

SU People



Eric Miller

A Passion for Fun and Success

YOU'RE LIGHT, YOU'RE LOUD, AND YOU'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT THINGS. Those were the words that originally inspired Eric Miller '03 to try out for his high school crew team. But they might also apply to his general sense of enthusiasm—a spirit that has helped him cope with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), a disease he was diagnosed with at age 7. “I tried crew and liked it,” says Miller, who was later recruited as a coxswain—the person who directs the rowers—for the SU crew team. Now a graduate of the College of Visual and Performing Arts’ five-year industrial design program, Miller says his crew team experiences have had a profound influence on his attitude, his work ethic, and his professional goal of designing athletic equipment. “I’m very competitive and really engaged in

things,” he says. “Being a coxswain was a perfect role for me.”

Growing up with arthritis was an equally formative experience, although Miller is quick to pass it off as “no big deal.” “I got through it because I had to,” he says. “It was a chapter in my life I had to deal with.” Still, Miller acknowledges that JRA—a sometimes crippling condition that caused his joints to become swollen and painful—shaped who he is today. “It affected how I deal with people, how professional I am about my work, and how I organize my life,” he says. “I’m grateful for it completely.” He even credits the disease with leading him into crew, because the medication he took for the disease stunted his growth. “So I’m a small dude,” he says—a key characteristic of a stellar coxswain.

In an effort to share Miller’s experience with other children with arthritis, his mom, Dee Dee Miller, recently wrote a children’s book, *Taking Arthritis to School* (JayJo Books, 2002), featuring her son as the main character. “I wanted kids with arthritis to know they can play sports, go to college, and have a career,” says Dee Dee Miller, a local elementary school teacher. She dedicated the book to her son, who consulted with her as she developed the story. “Eric has always been an inspiration to all who meet him,” she says. “He’s had to overcome more obstacles than most adults ever come in contact with. But he’s always been very positive, a real fighter.” Industrial design professor James Read, who has known Miller since he was a sophomore, agrees that he is a “pretty amazing” guy. “Eric has a real high level of enthusiasm and he channels that energy into his design work,” Read says. “And it’s infectious.”

The disease has been in remission since the end of Miller’s freshman year, although he occasionally experiences flare-ups. Even then, he stays active and enthused about pretty much everything—even athletic footwear: At last count, he owned 43 pairs of sneakers. “I’m into snowboarding now, and that’s cool stuff from an industrial design standpoint,” he says. He also enjoys writing, running, and spending time with his two “best friends”—his older brother, Jason, a graphic designer who lives in Boston; and his grandfather, Raymond J. Axelson Jr. ’50, an aerial photographer in Syracuse. “I have a lot of interests,” Miller says. “But whatever I do, I want to have fun.”

—Amy Speech Shires



Julia Salomón | Food for Thought

WHEN STUDENTS FIRST ARRIVE AT COLLEGE, THEIR EATING habits can drastically change—sometimes for the worse. Perhaps no one knows this better than Julia Salomón, the University's only full-time registered dietitian and nutrition educator. For the last three years, Salomón has worked with Syracuse University Food Services to balance campus dining center menu options, offering healthy foods while remaining sensitive to students' comfort-food cravings. "If we took away the chicken nuggets, we'd have a mutiny on our hands," she says. "But at the same time, we try to offer healthy options."

As part of her duties, Salomón works alongside the Food Services menu committee to adapt and implement menu choices and nutrition programs and to train employees. She also reviews menus for the dining centers, snack bars, and cash operations with Food Services staff. "There are more than nutritional options and suggestions that go into running a food services operation," she says. "We have to think of labor and food-cost issues, customer service, and food trends, so it's all a team approach."

Salomón's latest accomplishment involved broadening vegetarian and vegan choices in the dining centers. The effort earned a Chancellor's Exemplary Achievement Award in 2001. This year SU's vegetarian and vegan offerings placed third in a national online survey of college non-meat and non-dairy dining options sponsored by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Along with her responsibilities to Food Services, Salomón works with the University's Health Services (part of the Division of Student Affairs), counseling students who have such food or clinical nutrition conditions as allergies, diabetes, high blood pressure, or eating disorders. Many students who make appointments with her are looking to validate lifestyle or diet-related changes they're making, she says. "Perhaps they've just become a vegetarian or maybe they've made some really small changes

for a healthier lifestyle," she says. "They want to make sure they're doing it right."

Salomón also gives educational presentations to sororities and fraternities, athletic teams, and other student groups on how to make smart eating decisions. She emphasizes her personal philosophy that nutrition is part of one's entire lifestyle, not just part of one's diet. Focus should be placed on consuming food in moderation rather than whether the food contains a lot of fat or calories, she says. "I tell students that all foods can fit," she says. "It's OK to eat a piece of cake, but they should try to have a healthy diet throughout the day, not just for one meal."

Salomón discovered her interest in nutrition while working as a research assistant on cholesterol metabolism at the University of Chicago Medical School. After earning a master's degree in nutrition, she supervised community nutrition projects in Guatemala and Ecuador, completed a yearlong dietetic internship, and passed the registration exam for dietitians.

As a dietitian and educator for two different campus departments, Salomón says the responsibilities of her dual role can prove challenging. "But there's a great opportunity to be creative," she says. Salomón, for instance, is currently working with a group of students to produce a training manual on food and body issues for use by SU residence advisors. She is also continuing to develop a food allergy assistance program for students who have food allergies—an initiative that earned a Chancellor's Exemplary Achievement Award in 2002. As part of the program, Salomón created a food allergy manual with Food Services staff and the SU publications office that won a national publications award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. "I tell students that if they're going to make a drastic lifestyle change, the key is to seek reliable information," she says. "Use campus resources, and come see me." —Cori Bolger



Arthur Flowers

Literary Bluesman

ARTHUR FLOWERS LOUNGES BACK IN HIS OFFICE CHAIR, HIS eyes looking up to the ceiling and his interlocked hands resting on his chest. His deep voice lingers on vowels as he repeats particularly poignant phrases that describe his work as a novelist, performance artist, and English professor. "There are those of us in African American literature who feel we are heirs to two literary traditions—the Western written tradition and the African oral tradition," Flowers says. He pauses, sits upright, and exhales a thoughtful "hoo." His conversation resonates with the qualities one would expect in someone who calls himself a literary bluesman. "For me the blues are a way—a metaphysical way," he says. "The blues are more than just a music form, the blues are a cultural force."

The Memphis, Tennessee, native says that growing up, he and his sisters considered the city's legendary Beale Street their playground. "Many black professionals had offices on Beale Street, and it was one of the centers of the black community," he says. "But I wasn't aware of its cultural significance until I joined the Army and went to Vietnam. When I'd tell people I was from Memphis, they'd say, 'Tell me about the blues, tell me about Beale Street.'"

Shortly after returning from the war, he headed to New York City to become a writer and awakened to the value of his cultural literary heritage. He threw his energy into researching and developing the idea of the Mississippi Delta (the setting of all his works) as the African American Holy Ground. He also began an intensive study of the griotic (African oral storytelling) tradition and hoodoo—"one of a family of Afrospiritual retentions in the United States that evolved from the fusion of Catholicism and African religions," Flowers explains. He developed basic literary skills and the theoretical pillars of his writings—the blues and literary hoodoo. "The writer as shaman," he says. "Every book is a spell, every draft a divination. I try to use the power of literature to take care of the tribal soul, to give it what it needs to enhance its strengths and alleviate its weaknesses."

Flowers says his role as a teacher of undergraduate and graduate English literature and writing courses is indelibly connected to his role as an author. "I have a very mystical attitude about teaching," he says. "I consider it a sacred calling. It is my responsibility to pass that legacy on as it was passed on to me." Although the teaching schedule can at times be taxing, he says being a faculty member in an MFA creative writing program of Syracuse's stature ignites his drive as a writer. "It's like being in a literary pressure-cooker," he says. "Your peers are constantly growing, and you're constantly being exposed to young writers who are often as good or better than you are. When trying to understand the narrative strategies of my students, I grow as a writer." One graduate student, for example, introduced Flowers to hyper-text writing. Flowers, in turn, has adapted the nonlinear, dis-junctive style into his own literary technique. He calls it hypertext and uses this narrative strategy in his upcoming novel *Rest for the Weary*.

When not grading papers or working on one of several writing projects, Flowers enjoys doing performance art for local audiences and colleges across the country. With bells on his ankles and African instruments in his hands, he incorporates a bit of the griotic and blues traditions into the performance of his engaging stories. "I look at it as a ritual performance that transports the audience to a higher ground," he says. Flowers seeks personal enrichment by taking such SU courses as electronic music, African dance, and sculpture, and by traveling to places as undeveloped as Kenya and as commercialized as New York City, where he maintains a residence and serves as director of the New Renaissance Writers Guild. "I consider myself an old bluesman," he says, "catching the rails and getting around."

—Margaret Costello

Wei Zhao

Crossing Architectural Borders

IN HER PHOTOGRAPHS, SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE graduate Wei “Windy” Zhao G’03 captures the intricate artwork, statues, and structures of China’s ancient temples as well as the busy, colorful streets and sleek, modern buildings of its big cities. She could easily spot the beauty and virtues of architecture in her homeland, but longed to see architectural accomplishment through a different lens. “In my first year of college one of my professors gave a lecture about American architecture education,” says Zhao, who received a bachelor’s degree in architecture from Tsinghua University in Beijing. “It looked so interesting that I decided to continue my education at a college in the United States. I really wanted to look at the world outside of China.” After applying to several schools, Zhao enrolled in the master’s program at SU’s School of Architecture because of its reputation for excellence and the financial aid she received from the school.

Zhao’s arrival in Syracuse was her first experience in the United States. “I didn’t know anyone and I had no idea how hard it would be to adjust to living here,” she says. In fact, during her first few weeks Zhao considered returning home until she found the support and encouragement she needed from faculty members who convinced her to stay. To help settle in and avoid feeling homesick, Zhao quickly got involved with various activities and took on some teaching responsibilities. For her first two years at SU, she worked as a teaching assistant in drawing classes for freshman architecture students. This year she spent about 20 hours a week helping out with a freshman design class. “I learned how to distribute my time and be independent,” she says.

Last fall, Zhao completed her thesis, in which she designed a public bath and explored public versus private spaces within that context. She also examined how strangers communicate physically and verbally, and architecture’s role in that communication. In the thesis, she argues that architecture can generate new relationships between public and private spaces, especially by implementing the concept of transparency. Her



STUDENT

Schmitt Shoots!

Deep in the borough of Queens, I live in a two-story structure, with a house sits in a locally-mixed neighborhood. There are easy chairs and a couch, a rocking chair and a large dining table for six. There is a pass-through to the dining area (great place for swinging kitchen door).

The kitchen is basic, with a sink, a stove and double kitchen dishwasher. Ice-cold beer is in the refrigerator.

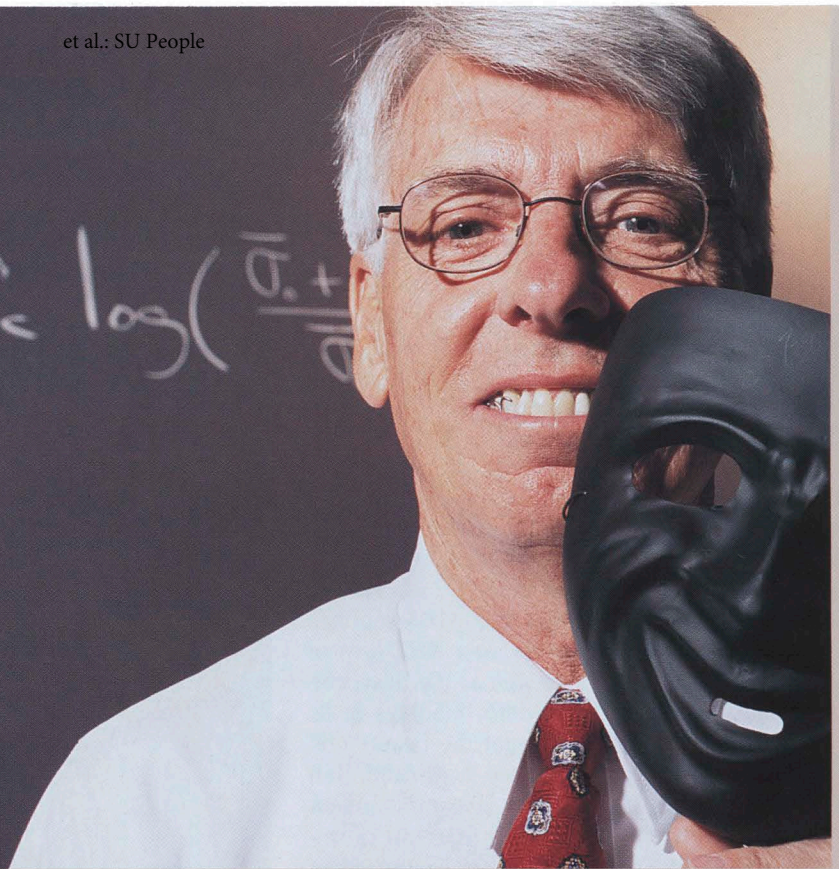
Upstairs, there are two bedrooms, a closet, and one bathroom with a bathtub.

diligent craftsmanship and research earned her an A on the project and a second-place showing in a school-wide thesis competition judged by a group of professors and architects.

Zhao’s love of architecture builds upon her related interests in freehand drawing and photography. Last spring, she took a black-and-white photography class to learn how to develop photos so they come out as she envisions them. Zhao has also continued to participate in international-style ballroom dancing, a hobby she and her partner at Tsinghua University mastered as university-level champions. “I’d like to dance competitively in the United States, but I’m having trouble finding a partner because there are very few people who dance in the area,” she says.

Although she ultimately hopes to return to China, Zhao first wants to gain a few years of professional experience at an architectural firm in the United States. “Architects have a lot of responsibility, not only to the buildings they design, but to society in general, because architecture has the ability to shape people’s lives,” Zhao says. “Aesthetics is not the only concern, and that is the difference between architecture and fine art—architecture has function.”

—Kristen Swing and Margaret Costello



Schmitt Shoors!

Sam Clemence

Engineering Marvel

A SILVER-HAIRED ENGINEERING PROFESSOR STANDS AT the front of the lecture hall, ready to introduce first-year students to their first design project. Instead of expounding on mathematical equations or the differences between pulleys and levers, the professor watches a young woman, masked and dressed in black, dart through the room, slipping sealed envelopes to the teams of students. She leaves, and the professor, without so much as a word, turns and walks out, too. “The students were just set awash there with the envelopes and were fumbling around as they figured out what to do,” recalls the professor, Samuel Clemence, with his distinctive chuckle.

After opening the envelopes, the students moved on to their real class assignment—solving a fictional crime that involved recovering the stolen “Buzz Shaw Diamond,” protected by a crisscross of motion-detecting lasers. This was their design project, ECS 101: Mission Impossible, and this is Sam Clemence designing the engineers of tomorrow. “What makes him such a great professor is his ability to relate course material to his own experiences and convey that in a very intriguing way,” says Mike Thibert ’05, a student in the Mission Impossible class. “Through his descriptions of the field, he strengthened my desire to become an engineer.”

Clemence is a long way from where he expected to be when he studied civil engineering at Georgia Tech more than four decades ago. “I liked building things with my hands, and always wanted to travel,” says the Atlanta native. “Teaching was the last thing on my mind.” After graduating, he served six years in the U.S. Navy Civil Engineer Corps and traveled the globe, building bridges and civil infrastructures in the South Pacific, Thailand,

Spain, and war-torn Vietnam. He then returned to the United States, worked for several consulting engineering firms, and eventually returned to Georgia Tech to earn a Ph.D. While working toward his doctorate, he discovered another way to satisfy his desire to build. “I was fortunate to be a teaching assistant, and thought, ‘Wow, I love this teaching stuff,’” he says. His desire to mold young minds led him to a job at the University of Missouri-Rolla and then to Syracuse University in 1977.

Clemence developed a reputation as a researcher and became a well-known specialist in the design and field application of soil properties and soil anchors used in underground piping and tower foundations. But teaching continued to fuel his career as a professor, and, in 1990, the University named him the Methodist Scholar/Teacher of the Year. From 1991-96, he served as associate dean of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science, which required him to all but abandon his classroom role. “Then this wonderful thing came along—the Meredith professorships—that allowed me to do a lot more teaching, something I really love,” Clemence says.

The Laura J. and L. Douglas Meredith Professorship for Teaching Excellence provided Clemence with the opportunity to develop a series of University-wide engineering courses and lectures that describe how technology affects our lives. Topics included the Erie Canal, technology in nursing, engineering in the Roman Empire and Middle Ages, and communications technology. In 2002, Clemence teamed with art professor Gary Radke to teach a course on Leonardo da Vinci that covered his artistic and engineering accomplishments and culminated with a spring-break class trip to Paris, Milan, and Florence. For the past three years, Clemence has shared his teaching expertise with new engineering faculty from across the country during a summer workshop series funded by the National Science Foundation.

“My greatest rewards are when former students drop by to visit or call me when they run into problems on the job,” he says. “Education is a great life.”

—Margaret Costello

Nissa Monrad

Hard Work and Hard Hats

NISSA MONRAD '03 HEHEDED HER HIGH SCHOOL chemistry teacher's advice to pursue a career in chemical engineering. Curious about how things work and gifted in science and math, she was confident chemical engineering was the right career path. For Monrad, that belief was reinforced when she spent a semester during her junior year at Dow Corning Corporation's basic silicone manufacturing plant in rural Carrollton, Kentucky, as part of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) cooperative education program. "At the plant I wore a hard hat and steel-tipped boots while working on day-to-day operations, analyzing trends, and diagnosing problems," Monrad says. "In my free time I learned how to drive a tractor and feed cows, and went to tobacco-spitting contests."

Monrad's Norwegian American father and Japanese mother taught her to believe that if she worked hard and never gave up, her dream of becoming an engineer would come true. She took her parents' advice to heart and received a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering at the University's 149th Commencement ceremony in May. Monrad was also one of two Class Marshals who led the procession of graduates into the Carrier Dome. "It was an honor to be chosen to lead my classmates," Monrad says. "I felt even more honored when I learned that I was the first-ever female engineering student to serve as a Class Marshal."

Selection as a Class Marshal is one of the most prestigious accolades for an SU student because it recognizes academic achievement, involvement in student activities, and community service. Monrad excels in all three areas. She's a member of Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society, Phi Kappa Phi University Honor Society, Golden Key International Honour Society, and University 100. She was also a 2002-03 Remembrance Scholar. "That meant the most to me because a Remembrance Scholar is someone who can look back on the past and learn from it, never forgetting the events that shaped history," Monrad says. In addition, she found time in her busy schedule to serve as an ECS Academic Excellence Workshop facilitator and participated in the college's K-12 Outreach, a community



service program. "My most enjoyable experience at SU was working with the kids in Shea Middle School's technology club," she says. "I loved it—my community service activities won't stop just because I've graduated from college."

Following graduation, Monrad headed for Stamford, Connecticut, where she now works as a process engineer at Clairol, the hair-care products manufacturer. "I've traded in my hard hat for a hair net," she says. Well aware that many people opened doors for her and helped her achieve the success she enjoys today, Monrad is eager to give something back by becoming a mentor. "I want to support and encourage other young women to go into the engineering profession," she says. "I want them to know that if they dream it, they can achieve it." —Christine Yackel