SUPEOPLE

Jacqueline D. Smith

DETERMINED TO HEAL

JACQUELINE D. SMITH'S DRIVE FOR A PH.D. degree in sociology was detoured by a lump. Although painless, the hard, unmoving egg-shaped nodule in her lower abdomen so concerned Smith '02, G'05 that she consulted a number of medical professionals in the Syracuse area. She was told it was nothing to worry about—the result of an infection, perhaps, or a swollen gland. As reassuring as those opinions were, she remained unconvinced, believing it was too dangerous to ignore. "I didn't want to annoy my doctors, but I knew the lump was not minor," says Smith, who holds a bachelor's degree in child and family studies and a master's degree in communication and rhetorical studies. "I kept going back and finally the doctor did a biopsy. It turned out to be stage three melanoma—an advanced skin cancer."

The diagnosis came two years after Smith had discovered the lump—and it shocked the seemingly healthy young woman. It was even more startling to her because she is African American. As a group, African Americans are far less likely to get melanoma than others. "I never thought I was at risk for skin cancer," says the New Jersey native who now lives with her parents in Orlando, Florida.

On the recommendation of Professor Christine Himes, then chair of the sociology department at the Maxwell School, Smith sought treatment closer to home, so she could be with her family. Smith's determination to fully participate in her treatment led her to do extensive research on the Internet and to persistently e-mail her findings to her oncologist at a Tampa-area cancer center. Surgery removed 16 lymph nodes, seven of which showed cancer cells. Smith then endured painful, intensive radiation treatments that left her with a deep tissue burn, and a course of interferon injections, which she administered to herself. It was a grueling, exhausting experience. One thing she did not have to worry about was her status as a doctoral student. "Everyone at SU was very supportive," Smith says. "My professors kept in touch with me to find out how I was doing, sent me gifts and cards, and didn't pressure me at all about when I'd be able to complete my studies. My classmates were also in constant contact to make sure I was OK."

In January 2008, after scans showed her to be cancer-free, Smith returned to Syracuse. She still undergoes scans every six months and must wear a compression stocking on her right leg, which swells due to the removal of lymph nodes. In December, she received a travel scholarship to attend a conference sponsored by the National Institutes of Health's National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities. "I am expressly concerned with the gender and racial disparities in cancer deaths," Smith says. "Through this summit, I learned of current and upcoming research in this field."

Smith will share the story of her battle with melanoma this May in a PBS documentary, *More Than Skin Deep: Skin Cancer in America* (*www.morethanskindeep.com*). "Most cancer patients I've spoken with were misdiagnosed, as I was," she says. "Something is broken in our health care system if misdiagnosis is the norm. My advice to people who find a lump—or suspect that something is wrong—is to be persistent. Don't give up or worry about being a bother. It could be your life at stake."

—Paula Meseroll

Photo by Susan Kahn

Published by SURFACE, 2009

Derrick L. Cogburn | BREAKING VIRTUAL GROUND

THE REAL ESTATE MARKET MAY BE SUFFERING, BUT virtual organizations (V.O.s) are undergoing a building boom. According to iSchool professor Derrick L. Cogburn, these structures, which put a single electronic roof over physically dispersed collaborators, are becoming vital to the success of contemporary research projects, which require broad ranges of expertise and new types of synergy. "Scholars in every discipline are producing mountains of data, but the knowledge base necessary for thorough analysis just isn't available at any one campus or even in any one region," says Cogburn, director of SU's Center for Research on Collaboratories and Technology Enhanced Learning Communities. "To solve this problem, researchers are creating virtual organizations as workplaces for their collaborative partnerships."

A strict interdisciplinarian, Cogburn is committed to improving communications across traditional academic boundaries—an undertaking born of experience. Since earning a doctorate in political science at Howard University, he has taught courses in African studies and industrial development as well as information studies. A veteran of grant projects that have attracted some $15 million in public- and private-sector funds, he is currently serving as principal investigator on a team of SU colleagues studying how human relationships and decision-making are affected when researchers rely on e-mail and other forms of V.O. communication. With the support of a $200,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the project aims to develop methods for evaluating the effectiveness of V.O.s and to create a model that facilitates maximum efficiency. The SU proposal was one of just 15 selected for funding from a national pool of hundreds submitted to the NSF's Office of Cyber Infrastructure for the "Virtual Organizations as Sociotechnical Systems" research program (*cotelco.syr.edu/voss*).

Cogburn, whose credentials include a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Fellowship at the Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center, traveled to South Africa in 1994 as part of a U.S. non-governmental delegation observing the country's first democratic presidential election. Inspired by South Africa's spirit of transformation, he remained there for five years, applying his expertise in a variety of public service positions to help one of Africa's most populous nations put its information infrastructure in order for the global economy. "These experiences allowed me to make tremendous contributions to a continent and region I love, and enhanced my scholarly and professional development immensely," Cogburn says. "I was able to engage with government, private sector, and international organization leaders from around the world at the highest levels, and these experiences helped me build a global network I still draw upon in my research, and for the benefit of my students." ***—David Marc***

Photo by Susan Kahn

London Ladd | ILLUSTRATING HISTORY

WHEN CREATING ILLUSTRATIONS FOR A CHILDREN'S BOOK, London Ladd '06 takes on a role similar to that of a film director, incorporating his own experiences and sensibilities into the process of animating characters and bringing a story to life. "I'm the book's Steven Spielberg or Martin Scorsese," says Ladd, a Parking Services staff member who, as a part-time University College student, earned a bachelor's degree in illustration from the College of Visual and Performing Arts at age 34. "When I first get the manuscript, which, really, is almost like a poem, I think about how the pacing will go. I do little sketches and quick drawings and try to figure out how I may want the characters to be—what scene they are in, what the perspective is." The next step is putting a storyboard together. For Ladd, the entire process is a very personal one, and a labor of love. When he is ready to send images to his publishers for review, he does so with high hopes that his work will be well received. "I know they may not like every one," he says. "They may say, 'Fix this,' or 'Draw out that.' That's part of the partnership. But I hope they like the majority of them, because I love them! I feel like they are part of me."

Ladd's first book, *March On: The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World* (Scholastic Press, 2008), was written by Christine King Farris, younger sister of Martin Luther King Jr., to mark the 45th anniversary of the August 1963 March on Washington, where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Ladd was assigned the project by Scholastic editor and award-winning author Andrea Davis Pinkney '85, a 2008 recipient of the University's Arents Award for excellence in publishing whose work celebrates African American culture. Ladd had only five months to complete the illustrations for the book, which was recognized with the 2008 Parents' Choice Award for historical fiction. "It was really meaningful to me that my first project was about King," says Ladd, who dedicated the book to his mother, wife, and daughter. "Seeing readers' reactions has made me understand the limitless power of children's books to break down boundaries between people. When I had a public book signing recently, I was scared at first because I didn't know what to say. So I just talked about the book and the experience of illustrating it. And it's funny because, just like at the March on Washington, there were all kinds of people listening—black, white, young, old. There were even people who had been there during the march. And they gave the book a thumbs-up!"

Ladd hopes to one day dedicate himself to practicing his art full time. Meanwhile, he can be spotted in his campus parking booth near Smith and Lyman halls, sketching and painting in between greeting visitors. Now completing illustrations for his second book, a childhood biography of a famous African American, Ladd also teaches art in the Kuumba Project at the Community Folk Art Center as part of the University's South Side Initiative. He has exhibited work at the Everson Museum of Art and the Syracuse Jazz Fest, and painted the mural of abolitionist Jermain Wesley Loguen at the Richmark Building on the corner of East Genesee and Cherry streets in Syracuse. In addition, he visits schools to read and talk about his art, encouraging children to work hard and follow their dreams. "I want to help these kids, be accessible to them," he says. "If I can give to them in any way, just like people helped me get where I am today, I'll do it." ***—Amy Speach***

Photo by Susan Kahn

Published by SURFACE, 2009

Laura Lee McIntyre

ENCOURAGING HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONS

FOR PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR LAURA LEE MCINTYRE, the proof is on the videotape. Her research program, the SU Parent Project, gives parents effective strategies for raising young children with developmental delays. The 12-week group parenting class, which has about a dozen participants per session, focuses on fostering positive parent-child relationships within the context of each child's unique strengths and developmental level. Follow-up visits of parent-child interactions during play sessions are videotaped, and the results are encouraging: fewer tantrums, more positive parent-child communication, and happier families. "We've been very successful at reducing negative parent-child interactions, which are often a precursor to the development of a severe behavior disorder," McIntyre says. "We've also reduced severe behavior problems. This research is a very important line of work that has the potential to influence the lives of numerous kids and families."

McIntyre's interest in helping others began early. Originally from Riverside, California, she thought she wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps and become a nurse, but a high school psychology class set her on course. She earned a B.A. degree in developmental psychology from La Sierra University in Riverside and began working with the Center for Autism and Related Disorders in Los Angeles, providing in-home support to kids with autism.

Her work with children and an interest in developmental disorders convinced her to craft a degree program that reflected those areas. At the University of California, Riverside, she earned an M.A. degree in special education and a Ph.D. degree in school psychology. "Once I started grad school, I realized my passion for research, but I also have a passion to provide direct services to kids and families," says McIntyre, a licensed psychologist and board-certified behavior analyst who completed a pre-doctoral internship in pediatrics at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

She joined the SU faculty in 2003, attracted by the University's focus on research and the quality of the psychology department. "The emphasis on service and teaching also resonated with me," says McIntyre, who is an adjunct professor in pediatrics at SUNY Upstate Medical University and a consulting psychologist for its Center for Development, Behavior, and Genetics.

For the SU Parent Project, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, McIntyre adapted a well-established parent training program, the Incredible Years Early Childhood Series, to meet the needs of children with developmental disabilities. "Kids with developmental disabilities are three to four times more likely to develop a mental health problem as compared to typical developing children," she says. "The way to intervene is early, proactively, and in partnership with families."

Another line of research for McIntyre is the Early Autism Project, which seeks to understand characteristics most likely to predict an early autism diagnosis. The research, funded by the Burton Blatt Institute, revealed racial and economic disparities. "African American children were diagnosed seven months later than Caucasians," she says. "If you're looking at young kids where early identification and diagnosis matters, so they can get treatment, the difference is statistically and clinically significant."

Along with her research, McIntyre's work in the community was recognized last year by Families for Effective Autism Treatment of Central New York, for which she offered workshops and consultation, and served on its board. McIntyre was also awarded SU's Undergraduate Research Mentor Award and the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. She enjoys helping students stretch their abilities as they assist in her research and in her classes. "I really try to convey to students my excitement for what I do," she says. "And hopefully it's contagious."

—Kathleen Haley

Photo by Susan Kahn