



# Plugged **in**

FACULTY & STAFF NEWSLETTER



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EXOTIC SPECIES POPULATE  
NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

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MARK USNICK RECIPIENT OF  
PRESTIGIOUS MEAD AWARD

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TALENT SHOWCASED DURING  
ANNUAL CLASSIFIED RETREAT

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COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER  
CONQUERS SLIPPERY SLOPES

## SUMMER2015

VOLUME VII





## AC's Natural History Museum Teeming with Exotic Specimens



If you would like to see a Brazilian beetle that's just a mite larger than a Texas tarantula, a bug whose suitably redundant name slithers off the tongue at a snail's pace, then make a beeline to the Natural History Museum.

The *Titanus giganteus* awaits your perusal.

Cocooned within the northernmost environs of Ordway Hall's first floor, the museum is home to a veritable swarm of globally collected insects—colossal species, some—mounted, maintained, and presented by the Biology Department for scholarly pursuits and public edification.

Of course you'll find far more than meticulously displayed arthropods at the Natural History Museum. Taxidermic mammals, big-game fish, and birds (some of prey) loom from mounts and perches throughout. There's a sprinkling of other collections, too—skulls, pelts, age-old eggs—one solely for handling by the blind.

For every visitor wowed by the near-neon vibrancy of the bounteous butterflies, another is enchanted by a rare, up-close encounter with a bald eagle, a

hammerhead shark, or a Cape buffalo out of Africa.

"People are amazed by the specimens we have here," Tiffany Lamb, assistant professor of biology and museum director, said. "We have a lot of insects, big creepy ones that you're not going to see unless you're deep in the jungles of Indonesia or South America.

"We have wonderful animals, many from other continents, some that are now threatened or endangered so that they can't be collected anymore. People really get excited about them."

AC owes its Natural History Museum to Richard Howard, a longtime member of the biology faculty who stepped away from the College a few years ago to brave the challenges of Parkinson's disease. Something of a Renaissance man, Howard is that consummate entomologist and curator who somehow found time to simultaneously, teach biology and taxidermy, coach fencing, and compose, perform and record classical piano music.

His extensive collecting expeditions have taken him the world over, and his enviable stockpile of insects, particularly

the butterflies, became the basis in the mid-1970s for a museum at AC. And like a butterfly, it flitted around some.

Originally the collection was displayed on the second floor of what is now Dutton Hall. Then it spent some years in Durrett Hall. It landed at its present location in the late 1990s, by which time Howard had a right hand in Dan Porter, professor of biology, who accepted an invitation at mid-decade to become associate curator and collections manager.

Porter, whose devoted service to the museum spanned 17 years, doggedly pursued grants. He obtained many that either helped grow the collections or expand the museum's services. Safari Club International, for example, donated not only the African mammal collection, but contributed funds for the expansion necessary to house it.

From 2000 to 2012, Porter personally delivered innumerable natural history programs at area schools. He acquired. He catalogued. He conducted countless tours of the museum for folks of all ages, but especially for kids.

"You never really know what will light a fire under kids," Porter said. "I believe the more we expose them to the marvels of science, wonders like the eight-inch Goliath butterfly or one of the largest beetles in the world, the better our chances are of sparking an interest in learning.

"We are one of the only community colleges anywhere with a museum of this kind, certainly of this quality, and we're lucky to have it," he said. "It's a definite fire-starter for knowledge and education."

The museum's torch was passed to Lamb in 2013, and she says it continues to be a popular destination for classes from area schools, tourists of all sorts, and visiting researchers. Many AC

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*Dan Porter points out the birds*

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students find their way to the museum, too. Science classes are commonly exposed to the unique AC resource, but students of art and English also are known to undertake class projects based on what they discover within. Lamb says she hopes to see the facility incorporated even more into AC curricula.

“The museum is a good bridge between disciplines,” she said. “There are so many research possibilities available, and whenever we take a group of students over there, they say ‘wow, I didn’t know this was here.’ We want everyone to know it is here and to reap its benefits.”

In that vein, visitors are always welcome. The museum is open some hours most days. A link at [actx.edu/biology](http://actx.edu/biology) states when. Tours can be arranged. Just call the Biology Department to clear the way—371-5081.

It’s truly worth lumbering over to Ordway Hall if only to witness the wooden mimicry of the giant Malaysian walking stick. Talk about a fire-starter.



## Flurry of Construction Impacts Traffic Patterns on WSC

An occasional detour may be necessitated by construction in the heart of the Washington Street Campus, but all remains accessible. Just follow the signs.

The pedestrian mall obviously is getting a facelift, and indoor renovations are progressing on both sides of that project—on the first floor of the library and on the second floor of the CUB.

Why now? Funding and finalization of plans only came together over the summer. And since these renovations will take almost a year to complete, they were destined to coincide with the busiest portions of the year, anyway.

But to ensure the least amount of disruption to business as usual, the projects will be done in phases. Still, a few temporary inconveniences are unavoidable—eventual closure of the

library’s east entrance (once the west side reopens), relocation of Career Services to the Student Service Center and Tutoring Services to the first floor of Durrett Hall.

Upon completion, the library’s first floor will be a well-equipped Student Commons. The pedestrian mall will have a fresh surface and an expansive porch in place of the bare-bones east entryway that presently serves the library. And the CUB’s second floor will have new infrastructure, technology and appeal.

The Amarillo College Foundation will have more to share about all this in late September.

**Also worthy of note:** Washington Street Campus roofs are being replaced, all of them, as a result of the hail storm of May 2013.







## Familiar Faces in Heightened Places

### Trio Promoted

Three conspicuous promotions bolstered AC leadership this summer. Lyndy Forrester became the College's first vice president for employee and organizational development on July 1. And in August, Toni Gray was appointed dean of continuing education, and Kim Crowley was named associate dean of health sciences.



#### Lyndy Forrester—Vice President for Employee and Organizational Development

Lyndy Forrester, who in less than three years as dean put a new and revitalized face on technical education at AC, left the East Campus to become the College's first vice president for employee and organizational development.

President Russell Lowery-Hart said he created the new post not only to oversee all aspects of human resources, but to put someone in a position to lead AC's student-success focus throughout the organization while weaving it fully into employee trainings, evaluations and development.

**Forrester said:** "I'm honored and excited to be a part of the President's vision for a more customer-oriented strategy for employee development. It's a new direction that he's taking us on, a cultural shift that will have a positive impact on student success. What could be better than that?"

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#### Toni Gray—Dean of Continuing Education

An 18-year veteran of the College, Toni Gray formerly served as director of the Criminal Justice Program and the Law Enforcement Academy, which provides almost 90 percent of law-enforcement personnel for the Panhandle. She steps into the vacancy created by the retirement of Kim Davis.

**Gray said:** "I'm humbled, honored and so excited for this new adventure. These are such fun programs to work with and I can't wait to see the growth that is on the horizon. I also want our faculty and staff to be able to submit and register courses easily. Those will be two of the first issues I explore."

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#### Kim Crowley—Associate Dean of Health Sciences

This newly created position serves to embed the Center for Continuing Healthcare Education, long under the direction of Kim Crowley, within the Health Sciences Division. Because so many of their efforts overlap, this reorganization will create increased opportunities for expansion and elevation of services AC provides to health professionals of the Panhandle.

**Crowley said:** "I have worked closely in the past with Mark Rowh (dean of health sciences), and I am looking forward to assisting with his vision to move the division forward. Mark and I plan to move toward building clear pathways from continuing education to academic programs, and adding academic sections to current CE programs in order to facilitate expanded dual credit opportunities for our area high schools."





## Mark Usnick Dominates Voting for Prestigious Mead Award



**M**ark Usnick is anything but reluctant about pushing his students to excel, yet no matter the extent to which he challenges them, they tend to respond more with appreciation than apprehension.

No wonder they turned out in force to nominate their mentor for AC's most-prestigious faculty accolade.

Based largely (but not solely) on student input, Usnick, associate professor of computer information systems, is the 2015 recipient of the John F. Mead Faculty Excellence Award.

"It was a wonderful surprise, an honor I never anticipated," Usnick said. "I was

enormously gratified to learn about the number of students and co-workers who nominated me. I truly appreciate it."

Usnick joined the faculty in 2001, returning to his hometown after several years of downstate employment with IBM, which then subcontracted to provide onboard computer systems for NASA. Usnick contributed to the creation of software programs used in space shuttles and the International Space Station.

Knowing what it takes to compete on a corporate level, Usnick, who teaches classes in CIS, engineering math, and computer science, demands much of his students. They countered this year by advocating his selection for the Mead Award, with comments such as:

- He is the type of teacher that you hear people say 'It is because of him that I had the confidence to complete my goals.'
- He has been very influential to my personal love of computer programming.
- He has been nothing short of amazing. I was very surprised to hear that he had not won this award before.

According to Dr. Brian Farmer, a member of the selection committee: "Mark was an overwhelming choice to win this year's

award. I've been on this committee a few times, but I've never seen the winner chosen so near unanimously."

Several of Usnick's colleagues also submitted nominations, which contained comments such as:

- He is very caring and immensely helpful to students.
- He goes above and beyond the norm both as an instructor and a coworker. Mark consistently improves his classes ... and he takes on extra, unpaid responsibilities to increase our recruitment success.

When Usnick is not teaching or immersed in his favorite pastimes — writing programs or developing Apps — you might find him building a workshop or a barn for a friend, another talent he has wielded professionally. He also donates time and effort to a local law-enforcement agency. But most everything takes a backseat when it's time to teach.

"I love what I do here at the College," Usnick said. "It's a great place to work. The CIS department and the people in it are great, and I plan to be here into old age."

**Little known fact:** Usnick, as a freshman at AC back in the day, was named Outstanding Math Major and collected a \$500 scholarship.



## Jazzy June at AC

*Dr. Jim Laughlin, professor of music, lured a number of alumni from the June Jazz Program back to the College to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the popular summer concert series. And as you can see, Laughlin, who launched June Jazz 20 years ago and has directed it ever since, returned to the stage after a five-year performance absence to do a little saxophone entertaining himself.*







## FACULTY AND STAFF ACCOLADES



### Lana Jackson Named LEAP Faculty Fellow

**Dr. Lana Jackson**, chair of First-Year Experience, has been chosen to join a prestigious quintet of Texas professors charged with engaging teachers in adapting educational tools designed to improve student success.

Jackson emerged from a competitive application process to be appointed a LEAP Texas Faculty Fellow and as such will help launch the Association of American Colleges and Universities Faculty Collaboratives Project.

LEAP is the acronym for Liberal Education and America's Promise and an initiative of the AAC&U. Texas is one of five states in which LEAP Faculty Fellows will lead statewide conversations and build collaborative networks. Their work will be aimed at advancing the practical application of existing and emerging educational tools in order to optimally leverage learning, ultimately nationwide.

The following faculty were approved for promotion by Regents at the Board meeting in June: **Tiffany Lamb**—biology and **Verena Johnson**—nursing, both to associate professor, and **Susan Burks**—business management, to professor.



**Mark Rowh**, dean of health sciences, and **Terry Kleffman**, assistant chief information officer, recently completed the Leadership Amarillo & Canyon program, which involves activities aimed at leadership development, networking, community awareness and

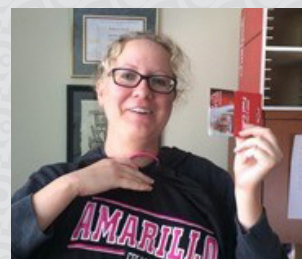
social consciousness—along with a bevy of site visits, panel discussions, guest speakers, and even a police ride-along.

**Dr. Richard Pullen**, dean of nursing, and **Kati Alley**, instructor of nursing, co-authored an article that appeared in the July issue of *Nursing Made Incredibly Easy*. The article is titled: *Sharpening Your Professional Image: Does your Professional Image Need a Makeover?* In it they state: “As nurses, we’re committed to helping patients heal in body, mind and spirit, and the way we present ourselves provides the foundation.”

A poster by **Debby Hall**, assistant director of the ADN Program, has been accepted for presentation at the National League of Nursing’s Education Summit Sept. 30-Oct. 2 in Las Vegas. The poster

is based on a pilot project Hall led in 2014 to equip Level 4 students with electronic devices in classrooms and clinical settings.

**Stefanie Carruth**, graphic design specialist in college relations, came up with “Camp Wow” to win the Name that Thing Contest sponsored by the Office of Employee and Organizational Development. She won a gift card and a new AC shirt. New employee orientation will henceforth be called Camp Wow.





## Employment Milestones

The following faculty and staff have qualified for length-of-service pins since the Spring *Plugged In*:

### CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES

#### JUNE

Michael Sugden, 10 years  
Albert Urbina, 10  
Jillaine Frank, 10  
Ylaria Balderas, 5  
Maria Juarez, 5

#### JULY

Heather Ann Reese, 10 years

#### AUGUST

James Jackson, 20 years  
Sara Bruce, 10  
Monica Herrera, 10  
Rodolfo Moreno, 10  
Holly Bentley, 10  
Robert Kennedy, 5

### ADMINISTRATORS

#### JUNE

Melissa Bates, 10 years

#### JULY

Diane Brice, 25 years  
Kathy Dowdy, 10  
Lacy Mueggengborg, 10  
Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, 5

#### AUGUST

April Sessler, 30 years  
Danielle Arias, 10

### FACULTY

#### AUGUST

Donald Abel, 15 years	Ann Fry, 10
Susan Burks, 15	Patricia McGuire, 10
Carol Buse, 15	Frank Sobey, 10
Jan Cannon, 15	Karen White, 10
Mary Jane Johnson, 15	Collin Witherspoon, 10
Kimberly McGowan, 15	Kathleen McDowell, 10
Ray Newburg, 15	Angela Downs, 5
Camille Nies, 15	Kristin Edford, 5
Dr. James Powell, 15	Carol Hergert, 5
Victoria Taylor-Gore, 15	Tammy Holmes, 5
Shawna Lopez, 10	Dalila Paredes, 5
Debra Avara, 10	Scott Rankin, 5
Danette Fenstermaker, 10	Ramona Yarbrough, 5



## U.S. Senator Cornyn Visits AC



Sen. Cornyn, at the podium, is flanked (from left) by Luke Morrison, director of personal enrichment, AC alumna Madilyn Newsome Black, President Russell Lowery-Hart, AC Regent Patrick Miller, and Vice President Deborah Vess.

**U**.S. Sen. John Cornyn briefly met with AC leadership July 2 on the Washington Street Campus, but the primary reason for his visit was to pop in on the Kids' College LEGO Robotics Camp in the Engineering Building. The senator heard from some of the fifth- through eighth-graders, who described their robot-building experiences. He then witnessed a robot battle before making some public comments and fielding questions from local media about the importance of STEM education and upcoming Senate debates on STEM-related bills.



## Check It Out



Andres Alcantar (center), chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission, stopped by the West Campus on Aug. 6 to deliver a check that was both large and LARGE. The photo prop represents a \$554,785 Skills Development Grant that AC's Center for Continuing Healthcare Education obtained to develop and provide training leading to certification in 18 specialty areas of healthcare for more than 200 employees at two grant-partnering agencies—Baptist St. Anthony's Hospital and Northwest Texas Healthcare Systems.



# CARING AND SHARING

Summer got off to a frolicsome start thanks to the Classified Employees Caring & Sharing event June 4 in and around the Concert Hall Theater.

Team-building activities, a lip-sync festival, and a picnic lunch got top billing at the annual retreat.



*Folks from the Business Office vie for most energetic.*



*Lyndy Forrester and Brian Jacob perform a duet.*



*Team-building requires keen awareness.*



*The picnic draws a crowd.*



*Jennifer Ashcraft solos.*





## A Look Ahead . . .

### President to Discuss Budget

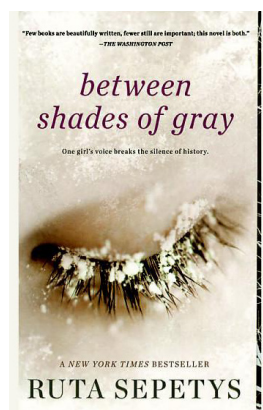
Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart will deliver his presidential overview of the budget situation from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 20 at Ordway Hall Auditorium. The AC workforce is invited and encouraged to attend.

The president's presentation will also be viewable on a live stream at <http://panhandlepbs.org/livestream>, and for those with conflicts at that particular time, the whole thing will be recorded and will be viewable at this same link no later than the following day.

### AC Closed for General Assembly

AC will close all its doors and cease business activities mid-morning on Friday, Sept. 11 so all full-time employees can comply with mandatory attendance at General Assembly. Widespread signage and messaging will alert the public to the College's down time.

Everyone must sign in for General Assembly by 11:45 a.m. at the Amarillo Civic Center Heritage Room. Lunch will be served at noon, and the program begins at 12:30 p.m.



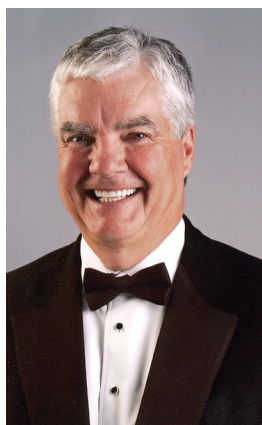
### Author to Speak on Oct. 29th

Ruta Sepetys (SUH-pettys), author of the 2015 Common Reader—*Between Shades of Gray*—will visit the College on Oct. 29 and speak that night at the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts.

The event is free, and the author's presentation will explore moral courage, a theme that permeates her novel, which is based on a 15-year-old's harrowing account of her family's forcible relocation from Lithuania to a forced-labor camp in Siberia during the war-torn 1940s.



## Ron Boyd Named 2015 Distinguished Alumnus



**R**on Boyd, who deals in the finest jewelry as principal owner of Duncan and Boyd Jewelers, has acquired yet another title that has a nice ring to it: Distinguished Alumnus for 2015.

The businessman and community advocate will be feted by the College at a special luncheon on Oct. 21 at Amarillo Country Club.

"I was shocked and humbled by this recognition. Flabbergasted might be a better word," said Boyd, who attended AC on a partial tennis scholarship from 1962 to 1964. "I expect an honor like this to go the scholarly

and smart, so I thought, 'why me?'" That's a question easily answered by even the briefest glance at an abbreviated résumé of the man who recently completed a second term on the Amarillo City Council.

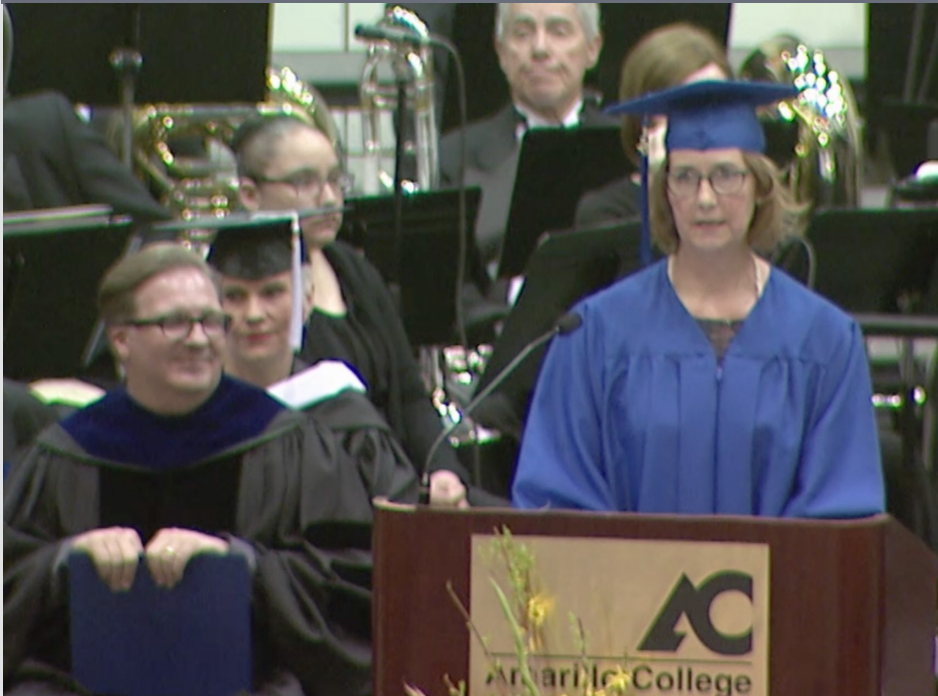
Boyd has been chairman of the Amarillo Area Foundation and president of the Golden Spread Council for the Boy Scouts of America. Also president of Center City of Amarillo, Boyd has served on boards for the Don and Sybil Harrington Foundation, Panhandle PBS and various other non-profit organizations. In 1994, he was campaign co-chair for United Way, and in 2009 he was named the Amarillo Globe-News Man of the Year.

"Ron is the quintessential AC success story," AC President Russell Lowery-Hart said. "This College was an important part of shaping his journey. He has had an important role in shaping our community. He is an inspiration for us all."





## Commencement Speaker Conquers the Slippery Slopes



**B**efore reaching the summit, the capstone of her metaphorical ascent of Mount AC, something happened to Tina Meredith. Whatever it was swept her from obscurity fostered by a decades-long quest for an associate's degree—not just up the slippery slopes of academia, mind you, but even further skyward—to the rarified air breathed only by that singular student chosen to speak at Commencement.

Tina, 52, graduated in May and delivered a vivid Commencement address. In it she symbolically likened the quest for academic fruition to mountaineering, the challenge made all the more precarious by unexpected pitfalls capable of snuffing the purest intent. With references to *avalanche* and *earthquake*, she applied harsh allegory to those myriad circumstances euphemistically relegated to “life gets in the way.”

It got in Tina's way, first when her traditional foray into higher education in the 1980s was cut short by an auto accident that claimed her father's life, and again in 2011 when her marriage unraveled. Here, then, is a very condensed version of her speech:

*In 2006, I registered again at AC....there were no typewriters now. In the library the card catalog was gone. It takes courage to return to school.*

*Tectonic plates of our lives can shift causing seismic changes, shaking us violently, and 2011 was such a time for me. All my sure footing crumbled. In John Bunyon's The Pilgrim's Progress, a pilgrim arrives at the Hill Difficulty and says: "Better, though difficulty, the right way to go, Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe."*

*When my world quaked, I arrived at my Hill Difficulty and chose to fight my way up with a pack of grief and against the odds. I leaned on my faith; I strapped on my crampons and chose to climb. We get our word "mediocre" from the Latin meaning "halfway up the mountain." I refused to stop, but mountain climbing is dangerous and only fools go it alone. It may feel as though you are in an avalanche, but if you shoot some flares heavenward, build an SOS from the rocks amid the rubble, someone may tether themselves to a solid surface and help you hold on until you can climb again.*

*I witnessed survival stories at AC.*

*I met a woman who succumbed to addiction, was loaded on a prison bus, two children left behind. That is an earthquake! Today she has a degree in social work and impacts people who need a mountain guide, a Sherpa....I met a woman whose husband committed suicide and left her with two children. This is an avalanche! She became a cheerleader to all her classmates and today is an RN...I met people who came from foster care, shuffled from house to house, and immigrants who came from refugee camps not knowing English...*

*Difficulty is universal. Faculty, we students need Sherpas. Speak encouragement. Many students face lies that have been spoken into their lives: You're too poor, too young, too old, too dumb! You can't carry our packs, but we need you to keep telling us to pick up our own packs and keep moving.*

*During those years of switch-backs when we can't recognize our progress, keep prodding us on. Sometimes people are literally clinging with white knuckles and all they need is hope to hang on. Some will turn back, quit, but we can also be led back from the precipice. I was.*

*Shame only comes in not owning our failures. I flunked Critical Care by six-tenths of a point. My nursing class was pinned; I attended only as a spectator. My family and friends talked me off the wall. I registered to retake the class, worked extra shifts to pay the tuition—again. I passed, was pinned, and was hugely gratified when my former classmates were there to share MY success. Learn from your failures. As you climb your mountains, savor the beauty. Don't try to navigate alone. Look not to the stars first, but to the Creator of the stars, for guidance, strength and hope. God bless.*