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DEAR OLES,

THIS ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE ranges widely from the creation of award-winning children's books, to bioinformatics and turtles, to service learning, to an inside look at a classroom on the Hill today, to the athletic accomplishments of student Nelson Westby. The stories told here map lives in progress that are taking their distinctive shape and character because of a St. Olaf education.

Try to diagram Chris Raschka's vocational quest: at St. Olaf, a biology major, orchestra member and student artist; after graduation, volunteering in Germany, a Peace Corps assignment quashed by violence in Liberia, admission to medical school but no attendance, volunteering in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and then illustrator, artist, writer and winner of some of the most prestigious awards his vocation offers. At St. Olaf, Professor Emerita of Biology Alice Burton encouraged Chris to follow his "whims and interests," advice that perhaps provides the logic behind his odyssey and that serves him well as an artist.

Faculty member Steve Freedberg began his career as a biologist by smuggling turtles home from camp as a boy. Now he mentors St. Olaf students who participate in his research using turtles to study sex-ratio and sex-determination evolution. In the lab and in the field, students do real science that will inform our understanding of the world around us. Perhaps Elizabeth Leslie and Eric Scholten who worked with Professor Freedberg last summer will become biologists. Perhaps, like Chris Raschka, they will end up with an entirely different vocation. Either way, their life's work will be informed by the rigor of the science they are doing now and, doubtless, by the memories of hunting turtles in Weaver Bottoms.

Brandon Button, required to take Professor Jan Hill's children's literature course for his teaching licensure, would have taken the course anyway. Perhaps one day he will be teaching the texts he is studying today to school children; perhaps he will be doing something completely different, informed by the interpretive skills he learned in this class and enriched by the texts he has read. Vera Belazelkoska and Laura Groggel, winners of Hawkinson scholarships, have found direction in their lives from both curricular and co-curricular service experiences with homeless persons in Washington D.C., victims of hurricane Katrina, lepers in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and orphans in India. Called to lives of service and equipped for international service, wherever in the world they locate they and their work will be marked by their service-learning at the college.

We know that Nelson Westby can get from one end of a swimming pool to the other more quickly than most humans, and we wish him the best at the Olympic trials this summer. But where, and how far, will he go when he gets out of the pool? Like the other Oles featured in this issue of the magazine, his journey, because it will be informed by the broad range of his experience at the college, will be fun to watch and difficult to predict.

A liberal arts education doesn't lead you directly from an undergraduate major to a specific job. The world is too rich, and it is changing too rapidly, for that to work. But here we see how a St. Olaf education prepares current students and nourishes alumni in their vocation. It's a good thing. 🦉

David R. Anderson