

# OCCIDENTAL

FALL 2010

## **NITE JEWEL**

In the last two years, **Ramona Gonzalez '09** has toured the world, completed a philosophy degree, and recorded her sophomore EP in her living room. Meet L.A.'s newest muse



# OCCIDENTAL

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 32, NUMBER 4 FALL 2010

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Ramona Gonzalez '09 started a MySpace music page in January 2008—and before you could say "Nietzsche" three times fast, one of her songs was selected for a Ben Stiller movie. Now the artist known as Nite Jewel has an LP and EP to go with her Oxy A.B.

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As a spouse, parent, and longtime trustee, John Farmer has eyed Occidental from a variety of perspectives. Oxy's new board chair addresses the prospects of mounting the largest capital campaign in College history.

### 25 PUTTING NAMES TO FACES

As Santa Monica grapples with its homeless population, Ian Noble '99 and his mother, Frances, document the women who call the streets home.

## Early Model Program

I read with great interest your article on the 25th anniversary of Occidental's U.N. program ("Silver Convention," Summer) and the accompanying timeline ("International Dateline: Oxy Thinks Globally").

With regard to the Model U.N. program at Oxy, I note that you did not include anything going on prior to 1970. I was a member of the 1958 and 1959 Occidental delegations to the Model United Nations, representing Ghana and Pakistan, respectively. We immersed ourselves in the politics, history, culture, and economics of these countries. We were able to present persuasive arguments in both the General Assembly and the Security Council. Even then, we were Oxy students thinking globally.

Just thought you might be interested to know that there was more than Crossroads Africa going on at Oxy in those long-ago days of the 1950s.

**TAMMY WARNER '60**  
Claremont

## Act Globally

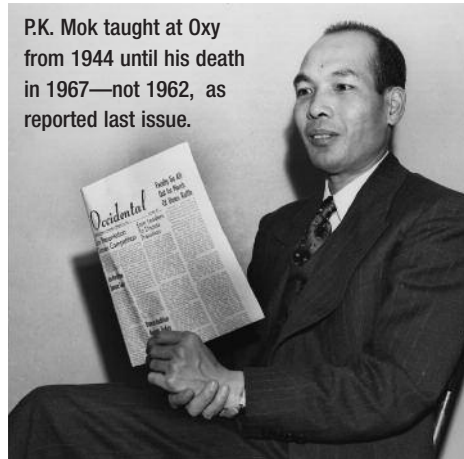
Your timeline fails to acknowledge the contributions of professor Edward Mill, who was director of the Chevalier Program in the 1960s that attracted so many students from Southeast Asia, especially from Thailand and the Philippines. (I was in the M.A. Chevalier Program from 1966-1967.) My experience is that Oxy has not kept up with its international alumni, many of whom have achieved great distinction.

I know many graduates from Thailand who have become prominent in higher education. Charnvit Kasetsiri '67 and Noranit Setabutr M'70 both became rector (president) of Thammasat University, one of Thailand's top universities. Corrine (Peterson) Phuangkasem '72 became dean of the faculty of political science at Thammasat University.

I enjoy receiving and reading *Occidental Magazine*. It would be great if the College could reach out to its international alumni in the future.

**THAK CHALOEMTIARANA M'68**  
Ithaca, N.Y.

Photo courtesy Occidental College Special Collections



**P.K. Mok taught at Oxy from 1944 until his death in 1967—not 1962, as reported last issue.**

## Gone Too Soon

You have made a mistake in your timeline regarding Dr. P.K. Mok. He could not have died in 1962, as I attended Oxy from 1962 to 1967 and my wife attended from 1965 to 1967, and we both remember him fondly. He told one of the most memorable stories that I remember to this day and repeat frequently.

Whenever during the Second World War he had to fly into China over the Hump from India, he would always look closely at the pilot. He preferred to fly with a Chinese pilot. It was not a racial thing. He was being realistic. The Army would let any American white pilot fly into China over the Hump—a dangerous flight—but only the best Chinese pilots were assigned the mission. He figured that he had a better chance to survive if he was with a great pilot instead of a mediocre one.

**KEN MACGREGOR '66 M'67**  
Columbia, Md.

## A Grand Ambassador

Your article "International Dateline: Oxy Thinks Globally" notes some of the College's distinguished diplomatic alumni and professors. My grandfather, U. Alexis Johnson '31, was among those listed, and you noted he had served as ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Thailand, and Japan, and under secretary of state for political affairs, then the third-highest post in the State Department.

Your readers may also be interested to know that during his unprecedented 42-year career in the State Department—for

which he has been recognized as Oxy's most accomplished graduate in the field of diplomacy—he served as the chief negotiator of the SALT II Treaty with the Soviet Union, the first treaty to put a limit on nuclear weapons, or "those beasts," as he used to call them. When I was a Congressional intern, he took out the treaty and went over it with me paragraph by paragraph, telling me one grand story after another about how it came to be negotiated.

He negotiated the Treaty on Japan, the defense treaty between our two nations. He also negotiated the Treaty on Okinawa which gave Okinawa back to Japan, for which he won Japan's highest honor, the Order of the Rising Sun. He served as deputy ambassador to Vietnam during the war and survived several assassination attempts.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, he authored the position paper that was adopted virtually in full by the president on how to handle the crisis. He served on President Kennedy's ad hoc Executive Committee of the National Security Council, referred to as ExCom, which was created to deal with the Cuban crisis. During the scramble he ended up in the front right seat of a government limousine with U.S. attorney general Bobby Kennedy sitting on his lap driving frantically to the White House to meet with JFK.

He was privy to and involved in decisions regarding many of the top secret operations of the United States. He had a red telephone in his Washington, D.C., apartment when he was under secretary that was a direct line to the president. As a young man, I would often stare at that telephone wondering what would happen if I picked it up. I had an incredible curiosity about spy stories for some reason and would occasionally try to get my grandfather, after he took his evening Scotch, to tell me some of them. All I could ever get him to do was to fold his arms and say to me: "All I can tell you, grandson, is thank God we have a few secrets left no one else knows about." This would send chills up my spine.

For more than three years during the 1950s, my grandfather was the only point of contact for negotiations between America and the Communist government in China. He was slated to be the first U.S. ambassador to China after formal U.S. recognition, but that honor went to George H.W. Bush instead.

He played a key role in the negotiation of the Korean Armistice, which suspended the fighting in the Korean War. He briefed the president, sometimes daily, on the peace negotiations from the D.C. side. He would forward negotiating instructions to the U.S. team in Korea by cable, often writing the instructions himself for the president to sign. His eldest son, and my uncle, Stephen Johnson '60, also had a long and distinguished career in the State Department.

Of greatest interest to Oxy readers may be the story of my grandfather's prisoner exchange. Just prior to World War II, he was posted to Mukden (now Shenyang) in northern China. It was under Japanese occupation at the time, and when Pearl Harbor happened my grandfather was seized and held by the Japanese as an internee. Midway through 1942, he was part of an exchange of non-military personnel such as diplomats, missionaries, and business people who had been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The exchange took place by ships in Mozambique, Africa.

My grandfather's debate partner at Oxy was Henry Shimanouchi '31, a Japanese citizen, who would later become the Japanese ambassador to Norway. Henry was a Japanese diplomat living in America when he was interred by the United States in New York City shortly after Pearl Harbor. During the prisoner exchange in Mozambique, Henry and my grandfather walked by each other and waved. Henry told that story in his Commencement address to Oxy's Class of 1981. I was among the graduates in the class and was seated at the ceremony when I heard this story for the first time.

**BRAD ZERBE '81**  
Scottsdale, Ariz.

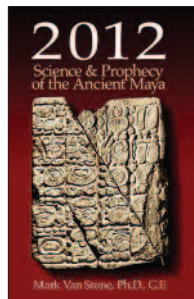
### Parting Shot

The picture of discus thrower Kelly Young '11 (From the Quad, Summer) warmed my heart and rekindled memories. When I was at Oxy, long before Title IX, Howard Benioff '64 offered to teach me shot put. There was no support for women doing such unpretty things then, and I didn't have enough courage to buck the tide. I'm glad women can do that now—and can even gain recognition in full color.

**PENELOPE STANLEY '67**  
Portland, Ore.

## Bookshelf

2012: SCIENCE & PROPHECY OF THE ANCIENT MAYA, by Mark Van Stone '73 (*Tlacaclae Press*; \$49). In this lavishly illustrated 170-page volume inspired by Maya inscriptions, astronomical knowledge, math, and myth, Van Stone responds to the uptick in interest about the prophecies that portend the end of the Maya calendar in two years. He shares his research based on science, archeology, decipherment, and pre-Columbian art regarding what the ancient Maya actually said about 2012 in 38 short essays, making this arcane material accessible to the layman reader. (The book is also available as a CD or PDF.) Van Stone is professor of art history at Southwestern College in Chula Vista.



THE SPIRIT-DRIVEN LEADER: THE SEVEN KEYS TO SUCCEEDING UNDER PRESSURE, by Sam Calian '55 (*Westminster John Knox Press*; \$14.95). If there's one thing that Bill Gates, King Solomon, and Abraham Lincoln have in common, it's the ability to successfully manage under pressure. A former president of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Calian outlines seven keys to effective leadership for people working with nonprofit, educational, and religion-based organizations: creativity, confidence, commitment, character, collegiality, compassion, and courage. He is a visiting professor at the University of Pittsburgh's Katz Graduate School of Business.

**Comics in Brief:** After three years as part of the bullpen responsible for writing Marvel's *Amazing Spider-Man*, Dan Slott '89 will be going it alone on the web-slinger's flagship title beginning with issue No. 648, which hits comic book shops Nov. 10. Slott's initial storyline, "Big Time," finds Peter Parker dealing with a new career, new girlfriend, and the return of classic Spider-foes such as Scorpion and Hobgoblin. Slott's writing credits includes stints on *She Hulk* and *Mighty Avengers*. He lives in New York City.



# OCCIDENTAL

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## OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

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All letters should include the author's name, address, and daytime telephone number. Letters selected for publication may be edited for length, content, and style.

**BELOW:** President Jonathan Veitch gets to know a gathering of freshmen in his office—an orientation tradition. **BOTTOM:** “We want Occidental to shape your identity, but at the same time, we want you to help shape Oxy,” Gonzalez told the first-year audience.



Photos by Marc Campos



# Opening Conversation

As Occidental launches its 124th academic year, new dean and economist Jorge Gonzalez urges the Class of 2014 to diversify

“If you came to Oxy thinking someone will teach you all the answers, then you are naïve,” Jorge Gonzalez—Oxy’s new vice president of academic affairs and dean of the College—told 573 freshmen assembled in Thorne Hall for Opening Convocation on Sept. 1. “What you really need is the ability to learn how to learn, how to adapt, and that is exactly what a liberal arts education gives you,” he continued. “It will teach you how to read, write, and speak effectively. It will develop your critical and analytical skills . . . skills that will serve you well regardless of what kind of profession you enter.”

A distinguished economist and academic administrator, Gonzalez arrived at Oxy in August after serving on the faculty of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, for the last 21 years—a lifetime for most members of the Class of 2014. While a liberal arts education is the best possible preparation for a world of globalization, growing diversity, bewildering technological change, and political polarization, superb teaching is only part of the Occidental equation, Gonzalez told the freshmen.

“We place special attention on diversity and global issues, and we are located in one of the most dynamic urban centers of the world,” he said. “Los Angeles offers you the

world within five minutes of campus, an incredibly rich setting you need to take advantage of.” Along those lines, Gonzalez counseled every first-year to “make a friend from a very different background” by semester’s end. “One of the greatest skills you can develop is the ability to have deep conversations with people who are very different than you,” he said. “It takes talent to learn from people with different backgrounds.”

Of the Class of 2014, 44 percent call California home, while 53 percent hail from 31 other states and Washington, D.C. Three percent come from 26 countries internationally, and 42 percent are students of color. ▣



**ABOVE:** From left, freshmen Patricia McGown, John Lee, Alex Stein, and Conrad Preston pause with President Veitch at the corner of Tonawanda Avenue and York Boulevard as they bicycle from campus to the L.A. River. **BELOW:** Former housing activist Sandi “Mama” Romero cheers as Jensen Rohlfs ’14 makes a tamale while stopping at Mama’s Hot Tamales Café in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.



**ABOVE:** Members of the O-Team cheer as Kate Correll-Buss ’14 passes through their ranks in front of Rush Gym during orientation. **BELOW:** Incoming freshmen jump as they pose in front of Walt Disney Concert Hall, a stop on one of many OxyEngage trips to explore Los Angeles.

**ABOVE:** Omar Rodriguez ’14 chats with Juergen Pelzer, professor of German, Russian, and classical studies. **LEFT:** From left, Qiu Meng Fogarty, Matt Nostro, Patricia McGown, Robbie Lundegard, William Harrison, Dan O’Connor, and Alex Stein look for clues outside Grauman’s Chinese Theatre during the Amazing L.A. Race.



**LEFT:** Yee-haw! A member of the L.A. Wranglers country-and-western dance troupe leads a posse of freshmen (and a few party crashers) in a line dance outside Thorne Hall. **ABOVE:** Mark Ugai (father of John Ugai ’14 of Durango, Colo.) carries a load of his son’s belongings into Pauley Hall, while John’s roommate, David Pino ’14 of Sacramento, follows close behind.

Photos by Marc Campos



Jo-Ellen Darcy, Ken Salazar, Lisa Jackson, Nancy Sutley, and Harris Sherman listen to questions from the Thorne Hall crowd, including activist Joe Linton '85, below.

# Open Mike Session

America's Great Outdoors Initiative connects with Oxy community

**T**AKING ADVANTAGE OF THE chance to speak directly to high-ranking Obama administration officials on subjects from horses and urban river restoration to sportfishing and national parks, almost 800 activists, students, and community leaders from Southern California and beyond filled Thorne Hall on July 9 for the sixth in a series of listening sessions titled the America's Great Outdoors Initiative.

Over the summer, the initiative sponsored 22 gatherings nationwide to support community-

level efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect Americans to the outdoors. The listening group at Oxy included Ken Salazar, secretary of the Interior; Lisa Jackson, Environmental Protection Agency administrator; Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality; and officials from the Department of Agriculture and Army Corps of Engineers.

"People in Los Angeles are proud of their parks and open space," Sutley—former Los Angeles deputy mayor for energy and environment—said at the opening of the session. "There are many people in this city working hard to restore and protect them in new and innovative ways."

In his welcoming remarks, Occidental president Jonathan Veitch provided several examples of innovative approaches taken by

Oxy faculty and students, including the creation of "farm-to-school" and regional food hub programs, support of the effort to reclaim the Los Angeles River, and the promotion of automobile alternatives—symbolized by the 2005 ArroyoFest that temporarily turned the Pasadena Freeway into a space for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Reflecting the region's diversity, audience members at the main session and the eight breakout sessions that followed represented a wide range of organizations and interests. Audience comments made clear the challenges faced by federal, state, and local policymakers. While some attendees pressed for the preservation of additional urban open space and wilderness areas, off-highway vehicle advocates argued that off-road recreation areas are shrinking despite public demand and need federal protection.

Land-use policy conflicts also emerged, exemplified by the push to boost renewable energy by building large solar arrays in the Mojave Desert. "Our desert, an incredible treasure, should not become a parking lot for solar panels," one audience member said.

Still, some common themes did emerge, including the need for more resources for conservation efforts and for better inter-agency cooperation on the federal level, and the desire to get more young people outdoors and into state and national parks. As one participant put it, "Generation Y doesn't know the difference between Yosemite and Yellowstone." □

## Conceptual Change Study Shtulman Awarded NSF Career Development Grant

Assistant professor of psychology Andrew Shtulman has been awarded a prestigious National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development grant worth more than \$470,000 to conduct research over the next five years. Shtulman was selected for his proposal, "Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Conceptual Change," which detailed a series of 12 studies to be conducted over the grant period.

One of the studies will attempt to resolve competing ideas in the literature about whether complex scientific phenomenon, such as evolution by natural selection, cannot be taught until high school, or



whether these topics can be taught at earlier grades. Shtulman hypothesizes that since younger children may have fewer beliefs and experiences that might interfere with their

learning, it should be easier to bring about a change in knowledge and skills about a particular science concept at that age.

"It's research I've been wanting to do ever since I arrived at Oxy but have not had the time or finances to pursue at full speed," says Shtulman, a Princeton graduate who received his Ph.D from Harvard and joined the College faculty in 2007.

The award will allow him to spend two full years on research and fund three undergraduate summer research fellows each year for the next five summers. He also hopes to use the resources to develop a new course on conceptual change, his area of expertise, and to use that course as preparation for writing a trade book on the subject.

This year, the NSF awarded 425 Career grants to support junior faculty "who exemplify the role of teacher-scholars through outstanding research, excellent education, and the integration of education and research," according to the foundation. Shtulman becomes the second Oxy faculty member to receive a grant, joining chemistry professor Eileen Spain (a 1997 honoree).

## Magnetic Field Reversals

### New Research Challenges Commonly Held Beliefs

Geology professor Scott Bogue has found evidence of a brief episode of rapid geomagnetic field change thousands of times faster than usual—a discovery that may throw into question commonly held beliefs about Earth's geomagnetic field reversals, when the magnetic north pole flips to the south pole, and vice versa.

Ordinarily, geomagnetic field reversals happen every few hundred thousand years and take several thousand years to complete. Bogue and his research colleague, Jonathan Glen of the U.S. Geological Survey, used Occidental's super-conducting rock magnetometer to analyze the magnetization of a lava flow in Nevada's Sheep Creek Range that erupted 15 million years ago as the geomagnetic field was reversing polarity. They discovered that the lava contains two magnetic patterns acquired within about a year of each other as the lava cooled. The patterns differ in direction by 53 degrees, implying that the geomagnetic field was changing at a startling rate of about one degree per week. An abstract of the team's findings, which will appear in an upcoming issue of *Geophysical Research Letters*, has attracted significant

attention, with reports appearing in *New Scientist* and *Science News*, among other outlets.

Their research, funded by National Science Foundation grants, brings more credence to a similar instance of reversal—the only other example discovered so far—found at Oregon's Steens Mountain in 1995. The researchers for the earlier study analyzed lava flows 1.2 million years older than the rock at Sheep Creek Range and found evidence of an episode of a 6-degree per day change. That rate of directional change was so high that many in the earth sciences found it hard to accept.

While Earth's magnetic field serves as a navigational tool for pigeons, bees, and even some bacteria, humans cannot sense geomagnetic field reversal. Even an episode of rapid field change would be extremely hard to detect unless one used a compass at the exact location of rapid change at exactly the right time. Global-positioning devices rely on satellites rather than the magnetic field, so there is no direct connection, Bogue says.

Scientists don't know why the Earth's magnetic fields flip, he adds. Geomagnetic field polarity reversals somehow arise from the turbulent fluidity in the Earth's super-hot core, but nobody really knows the details. Like Earth, stars and many planets have magnetic fields. In the case of the Sun, the magnetic field reverses polarity every 11 years.

## Occidental in Brief

Four 2010 Occidental graduates have been awarded Fulbright scholarships to work and study abroad. Madolyn Hollowed (a biology major from Mercer Island, Wash.) has received a research grant to work in public health in Costa Rica. Debbie Kim (English and comparative literary studies; Cerritos) will use an English Teaching Assistantship to teach English and coordinate an arts program with children and adults in South Korea. Benjamin Uy (biochemistry; Los Angeles) was given a research grant to study neuroscience at University College in London. Luca Valle (biology; Spokane, Wash.) received an English Teaching Assistantship to teach English and work in an emergency medical clinic in Indonesia. All totaled, 51 Oxy students and alumni have won Fulbrights since 2003, making Occidental one of the country's most prolific producers of Fulbright scholars, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. ¶ A \$500,000 pledge from Occidental trustee Bill Kahane '70 and his wife, Elizabeth, will go toward a permanent endowment for the College's United Nations program, which observed its 25th anniversary with an afternoon symposium in New York City on Sept. 25. The Kahanes' gift will endow two scholarships for the program that this year has its biggest class ever—17 students spending a semester living in New York, taking classes and interning at U.N.-related organizations. More than 350 students have participated in the program since its creation in 1986.

Photo by Suzanne Tenner © 2009 Overture Films, LLC



The Occidental campus returned to the big screen this summer in the arthouse hit *The Kids Are All Right*, starring Annette Bening, Julianne Moore, and Mia Wasikowska. If you missed it in theaters, director Lisa Cholodenko's critically acclaimed film arrives on video Nov. 16.

## College Guide Rankings

### We're No. 36, or 9, or 20—Depending on Whom You Ask

Occidental has been named one of the country's best colleges in the latest editions of several major college guides, ranking No. 36 among the country's best liberal arts colleges (and third in diversity, behind Swarthmore and Wellesley) in the granddaddy of the genre, *U.S. News & World Report*. But the College also places high in some other key (and sometimes random) measures as various guides look to set their listings apart.

Occidental was again cited by *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges* as one of a handful of schools with the strongest undergraduate focus, adding: "Oxy provides diversity not only in the student body, but also in the breadth of academic options, the expansive extracurricular opportunities, and the great resources of Los Angeles that make the school unique."

*The Fiske Guide to Colleges* bestowed four-star academic and quality-of-life ratings on Oxy, and listed Occidental among "Small Colleges and Universities Strong in Film/Television," as well as "Drama" and "International Studies." *Princeton Review's The Best 373 Colleges* gave Oxy's financial aid office a score of 97 out of 100 (in addition to rating Oxy's food as among the best in the country, based on student feedback).

High school counselors polled by *U.S. News* ranked Occidental No. 20 among national liberal arts colleges, while a survey of counselors named Oxy to *Parade's* "College A-List." *Washington Monthly* ranked the College No. 17 for its service orientation—while, using a different tack, *Forbes* ranked Oxy No. 9 among "Colleges That Will Make You Rich."





Emma Kraft, Salem, Ore.



Aaron Spoto, Los Angeles



Kenneth Smiley, Long Beach



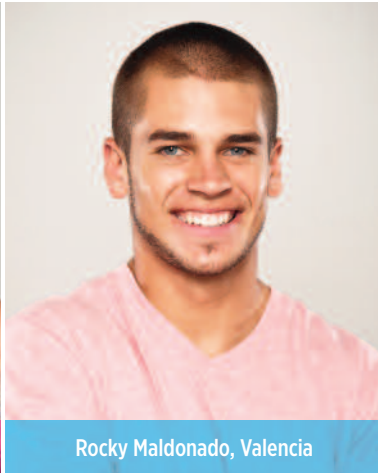
Nancy Nguyen, Des Moines



Gaby Marquez, Los Angeles



Cordelia Kenney, Rensselaerville, N.Y.



Rocky Maldonado, Valencia



Genesis Coronado, Los Angeles



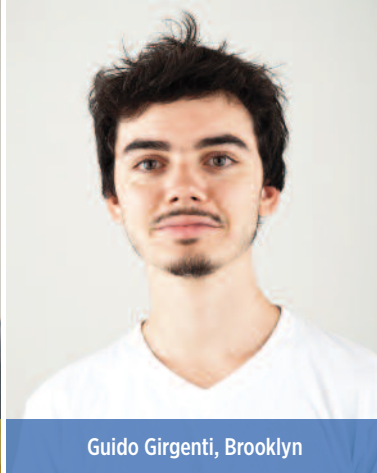
Anna Hartz, Roscoe, Ill.



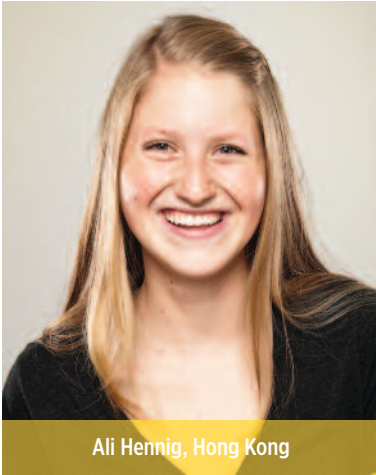
Jonathan Padron, Kapolei, Hawaii



Lily Strelch, Santa Barbara



Guido Girgenti, Brooklyn



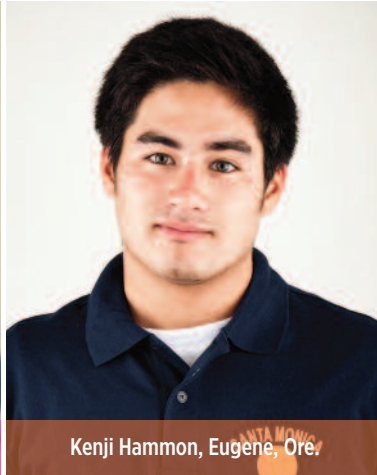
Ali Hennig, Hong Kong



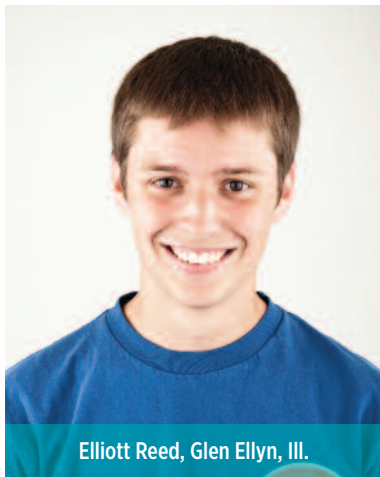
Cullen Parr, Chicago



Alyssa Mort, Tucson



Kenji Hammon, Eugene, Ore.



Elliott Reed, Glen Ellyn, Ill.



Hilary Brown, Seattle



Mike Kang, Rancho Palos Verdes

**Braun** is home to roommates Afrika and Lily; Cordelia and Nora; and Cullen and Kenneth. **Chilcott's** groupings include Ali, Emma, and Hilary; Griffin and Rocky; and Alyssa, Esther, and Nancy. **Pauley's** groupings include Anna, Gaby, and Genesis; Aaron, Guido, and Jonathan; and Elliott, Kenji, and Mike.

# Under One Roof

With their ideas, interests, and ambitions for the next four years in tow, the Class of 2014 descends on campus. Who's rooming with whom?



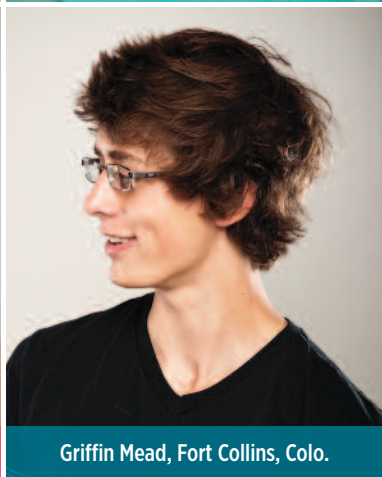
Afrika Bakenra, Cleveland



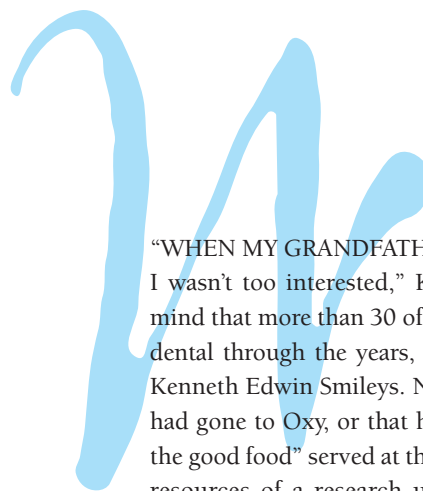
Esther Shears, Cameron Park



Nora Feichtmeir, Seattle



Griffin Mead, Fort Collins, Colo.



BY DICK ANDERSON  
PHOTOS BY MARC CAMPOS

“WHEN MY GRANDFATHER FIRST SHOWED ME OXY, I wasn't too interested,” Kenneth Smiley admits. Never mind that more than 30 of his kinfolk had attended Occidental through the years, including three generations of Kenneth Edwin Smileys. Never mind that Barack Obama had gone to Oxy, or that he'd even heard “rumors about the good food” served at the College. Kenneth wanted the resources of a research university—or so he thought. “From every UC or Cal State school, I heard of furlough days interrupting class time,” he says. “I heard how difficult it could be to get even one class that you wanted. I saw the lecture halls, the thousands upon thousands of faces.” Then Kenneth took a closer look at Oxy, where he found a highly ranked chemistry department and lecture halls a fraction of the size of those on other campuses. The more he looked around, Kenneth says, “I came to realize that Oxy could offer a great education, smaller class sizes, and warm weather at the same time. I chose Oxy because of the community.”



What awaits these freshmen beyond the walls of Braun?  
**BACK ROW, L-R:** **Nora Feichtmeir** would like to work for the government, “possibly as a district attorney.” **Cordelia Kenney** aspires to study tropical diseases “where they are happening” or to be an anthropologist. **Lily Strellich** has been learning German for several years, and “study abroad would be the perfect opportunity to put it to use.” **FRONT ROW, L-R:** **Kenneth Smiley** is pondering a major in the sciences or math. **Cullen Parr** is “loosely leaning” toward a theater major: “I hope to leave Oxy with a stronger sense of direction than I have now.” **Afrika Bakenra** knows what she wants—a career in acting and eventually her own TV show devoted to conserving the environment.

Among the 573 entering members of the Class of 2014, there is no one with more ancestral connections to Oxy than Kenneth; indeed, 19 percent of all freshmen are the first in their family to attend college.

A few quick facts: Ninety-three percent of Oxy freshmen ranked in the top quarter of their high school graduating class, 62 percent of them in the top 10 percent. Median combined SAT: 1940. Median ACT composite: 29. Number of people who like the Facebook fan page We Love Afrika Bakenra: 147.

In this age of social networking, gone are the days when your first impression of a college roommate was the one you got when you first set foot on campus. There are exceptions to this trend, of course: When contacted for this article on the eve of his arrival at Occidental, Griffin Reed was unaware that he was even in a triple. “Should’ve read that housing assignment e-mail more thoroughly,” he admits.

In our annual canvass of the incoming freshman class, *Occidental* talked to nine sets of roommates in three residence halls about their expectations for themselves, and of Oxy, for the next four years.

## Braun

“Residence hall life is a phenomenal thing,” observes **Nora Feichtmeir**. “I talk to my peers about physics as we play pool in the common room. My R.A. and I discuss feminism late at night in the hallway while I wait for a free washing machine. Learning happens in the most unexpected places.”

“Having gone to boarding school for all of high school, living in a dorm is not new to me,” says **Nora’s** roommate, **Cordelia Kenney**. “But living with this many people in this configuration is.” (It didn’t help matters any that plumbing issues in Braun necessitated leaving the building to take a shower during orientation—but hey, welcome to college.)

### Why did you choose Occidental?

**Afrika Bakenra**: Oxy had everything that I was looking for academically, socially, and locationally, but mainly I fell in love with it from first sight last October when I came to campus for the Multicultural Visit Program. I am perpetually astounded at how genuinely friendly and welcoming everyone is.

**Lily Strellich**: I wanted a small school on the West Coast that still offered a wide range of subjects to explore. The fact that Occidental is a liberal arts school, coupled with the positive atmosphere and sense of community that comes with its small size, made it the obvious choice for me.

**Cordelia**: There are a lot of ways I could answer that, but the simplest is that it is a unique experience to be an Occidental student. The Undergraduate Research Program, the Core Program, and Oxy’s location all provide for an interdisciplinary, interactive, and engaging learning environment. Being in Los Angeles will allow me to explore different cultures in ways I would not have been able to otherwise while I can still have the personal feel of a small liberal arts college.

**Nora**: I decided to come to Occidental because I believe the liberal arts provides a solid foundation for intellectual and personal growth, and because I believe small class sizes and the discussions they allow are important to the learning process.

**Cullen Parr**: I was looking to leave the Midwest both for warmer weather and to take full advantage of the chance to reinvent

myself, so I applied to five schools in the Southwest and one in the East. Looking over the programs each school offered, I concluded that all of them except Oxy were missing something I was looking for.

**What are your interests outside the classroom? Any extracurricular activities that you hope to pursue?**

**Afrika:** I would love to participate in Dance Production—the College’s most attended event—and Pulse, the Oxy hip-hop group. I am considering cheerleading as well.

**Lily:** I love writing and photography. I’ve been playing the piano since I was about 8 and doing martial arts nearly as long. I’m looking forward to pursuing those interests as well as discovering new ones. I’m curious about the many clubs here on campus—so far the Bad Movie Club and the Quidditch team both sound intriguing.

**Cullen:** I have a few miscellaneous hobbies, including piano, origami, and contact juggling—a type of ball manipulation that you’re likely to see me doing in the Quad or at Stewie Beach. As for formal extracurriculars, I expect to do a lot of construction and stage crew at Keck, because that was my most cherished activity in high school.

**What are your first impressions of your roommate? Of residence hall life?**

**Kenneth:** Cullen is a quiet guy with insane dreadlocks, a habit of contact juggling in the street, and an interest in theater. My first response was to scratch my head, wondering how the odd combination could come about. (He’s a great kid, of course.)

**Cullen:** The biggest adjustment for me has been getting used to sharing certain spaces with 10 or 20 people rather than three like at home, but overall I like residence hall life a lot. Kenneth, like me, is quiet, so I think we’ll get along.

**Afrika:** A few weeks before orientation, I was told who my roommate was so we added each other on Facebook and began talking about ourselves, our families, our expectations, and our rules. I was surprised by how sweet and similar she was.

**Lily:** By the time we finally moved in, Afrika and I already had a good idea of each other’s backgrounds and interests. And as drastic a transition as it is to go from living at home to living in a res hall, it honestly just feels a little like a summer camp—but a lot more comfortable.

## Pauley

Going away to college carried first-generation student Genesis Coronado a mere 15 minutes from home, but the Occidental experience has transported her to another dimension. “I feel like I’m in a completely different world,” says Genesis, “and that makes me love Oxy so much more!”

The oldest of eight children, she finds herself sharing a triple with fellow Angeleno Gaby Marquez and Anna Hartz of Roscoe, Ill. “My first impression of residence hall life was completely different to the one I had in mind,” Genesis admits. “I was extremely scared of how my roommates would be, but they couldn’t have been better.” The feeling seems to be mutual: “I really like Genesis and Anna,” Gaby says. Anna makes it unanimous—with one tiny caveat: “My roommates are fun, and so far don’t have too many strange habits,” she says, “though they did wake me up at 5:30 this morning because they needed to finish homework.”

**What do you intend to major in? What do you aspire to do professionally?**

**Guido Girgenti:** The breadth of urban and environmental policy, as well as its unmatched appetite for experiential learning in both local activism and field research, prepares students for a life of intellectual and public advocacy for more sustainable and just cities. After my graduation, I hope to find a job as a public school teacher or a



**Why did these Pauley residents opt for Oxy?**

“A small liberal arts college was exactly what I wanted, not to mention the beautiful campus,” says **Gaby Marquez**, above left. For **Genesis Coronado**, above right, “Coming from a high school of 4,600 students made me realize the importance of smaller classes and of a close-knit community.”

**BELOW, L-R: Kenji Hammon**—who will play water polo and swim for Oxy—“wanted a school that focused on education, but still had competitive sports teams.” Oxy’s diversity sold **Elliott Reed**: “I want to go to school and live with people who have had different life experiences, in order to help me try to understand my world better.” **Anna Hartz** liked the one-two punch of a location and a major (critical theory and social justice) “that completely suits what I want to study and to do with my life.” **Guido Girgenti** “wanted to work alongside a diverse group of professors and students who are using their education to empower those without access to the resources we have.” **Aaron Spoto** “wanted to take a wide variety of classes because I have a wide variety of interests, so Occidental was ideal in every way for me.” **Mike Kang** brings his passion for urban policy, as well as a nonprofit organization he created a couple of years ago. A key attraction for **Jonathan Padron** was “being in the very busy city of Los Angeles.”





Talent pool: Chilcott's newest residents wield a broad range of skills. L-R: **Griffin Mead** rowed this summer on a Fort Collins, Colo., crew team. **Rocky Maldonado** is suiting up as a linebacker for the Tigers. **Ali Hennig** placed in nationals four times as a rower while in boarding school in Canada. **Hilary Brown** works with guide dogs and hopes to join an L.A. puppy-raising group. **Emma Kraft** plans to continue her piano lessons. **Allyssa Mort** serves a mean volleyball. **Esther Shears** has a passion for painting. And **Nancy Nguyen** wants to join Oxy's Quidditch team: "I think my love of *Harry Potter* and Oxy will combine to give me a valuable experience."

community organizer, that will allow me to work in local areas in need of better food, better jobs, and better schools, while simultaneously pushing for more progressive public policy for our country.

**Elliott Reed:** Diplomacy and world affairs, because I have always had an intense interest in the world and in current events. Some of my earliest memories are watching "The NBC Nightly News With Tom Brokaw." I am not positive, but after Oxy, I think I would like to work for the State Department or another government agency.

**Kenji Hammon:** I plan to major in economics. I want to eventually get my MBA and someday own my own business.

**Anna:** Critical theory and social justice, with a minor in linguistics and possibly religious studies as well. I want to work for a nonprofit organization internationally, or go into mission work.

**Gaby:** As of now, I am uncertain of my major. I am exploring different paths my life could take. That is one of the great things about Oxy: You can explore various aspects of higher learning, and yourself as well.

**What are your interests outside the classroom? Any extracurricular activities that you hope to pursue?**

**Guido:** Male a capella groups have always enticed me, simply because I love

musical theater and harmonizing with a group. Aside from singing, I would love to work on the campus garden and join the Rebirth Club, a student group committed to revitalizing neighborhoods in New Orleans.

**Mike Kang:** More than four years ago, I created a youth activism campaign called Generation Against Global Injustice (GAGI), which is dedicated to getting teens/young adults in the fight against extreme poverty. Currently, GAGI is going through an organizational overhaul. We are going to change the name of the organization, create new projects, and be involved in more major projects through global partnerships.

**What are your first impressions of your roommates? Of residence hall life?**

**Aaron Spoto:** I am extremely glad to have very unconventional roommates from such diverse backgrounds. I have never been so exposed to such worldly students who are intellectually capable as well as extremely active and passionate about social issues.

**Guido:** We've got a track star, an artist, and an activist all under one roof, and so far it's been very pleasant. Dorm life is very social, and I've met a lot of new people. My roommates and I like to keep our door open so anyone passing by feels free to stop in.

**Jonathan Padron:** Right off the bat Aaron, Guido, and I figured out how to

arrange the room and got to know each other as we figured out the arrangement. Pauley seemed small at first, but over time this became an advantage to me. Now I know pretty much everyone on my hall, and we aren't complete strangers.

**Mike:** My first impression of my roommates was that they were pretty cool and social. As simple as that may seem, that was actually all I wanted them to be.

**Kenji:** We are in a forced triple, so the room is tight, but I am OK with it because I get along with both of them fine. Residence hall life is fun and loud. There are so many interesting people to talk to, which makes things hard, especially when my first water polo practice of the day is at 6 a.m.

**What do you hope to accomplish over the next four years?**

**Guido:** I hope to grow, intellectually and personally, so that I can be prepared to tackle the social injustices and environmental hazards facing neighborhoods across the country.

**Mike:** I want to be personally engaged with the city of Los Angeles and really be involved in the projects to make it a better place. Of course, I want to also receive good grades so that I can move on to graduate school and then beyond.

**Anna:** Academic accomplishments aside, I'd really like to learn how to surf.



**Emma Kraft:** I wanted to go to a small school to have a better relationship with my professors and be a part of smaller classes. Oxy is one of the few private liberal arts schools to be in an urban community, so I liked that it was near a large city, but centered in a suburb. The campus is gorgeous, and I had a great feeling when I visited.

**Griffin Mead:** My decision to attend Oxy stemmed from reading and hearing good things about its liberal arts program and overall “college-ness,” as well as being the best school to which I was admitted.

**Esther Shears:** What separated Oxy from all the other small liberal arts colleges that I looked at was its stellar reputation for undergraduate research opportunities, its study abroad program, and its clear commitment to cultural studies.

**Nancy Nguyen:** I have lived in a quiet Midwestern city for all of my life. In my college experience, I sought a school that would challenge my way of thinking, as well as foster an intimate and intensive learning environment. In Occidental, I saw all of these qualities, as well as an inspiring campus and weather that didn’t threaten to freeze off any body parts.

**What do you intend to major in? What do you aspire to do professionally?**

**Hilary Brown:** Right now I am interested in diplomacy and world affairs and am thinking about premed. Last year I worked in a women’s health center in Senegal and loved it. I am not exactly sure what I would like to do for a career, but it would be extremely exciting and rewarding to return to Senegal and work in public health.

**Emma:** I intend to major in psychology to become a child grief counselor and work either in the inner city or at an elementary school. I also want to minor in Spanish.

**Alyssa Mort:** I am not sure, but I do know that I want to become an elementary school teacher, so I will minor in education.

**Esther:** While I am not certain where my education will lead me, I would love a

career where I could live abroad and be involved in humanitarian efforts, perhaps working with the United Nations or with Doctors Without Borders.

**Griffin:** I plan to major in chemistry and work for a pharmaceutical design company. That, or major in political science and work as a foreign policy analyst.

**What are your first impressions of your roommate? Of residence hall life?**

**Ali:** Facebook allowed us roommates to contact each other weeks before school started, making it easier to find out what type of people we were, and to find things we had in common. So far, we have gotten along great, and I know we will continue to do so.

**Esther:** Alyssa and Nancy are so great! It’s interesting, because we all seem very compatible, yet we are all so different. The rooms in Chilcott seem to be bigger than the rooms in most other residence halls, so I don’t feel that our room is too crowded.



**Hilary Brown** sounds like a walking ad for Occidental. “I wanted to attend a small school where I would be able to get to know my professors and classmates,” she says. “I also wanted to be at least a thousand miles from home and surrounded by people from diverse backgrounds. But ultimately what solidified my decision to come to Oxy was how kind and welcoming the students were during my visit. A freshman girl approached me, invited me to see her dorm, and gave me her e-mail and phone number so I could ask any questions I might have later on. And she promised that she was not being paid by the admission office.”

**Nancy:** Residence hall life is a lot less intimidating than I previously assumed. My roommates are incredibly nice, and we all seem to function as a room efficiently. It’s different sharing a room, but the feeling of knowing my experience is shared helps with the transition to college life.

**Anything else you’d like to add?**

**Nancy:** The community dynamic at Oxy is amazing. It’s engaging and gives me something new every day.

**Rocky:** Go Oxy! 🍷

# Chilcott

**Rocky Maldonado** is a man of few words. “I wanted to come to Occidental for the excellent academics and athletics,” explains the Chilcott resident, who plans to major in kinesiology and aspires to be an orthopedic surgeon one day. “I hope to have an amazing experience at Oxy that will aid me in becoming the person I one day hope to be.”

But there’s much more to Rocky’s story. Since losing his mother, Ann, to breast cancer eight years ago, he has worn a T-shirt with her picture underneath his football jersey for every game he has played. (“Every time I put on that shirt, I know she’s there on the field with me,” Rocky told *Santa Clara Valley Signal* sports editor Cary Osborne last year.) His favorite quote? “It’s not about whether you get knocked down, it’s about if you get up.”

**Why did you choose Occidental?**

**Ali Hennig:** Occidental was the first college I visited, and the one I fell most in love with. I could have saved a lot of traveling money for my parents in the quest of visiting other schools, but because the overwhelming feeling of excitement felt so surreal, I just wanted to make sure that this amazing feeling was something I only felt for Oxy.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a black polo shirt and khaki pants, is sitting on a ledge of a classical building. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The building behind him has ornate architectural details, including a dome and arched windows. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, and the sky is clear blue.

# OVER THERE

BY SAMANTHA B. BONAR '90 | PHOTO BY DENNIS DRENNER

"They never talk about the politics of it," Villard (shown at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C.) says of the soldiers he was stationed with in Afghanistan. "They're just there to do a job."



AFGHANISTAN PHOTOS COURTESY ERIK VILLARD '90

After documenting the Vietnam War for the Army for nearly 10 years, military historian **Erik Villard '90** was embedded for three weeks last spring with a U.S. Stryker brigade in Afghanistan—and experiencing the soldiers' daily routines brought that conflict closer to home

**W**HEN HE WAS STUDYING to become a military historian, Erik Villard '90 expected he would one day find himself sifting through dusty archives. He did not anticipate rolling through the dusty streets of Kandahar with a U.S. Stryker brigade. But part of being a military historian in wartime is being a witness to history. And Villard is one of the government historians tasked with writing the official Army history of the war in Afghanistan.

"It's a very complicated emotion," he says. "At the same time that you're nervous about being blown up, there's also a feeling of tremendous power. You're in a 30-ton armored vehicle bristling with weapons, wearing body armor and cool sunglasses, rolling through a country barely out of the Middle Ages—and people are looking at you like you're from Mars. There's something

intoxicating about that. You simultaneously feel invincible and incredibly vulnerable."

A Vietnam War specialist, Villard has spent much of the last decade at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, based at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C., reviewing documents (some of which have just been declassified after 40 years) and taking oral histories from veterans. His book on the Tet Offensive, due in 2012, will become part of the Army's official history of the war.

When a fellow historian who was working on a book about the war in Afghanistan left for another job, the Center sought someone to take over the project, which included going to Afghanistan to observe and take oral histories from the 5th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Division (the first such armored vehicle unit dispatched to Afghanistan, in summer 2009). Villard, a civilian, jumped at the chance to see military history in the making.



**TOP:** The view from the back of COP Rath, the outpost for B Company, 2-1 Infantry, in Pir Zadeh. The fort dates back at least to the mid-19th century and was used by British forces during the Second Afghan War. The British Army suffered one of its worst defeats of the century about two kilometers up the river. **ABOVE:** Villard gets ready for a Stryker mission. "You can see some of my body armor as well as the Mobile Gun System version of the Stryker in the background," he notes.



**RIGHT:** Villard and his Stryker convoy prepare to return from Forward Operating Base Ramrod back to Kandahar Airfield via Highway 1—regarded as the most dangerous stretch of road in the world today due to IEDs. **BELOW:** Soldiers load gear into the rear of a Stryker vehicle at 2-1 outpost in Maiwand District. “When you get into a Stryker, it’s noisy,” Villard says. “You put on headphones with speakers so you’re all on the same intercom. As soon as the wheels start rolling, it becomes stand-up comedy hour, with the guys cracking jokes the entire time. A huge part of it is they’re taking their minds off the fact that they might get blown up at any minute.”



“The objective was to visit the brigade in action to get a sense of the sights, smells, and sounds, but also to interview the senior commanders, to collect documents for the monograph that would come out and also to establish a personal relationship with the leaders of the 5-2,” says Villard, who trained for the mission at Fort Benning, Ga.

Villard had planned—and promised his wife, Eve—to stay at Kandahar Airfield, the largest base in southern Afghanistan. But as soon as he arrived there in March, “I realized that was only a small part of the story,” he says. “It’s a city unto itself. You’ll see how the brigade staff works, but you won’t learn anything about what’s going on in the field. I knew I needed to go out to a forward operating base. I only had three weeks, so I was going to make the most of it.”

The brigade is spread over 600 miles, partitioned into several battalions. Villard first visited the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry, in the Arghandab Valley. The group had recently lost 22 soldiers to improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. “That experience was really seared into the consciousness of everyone. It was pretty powerful stuff to talk to the

guys who went through it,” Villard says. He traveled north with a Stryker convoy, visited a medical clinic the Army had recently built, and attended a graduation ceremony for Afghan police officers. After a week at Forward Operating Base Frontenac, Villard visited the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry at FOB Ramrod in Maiwand District, where there “is a lot of Taliban activity,” he says. Villard listened as soldiers vented their frustrations.

“The comment I heard most often from soldiers was that everyone was frustrated by the rules of engagement put in place by [Gen. Stanley] McChrystal,” he recalls. “They were very restrictive rules of engagement—the conditions you must meet to arrest or shoot at someone. ... The Taliban has to be literally shooting at you before you can do anything. You can’t go into a house after sundown—that’s just a rule. You can’t go into a house if there are women there. You can’t fire if there is a mosque nearby. Very often the American soldiers would get guys and know that they were bad guys, but for one of those reasons couldn’t haul them in or pull the trigger and would have to let them go.”

Frustration notwithstanding, Villard was impressed with the “extraordinary care the Americans take in applying force. They will agonize and go through layers of command and take every necessary precaution to make sure no civilians are hurt, no crops are damaged, no buildings are demolished—and a lot of times that means the bad guys get away. Despite the fact that there are civilian casualties in this war, I can attest to the

fact that our armed forces go to extraordinary lengths to minimize those losses.”

A third-generation Oxy student, Villard graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a double major in history and English and comparative literary studies. “I thought the two majors complemented each other—the epic sweep of history is in novels, too,” says Villard, who spent nine weeks as a junior in Australia on a Richter Scholarship interviewing Vietnam War veterans for his honors paper. After Occidental, he moved to Seattle for graduate school, completing his master’s and Ph.D in history at the University of Washington.

Villard traces his interest in military history to playing with toy soldiers as a child. “I was intrigued on the level of it being a game: Why does one side win and not the other? There was an intellectual challenge to it,” he explains. “As I grew older I began to appreciate the more human and tragic aspects of military conflict—it affects so many people in our world and it has such far-reaching consequences. It’s filled with drama and emotion. It’s gripping and epic by its very nature.”

As one of about 20 full-time historians at the Center, Villard also responds to queries from the Pentagon and other government agencies and officials. After the Abu Ghraib scandal in 2004, for instance, he spent a year researching U.S. treatment of POWs going back to the Civil War for the Pentagon. “It gives them context,” he says. After the 9/11 attacks, he recorded oral histories from the 3rd Infantry soldiers who dug through the wreckage of the Pentagon building.

**BELOW:** A pair of Afghan National Army soldiers man the tower. “Every Afghan soldier I met loved having his picture taken,” Villard says. **RIGHT:** Villard poses with graduates of the first Afghan National Police class of Shah-Wali-Kot district. **BOTTOM:** A soldier tends to a 155-mm howitzer at FOB Frontenac.



**BELOW:** While Army regulations strictly forbid soldiers from keeping mascots, “Naturally, every forward operating base and company outpost has at least one dog,” Villard says, “and usually two or three.”



“We are not instructed or expected to toe the company line,” Villard says of the Center’s work. “We are given the freedom that would be afforded to a university academic. We have the discretion to write objective history and let the chips fall where they may. The Army is only interested in one question: How can we fight our wars more effectively? They want to analyze their performance and make adjustments. It’s not helpful if we candy-coat it. Not everything goes as planned. The failures or the problems are at least as illuminating as the successes.”

When Villard arrived in Afghanistan, he had to break through some preconceived notions from the soldiers, who had grown wary of visiting journalists. “I told them, ‘I’m an Army historian, and I’m here to tell your story. I’m on your side; I’m not here to embarrass anybody. I’m here to record your sacrifices for posterity.’ After I said that, I got no resistance. I got tremendous cooperation, complete access. Believe me, your stock goes way up when you get on that Stryker vehicle.”

Despite his career path, Villard says he never had any thought of joining the military: “I’m not pro-war or anything of the sort. From an intellectual and emotional point of view, it’s a fascinating subject.” Whatever one’s feelings are about U.S. military policy, he adds, “you won’t find more dedicated people than those in our armed forces. It’s rare to be in a community of people who are so dedicated and selfless in their mission. Whenever I talk to a Vietnam veteran, they’re so grateful that someone wants to hear what they did. These people give up so much, for relatively little money, and they do it again and again. It’s hard to not want to support them.”

Being in a combat zone, Villard soon realized that “all the sort of mundane headaches and frustrations of daily life just vanish. Everything has an intensity that you just don’t find in the civilian world.” In immersing himself in the soldiers’ lifestyle, “It was important to me to do everything they did, to get no VIP treatment, no special favors. I slept on the ground, on benches. Whatever they did, I did.

There was no way that I was going to hang back on the sidelines.”

In addition to the video, photos, and mementos (including Afghan scarves and jewelry), Villard brought home an unintended souvenir from Afghanistan—“a little nick on my forearm that I got from a fragment while I was watching soldiers throw grenades at the practice range,” he says. “Imagine my surprise. We all laughed about it later.”

As a historian, Villard views himself as “the link between the soldiers and the veterans and the civilians. I feel like I’m bridging that divide and having one talk to the other.” The core mission of the Center of Military History is to tell the story of the Army to the American people (“We deliberately write for a general audience”), and Villard’s Afghan book should surface by 2014. “The intel stuff will remain classified,” adds Villard, who hopes to return to the region soon. “I expect to be working on Afghanistan for the rest of my career. Even if we leave tomorrow, there will be a lifetime of work to be done.”



Philosophy  
of Music

By **Dick Anderson**  
Photos by **Max S. Gerber**

"I've always been a fan of Brian Eno's photo shoots in his house," says Gonzalez, who was photographed at her home in Lincoln Heights. "He has a bunch of stuff everywhere." **Opposite page:** Cover art for Nite Jewel's new EP *Am I Real?* and her 2009 debut LP, *Good Evening*.

Ramona Gonzalez '09 started a MySpace music page in January 2008—and before you could say “Nietzsche” three times fast, one of her songs was selected for a Ben Stiller movie. Now the artist known as Nite Jewel has an LP and EP to go with her Oxy A.B.



FROM A GENEALOGICAL standpoint, Ramona Gonzalez '09 has fulfilled the musical promise portended by her Great-Aunt Florence, a teenage prodigy in classical piano who “skyrocketed to fame” in local competitions en route to Juilliard. For generations since, “Everybody in the family—every kid, cousin, whoever—has had music lessons, and I was the only one who actually had a sincere interest in doing it and not just because my parents told me to,” Gonzalez says. “From a very young age I wanted to take piano and voice lessons.”

Great-Aunt Florence should be proud. Less than three years after laying down her first solo recordings on an eight-track cassette recorder in her living room at home, Gonzalez has gained a foothold in the independent music scene. As the core member of Nite Jewel, whose self-described “transcendent minimalist dance-pop” defies easy categorization, she has released an LP (*Good Evening*), an EP (*Am I Real?*), and a 12-inch single (“Want You Back”) to critical hosannas among the cognoscenti of the online and terrestrial music community.

Gonzalez was one of five women profiled as “Queens of L.A.’s lo-fi scene” by the *Los Angeles Times* back in February—an “unfortunate title,” she later blogged, but a sign of her arrival after years of kicking around the fringes of the club circuit.

Dance venues, rock joints, art galleries, hipster locales, even big outdoor stages—“It works in all these different contexts,” Gonzalez, 26, says soon after her return from

a two-week tour of the Northeast to promote *Am I Real?*, which was released digitally in July and on CD in August. Nite Jewel appeals to many disparate types of bands, she adds, “so we find ourselves appearing with Autotune karaoke; people playing punk; cute girl groups; dorky, nerdy, record-collector noise acts; strictly dance DJs—it just depends. And it has everything to do with my lack of discriminating against all kinds of music styles.”

Gonzalez enrolled at Oxy as a junior transfer in fall 2007, two years after leaving Barnard College, the women’s school at Columbia University. “I took a couple of fiction writing classes and was really interested in becoming a writer,” says Gonzalez, who also practiced writing poetry and worked in publishing for a year between her freshman and sophomore years.

“I wanted to go to an Ivy League school, for aesthetic reasons mainly,” says the Oakland native, who grew up in Berkeley. “The ivy on the buildings really didn’t impress me after a year of being unimpressed by the teaching. I loved New York, so I tried to stick it out, but the city itself is a bit of a torture to live in.”

On the plus side, Gonzalez met fellow Bay Area native Cole M. Greif-Neill, who was a student at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. The couple played in a band called the Whales, recorded an EP, and got married in January 2006. “We would both complain about the education and the expense, and then we decided that we were just going to leave.” So they relocated to Oakland for a year, where they played in a

succession of bands while contemplating their next move. “We decided that L.A. was the best option because of the number of colleges and universities in the area, and the music scene was really blossoming for us.”

About two months after Gonzalez enrolled at Occidental, the couple moved from Echo Park to Lincoln Heights. “I remember writing some papers when I got there—papers that resembled the quality of the papers I was writing at Columbia, I thought—and getting much lower grades than I got at Columbia,” she says. “And I thought to myself, ‘Geez, I’ll have to work a lot harder and pay much closer attention.’ And I improved quickly.”

“The thing about Oxy that was so refreshing was that not only were professors saying things that were blowing my mind and changing the way that I looked at the world, but they were completely unpretentious,” Gonzalez adds. “They reminded me of my experience going to Berkeley High.”

Gonzalez was a 16-year-old student at Berkeley High School when she fell in love with her first German philosopher. “My teacher, Doug Powers, taught these very strange philosophy classes masquerading as psychology and economics courses. When I was in his classroom, I would just spout off about different things I would believe in without having really read anything.”

That all changed when Powers suggested she read *On the Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). “It was like reading my thoughts,” Gonzalez recalls. “And it was truly fascinating to read your



Nite Jewel in concert at the Beach @Governors Island in New York Harbor on Aug. 14.



Photos by Chris La Putt

thoughts at that age. To me that was just crazy—I mean, how had these people been thinking this already? When you're a teenager, you imagine that you're the only person on Earth who's ever thought this."

When it came time to write her thesis for senior comps at Oxy, titled *The Ontology of Mass Art*, Gonzalez enlisted "all the help" from faculty outside the psychology department, including Carolyn Brighthouse (cognitive science), Dan Fineman (English and comparative literary studies), Bruno Louchouart (music), Amy Lyford (art history and visual arts), in addition to Saul Traiger (cognitive science). "This cross-disciplinary help was the only way it became successful," she says. "If there is a lack of bureaucracy and ego among professors, you can ask everyone to help you to bring your ideas together."

Between her studies and her musical pursuits—to say nothing of married life—Gonzalez had very little time for socializing when she got to Oxy ("which was fine," she says, "because I'd spent a year in L.A. just socializing"). "I worked one day a week in Silver Lake, and most of that time was spent reading. The rest of the time I spent studying and recording these little songs to my eight-track in my spare time."

While Gonzalez and Greif-Neill have played together in different bands over the years, Nite Jewel was conceived as her project. "When we got this eight-track recorder and Cole taught me how to use it, we decided to set it up in the main room," she recalls.

"Cole said to me, 'Are you sure we should set this up here? Is this going to distract you from school?' And I was like, 'No! This is going to be fine!'" During her first year at Oxy, "There was an OK balance," she says. By spring semester of her senior year, "it was complicated, to say the least."

In January 2008, "in moments of ecstasy, emotion, and hardship," Gonzalez began recording the songs for what would become her debut LP. She also started a MySpace page in the wake of the "insane phenomenon" of labels signing acts on the strength of their profile views: "You didn't necessarily have to play any shows or put out any music," she says. And while Nite Jewel didn't follow in the "Bubbly"-toed footsteps of Colbie Caillat, she played some shows that summer in Manhattan "courtesy of a MySpace dude who bought me a plane ticket to come to New York. Little did I know that he was an 18-year-old kid living with his dad"—or that he was using his dad's Visa to pay for the flight.

In addition to performing at some small venues, Gonzalez took her homemade CD-Rs ("with cover art that Cole had made on my computer") to a store in Manhattan's NoHo district that sold an eclectic mix of music on consignment. "I just thought it was this record shop that I could make \$10 a piece selling some CDs at," she recalls.

What she didn't realize was that Other Music was highly influential in the indie-music community—and critic Scott Mou left no adjective unturned in raving about Nite

Jewel's *My CD* in the store's weekly online newsletter. "Be the first on your block to woo the crowd with these utterly charming, narcotic, bedroom-disco jams," he wrote. "There's just something in the lazy, hazy, listless atmosphere of Nite Jewel that puts you in [an] '80s prom-dream, dance-in-the-living room, evening-cuddle vibe."

That review prompted a meeting with a Universal Motown executive who wound up leaving the label but became Nite Jewel's manager. It also caught the eye of director Noah Baumbach (*The Squid and the Whale*), who was looking for songs for his next film, *Greenberg*, a coming-of-middle-age comedy starring Ben Stiller in arthouse mode.

In addition to her song "Suburbia" (from *Good Evening*, which was released on vinyl in December 2008 and on CD three months later) being picked for the film and its accompanying soundtrack, Gonzalez landed a small speaking role (billed as Anita in the credits) in *Greenberg*'s party scene. "I have two lines: 'Paige has a site, but it's more art than porn.' And then I say, 'Nothing.'"

Filming of *Greenberg* took place during Gonzalez's second semester at Oxy. "We worked from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., and then I would go to school the next day," she recalls. "But after I missed *Metalogic* because of shooting one day, Carolyn Brighthouse was so sad that I never missed it ever again. Can't afford to miss *Metalogic*, man."

The *Greenberg* effect on Nite Jewel's career was fleeting, but discernible. After the

film opened last March (grossing a modest \$4.2 million in theaters), Gonzalez saw a spike in *Good Evening's* sales. "The exposure for the new EP may have been slightly greater because of it," she adds. "I don't think Noah Baumbach realizes it, but he provided my living expenses for three or four months."

Following the initial release of *Good Evening* during Gonzalez's final semester at Oxy, she started to miss a lot of classes. "I started touring more, going to South by Southwest and places like that, but luckily the professors were so incredibly supportive," she says. "I was taking five classes, which was crazy, and I finished all my finals two weeks early, which was insane. I was stretching every part of my mind possible: visual art, music, philosophy—every skill was being enlisted. But I felt that my last semester was really successful."

Since graduating from Oxy, Gonzalez has continued to work at her old job as a part-time receptionist between gigs, but that may be coming to an end soon. "Cole just got a pretty good job working for Beck, doing engineering and things like that," so the couple may be moving to the west side. In the meantime, Gonzalez and Greif-Neill (who officially joined the band last February) have been recording in a studio in Berkeley for the next Nite Jewel project, which she hopes to release in the spring.

In approaching the Berkeley sessions, "Cole and I initially wanted to do an entirely instrumental record, but we kept going back, and the songs kept building slowly over time," Gonzalez says. "We would go in the room and improvise and piece out things and send certain things through processors and just make music in a very organic fashion," like famed British musician/producer Brian Eno did with his 1975 album *Another Green World*.

"I can always get a sense when I'm done with a song," she adds. "For *Am I Real?*, some of the songs were made when I was touring a lot. I would start with the initial phase and then come back to it, but for the most part I try to work as quickly as possible in making songs because you don't stop and analyze as

**A record collector friend started calling Gonzalez "Night Jewel" after an '80s synth prog song by the group Nimbus Obi, whose members are still kicking around as a hard-rock bar band in San Diego: "I don't think they would be into what I'm doing now."**

much that way. I try not to overdub a lot and keep it to a bare minimum in places—it lets the song breathe a little more. I'm not really a perfectionist; I let things happen."

In the early days of Nite Jewel, Gonzalez was rehearsing a 30-minute set at home to an audience of one—her cat, K.Z., who sat on a chair near the amplifier. Three-quarters of the way through, "K.Z. found it boring, and she left," Gonzalez says with a laugh. "That was my sign that I needed to shorten the set."

Gonzalez only recently started inviting people to shows, she says, "because now I am proud of what I'm doing. In the beginning I was singing along to backing tracks doing karaoke." Nite Jewel has since grown into a five-person touring unit, including Gonzalez, Greif-Neill (keyboards and guitar), Corey Lee (bass), Gavin Salmon (drums), and Julia Holter (vocals). "We are trying to be much more diligent about booking things in advance, especially for this next tour. We've been doing it super last minute, and that's annoying and expensive."

Looking ahead, Gonzalez plans to return to academia and her study of philosophy. "I really gained a lot of confidence going

back to Occidental after being out of school for more than two years. I thought I might have lost something, but, in fact, I gained a lot." Among the options she's considering are a one-year master's program emphasizing interdisciplinary research at the University of Chicago, or applying for a Fulbright through Occidental to study abroad for a year.

While Gonzalez had an interest in studying in Germany a while back, she has since moved on philosophically. "Now I'm getting interested in this guy, Giorgio Diaz de Santillana," an Italian-American science philosopher and historian who died in 1974.

"I see the world through a lens that I don't think can be wrapped into a pretty package," says Gonzalez. But she never embraced the French philosophers, "who lead such leisurely lives that they can beat about the bush for 250 pages. I need answers. Right now I'm more interested in people who are more connected to a spiritual side of philosophy, and that happens to be a little more positive outlook. That's what working for me at the moment.

"But for a long time the Germans were great," she adds. "They were fantastic." ▣





# RETURN ON INVESTMENT

BY DICK ANDERSON ▾ PHOTOS BY JIM BLOCK

As a spouse, parent, and longtime trustee, **John Farmer** has eyed Occidental from a variety of perspectives. Oxy's new board chair addresses the prospects of mounting the largest capital campaign in College history

**T**HE FIRST TIME JOHN FARMER set foot on Occidental soil was in the fall of 1994, more than 20 years after marrying Tawnie Buchanan '64—and on the heels of their youngest daughter, Heddy, laying eyes on Oxy during a visit to campus as a high school junior. Traveling from London in April and landing in Los Angeles, “Heddy said to her mother, ‘It’s so green—is this Astroturf?’” recalls Farmer, who was himself “blown away” by the beauty of the College.

Soon after Heddy enrolled at Oxy (she graduated in 1998 and works with children with specific learning disabilities as a teacher in San Francisco), Farmer got to know then-President John Slaughter, who invited him to join the Board of Trustees in April 1995. At the time, Farmer was chairman of the board of the American School in London, where his four children had gone. “I thought it would be interesting to see how higher education operates vis-a-vis a secondary day school,” says Farmer, who chaired the American School board from 1993 to 2004.

Fifteen years later, you’d be hard-pressed to find a more persuasive cheerleader for the College than Farmer. In spring 2009, he lent his face—and distinctive voice—to a video

appeal soliciting support for the Annual Fund. That came in the wake of his chairing the presidential search committee that led to the appointment of Jonathan Veitch. Now, the Johnson City, Tenn., native—who was named chair of the Board of Trustees last October—will be instrumental in ushering the College through the largest campaign in its history.

“Alumni cherish the time that they spent at Occidental, developing enduring friendships and an intellectual curiosity that lasts a lifetime,” Farmer says during a visit to campus for Convocation on Sept. 1. “While I don’t have the institutional memory or the personal fondness of an alum, I have come to develop a real appreciation and understanding of the College.”

“John has an almost unique perspective on this place,” says Dennis Collins, Farmer’s predecessor as board chair and Oxy’s senior vice president for institutional advancement and external relations. “He has this great line, ‘Noses in, fingers out,’ and that philosophy guides his leadership.” In steering the presidential search last year, Collins adds, “John had the total confidence of the trustees.”

A senior director of Goldman Sachs since 1999, Farmer joined the company in 1974 as vice president of the fixed income

division, serving both the Boston and San Francisco regional offices. He was named a general partner in 1984, then moved to London in 1988 as co-head of European fixed income, a post he held until 1992, when he became co-head of European operations, technology, and finance.

Concurrent with his service at Oxy and the American School, Farmer also chaired the largest capital campaign in the history of his alma mater, Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va., between 1998 and 2003. This experience will be helpful in shaping Occidental’s own fundraising. The College has quietly raised more than \$120 million since whisperings of a capital campaign began in July 2004. The public phase is scheduled to commence in 2012, coinciding with Oxy’s 125th anniversary. “It’s going to take a shared commitment for our constituencies to understand that Occidental needs their philanthropy to continue to execute its mission in the way it has,” he says.

Farmer’s willingness to succeed Collins as board chair was predicated in large part on the ability to work closely with the person who now serves as Occidental’s 15th president. When the College began its presidential search July 2008, Collins turned to





“Occidental College is very special, and I take it as an honor and privilege to serve,” says Farmer (with his wife, Tawnie, at their home in Tiburon).

surrounding neighborhood to make it more vibrant and attractive; and creating a culture for long-term planning and decision-making (page 56).

The next step, he says, is communicating the vision for Occidental in a way that alumni, parents, and friends “can fully understand the unique and compelling qualities of the Oxy experience. The Board of Trustees completed an exercise at our recent retreat in which we identified the values and qualities that we believe undergird Occidental. We will be holding similar conversations with the College’s

Farmer to oversee the process. Rather than handing it off to a commercial search firm, as had been done in previous searches, “We first decided that we would do the search ourselves,” Farmer explains. “We went through a process of asking all of the constituencies—alumni, students, faculty, and administrative staff—what personal characteristics and professional traits they would most like to see in a new president. Two themes emerged from that exercise: People wanted a leader and a fundraiser.”

Veitch was the trustees’ unanimous choice. “He’s a scholar and an educational leader, and he shoulders responsibility in a very thoughtful matter,” Farmer says of the Southern California native. After little more than a year at Oxy, Veitch has “demonstrated the facility for juggling a number of complex issues at the same time. He also has a keen sense of identifying and prioritizing important issues for the College.”

Among the initiatives under way, which will be priorities in the capital campaign, are turning the library into the intellectual center of campus; the renovation and expansion of Swan Hall, which houses more than one-third of all faculty; devoting resources to the

other stakeholders to ensure that the story we tell about this very special institution accurately describes its essence.”

From his perspective, “Oxy absolutely lives its mission of excellence and equity. A high-performing 21st-century college must be committed to both.” Farmer points to the 25th-anniversary celebration of Occidental’s

**“If an alumnus or alumna had a good experience at Occidental,” Farmer says, “then they should want to share that experience with kids at Oxy today.”**

United Nations program in New York City on Sept. 25, where he found a common thread in talking with former participants. “These alumni have grown into professionals and community leaders,” he says, “and they came of age during their time here. Not only did they embrace the academic and intellectual culture of the College, they also adopted the values embedded in the Oxy experience to become the people that they are.”

At Opening Convocation in Thorne Hall, Farmer came face to face with the Class

of 2014. Of the 573 freshmen who are new to Oxy this fall, 42 percent are students of color, and 26 percent are recipients of Federal Pell Grants (a need-based undergraduate aid program). Nearly 1 in 5 freshmen are the first in their families to go to college.

Consistent with Oxy’s mission to educate the best and brightest regardless of their ability to pay, “More than 75 percent of the kids here are on some form of financial aid,” Farmer adds. “Even for a full-pay student, tuition has never covered the cost of an Oxy education. Gifts built Occidental, and gifts must perpetuate the College so that we can continue to attract high-quality students and faculty for the next 125 years.”

The College’s endowment stood at approximately \$300 million as of June 30—almost 25 percent below its pre-recession peak three years ago. “Oxy stretches its endowment and its financial resources further than any other institution I’m aware of,” Farmer says. A significant percentage of the capital campaign’s working goal will create endowment support of financial aid and faculty resources to sustain Occidental’s educational excellence.

“An institution of Oxy’s reputation must be able to demonstrate the support of its alumni in the capital campaign if it expects to appeal to those individuals, corporations, and foundations that are not so closely aligned with the College,” he continues. “It’s their responsibility to support their alma mater so that others will be encouraged to do so.”

Farmer knows that Occidental must make its case for philanthropic support through deeds, not need. “Education is at the heart of human development, and an institution like Oxy offers a return on an investment in countless ways,” he says.

“I’ve heard people in a number of quarters refer to Occidental as a national treasure, and I believe that to be true,” Farmer adds—even if at times it seems like a hidden treasure in its own backyard. “I’ve talked to people who live in Pasadena who don’t know where Oxy is. I guess they haven’t noticed the freeway sign.” □



**ABOVE:** Stephanie, three months pregnant with her eighth child, awaits her fiancé's release from jail for a parole violation.  
**RIGHT:** Lidy claims to be 75 and alleges that seven attorneys owe her money.



As Santa Monica grapples with its homeless population, **Ian Noble '99** and his mother, Frances, document the women who call the streets home



# PUTTING NAMES TO FACES

BY RHEA R. BORJA  
PHOTOS BY IAN NOBLE '99  
AND MARC CAMPOS

**F**RANCES AND TOM NOBLE '65 moved to Santa Monica in 1969, lured in part by the city's wide, sandy beaches, cool sea breezes, and its tolerant, freewheeling nature. In the 1980s, Frances started noticing other folks drawn to this resort town—hanging out in the parks and sidewalks during the day, and sleeping underneath lighted shop windows at night.

The hundreds of homeless men and women who call Santa Monica home have become as much of a fixture as the city's surfers, skaters, tourists, and iconic boardwalk. Like many local homeowners, the Nobles tolerated their transient neighbors. They became so ubiquitous that Frances, a writer and former civil litigation attorney, started wondering: Who are they? Where do they come from? How did they end up on the streets?

Those questions were the seeds that grew into a hardcover book, *Blanket of Stars: Homeless Women in Santa Monica*, published in June by Angel City Press. Frances Noble interviewed dozens of women and chronicled the lives of 57 of them in the 158-page volume. Full-color photographs of the women taken by her son, Ian Noble '99, accompany their stories.

"We wanted to capture a population as much as we could," Frances says. "This book is for the average person who's not aware of the homeless or who doesn't know anything about them."



"I've been mulling over doing this book for a while," says Frances Noble—while for son Ian, *Blanket of Stars* "is my first concentrated photo effort in years."



The women's stories are at once familiar and heartbreaking. Almost all are mentally ill. Many had been abused, either by a parent, spouse, or boyfriend. Many are addicted to drugs or alcohol and suffer a variety of health problems such as hypertension and diabetes.

Their histories and backgrounds are diverse. The women are white, black, Asian, and Latino. They range in age from early 20s through 70s and possibly beyond. They come from families poor and middle-class. Some are college graduates, while others never finished high school. Some held jobs such as real estate broker, legal secretary, corporate receptionist, and nurses' aide. Others have never punched a time clock. Many have grown children. None are in contact with their families.

Several of the women stood out to the Nobles. One was Betty, a 79-year-old Irish American with a gentle demeanor who had lived on the streets a long time. She left her husband after 22 years. "Things can happen in your own home, even by your own husband," Betty explained.

"She was such a sweetheart, so dignified," Ian says. "She just seemed like someone's grandmother."

But the woman who haunted the Nobles was one they never spoke to. They found the white, middle-aged woman sitting in the middle of Palisades Park, a well-manicured green space that overlooks the Pacific. Tourists strolled by, ignoring her as she cried silently, her eyes screwed shut. "I tried to approach her, but she didn't seem to know we were there," Frances says, and Ian adds: "There was lots of pain and suffering and despair."

The Nobles spent about four years cataloging the women. Frances supplemented her research on Santa Monica's homeless by interviewing city officials and social service providers. Her conversations with the women ranged from a few minutes to a few hours, and the women seemed flattered to be interviewed and photographed. "Just because someone has mental illness doesn't mean they're devoid of social graces," Frances says. "Some of them smiled and smiled when they got their pictures taken. It was very charming."

By his count, Ian Noble took close to 4,700 photos of



Santa Monica's homeless on his 35mm and digital cameras. He traces his interest in photography back to the Windward School, a college preparatory school in Mar Vista, where he took a photography class to fulfill his art requirement. Ian majored in philosophy at Oxy—where he met his wife, Michelle Siazon Noble '97—and left college after two years to start an art gallery in Echo Park. He eventually shelved his cameras and photo equipment to work for Noble & Co., a Palm Desert-based commercial and alternative energy developer founded by his father.

*Blanket of Stars* reignited Ian's passion behind the lens. Walking the city's tony streets between midnight and 5 a.m., he saw a "completely transformed" community. Free of tourists and shoppers, the sidewalks outside many businesses become impromptu beds for the homeless. "There's no sleeping in the park at night," Ian says. "Third Street Promenade is lit up, so they feel safe."

Most of the homeless women, however, find isolated places to sleep overnight, the Nobles say. It's not uncommon for homeless women to fall prey to sexual predators and others wishing them harm. In fact, many of the homeless women arm themselves to fend off attackers.

At times, the Nobles felt overwhelmed by their task and the women's plight. But Ian ultimately found the project to be life-affirming. "I just had to realize that I can't bring everyone home. But I can work on a book and raise awareness," he says.

Betty, 79, knows you shouldn't talk to strangers, but sometimes a stranger is merely an "angel unaware." And if you don't talk to strangers, you might not meet the angel.

Photographed in Palisades Park  
Jan. 9, 2006



BETTY



STAR



LIBBY



SHEBA



GLORY

Frances cautions that while the women may need help, they shouldn't be objects of pity or scorn. "The women we spoke to didn't feel sorry for themselves," she says. "There was a lot of human vitality there."

In recent years, city officials have taken a multi-pronged approach to help the men and women who live on its streets, and as a result, the city's homeless population has declined 25 percent since 2007, from 999 to 742 (according to the 2010 Santa Monica Homeless Count, conducted on Jan. 27).

Some of the lucky ones end up in Daybreak, a Santa Monica shelter for homeless women that provides food, shelter, mental-health therapy, counseling, and other services. The Nobles profiled 11 of the women at Daybreak, and the shelter's project director, Amy Turk, says *Blanket of Stars* helps to make the women more real. "The book brilliantly captures the experience of homeless women," Turk says. "Frances brings dignity to the women and makes their stories accessible to people who never considered why people become homeless."

When the women at Daybreak saw the book, Frances says, many were touched and grateful. "One of them, Sheba, said it made her happy that for once, there's a picture of her smiling."



LYNN

"We didn't want to portray just sorrow and misery," Ian says. "We wanted to present the women as they are." □

Frances Noble will have a reading and signing of *Blanket of Stars* at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena on Nov. 13 at noon. A portion of the proceeds from the book will go to local organizations in Santa Monica, including Daybreak, that assist homeless women.



OLIVE

"We wanted to capture a population as much as we could," Frances says of *Blanket of Stars: Homeless Women in Santa Monica*. **Clockwise from top right:** Star aspires to be a singer, "like Selena, J.Lo., and Mariah Carey." Glory talks "somewhat randomly" about the rewards and pitfalls of the nursing profession. Jamaican-born Olive has been off the streets for 10 years and lives in a board-and-care residence: "She likes getting her picture taken and strikes several different poses." Lynn "seems confused about where she is" and is looking for a former co-worker named Rosie. Sheba, born in South Africa, was adopted at age 4 1/2 and grew up in Philadelphia. She wants the "load" relieved of not knowing who her biological parents were. Libby, newly homeless, "is a self-described poet, smart and snappy in both her speech and demeanor," with an IQ of 167. Tina and her husband moved to California after their home in Missouri burned down. Jobless, they ask for money near the Third Street Promenade.

Himmelstein has been tasked to engineer what he calls “a road map that will allow us to direct Oxy’s resources and energies into the areas that will help us achieve the vision of the president, faculty, and trustees.”



Photo by Marc Campos

## Mission and Vision

From enrollment management to civic engagement, Oxy needs to plan for its future. **Amos Himmelstein** is leading the discussion

In his inaugural address last October, President Jonathan Veitch declared that Occidental “is at a moment in its history when high-minded abstractions are not enough,” and called for the creation of an inclusive and efficient culture of planning and decision-making.

Leading the effort is Amos Himmelstein, Oxy’s new associate vice president for institutional planning, who played a similar role under Veitch for five years at The New School in New York City. “Higher education knows how to launch new initiatives, but it rarely knows when to stop,” says Himmelstein, 45, who has an MBA in business and management from Baruch College. “This planning process will give us the information we need to prioritize our efforts and reallocate resources in a way that is more closely aligned with Oxy’s mission and vision.”

Among the many issues to be wrestled with is the size of the student body, which has taken on new urgency in the wake of the arrival of two larger-than-expected first-year classes, resulting in a record enrollment of 2,093 this fall. It’s a subject that touches almost every aspect of the College’s operations, from student housing and classroom space to food service and financial aid. “There are no magic bullets,” Veitch says. “Every approach involves trade-offs, and we have to do the planning to be successful.”

“The strategic plan we are working to develop is derived from the mission of the College,” Himmelstein says, noting that the process builds on the efforts of presidents John Slaughter and Ted Mitchell. “We are not undertaking a total transformation.”

Boiled down to its essence, the planning process is a fairly simple one, according to

professor of geology Margi Rusmore, steering committee member and a 25-year veteran of Oxy’s faculty. “We are opening up the space to look at what we do and how we can do it better,” she says. Professor of English and comparative literary studies and Faculty Council president Raul Villa adds, “We’re not letting go of Oxy’s basic values, but asking what are the possibilities for moving them forward?”

To help Veitch and Jorge Gonzalez (Oxy’s new vice president for academic affairs and dean of the College) get a better handle on Occidental, each academic department put together an overview of its faculty, curriculum, research, goals, and needs. “After reading your templates, I would say it’s clear that Oxy overperforms its assets,” Gonzalez, an economist by training, remarked at the first faculty meeting of the year.

Since Himmelstein’s arrival last November, a steering committee made up of Veitch, Oxy’s vice presidents, and elected faculty representatives has been meeting regularly to “plan how to plan.” That includes building a consensus around a list of shared themes that define what is distinctive about an Occidental education, the drafting of a vision statement, and creating a system of committees and other groups to explore how best to implement those commitments and values.

In addition to the steering committee, which will be working with a trustee task force, three ongoing committees will help drive the planning process: academic planning, budget, and space allocation. Other task forces have been formed to address areas of particular urgency—including enrollment management, civic engagement, and the core curriculum—with more to follow. Each has been asked to deliver a set of goals and recommendations by the end of the academic year. Non-academic departments are going through a process known as resource optimization, in which each unit will undergo an in-depth examination to ensure that its activities are consistent with the College’s mission and are performed efficiently and cost-effectively.

“Right now we are still learning, developing a planning structure, and developing trust,” says Himmelstein. “As a planner, you don’t come into an institution with plans in your pocket and say, ‘Which of these fits best?’ All schools are different. Our job is to develop a plan that’s right for Oxy.”

—JIM TRANQUADA

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