new perspective on my senior year. One day I'll be like someone I saw on my ride, going about a daily routine. I'm not sure where I'll pedal after graduation, but it's comforting to know that there isn't one set path I have to follow; I can make my way up as I go along. And even when I don't know where I'm headed, I can find my way. And I'll be just fine.

Forgive myself

I'm sitting on the grass at the SUNBEAU Farm in Ravenna for the 32nd annual Balloon-A-Fair. Three boys about 10 years old ponder what it would be like to ride in a hot air balloon. "I would be too afraid," the one says. "I think it would be fun," another says. I want to tell them that I rode in a balloon last year. That I was scared, but it was one of the best experiences I have ever had. This time last year, I was riding the high life, unaware of the bumpy landing ahead.

I am not writing off my conduct last fall, so I will simply say I overextended myself. In trying to succeed at everything, I wound up flying like Woodstock: zigzagged, upside down and indirect. I eventually landed on my feet and finished junior year and spent the summer recovering with family, food and books — lots of books. When I read Gilbert's experiences, I realized it wasn't too late to make amends for last year.

I knew just where to start. There's been something on the back burner for months, which brings me back to the Balloon-A-Fair. I enjoyed
my ride with my balloonist so much that I chose to make him the subject of a profile for my Feature Writing class. I received a decent grade on the assignment, but it never felt quite right.

I haven’t reread the profile since I submitted my final draft because I didn’t know how to make it better. It’s not as bad as I thought, but it’s about as interesting to read as a story on the G-20 Summit. Now I know where I went wrong — and how to do my balloonist justice. I take a seat at my desk. I reread the first sentence, then the first paragraph. I keep going. As I add my emotions and my balloonist’s charming personality, I can finally breathe a sigh of release. Better, much better.

Lying in bed that night, I reflect on the past year. It wasn’t all as bad as I made it seem. There are plenty of pictures and mementos to prove that I had some fun. However, I was unfair to myself. I willingly put myself into situations that made me and those who I made commitments to unhappy. To prevent making the same mistakes again, I cut out part of an advertisement that I read from time to time: “What makes you happy?” to which I added with a Post-it note: “What’s stopping you?”

After reading Gilbert’s mistakes, I realize I must forgive myself for the mistakes made last year. If I can do that and learn from those mistakes, then I can be a better person. Walking up to my good friend the balloonist and receiving a warm greeting gave me the confidence to rewrite his profile, and in doing so, help me rewrite part of last year.

Now that I have finished my journey, I realize that I don’t have to follow Gilbert’s footsteps around the world to find my word. I found it during my journey.

I am a navigator.

I don’t usually know my destination, but I go out on little life adventures anyway. I take opportunities as they come and make everything up as I go along. Sometimes I make some wrong turns and have to recalculate. Sometimes I have to stop and ask for directions. But I eventually get right where I need to be even if I don’t know it at the time. And I usually have an interesting story to tell once I arrive.
Peace & Reconciliation

Story & photos by Laura Fong Torchia

Recent Kent State graduate Laura Fong Torchia traveled to Vietnam with veterans to capture their journey to make peace.

The words echoed in my ears time and time again as I sat on planes, trains and buses, in conference rooms and even when I stood at sites where great battles were fought and much blood was shed. Peace, reconciliation and forgiveness after war are possible. On this trip I discovered that I am more than a witness. I, too, am a warrior — a warrior with my finger on the button and an open heart, ready to receive and share this beautiful story of the community of Tallmadge, First Congregational Church and Warriors Journey Home, a healing circle for veterans.

On Oct. 3, I boarded a plane at Akron-Canton Airport. This was the first of five flights to Vietnam with U.S. Marine Corps veteran Tom Saal. Meeting Tom in 2006 is how this story began. I stuck with him and, during my time at Kent State, became fascinated by the truth of war and the harm it causes. I learned how it touched so many, including those who love veterans — people of strong heart.

I learned about the effects of war while at Kent State. First, by covering the annual May 4th candlelight vigil as a correspondent for the Daily Kent Stater, and later joining in the vigil with JMC alumna Paula Slimak as a grateful recipient of her scholarship for four years in a row. Paula is determined to keep alive the memory of four students who gave all to speak their truth against the war in Vietnam.

As I continued to interview and photograph veterans, I found myself a witness to the power of what a small community can do by sticking together and supporting one another. The love and support of the healing circle and the citizens of Tallmadge are an example of how any community can support their veterans. Without community, the storytelling and necessary healing cannot take place. We send these soldiers to war; therefore, each one of us is responsible to bring them home and help them be civilians again.

On my trip, I heard stories of difficult choices Vietnamese people had to make in a country divided in half, and how they didn't want the war either.

"I'm left with this one question," said Rev. John Schupe of the Warriors Journey Home. "If they didn't want the war, and we didn't want the war, how the heck did this war happen?"

It's hard to hear these questions, but to witness it firsthand left me speechless many times — tears of gratitude flowing behind my camera. The hugs, smile and brotherhood of former enemy soldiers were now a common bond of peace.

"The only universal language is pain," said Joe Caley, U.S. Army veteran who went to Vietnam in search of forgiveness and peace.

Click. Peace.

Click. Reconciliation.

Click. Exhale and wipe away the tears.

I witnessed men who left Ohio as warriors defined by their military service. They returned home from Vietnam still warriors — warriors of peace.

Peace despite 3 million Vietnamese dead (1/8 of their total population), and 58,479 Americans dead.

Peace despite the effects of Agent Orange still appearing as disabilities in children three generations later.

And peace, because it is how they live, and it was how they lived before 1965 when the war in Vietnam began.

There is so much that can be done to offer peace to the Vietnamese in return for what they have given to five combat veterans. This is just the beginning. These veterans are brave and courageous for returning to face their past in Vietnam and also to share their stories with the community and the world. It's an honor to listen, speak and heal with these warriors. May they inspire all suffering veterans to let go of the past and let their healing begin.
Former enemies: Tam Tien, of the Mekong Delta, and Joe Caley of Tallmadge in Oct. 2010. Tien and three other delegates of Vietnam came to Cleveland to participate in the International Summit on War and Peace at Case Western Reserve University.
Iraq veteran Michael Blake and Dr. Edward Tick, both of New York State, pray at a Buddhist temple in a commune close to Ha Noi. Offering incense during prayer is a traditional Buddhist ritual.

Vietnam veteran Tom Saal with students at the MAC Dinh Chi school his officer class funded and built 10 years ago.

Throughout the trip, members of the Warriors Journey Home Ministry held ceremonies at each place that was meaningful to them. At each location, members told stories and prayed for healing to let go of the past.
An American tank decorates the lawn at the Reunification Hall in Sai Gon.

Daoist Monks at the Citadel in Hue, Vietnam.
Sarah Dobson picked up her first rugby ball in the spring of 2008. She had no idea how the sport would change her, mentally and physically.
Kent State rugby player Sarah Dobson could have been sidelined for good when she hit a tackle too high. But now she is back in the game.

Story & photos by Dawn Einsel

As she stepped onto a field in Nashville, Tenn., Sarah Dobson clung to thoughts of certainty. She reminded herself of the one aspect of game play that she was absolutely sure of: You must tackle whoever has possession of the ball.

It was only her third game since joining the women's rugby team in spring 2008; her second was earlier that day, but the then-freshman business major was confident.

Momentarily her confidence was shaken by the size and reputation of the Division I University of Connecticut girls.

Then she told herself stop thinking, just tackle.

The ball went into play, and she bolted toward her opponent. Another player also ran full-speed toward the ball carrier — two girls going after one tackle.

Sarah was too high and only inches away from contact when her teammate hit the UConn rugger with all that she had. She couldn't rethink her position. She had no time to halt. The impact of the collision snapped the back of the ball carrier's head into the right side of Sarah's face.

She felt a small jolt of pain as she lay stunned on the grass. Teammates poured into her peripherals. Water splashed her face. She just wanted the minute allotted to any injured player. She was fine.

"You're bleeding," said then teammate Kelly Yost.

With confusion, Sarah lifted her fingers to the only place she could feel pain. She gently touched her forehead and brought her hand back down. Nothing.

"Honey, it's your eye," said Kelly, who was now holding her fingers in Sarah's line of vision.

"I can see," she argued. "Can I just get some space?"

Her teammates lifted her up and walked her to the sidelines. She glanced around as she took shaky steps. Every fan on the field brought their hand to their mouth in horror as she passed.

At the medical station, she was instructed to go the emergency room, but she declined. She had heard the seasoned medics tell her it was the worst black eye they had ever seen, but rugby players don't go to the emergency room for such trivial injuries. She walked back to the field to watch the rest of the game, posed for pictures with the damaging UConn team and then called her mother.
It was only then Sarah began to cry, fear forcing her tears. She started the day knowing she was capable of playing a rugby game and ended it with an uncertain injury.

Sarah finished her weekend in Tennessee and rode back home with the team. As she parted ways with her teammates and her coach, she called back.

"I'll see you in the fall," she said. But no one believed her. She was just a rookie. And she was hurt — badly hurt.

She was injured on Saturday and it wasn't until Tuesday that she got medical attention for what she thought was just a damn-good black eye. From an emergency room in Dayton, she was referred to a plastic surgeon who was astonished at her ability to move her eye, she recalled. He knew he'd need reconstructive surgery, but he wasn't sure exactly what it would entail. One week after her initial appointment, nurses shaved the side of Sarah's head in preparation for exploratory surgery.

On the operating table, her surgeon discovered fractures to her nose, cheekbone and eye socket. According to Sarah's medical records, the surgeon made an incision under her eye. He then cut between her upper lip and gums to inset a balloon that was inflated to return a displaced segment of bone from her eye socket to its original position. He placed a silicone implant over the bone and made an incision at her temple. He then inserted a probe and pried her cheekbone forward. He also realigned her nose.

After more than two hours of surgery, doctors dressed her wounds. A hard plastic plate was fitted over the right side of her head to protect her incised temple. Thick layers of gauze were wrapped around her face, across her forehead and underneath her jaw. Her nose was packed with thin, white cotton and a splint was taped over it. A yellow tube extended from her mouth.

Sarah was in the hospital for two days and in a head cast for two weeks. In the hospital, she wasn't allowed water. In the head cast, she wasn't allowed to eat solid foods. She was so physically weak that she could barely move. She didn't even want to get up to use the bathroom. It was a task that meant lifting herself up, dragging her IVs and facing her reflection.

"There was a mirror right when I walked
in (the bathroom)," Sarah said. "And it was the last thing I wanted to look at."

To her, it seemed that everyone who saw her shared that thought. Sarah recalled the horror she felt when going out in public — the stares, the confusion, the unasked questions.

"I tried to joke about it because I didn’t want to make other people feel bad," she said. "But I couldn’t even talk normal because I had a tube in my mouth. I felt like every person I encountered could have jumped back 10 feet."

Long-time friend Dara Hendricks said Sarah never once seemed self-conscious.

"She is a strong person," Hendricks said. "If she had any insecurities, she didn’t show them."

But inside, like any young woman, she felt them.

"I’m still self-conscious about it," she admitted. "I still notice it. I can still see a difference and it still bothers me a little bit, but I just had to deal with it. There was nothing I could do. I just wonder if I didn’t get it fixed how my face would look and the complications I would be facing. That’s the only thing that helped."

Throughout the spring and summer of 2008, Sarah was slowly slipped back into daily routines. She was able to eat again, shower again, tan, style her re-growing hair and enjoy the company of her friends. Though a relief, this wasn’t enough.

Sarah feels her accident was an act of fate. She said she has lived a fairly privileged life and working through the injury showed her how to cope during a challenging time. The staves she endured taught her a powerful lesson in empathy: not to judge someone before their story is known. And from returning to the sport that had caused her such grief, Sarah learned about the power of both fear and courage.

Yost, her former teammate, coached in fall 2008. She recalled the immediate discoloration and indentation of Sarah’s face as she watched her step onto Manchester Field for that first practice. She was not surprised by her presence, but more so her performance.

“When she did come back, she didn’t hold back," Yost said. "Even after reconstructive surgery, she still played aggressively. Her heart was still in the game."

Yost has seen many injuries, both as a player and a coach. She said athletes can use the fear to either motivate or cripple.

“I feel like I can go through anything and be the same person,” Sarah said. “I’m not going to let something like that set me back and hold me back from something I enjoy.”

Sarah said she was never nervous about playing before her accident, but now she gets a little anxious pre-game. She is always timid until she hits that first tackle and hits it hard. She has played five semesters since her injury and helped lead Kent State to a Division II championship last fall.

Though she did not complete this season and is taking time off from school, Sarah started the 2010 competitive season with a game against Ball State. She ended the first half with what would be the game-winning try, the equivalent of football’s touchdown. As she dove into the try zone, she caught a knee to the face. The whistle was blown, and she walked to the side lines.

“I think I heard something crack," she said, spitting blood. Her lip was swollen and her teeth were stained. "I think I’m done for this game."

She watched as the second half progressed, pacing to keep with her team, dodging out of the way as another girl was slammed off the field. The coach called for a replacement. No one answered. Ball State lined up at its 22-yard line. The coach yelled again as the referee continued play. Sarah dashed out into position. She wouldn’t just watch. She couldn’t let her opponents score.

“You can’t tell Sarah ‘what if,’” Hendricks said. "It doesn’t help to worry because she doesn’t. When you see her so confident, it eases your fears."

It has been two and a half years since her reconstructive surgery, the amount of time surgeon told her it would take for the bone to completely regrow. Sarah is finally healed.

Two reminders permanently mark her body. A small, round scar that only she can notice below her eye and a tattoo she has etched on her ribs. In small script it reads: "I am not afraid... I was born to do this.”

SEE MORE PHOTOS OF SARAH AND HER TEAM AT THEBURR.COM.
There's no place like Kent

Written by Rabab Al-Sharif
Photos by Chris Wallis

In the spring issue of The Burr we featured a glimpse into the lives of townies. This fall, we caught up with more locals and found out what has made them stay in Kent.

Cass Mayfield moved McKay Bricker Framing into the shop's new home at 141 E. Main St., in downtown Kent in February 2009. Cass and her husband, Bob, lost their old home, which doubled as their shop, so the new Fairchild Avenue Bridge could be built.
Portraits of Rick Bissler’s great-grandfather Samuel [left] and his grandfather Ira [right] greet guests as they enter Bissler & Sons Funeral Home. Rick is the fourth-generation owner and operator of the local funeral home and crematory started by Samuel and Ira in 1913.

Sandy Halem had never heard of Kent, before she moved here from Philadelphia in 1969 with her husband. Her husband was taking a job at Kent State.

“We thought he had a job at Penn State, not Kent State,” she says.

Sandy got involved in the community early, working with the Kent Environmental Club to clean up the Cuyahoga River. While working to conserve the river, she got wind that an old building nearby was rumored to have been built by John Brown, the American abolitionist, and so she submitted it to the National Register of Historic Places.

She was happy it was the first building in Portage County to be put on the register, even though it ended up being torn down.

“In a small town like this, you can do something that really changes the community,” she says. “You can make a big difference by being one person.”

Sandy later became the first woman on the Kent Historical Society Board and its first female president.

“All along, I just kept loving the history,” she says. “I thought ‘What an amazing little community this was because it was involved in every part of the history of the Midwest: transportation, the abolition movement and of course, May 4 was a seminal moment in the nation’s history.’”

She may not have been born in Kent, but she has made herself a part of the community. She plans to end up where she first got involved in the community: the Cuyahoga River.

“Probably the end for me will be when they toss my ashes into the Cuyahoga,” she says. “I don’t know if it’s legal, but that’s where I want to end up.”

Right around the corner from the Historical Society where Sandy works is a small custom framing and gift shop owned by Cass Mayfield.

Unlike Sandy, Cass has lived in Kent all her life. Although she has lived in surrounding areas for a couple brief stints, she has never wanted to live anywhere else.

“It feels like home, and I always thought it had a certain charm,” she says. “There’s just something about Kent that makes people want to stay.”

Cass owns the McKay Bricker Gallery and Framing downtown, a business she says she just happened to fall into. While working for an interior design firm in Akron, she was a regular customer at a frame shop. A new door opened when the previous owner mentioned to Cass that she wanted to sell the business.

“One morning, I just woke up and thought, ‘We can do that,’” she says. “I don’t know why because I had never framed anything in my life, but I always have been good with my hands and good with people so I thought it might be a good fit.”

Cass has owned the business since 1984 and after a few moves has finally settled on Main Street and built many relationships through friendly words over the counter or by going to someone’s home to help him or her install artwork.

“Since I’ve been in business, I really felt like part of the community,” she says. “There are a lot of really good people in this town who want the best for this town, and who really are very hard to try and make things happen.”

Just a few doors and a rickety old staircase away from Cass’ frame shop is Fuller Design Group, a full-service architectural and planning firm owned by Doug Fuller.

Doug grew up in a very small town north of Boston. In fact, the town was so small they had to combine two towns to have a decent-sized high school. He came to Kent State in 1968 to study architecture.

“One of the reasons I liked Kent State was it was in a bigger city,” he says. “For me, moving from the small town in New England to Kent was kind of like moving to a bigger place. I’m not a big city person; I like this size (of a) city, and I think it has all kinds of opportunities for people to enjoy the place that they live.”

Doug met a local girl at the ice arena, fell in love, got married and decided to stay in Kent.

He has since worked on a number of projects in Kent, most recently downtown on Acorn Alley.

“Those are the kind of projects when I set out to start the office we were really hoping to do,” he says. “We really, as a firm, wanted to be involved in the city we (where) he lived and worked.”

Maybe it is because he came from a small town where everybody

The aged map of Portage County that now hangs in the conference room of Doug Fuller’s architecture firm was loaned to them by Dr. Bob Stevens, who had the map rolled up and stored away in a corner of his house. Stevens didn’t want it back, however. “I tried to give it back at least once a year for six or seven years,” Fuller says. “After this, I’ll probably let him know it’s still here if he wants it.”
knew each other, but Doug says
he doesn’t get the same “small
town” sense as some other
townies.

“Every number of years we
get a change-over in students
and it’s a whole different energy, a
whole different group of people
and faces,” he says. “I guess we
all like it when it slows down in
the summer, but I’ll tell you the
energy that rolls into this town
when the students come back in.
I think it’s fantastic.”

Doug may have lived here
for more than 40 years, but he
doesn’t think it’s fair to the “real”
townies if he were to consider
himself one. He considers a
townie to be a lifelong resident,
lke Rick Bissler.

Rick is currently the owner
and director of Bissler and Sons
Funeral Home and Crematory in
Kent, a business that has been in
his family since 1925.

He not only owns and runs
the only funeral home in Kent
but also lives right across the
street from it.

Before Rick took over his
family business, he wanted to be
a farmer like his grandfather. This
dream to be a farmer was before
he came to the realization that it
wasn’t a possibility for him.

“I was finally reading the
farm magazines and realized I
couldn’t make a living off of his
19 acres,” he says.

By the time he was a junior
in high school, he had decided
he was going to join the family
business.

The only time Rick has lived
away from Kent was in the early
70s while he was attending the
University of Minnesota for his
degree in mortuary science.

Rick says he likes living in a
small town and being able to have
close one-on-one contact with the
people he works with.

Although many of these
people are lifetime residents,
Sandy says someone doesn’t
necessarily have to be a lifetime
resident to be considered a
townie.” That label can come
from simply being involved with
the town and its people.

“People have a choice: you can
be part of the community, or you
can sleep in the community,” she
says. “I came here because my
husband had a job, and I ended up
with a life.”

The same painting that hung in the Huntington Bank lobby in Kent more than 40 years ago now hangs behind Sandy Halem’s desk at the Kent Historical Society. Halem says the story told to her was that
Mark Geldhof, who later owned All Media Art Supply, painted what she refers to as “Portage across the
Cuyahoga” when he was a student at Kent State.
Social media and hiring:
It’s a complicated relationship

How to not let social media ruin your chances of getting — and keeping — your dream job

Written by Lisa Robertson
Photo illustration by Dana Beveridge

Social media keeps us connected, but it also poses a new set of problems for the budding professional looking to transition from college to career.

Companies are increasingly using social networking sites to investigate potential employees, keep track of current employees and monitor the use of the Internet by employees. A June 2009 study by CareerBuilder.com found that 45 percent of employers use social networking to screen potential employees. According to the report, 29 percent use Facebook, 26 percent use LinkedIn and 21 percent use MySpace. Eleven percent search blogs while 7 percent follow candidates on Twitter.

To avoid the wrong eyes seeing your accounts, it is important to learn to be careful with the information you post about yourself. It’s also worth remembering that more of a problem exists in controlling what others, often times your best friends, are posting about you on social media sites.

Above all, Salina DuBose, graduate assistant at Career Services, says to “know that regardless of your security settings for letting larger companies or H.R. people get into your page, you really have no say [over what companies can access]. Somehow they can override some of those privacy settings.”

Taking her advice into account, build your profile accordingly. It’s not about hiding who you are, but being mindful that what’s online is easily judged, without the benefit of your explanation.

User Beware:
Salina DuBose, graduate assistant at Career Services, shares helpful tips for social media users:

• That picture of you sucking face with your significant other? Take it down. Now.
• Enjoy excessively drinking and photographing your drunken exploits? Rethink posting those pictures because that doesn’t exactly scream “Hire me!”
• Restrain the urge to post every piece of information about yourself and every thought that pops into your head.
• Remember to keep your privacy settings up to date. DuBose recommends adjusting privacy settings so friends can’t tag you in pictures or post on your wall.

Make sure your Facebook doesn’t look like this:

facebook Search Home Pro

Sally Smith Monday: drinking some Natty Light... Tuesday: drink some more... We everything look blurry? Thursday: pass out! Friday: do it all again!!!! 3 hours ago Clear

About Me

Basic Info Sex: Female
Birthday: February 14, 1990
Relationship Status: In an Open Relationship
Interested In: Men
Looking For: Friendship, Dating, A Relationship Networking
Political Views: Poltics are dumb.
Religious Views: Meh, it’s all the same.

Bio
I love being in college and having absolutely no responsibility other than making sure I show up on time to a party.

Favorite Quotes
"I bet living in a nudist colony takes all the fun out of Halloween."

Information

Relationship Status: In an Open Relationship
Birthday: February 14, 1990

Education and Work

College Kent State University
Decided
Roommate HORROR stories

Written by Leighann McGivern
Photos by Brittany Ankrom

Roommates are strangers randomly thrown into an 11-by-17 space and forced to coexist for the sake of higher education. Wait, what? In some cases, random roommates can become best friends, but in other cases, well, let’s just say things can get ugly.

Quadruple the trouble

Laura* not only had to become accustomed to living with one stranger, but was also thrown into a room with three other girls — one of whom became her best friend and the other two her worst enemies. One of her roommates stole from the other three and unofficially declared her boyfriend as their fifth roommate. The couple routinely clipped each other’s toenails onto the floor and indulged in deep conversations about the Facebook game Farmville. Laura and her friend attempted to apply for a double room together and managed to kick out the kleptomaniac.

They couldn’t manage to get rid of the other who went home every weekend and practically lived with her boyfriend. For the remainder of the semester, the girls were assigned a replacement roommate who at first seemed relatively normal, other than being a bit of a neat freak. Then all hell broke loose when Laura accidentally tripped over some of the girl’s belongings. When she returned, their new roommate noticed her things were out of order, threw a fit and immediately moved out of the room. Needless to say, this year Laura and her best friend decided to live in a double room.

Getting frisky across the room

Christie’s freshman roommate had a revolving door of guys who came into their room. On one occasion, her roommate invited a girlfriend to stay for the weekend. Being such a wonderful friend, she slept with a guy in the same night. Christie shared a bed with her roommate’s friend, whom she’d never met before, while her roommate and the guy had “loud, angry sex” less than five feet away. Her roommate didn’t seem to mind the fact that Christie and her friend hadn’t gone to sleep yet and continued her sexcapades throughout the night. To top off the already uncomfortable situation, her roommate’s plant fell on them in the middle of the night. It’s safe to say her roommate’s friend won’t be making another visit to Kent State anytime soon.
Sleep talking and naked handstands

Steve had a roommate who constantly talked in his sleep. On one occasion, when Steve had friends over to play Halo, his roommate sprung out of bed and yelled, “Steve, I’m out of ammo, and they’re still coming!” Steve actually carried on conversations with his roommate, who would answer even though he was still asleep. The sleep talking may not have been horrible, and at times Steve found it quite entertaining, but on another occasion he walked in to find his roommate butt naked doing a handstand in front of the door. Apparently Steve’s roommate was expecting him back any minute and decided getting naked would be a funny way to greet his roommate. Steve was not amused.

The friend request from hell

Stephanie and her roommate met on Facebook and decided they’d make good roommates. Boy, were they wrong. At first the two became fast friends, and even planned on getting an apartment together the following year. Things began to change when Stephanie started to branch out and meet new friends. Stephanie said her roommate had no other friends on campus and got angry and jealous when Stephanie brought new people into their room to hang out. Her roommate constantly requested that Stephanie leave the room when she wanted to be alone with her boyfriend at times when Stephanie had to study.

Eventually the tension between the two came to a boil and ended in a screaming match, which the resident assistant had to resolve. The two decided to cancel their lease for the following year, for which Stephanie’s family had paid the entire security deposit. Both of the girls’ parents became involved in a vicious battle over who should have to pay the deposit and who had caused the problems. Sarah never received her roommate’s half of the security deposit and got a new roommate for the spring semester.

The gestapo roommate

Alyssa and her roommate lived different lives, which would have been fine except when they were together, they couldn’t agree on anything. Her roommate made loud phone calls to her friends and relatives throughout the day, cursing and bashing other people, including Alyssa and her friends. Her roommate had complete control over the TV and constantly watched her favorite shows, “Golden Girls,” “Wife Swap” and “Repo,” all three of which Alyssa couldn’t stand. Alyssa tried on several occasions to switch roommates, but her roommate refused to give up the room. She stuck it out for the rest of the year, and on the last day of school, they didn’t even say goodbye to one another when they parted ways.

* All names were changed for privacy.
Top 10 forgotten movies

Written by Brittany Schmigel

Sometimes good movies are overshadowed by blockbusters and never quite get the attention they deserve. The Burr is bringing back a few forgotten classics from the vault.

'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' (1992)

If the only vampires you know “shimmer” in sunlight and would rather play baseball than feast on humans, I suggest you watch this early ’90s gem, which preceded the long-running TV series. Kristy Swanson plays Buffy, a cheerleader whose normal teen life is turned upside down when she must take on her birthright as a vampire slayer. Swanson is the polar opposite of “Twilight”s Kristen Stewart: sexy, witty, and most of all, entertaining.

'Funny Games' (2008)

When a husband, wife and son take a trip to their lake house for the weekend, they are visited by two young men, who claim they are the neighbor’s nephews and ask to borrow eggs. The young men then take the family hostage, forcing them to participate in a number of sadistic games in order to stay alive. If you’re tired of the overdone gore of recent horror movies, “Funny Games” is just the opposite and instead offers suspense and tension that can be almost unbearable at times.

'The Wedding Date' (2005)

A romantic comedy starring Debra Messing as Kat, a single New Yorker who hires a male escort to pose as her boyfriend and accompany her to her younger sister’s wedding. Kat’s ex-fiancé, who dumped her two years earlier, is the best man in the wedding and she has every intention of making him jealous. Though it’s similar to “Pretty Woman,” the story is just as refreshing, and Messing is delightful as Kat.

'The Brave Little Toaster' (1987)

The plot follows five household appliances — a toaster, desk lamp, electric blanket, radio and vacuum cleaner — on their quest to be reunited with their owner after being left behind at their owner’s summer home. Think “Homeward Bound” but with really cute animated appliances.
'Drop Dead Fred' (1991)

This comedy follows Lizzie, a painfully introverted young woman who loses her car, job and husband all in one day. Upon returning home at the demand of her mother, Lizzie finds her old jack-in-the-box and opens it, unleashing her imaginary childhood friend, Drop Dead Fred. Lizzie thought she had faced the worst of her problems until Fred begins creating more havoc in her life. Slashfilm.com hints the remake will have Russell Brand playing Fred, so be sure to see the original first.

'Saved!' (2004)

Mary Cummings, played by Jena Malone, leads the perfect “born again” life alongside her boyfriend, Dean. When Dean admits to Mary that he thinks he’s gay, Mary believes sacrificing her virginity is the only way to restore his heterosexuality. Despite her efforts, Dean’s parents find gay pornography under his bed and send him to a Christian treatment center. Soon after, Mary discovers she is pregnant and is eventually shunned by her religious friends but finds solace among other school outcasts. Think “Juno,” with religious satire and Macaulay Culkin.

'Green Street Hooligans' (2004)

This British independent drama is about Matt Buckner, an American college student, played by Elijah Wood. Buckner joins a violent football firm, a group of football supporters that mirrors a gang, after moving to the United Kingdom to live with his sister. The firm arranges fights after football matches. Matt soon learns the ways of the firm and how its members are morally transformed by their commitment to the firm. Wood’s talents in this movie are sure to impress.

'Return to Oz' (1985)

This “Wizard of Oz” sequel wasn’t well received as the first because of its dark content. Six months after returning from Oz, Dorothy begins to concern those around her with tales of Oz and is taken to a doctor specializing in electro-shock therapy. She escapes from the hospital just before she is supposed to receive the shock treatment and accidentally falls into a river. Upon awakening, Dorothy finds herself in Oz again, with the Emerald City now in ruins. She sets out to restore Oz. A darker version of its predecessor, the film’s gloomy atmosphere and controversial themes definitely make it worth a watch.


Christian Bale plays Trevor Reznik, a factory machinist who has battled chronic insomnia for the past year and has become severely emaciated because of it. When brief flashbacks start to haunt him, puzzling Post-it notes appear on his fridge and a mysterious man begins to follow him. Trevor begins to doubt his own sanity. “The Machinist” will undoubtedly keep you in the dark until the last scene. The best part about this movie was Bale's dedication to it; he lost more than 60 pounds to accurately portray the withered insomniac.

'One Hour Photo' (2002)

If you thought Robin Williams was incapable of playing a dark sinister role, “One Hour Photo” is proof his talents can exceed the typical comic role he's played. Williams plays Sy, a photo lab technician at SavMart, who makes his mental job his life since he has no family or friends. He becomes fond of the Yorkins, a family who has been frequent customers of his for four years. As the movie progresses, Sy's fondness for the family develops into a creepy obsession and will have you wondering how the same man who played Mrs. Doubtfire could successfully deliver such a disturbing performance.

... and movies that should stay forgotten, no explanation required

'Glitter' 'From Justin to Kelly' 'I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer' 'The Hottie & the Nottie' 'Private Valentine: Blonde & Dangerous'
Last shot

Before going to World War II, J.D. Williams had never left Cleveland. After he was drafted, he says the U.S. Army "put his behind on a bus," took him to California for training and stationed him in England, France, Germany and Belgium. As a pole digger, Williams efforts were imperative for enabling communications among the Allies. "It hurts worse going home than when you're going in [to war]," he says. "Leaving them fellows, it really hurt. Most of us, when we were getting on the busses, were just sitting there crying." When Williams returned to Cleveland, where he still lives today, it took him a while to adjust to post-war life. "My momma thought I was going to crack up or something," he says. "But I eventually got over it."
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