Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Laurie Jungling

“Time to Renew the Story”

Heritage and Hope at Augustana

7 Feb 2011

“Time...keeps on slippin, slippin, slippin into the future...” These are the lyrics from Steve Miller’s hit “Fly Like an Eagle” that slip unwanted into my brain every time I celebrate anniversaries. For some reason, the future will just not stay away during those occasions of the present when I am remembering the past. I recently finished a book, read on the recommendation of our own Janet Blank-Libra, entitled “The Time of Our Singing.”¹ It’s a story that interweaves the physics of Time with the beauty of Music as it explores the complexities of race during the 20th century. The story is told in such a way that the chapters loop from the present through the past and then into the future before starting a new loop all over again. And what’s so interesting is that the characters end up doing the same thing: the present is never only the present, the past never just stays in the past, and the future is never something that hasn’t happened yet. The characters, in their own lives and through the lives of their parents and children, loop back and forth through time so that there no longer seems to be a past or future. There is simply an eternal Now with the past and future weaving through it.

I relate this looping image of time to our celebration of Augie’s 150th year as a college, a college that has done its own share of traveling through time and space to reach its current now. And as we celebrate our past journey, we realize that its heritage is still with us in the now,

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naming us, writing us, and integrating itself into us. At the same time, though, the hopes (and perhaps fears) of the future are also traveling through time, looping back into our present, enticing us forward into new challenges…or perhaps better said, new opportunities.

Recently I have had the amazing privilege to travel through time with Dr. Art Olson, professor emeriti of religion and ethics. Through the words of his wisdom and eyes of his experience, I sat at Art’s feet (well not literally – but definitely figuratively) and visited the past through his stories, his teachings, and his written words. But we not only visited the past together; we also explored our present and our future. And one of the things that struck home for me in our adventure was Art’s image of “story” as the heartbeat of a college’s life. “Stories,” he writes in his introduction to a study prepared for Lutheran college faculties in 1977, “show how a community of people view their past, place themselves in the present, and hope to live in the future.” Art’s quote reminded me that in the midst of all of our discussions about tests and papers, curriculums and mission statements, money and recruitment numbers, it is finally Augie’s story that holds us together as a community.

But as I considered this idea of story, I began to wonder: what is Augustana’s story? I’m not necessarily talking about Augie’s history (and her-story), though certainly the history of the school is part of that story. I’m talking about the story, the central narrative, the enduring saga that lies beneath and above the history and pulls Augustana forward into the ever-changing nows of the present and future. Certainly, there are many stories that make up Augustana, just like there are many story-tellers. But as Art reminded me, these many stories are – or at least ought to be – connected through some common threads. “Without these threads,” Art writes, “the several stories become without a common voice…” and without this common voice “the institution is

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mindless.” So I ask you, what do you think Augustana’s story is? And what does it mean in this story for Augustana to be a college of the church?

I asked Art these questions and he started pulling out books and papers right and left for me to read. And then he told me about some of the characters in Augustana’s story who had also investigated these questions…including himself. He told me about the group of Augie’s faculty who in 1950 joined with faculty from other Lutheran colleges to explore this question of story. Apparently, someone had stated at a Lutheran College Faculties conference that church colleges were simply secular schools with a chapel and religion classes thrown in. Umbrage was taken at this suggestion and men of Augie like Stanley Olsen, J. Jorgen Thompson, Jr., Richard Solberg, and Ed Gunberg came together with men from other Lutheran colleges and met for ten years to think about the philosophy (one might substitute “story” here) of a church-related liberal arts college. What was produced was this book, Christian Faith and the Liberal Arts, published in 1960, which offers a variety of answers to this question.4

But as soon as this book was completed, the setting and characters of the story changed and the question was asked again. And again various faculty members from various Lutheran colleges stepped up to explore it, only this time the question concerned finding a viable saga for church-related liberal arts colleges in an “age of pluralism.” Art participated as a member of the task force who for several years discussed various answers to the question before offering this report in 1977.5 But time did its thing and the question of Augustana’s story resurfaced again…and again…and again as new curriculums were written, deans and presidents came and left, students changed, and the school morphed into new versions of future pasts.

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3 Ibid., 12.
4 Christian Faith and the Liberal Arts, ed. Ditmanson, Hong, and Quanbeck (Augsburg, 1960), iii.
5 Quest for a Viable Saga, 9.
One example of time’s story that Art shared was how things had changed from the 1960’s when students, faculty and the culture as a whole had an idealistic hope for changing the present to make the world a better place. There were even civil rights marches…yes, right here in Sioux Falls, SD…and students were hungry to go out and do, do, do. In the 1970’s however, as the disillusionment of unfilled dreams and violent backlashes blew over the country, students and faculty became more introspective…careful and spiritually inclined, less likely to go out and help the world, more likely to find a way to live in it. We didn’t spend much time talking about the 80’s and 90’s but I’m guessing similar movements in mood could be found – time looping from doing through feeling and into thinking and back again. Art even wondered if perhaps the current generation of students aren’t in fact returning to the “doing” part of the story.\(^6\) A generation of people wanting to “make a difference” through active service and love for others. Though I’ve only been here 2.5 short years, I had to agree…our students here at Augie definitely have a drive to change the world…such a strong drive that it can be a challenge sometimes to get them to stop and think for a moment about the changes they might want to effect.

The time and conviction that Art and his colleagues put into exploring the question of Augustana’s story has inspired me to wonder further about this story. One thing I’ve learned from Art is that just as the story-telling of Augie is never finished, neither is the task of discerning that story. The story is not finished…it has been moving for 150 years and it is still being told today and tomorrow. Which makes me wonder: could it be time for us to return again as a community to the question that Art and so many characters from Augie have asked: What is Augustana story?

I’ll be honest…I’ve been here two and a half years and I’m not sure what the story is. I know the history and I’ve heard many stories from all parts of the campus. I’ve read the mission

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\(^6\) Art Olson, Interview, Augustana College, January 26 & 27, 2011.
statement and looked over the website. I’ve studied the handbooks and the catalog, and I’ve learned a lot about how Augie works and what Augie does. I know what I think my story is and the stories of some of my colleagues…and I have some idea of how these many stories fit into a general “liberal arts” story. But I’m just not sure what the unique story of Augustana College, a liberal arts college related to the Lutheran church, is. And then I wonder: Am I alone in this wondering? What about other faculty? What about our students…do they have a sense of the story that drives Augustana? Art wrote that, “The state of the story of an institution is a barometer of its health.” Thus, as we think about important things like curriculum changes, financial realities, and all the many things that make up important pieces of Augustana’s future as well as its history, might it also be time to renew Augustana’s story? Not rewrite the story. Not replace it with something new or restore something old. Instead, renew it…tell it anew for our unique now with its past and future folded in.

[One way to consider Augustana’s story has been and will no doubt continue to be its mission statement. For those who do not have it memorized, Augie’s mission is: “Inspired by Lutheran scholarly tradition and the liberal arts, Augustana provides an education of enduring worth that challenges the intellect, fosters integrity and integrates faith with learning and service in a diverse world.” And as I read that mission statement yet again, I think that it reflects a good, solid central plot for a college like Augustana. But being the critical thinker I am I can’t help but ask questions of it…especially as we again discern how to live out Augie’s story through its curriculum. Questions like: what kind of worth do we want to have endure in our students? How can we better challenge intellects in the midst of diversity and foster moral excellence in a culture that prefers a live and let live morality? What does it look like to integrate all of our
learning with faith? Was that speaker in 1950 correct – is faith simply a tack-on? Or is it something richer, deeper, more profound?

I really appreciated Nancy Davidson’s story in the faculty meeting the other day about a young man who wanted to go to a college that would give him “the best deal.” Nancy responded by asking if by deal he meant “cheap? fast and easy? or good quality?” I think all of us want to provide the latter… the best quality is always the best deal. Part of providing that quality, I believe, is knowing what our story is and sharing it through all we say and do.]

So as a part of beginning this conversation about Augie’s story, I would like to contribute my two and a half cents – 1 cent for each of the years I’ve been here -- by focusing on a central theme that undergirds most Lutheran Liberal Art’s colleges: vocation. I was excited to read Mike Wanous’ contribution to the January (2011) Cues sharing that Augustana has entered into the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education. I believe that the concept of vocation can be one of those thick threads that ties together Augustana’s story across time and space. At its most basic, vocation is God’s call to love and serve the world because God loves and serves the world through Jesus. One of the most powerful ways to present vocation as a central thread of the Augie story is to do what Art Olsen did and turn to John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only son…” God not only loves the whole world so much that God wants to save it; God loves the whole world so much that God wants us to learn everything we can about it. Let me quote briefly from a presentation Art gave to the American Lutheran Church’s District convention in 1975:

“God gave his Son because of his love for the world. A church-related college should embody something of God’s love for the world. This means simply that there is no truth in the world that we should shy away from. We ought to view as fully as we can the expanding universe and the expanding neighborhood, even when the vision is painful, as it often is…Since Christ came for the sake of the
world we cannot shrink from our responsibility in it. The world is the horizon of the activity of God’s love.”

A liberal arts education is one central way to teach us about this world in all of its complex, inter-relational fullness as well as its unpredictable, chaotic, incompleteness.

Thus, as Liberal Artists – I love that phrase – as Liberal Artists at a church-related college I believe that we are called…called to study this world – to become aware of it, to learn about all of its parts, to ask as many questions about it as we can think of and then start all over again. But this call doesn’t stop at awareness. We are also called to know this world – to know it relationally and intimately. And we are called to love this world just as God loves it, to serve this world as God has served it, to have compassion for this world just as God has compassion for us.

And how do we fulfill this call? Well, we do what we do as only we at Augustana can do it. We teach what we teach. We learn what we learn. In each classroom, department, division; in each office, building, and dorm room; as teachers, learners, staff and administrators. Through the sciences and the arts. By teaching how to teach and learning how to nurse. In English classes, philosophy classes, chemistry classes, history classes, and yes, even religion classes. In all these ways, we fulfill this call to “embody something of God’s love for the world” and face head-on, as painful as though it may be, the many truths this world has to offer. Lutherans call this seeing the world through the cross. Liberal artists call this becoming the fullest humans we can be.

Whatever we call it, we are telling our story by living our vocations, each in our own way ministering to Augustana and the world.

So, as we bring the past forward into our now and celebrate our heritage this year, let us also pull ourselves forward into the future and take some time to renew Augustana’s story and follow God’s call. Thank you.

HERITAGE AND HOPE AT AUGUSTANA
Monday, February 7, 2011

Prelude "Partita on Joyful, Joyful" Charles Callahan
Welcome/announcements Invocation Psalm 90, read responsively by half verse Prayer Hymn "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" ELW #836 Scripture John 3:16 Message “Time to Renew the Story” Laurie Jungling, religion Lord’s Prayer Benediction Postlude "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" Paul Manz

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SPRING SEMESTER SERVICE LEARNING - Student participants and leaders are sought for these service learning trips next spring. Costs are reduced for leaders willing to help with recruitment and planning. See Pr. Paul or Carol if you are interested.

FILM SHOWING - "For the Bible Tells Me So" - Through the experiences of five very normal, very Christian, very American families -- including those of former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt and Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson -- we discover how insightful people of faith handle the realization of having a gay child. Informed by such respected voices as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Harvard's Peter Gomes, Orthodox Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Reverend Jimmy Creech, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO offers healing, clarity and understanding to anyone caught in the crosshairs of scripture and sexual identity.
Mon., 8 pm in Kresge; Tues., 6:45 pm in the Back Alley, Wed., 6:15 pm in the Back Alley, followed by a panel discussion at 8 pm.

DISCUSSING OUR WELCOME. The Augustana Student Congregation is a Reconciled in Christ congregation, making explicit welcome to all. [See below.] Next Sunday, Feb. 13 we'll let Matthew 5 help us consider welcome hospitality from a biblical point of view. The documentary "For the Bible Tells Me So", shown and discussed this week, will also contribute to that discussion!

AUGUSTANA STUDENT CONGREGATION WELCOME -Come to me, all who believe, all who wonder, and all who don’t know what to think; All who are joyful, all who suffer, and all who are complacent; All who are homosexual, or heterosexual, or bisexual, and all who simply don’t know; All who are male, all who are female, and all who are transgender. Come to me. All who are young, all who are old, and all who know no age; All who are black, or white, or brown, or tan, or yellow, or purple, or blue, or red, and all combination of hues; All who give grades, all who receive grades, and all who wish there was a better way; All who love, all who long to be loved, and all who do not know love; Come to me. All who are healthy and all who are unwell; All who hurt and all who are hurting; All who judge and all who are judged; All who feel included and all who feel left out; Come to me, all. I will give you rest. Come as you are. You are welcome.

Pastor Paul is available to support students [and friends of students who want to be helpful.] He particularly has wide experience in healing from depression, walking with grief, probing vocational discernment, and exploring changing faith. He's happy to meet with either individuals or small groups.

PUEBLO de DIOS CRAFT SALE - Augustana Lutheran Church here in Sioux Falls is home to a Spanish-speaking congregation, Pueblo de Dios. There is an women’s artisan cooperative who will be presenting a sale of their handmade craft items on Thursday and Friday, Feb. 10th and 11th, in the Commons Concourse (by the mailboxes), from 10 am - 2:30 pm.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE
Tuesday (8th) Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am - Fr. James Morgan - Camp Fair - Commons Lounge - 10 am - 4pm Wednesday (9th) Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Molly Sasser-Goehner, Thursday and Friday - Pueblo de Dios Gift Sale - Commons...10-2:30 Friday (11th) Worship, 10 am - Jalynn Joy, Sr. Spkr.
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- March 18-21 - Joy Ranch, Watertown. Cost is $25 for gas
- March 27-30 - Pine Ridge Reservation. Cost $125
- May 22-26 - New York City. Cost is $800 including flight, housing, most food and Broadway play ticket. Full payments for Joy Ranch and Pine Ridge, and $300 deposit for NY due by Feb. 28th.

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