

Community

Retiring international studies professor reflects on four decades in the classroom

BY DANIELLE DiNATALE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Donald Orr had a dream, one unlike what most imagine their future to be. He wanted to buy a boat, and live on it for three years. During that time, he would work around the British Islands. And when he was finished, he would then take his boat and sail around the world.

Instead, he did the one thing he never wanted to do: he became a teacher.

Now that he's planning to retire, Orr reflects back on what brought him to La Roche, and all that the college has taught him.

Born in Malta, a small country

made of two islands situated in the Mediterranean Sea, he graduated from St. Aloysius College at the age of 18. At 19, he taught literature for high school. He then attended the University of Pittsburgh and studied economic and social development. He has been teaching here at La Roche for 40 years.

La Roche College is a far cry from Orr's dream of living out on the sea. In fact, he was never meant to be teaching in the first place.

"I came here through a series of mishaps," Orr said with a laugh. "It was purely an accident."

Originally, in 1978, he was waiting to see if he would get a contract for a job in the British Virgin Islands in economic development. The job would pay \$45,000. The problem with this job was that he was not guaranteed that the bid on the contract would be successful.

During this wait, Orr said he had hit a rough time in his life. Going through a divorce, he needed a job to pay the bills. While studying at the University of Pittsburgh, a friend asked if he would teach a spring semester at La Roche College. He accepted, needing a job, and, to his surprise, enjoyed it. The college asked after the semester if he would apply for full-time. At a crossroads, he had two options: wait to see if his contract went through, or take the teaching position.

In the end, Orr chose teaching. He said, "If it's good for you, you have to do it. If you do it for the money, you'll be miserable."

For Orr, teaching was what he needed, and the classroom, he added, was an oasis. At the time he started, he was depressed. But being in the classroom brought him relief.

"It was like wearing an overcoat," Orr said. "When I entered the classroom, I could take the overcoat off."

The college itself is a place that Orr commends for its atmosphere. The La Roche community describes itself as a place that is accepting of all backgrounds and beliefs. To Orr, the college holds up to that mission. He said that La Roche is a place of value.

"People here really try to do the right thing," he added.

Since starting here in 1978, Orr has witnessed the college go through many changes. Overall, he said that the college has changed for the better, especially due to the international program. He added that he thinks the

SEE ORR, PAGE 10

"Some students have an old wisdom. Sometimes they have different takes on something that I wouldn't have thought."

- Donald Orr

International desserts spotlight diverse customs and culture

BY KRISTEN SPEZIALETTI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On Nov. 14, the college center was filled with Chinese almond and pineapple cakes, Vietnamese bánh khoai chiên, Saudi Arabian basbousa, and traditional desserts from 11 other countries.

This event, Global Day: A Celebration of La Roche's Many Cultures, was part of La Roche's new International Education Month.

Previously, La Roche hosted International Education Week, but devoting a whole month gave students a better opportunity to showcase their cultures.

"This year we are excited to brand November as International Education Month and continue these popular programs beyond a single week. The activities included are designed to build a greater global understanding and strengthen the cultural awareness of the full campus community," Emily Markham, Assistant Director of Global Engagement, said.

According to Sister Veronica Kim, Assistant Director of International Student Services, there are about 300 international students on campus. That's 20 percent of our students.

"To international students, this is a home. They have good friends here," she said.

This is why November's cultural events are important to the community. "Our diversity is beautiful. We learn from each other," Sister Veronica said.

Students, faculty, and staff participated in these events by preparing and eating food, teaching and learning about different cultures, and hosting events on campus. "[International students] learn how to open their culture, their mind and their heart," Sister Veronica said.

Senior psychology major Sijal Mokhtar is from Saudi Arabia and wanted to participate in this month's events "to show people from around the world a part of Saudi culture."

Ly Nguyen, a junior international management major from Vietnam said, "by [participating] in [Global Day], I had the opportunity not only to learn more about other countries, but also to share with others a little bit about my country."

SEE DESSERTS, PAGE 9

Sister followed a singular path to religious life

BY JULIA FELTON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Sister Donna Tracy, a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence Congregation, was 19 years old when she decided to dedicate her life to God as a religious sister. Her decision to join a religious community, however, came in an unconventional manner.

Tracy said that when she was in elementary school or high school, she would have denied the call to become a sister. The reason she became a nun was actually thanks to her sister. Tracy recalled that one day, she found her sister writing a letter to the Mother Provincial at the Sisters of Divine Providence congregation, inquiring about joining the community. She told her sister to add her own name to the letter.



Sister Donna Tracy (above) co-founded Deborah House, a convent that benefits single mothers

© JULIA FELTON

Tracy and her sister entered the community on the same day. Tracy

SEE SISTER, PAGE 10

Sister, continued from page 3

stayed. Her sister did not. Tracy said she still teases her sister about the unique way in which she entered the community.

Once she became a sister, Tracy said she felt she found her call.

She had not always felt called to become a religious sister, though. As a matter of fact, she said she had previously believed she was called to be a missionary. Tracy recalled that she had always been excited when missionaries would speak about their work.

"I always had the great heart to be a missionary," Tracy said.

During her 61 years as a nun, Tracy has spread that love. She worked as an elementary school teacher, she

worked in parish social ministry, and she advocated for social justice issues.

Tracy co-founded Deborah House, a repurposed convent where single mothers from poor economic backgrounds could come together. They lived in the home, where they were given support as they raised their children. Deborah House also offered resources to help these women find employment.

When she reminisced about the work she did with Deborah House, Tracy called it "one of the greatest things I ever saw happen in my lifetime."

Tracy said no matter what kind of service she was involved with, she always loved being part of something

larger than herself.

One of Tracy's most recent positions was working as the volunteer coordinator for Providence Family Support Center. She said she often recruited La Roche College students to volunteer.

Tracy still advocates volunteerism for college students. "When a volunteer opportunity is offered," Tracy said, "try to do it."

Though Tracy said she loved vol-

unteer work, she admitted it is not always easy. Still, she encouraged students to overcome their fears, try to find new ways to get involved in the community, and find social justice issues about which they are passionate.

For La Roche College students, Tracy offered an encouraging message. She said, "To me, the great hope is that you would use your four years to become more aware of how you could change the world in the future."

"To me, the great hope is that you would use your four years to become more aware of how you could change the world in the future."

- Sister Donna Tracy

Orr, continued from page 3

college especially improved due to the Pacem In Terris program. Established in 1993, the program brought students from war-torn countries to study at La Roche.

"Before, most students were from Northern Allegheny," Orr said. "There were many close-minded people. Now students are exposed to so many different people and cultures. It's fantastic."

In his opinion, La Roche does its best to discuss important topics and combat those closed-minded thoughts. Orr said La Roche Experience classes such as Economic Justice are great examples of how the college tries to make students more aware of the world around them.

"They can make an impact in the right hands," Orr said. "The more you put in, the more you get out."

While Orr has spent much of his life teaching here, he said that if he had the chance to go back, he wouldn't change anything. Instead, he would make the same decisions, but try to do better. He said that he would be more demanding of his students, and not let them shortchange themselves.

Orr added he would also work harder to instill a spirit of inquiry and curiosity in his students. In his opinion, professors, and colleges themselves, sometimes put too much emphasis on students going to school in order to get a job. They miss the point of schooling completely.

"You get an education to get an education," Orr said. "Not to get a job."

Although he is the teacher, the students have taught Orr over the years

as well. He said that through his students he learned to be more patient.

"The biggest lesson they've taught me is that what I say doesn't always make sense to others," Orr said. "And that was a hard lesson to learn."

Students have also taught him, he added, to not assume that a group is all the same.

"Some students have an old wisdom," he said. "Sometimes they have different takes on something that I wouldn't have thought."

In a similar way, Orr tries to impart knowledge onto his students other than the subject that he's teaching. Never a fan of conformity, Orr said that he'll often go off on tangents during his lessons, but they're all meant to teach his students something beyond subjects of economics, which many students find boring.



Different cultures come together to eat some fantastic desserts. (First row left to right) Dipina KC, Sister Veronica Kim, Ashley Waltz, Jaynil Patel, Isabelle Wallace, and Neemu Sherpa, (second row left to right) Dung Thuy Tran and Ly Nguyen.

© SARAH RODGERS

"That's the fun of it," Orr said with a smile. "I like to weave things in when the time is right."

While Orr has enjoyed his experience in teaching, he said that it is time for him to move on. No longer dreaming of living life at sea, he now has a new dream to fulfill: living in Malta. Orr said he bought a house back in his home country, where he plans to spend eight to nine months of the year. There, he said he plans to take part in activities he enjoys such

as writing, playing music, and taking walks.

"The hardest part will be the psychological adjustment," Orr said. "You work your whole life saving for when you're old. Well, now I'm old. So now it's going from accumulation to depletion. But I'm looking forward to it."

Orr plans to retire in May 2018.

NaNoWriMo, continued from page 6

ed, she tries to write 1,000 words per day.

"It is very difficult," Valderrama said of the balancing act NaNoWriMo requires. "The first four days I was meeting my 1,000 word count, but then I started getting assigned projects, so it's been harder to (reach) 1,000 words. And then if writer's block is there, then I really don't know what I want to write."

Writer's block, Kenna said, is one of NaNoWriMo's frustrating elements. She said she aims to write for 30 minutes to one hour each night, but has had some days where she doesn't write at all. Kenna added people and elements of nature, like the moon, can provide her with writing inspiration.

"I'm definitely a big people-watcher, so that definitely helps me out with a lot of stuff," Kenna said. "Nature always puts me in the mood."

Valderrama said she likes to write to movie soundtracks, such as the "Wonder Woman" and "Transformers" soundtracks. She said she finds soundtracks helpful because there are no lyrics and the varying tempos can encourage writing production or relaxation.

"If you think of movies, those are stories as well," Valderrama said. "So their soundtracks or scores have to match what they're trying to convey out to the audience. So that's how I feel when I'm writing. Whatever I'm listening to, I'm matching the energy that I'm putting into a scene."

Another challenging aspect of NaNoWriMo, Valderrama said, is maintaining confidence in one's novel.

"I may think my story is great, but then as I'm writing it I'm thinking, 'Are other people going to like it?'" Valderrama said. "I think staying confident in knowing that your story is good, your material is valuable – that really can be a challenge to the whole thing."

Valderrama described her novel as a teen romance drama. She added she would like to continue editing and revising it after November concludes, and she has not ruled out the idea of publishing.

"I'm basing it around that coming-of-age time," Valderrama said. "The two main characters are 16

and 17-years-old, they're young, it's like first love. But then I decided to throw in a little plot twist to make it a little dramatic and something to keep somebody reading it."

Kenna said she would also like to edit, revise and possibly publish her NaNoWriMo novel, which she described as realistic fiction. NaNoWriMo, she added, can provide aspiring writers with a solid starting point.

"I think it's nice to have some foundation to start with," Kenna said. "Especially since Dr. Bellin said the novel he just got published ('Freefall') was a project he had worked on. I was like, 'Wow. Dreams do come true.'"