



## THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

# KATHY HELPENSTILL

WORDS *Megan Ledbetter* // PHOTOS *Abigail Cooper*

**D**uring 19 years of teaching at Harding, Kathy Helpenstill, associate professor of behavioral sciences, has used her social work experience in oncology, hospice and acute psychiatry to teach students how to see humanity through a different lens. Constantly working alongside the Department of Human Services and being an ambassador to the community through the Child Safety Center of White County (a project started by her community practice class in 2007), she has been a role model, mentor and friend to students who leave her classroom prepared to serve others. Because of her unwavering love for her students and her desire to make the world a truly better place, the student body unequivocally dedicates this 94th Petit Jean to Kathy Helpenstill.

**MEGAN LEDBETTER:** Why did you choose social work?

**KATHY HELPENSTILL:** “My very first semester [of college] I took sociology, and I was hooked. I came in as a family and consumer sciences major, and I changed it the next semester to social work. I took intro to social work, and I have just been rolling ever since. I am very much the poster child for social work because, as hard as it is, it’s never the same day twice, and I just feel like my life is so much richer for understanding people and understanding life and just experiencing what people experience.”

**ML:** How does your experience in the field of social work prepare you for what you do at Harding?

**KH:** “Students can ask me about mental illness, and I can talk about that; people can ask me about child abuse, and I can talk about that; people can talk to me about sexual abuse, and I can talk about that. I just feel like all of that [experience] brought me to where I am, but then also makes me more accessible. [...] I have done a lot, and even though I have been in academia for 20 years, I am still doing a lot, and I think that helps me to keep my finger on the pulse of things that are relative. [...] And I don’t mean any of that to toot my own horn, but my point is that when we open ourselves up to God’s will — and my prayer is constantly, ‘Let me be your vessel,’ — then it just becomes a ride. Some of it is terrifying and some of it is heartbreaking and some of it puts you on a cliff, but then He always equips and provides a support team, whatever it takes to get through that. Even as a social worker, how do you listen to that and keep going? That is really what I feel like is the macro level of what God has brought me through and brought me to and my mission. Harding is my mission field to turn out workers

that can address the needs, but I try to do it by example and not just by textbook theory.”

**ML:** What keeps you teaching among everything else you do in the field of social work?

**KH:** “I [often] ask people, mentors or colleagues I respect, ‘Are we copping out? Are we taking the easy way out by sitting here in a classroom with a nice comfy chairs and nice desks and a nine to five schedule? Is this really where we are supposed to be or are we supposed to be doing something bigger, better, different?’ Everybody says the same thing, ‘You are put here for a reason. You have the experience and the perspective. That is the best teacher. It is not all about theory and models. It is about reality; therefore, you can make a difference by teaching people to be good social workers.’ Probably one of my big struggles is wanting to be in the field but wanting to equip people for reality.”

**ML:** Is there an overarching lesson you try to teach all your students?

**KH:** “People come first. It is not the addiction. It’s not the crime. It’s not the behavior. It’s the people. When we see people as the same as us, then there is no difference. If you see an abused kid, that could be your kid, so what are you going to do about it? If you see an elderly person that is being neglected, that is your grandmother. I feel like we belong to each other, and we are not polarizing Democrats and Republicans or mentally ill and healthy or rich and poor. We are not divided. We are the same. We just have different experiences, and that is what I want people to know. It is not us and them. We belong to each other. We are tribe, and we are a community of humanity.”



# WINNER WINNER CHICKEN DINNER

DGR, OMEGA PHI AND FRIENDS WIN SPRING SING

WORDS *Alex Petty* // PHOTOS *Kazu Fujisawa*

**S**pring Sing 2017 was a historic year for men's and women's social clubs Omega Phi and Delta Gamma Rho (DGR) and their friends. The two clubs took home the John H. Ryan Sweepstakes Award for their show "Chicken Fillet: The Moo-sical," a satirical look at the origin story of Chick-fil-A. This marked the first overall win for the two clubs since they teamed up to perform together. It was also the first win for DGR in 20 years and the first win in club history for Omega Phi.

The show was a combined effort of directors alumna Kim Chambers, junior Kayla Meeler and seniors Caroline Nelson and Jackson Eldridge. The team worked for a year staging choreography, writing lyrics and crafting the story they wanted to tell with their parody of the popular fast food chain, which was met with enthusiasm from their clubs.

"Our clubs seemed pretty open to the idea," Meeler said. "DGR has never been a huge Spring Sing club, and freshmen are not required [to perform]. When they found out the theme was about Chick-fil-A, I think a lot of people got excited. It definitely persuaded older members to be involved."

Once rehearsals began in spring 2017, the directors began to piece together all of the odds and ends of the show they had cultivated in their heads for so long. With a cast who was willing to work hard and directors who were open to trying new things, the show began to come together.

"Like any good Spring Sing show, we tried to create a rehearsal atmosphere that was a blend of lighthearted fun, socializing and dedicated work," Eldridge said. "Because of my task-oriented nature, I pushed the performers every day to perfect their singing, dancing and character-work. As we hit milestones and accomplished our goals, there was a growing sense of momentum and anticipation because of the special show we knew we were creating."

The directors attributed the success of their show to their dedication to detail and practice. According to Nelson, the stress of hard practices proved worthwhile.

"We loved our idea, and we knew that it was clever," Nelson said. "We just wanted to make sure everything was in place to make it the best show that it could be."

At the end of Spring Sing, when the overall winner was announced, the directors and cast of the show realized that their hard work had paid off. The two clubs and friends scored their first win as a team and earned \$2,000 for their charity, Hope Cottage, whose mission was to decrease domestic violence.

"That moment when I took the John H. Ryan first-place trophy from [President] Bruce McLarty's hands, hoisted it above my head and celebrated with my fellow show members in front of a packed Benson Auditorium is my favorite Harding experience thus far," Eldridge said. "Winning together for the first time was an unforgettable joy and honor."

DGR, OPhi and friends' Spring Sing 2017 show, directed by seniors Jackson Eldridge and Caroline Nelson, explores the origins of Chick-fil-A from the perspective of cows and chickens. This was the first year DGR and Omega Phi won the John H. Ryan Sweepstakes award since they began performing together. // Photos by Kazu Fujisawa

# COUTURE FOR A CURE

## BOAZ BEATS CANCER TWICE

WORDS *Megan Ledbetter* // PHOTOS *Abigail Cooper & Rebecca Boaz*

**R**ebecca Boaz, associate professor of family and consumer sciences, survived the trauma, surgeries and struggles of being diagnosed with breast cancer twice.

In addition to the support from her family, Rebecca found a support system in her close-knit childhood friends. One of these friends was Lisa Fuller, student success librarian and assistant professor.

"She is an exceptional woman and she has a remarkable story," Fuller said. "When you are hanging out with someone in the fourth grade, you have no idea the remarkable individual they are capable of becoming. As a friend, though, I cannot imagine my life without her at this point. We have been through marriages, divorces, sick children, well children and her cancer twice."

Until the time of her first diagnosis in 2006, Rebecca, the single mother of Annabelle, who was three years old at the time, had no family history of cancer and had just been offered an adjunct teaching position at Harding.

After taking precautions with a lump she found on her chest, she discovered that, although the lump she found was nothing, she had stage zero breast cancer that would not have been found otherwise.

"I feel like that was just God getting my attention," Rebecca said. "I was only 38. I would not have had a regular mammogram until I was 40, and, by that time, I could have been really sick."

Because they caught it in the early stages, a simple lumpectomy and radiation was sufficient treatment without using chemo therapy. For the next five years, while teaching visual merchandising, Rebecca remained on a chemo drug and maintained clear scans. She was declared in remission in 2011 and got a pink ribbon tattoo on her ankle, but in 2013, Rebecca was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time.

"When she had clear scans for five years in a row, we honestly thought she was done," Fuller said. "So, when it came back on the other side in a different form, we knew that this time it had to be an aggressive treatment."

To ensure this would be her last diagnosis, she had a bilateral mastectomy and reconstruction that consisted of five surgeries in 10 months, radiation and a year of recovery on a "forced sabbatical" that allowed her to be with her daughter, who was then 10.

After her return to school in 2014, Rebecca's mother, Sandra Boaz, was

diagnosed with breast cancer the following year.

"It was almost like a post-traumatic stress reaction," Rebecca said. "I wouldn't want anybody to have it, but if she was going to have it, I'm glad that I had it first because we already had all the doctors in place. She and my dad had been with me to my appointments, and they knew the doctors. She had exactly the same procedures done, down to the type of reconstruction we had, so that was good because we had all that stuff figured out."

Rebecca cared for her mother and took her to Race for the Cure only three weeks after her first surgery to participate in the survivor walk.

"She is my hero," Sandra said. "She has been through a lot of things very young. She is so strong."

On Sept. 14, 2017, Rebecca's experiences culminated at the Runway for the Cure, a Susan G. Komen fundraising fashion show in which all the models were breast cancer survivors. After participating in 2015 as a model, Rebecca took a group of students as volunteers to the show in 2016. In 2017, Rebecca and her mother were both selected as models while her visual merchandising students helped run the show backstage.

"It was an overwhelming experience," Rebecca said. "Everyone was backstage getting dressed and talking about their different experiences and the surgeries and doctors they had. It was kind of surreal. You would never want to be in that club, but if you were going to be in it, it's an automatic belonging. All those women were like me."

Megan Golliver, a senior fashion merchandising student who volunteered in 2016 and 2017 at Runway for the Cure, described Rebecca as resilient and was inspired by seeing Rebecca and her mother receive the applause and recognition they deserved.

"Having everyone in the room together and [supporting] her was an amazing opportunity," Golliver said. "For someone that pours into others all the time, for us to get to pour back into her and be there for her, that was a really great moment."

Rebecca learned through her experiences to care for herself along the way. "It has given her the permission that she needs to take care of herself," Fuller said. "She is a very sacrificial person. Through having cancer, I think she has learned to take care of herself in the process too. The beautiful part is that [Rebecca and Sandra] are both here, and they have both lived through it."

Rebecca Boaz, associate professor of family and consumer sciences, reviews a textile swatch kit with sophomore Sierra Heasley in the Olen Hendricks building on Oct. 27, 2017. Boaz not only taught students about fashion merchandising but also demonstrated resiliency in the face of adversity. // Photo by Abigail Cooper

Boaz accompanies her mother Sandra at the Susan G. Komen Runway for the Cure in Little Rock, Arkansas, on Sept. 14, 2017. Boaz and her mother were part of a group of 48 breast cancer survivors chosen as models for the show. // Photo courtesy of Rebecca Boaz

