cornerstone

CELEBRATING PHILANTHROPY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SPRING 2014

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ISSN: 2292-7964
Publications Mail Agreement No. 40112326

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On the cover:
Rohit Sharma, alumnus and entrepreneur, photographed in his home, March 2014.
Photo by The Canadian Press Images/Alison Yin

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Family has long been at the centre of Rohit Sharma's life — whether it's mornings spent with his son in his California home or days long ago learning curiosity at the feet of his father in India. So it's no surprise his life has been about creating connections (page 28).

Photo by The Canadian Press Images/Alison Yin

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CREATES

Philanthropy allows the University of Alberta to advance creativity, support discovery and create positive change in the world. It has opened doors for students. It has created boundless opportunities for researchers. It is truly transformative. Here is just some of what the generosity of our donors has accomplished.

46
national championships won by student athletes supported through the Adopt-An-Athlete program

1
vaccine discovered by Li Ka Shing researcher Michael Houghton that will potentially help combat hepatitis C

841
rare items — including art and textiles — from ancient and modern East Asia in the Mactaggart Art Collection, donated by Cécile and Sandy Mactaggart

164
community organizations served by students through the Community Service-Learning program

3
books written about the Mactaggart Art Collection

1
robotic arm created by a student thanks to a grant from the Undergraduate Research Initiative

13,077
acres of land donated by the Mattheis and Bocock families on which researchers conduct agricultural and environmental studies

7
donor-funded scholarships received by 2013 Rhodes Scholarship winner Megan Engel

3,913
K-12 students who learned how to be allies for diversity by attending fYrefly in Schools workshops in 2013

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Building Together

The president's residence faces east. On this late winter morning the sunlight coming through the front windows brings the promise of spring — days of green grass and budding trees.

This house once belonged to one of the University of Alberta's most distinguished alumni, former MLA and university chancellor Lou Hyndman. It was within these walls that he and another alumnus, former Alberta premier Peter Lougheed, would meet to discuss their vision of what this province could become.

Although they're no longer with us, we continue to feel the impact of these passionate and daring leaders. Philanthropic legacies established in their honour continue to uplift students and this institution, through the Lou Hyndman Service Bursary and the Peter Lougheed Leadership Initiative. Hyndman and Lougheed will long be remembered as two cornerstones of the foundation of our university.

This magazine celebrates philanthropy at the University of Alberta. In the pages of this inaugural issue, you will come to know some of today's cornerstones — this institution's closest friends and greatest advocates. You will learn about these innovators and visionaries, and hear what moved them to partner with the University of Alberta. You will come to know not only how they are changing the lives of our students, faculty and researchers, but also how they are creating positive change in the world around us.

When Lou Hyndman and Peter Lougheed sat in this house nearly 50 years ago, surely they felt the potential of what they were creating. I hope the people you meet in this magazine create the same feeling for you and inspire you in following your life's ambitions and creating your own legacy.

Indira V. Samarasekera, O.C., President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Alberta

The Lou Hyndman Service Bursary and the Peter Lougheed Leadership Initiative are made possible by donor gifts. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

A Bridge to Health

STORY BY CARISSA HALTON | PHOTOS BY JOHN ULAN

One of the world's leaders in finding the link between nutrition and chronic disease is working at the University of Alberta to improve the health of Aboriginal communities

Sangita Sharma has always been interested in food. Or, more accurately, she has always been interested in nutrition. "I like nutrition," she says. "While it's a neutral topic, you can learn so much from people and about people."

One of the world's leading experts in nutritional epidemiology, dietary assessment and nutritional and lifestyle interventions, Sharma has studied the health of nearly 30 ethnic groups across the globe — from Jamaican to Nepalese — in an effort to learn how a culture's food affects its risk for a variety of diseases. But her research on a project called Healthy Foods North in Canada's Arctic was the catalyst for her work as the University of Alberta's Endowed Chair in Aboriginal Health.

"The first time I arrived [in the Arctic], people laughed because even my *teeth* were cold!" Sharma remembers. The Inuit and Inuvialuit people, however, were the warmest she had met in her career, excited to share their culture and food, introducing Sharma to the taste of muskox and polar bear. But globalization and global warming are gradually pushing these traditional foods out of fashion in the North, replacing them with processed foods high in sugar and fat, low in fibre and nutrients. Obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer are on the rise, and even accessing treatment is a major challenge for northern indigenous people. "Consider that from Nunavut you have to fly almost a day for treatment. Who wants to fly when you're sick?" asks Sharma. "There is an emotional and financial cost to chronic diseases in the North."

Sharma's consultation with community members and collaboration with local grocery stores worked to reverse this trend. Limp produce, expired cereals and processed foods were replaced with fresh vegetables, lentils and skim milk powder. Free taste tests and cooking demonstrations featured healthier alternatives, and the nutritional benefits of traditional meat were promoted. People lost weight and their vitamin intake increased. This initial work in Arctic nutrition opened the door to a variety of new projects in the North: an exploration of maternal health, a study into obesity prevention and, recently, research into how northern indigenous communities access cancer screening services.

Consultation and collaboration are a key part of her responsibilities as Endowed Chair in Aboriginal Health. Sharma will form a bridge

between health services and communities, but she will also bring to the table other University of Alberta faculties and other academic institutions worldwide as well as governments, policy-makers and private-sector partners. This kind of collaboration is vital to creating programs that incorporate indigenous knowledge to improve the population's health. "The communities know what needs to be done; they just need support facilitating."

Sharma has also been working with a number of Edmonton high schools on Why Act Now?, a project to better understand the health of urban Aboriginal youth. Preliminary data from her study suggests that more than 90 per cent of the Aboriginal youth surveyed don't get enough dietary fibre and exceed acceptable sodium intake. As with her experience in the North, education will be critical to transforming the teens' diets. By working with Aboriginal youth, elders and other members of the community, Sharma hopes her research will inform existing Aboriginal health programs and lead to the development of new programs to fill any gaps. She is working with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack (centre, facing page) at amiskwaciy Academy in Edmonton to guide the program.

"In Canada, there is a large health disparity between the Aboriginal population and the non-Aboriginal population. There is an up to 12-year lower life expectancy and we need to eliminate that gap," Sharma says.

The Endowed Chair in Aboriginal Health is supported through philanthropy and aims to improve the lives and health of Aboriginal people. Sangita Sharma's research is funded in part by Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions, Alberta Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada. For more on how to support this work or other research at the University of Alberta, turn to page 42.

The Voice

STORY BY OMAR MOUALLEM | PHOTOS BY MARK PETERMAN

One man overcame all odds to become the voice trusted by millions. Now he takes on a new role: hero to fine arts students

Alan Bleviss has a distinctive look — a shaggy white mane and woolly beard crowd his face — but it's his voice that is singular. Sonorous and honeyed, inviting yet imperative, his words have summoned you many more times than once from your living room to rent a car, to switch phone providers, to buy the leading brand of diapers and to see "the one movie you can't miss."

"There were other lines I kept using: 'In a world' or 'one of the best movies of all time,' " says the voice-over master from his Scottsdale, Ariz., home, sitting beneath a framed original poster from what might actually be one of the best of all time. He narrated the trailer for *Scarface* in the early '80s, as well as those for *Dirty Dancing* and *Flashdance,* though producers stopped calling him decades ago, he says. "They're going for younger voices." These days, it's mostly commercials and documentaries that he narrates, just steps away in his home studio linked up through a network to New York and Los Angeles.

The 72-year-old actor, born and raised in Edmonton, earned a modest fortune doing voice work. He continually gives some of that wealth back, including endowing two scholarships to help University of Alberta students pursue theatre: the Bleviss/Motkovich Family Graduate Award and the future Bleviss/Motkovich Family Undergraduate Prize in Drama.

In recognition of Bleviss's success, the University of Alberta Department of Drama has named a technical auditorium the Bleviss Laboratory Theatre. He hopes the theatre, which officially opened in March, will be used for experimental productions. "I go to the theatre and it seems that the majority of the people there are grey-haired," he says. "I think experimental theatre, be it experimental in attitude or subject matter, will bring a younger audience."

But the reasons for his charity go deeper than trying to establish a future for theatre. He is passionate about accessible education and believes all education should be free, though he knows that will probably never happen and probably isn't pragmatic. "You need a commitment from the students," he admits. "But it wasn't free for me and I wasn't that committed, either." He erupts in bassy laughter that startles his nearby Doberman.

Bleviss wears his sense of humour prominently, and will happily tell you about some of the pranks he pulled while at the University of Alberta. His puckish nature even stretches into his philanthropy — including naming a theatre scholarship and two facilities in the surname of his deceased father, Joe Bleviss, who disdained plays and refused to fund Alan's education. (Motkovich is his mother's maiden name.)

Though the elder Bleviss once owned two performance venues in Edmonton, the Varscona and the Roxy — plus the former Garneau movie theatre — he saw them strictly as business ventures. As was Hub Cigar Store, which he tried to give his eldest son in order to dissuade him from pursuing schooling in the arts.

Bleviss was unfazed by his father's objections; he followed his love and became a gifted stage actor. But it was a Canada Dry voice audition

that earned him his prestige. “It was something like, ‘From the salt spray of the Pacific Ocean to the wheat fields of Alberta … the champagne of ginger ales.’ And then I got my first paycheque. It would have taken me months to earn what I earned in an hour. I continued theatre, but in my lunch hours I would grab a bag of chips and then go do commercials.”

And there were many. AT&T. Kodak. American Express. The U.S. Democratic Party. “I was invited to Bill Clinton’s inauguration — both times — but I didn’t go, to keep the mystery. My voice will create an image for them to believe in.”

His was one of only a handful of voices trusted to sway the American people. He earned a slew of awards, including six prestigious CLIOs and one in 1985 from the Cannes International Film Festival. But in 1992, at the peak of his career, he developed chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy, a crippling nerve disease that might have been brought on by a virus or a bug bite; he still doesn’t know. It disabled his legs, leaving him on crutches to this day. “Sometimes I think this was God telling me to slow down. First, he took away my legs — ‘*Just slow down*.’ ” Bleviss didn’t. So next, he thinks, God came for his voice.

The disease paralyzed his vocal cords, leaving his voice — his gift, his livelihood — out of his control. He remembers nervously recording an AT&T commercial, hoping his voice could get through the 30-second spot intact. “I would start talking and my voice would just —” he inaudibly mouths words “— it would just disappear. It was just air.” Other times it came out as a growl.

After years of speech therapy that involved singing — songs, his scripts, the newspaper — he regained control of his speech. But by then all but two of his clients had stopped using him for their projects. For 20 years, he hardly worked.

Today, Bleviss’s faith tells him it was a painful blessing. In addition to commercial and documentary jobs, he’s getting more out of life now: attending Scottsdale theatres, taking regular vacations with his three adult children, visiting his mother in Edmonton and building one of the most impressive Civil War token collections in the world. (Merchants privately minted the currencies in the 1860s when the American government shut down. About 700 collectors belong to the Civil War Token Society, over which Bleviss presided as president until 2008.)

His disability is also improving. Though he still requires crutches or a motorized scooter to get around, he’s optimistic about a new treatment that he began this year. But most of all, he’s happy to have mastered his voice again.

“So many functions of the body we take for granted, until you take a look at a newborn. When a child is born, you look at him and go, ‘Wow — 10 fingers, 10 toes, a nose, two eyes, the kid can see something, and he’s crying — he’s alive. There is so much to what creates that sound, that voice.”

The Bleviss/Motkovich Family Graduate Award is offered to graduate students in the Department of Drama in recognition of superior creative or research accomplishments. The Bleviss/Motkovich Family Undergraduate Prize in Drama will support undergraduate students studying dramatic arts such as acting, directing, playwriting, theatre design and technical theatre. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

Bigger Than Barriers

STORY BY JEN JENSEN | PHOTOS BY JOHN ULAN

Tom Morimoto reflects on lessons learned over a lifetime of winning battles, from landing at Juno Beach to earning a university education

Tom Morimoto only made it into the Army thanks to a small bribe and a particular pair of shoes.

It was 1940 and Morimoto, in his 20s, was living in northern Canada and was eager to join the army. He had two things going against him: his height (five-foot-two) and his slim build (116 pounds). What he did have going for him was a friend who was a highly respected lieutenant with clout, and Morimoto soon found himself in Calgary getting sized up.

"There was a corporal doing the weighing and measuring," he says. "My friend said he would give him a buck if he added an inch to my height."

The corporal took the dollar and told Morimoto to keep his shoes on. He'd worn his pair with the thickest heels and they did the trick, adding the extra two inches he needed to qualify. Even with them on, he was still well more than a dozen pounds too light, but the medical officers figured he just wasn't getting enough to eat up North and gave him a pass.

By the time he joined the Armed Forces, Morimoto was highly experienced in finding his way around obstacles. Or, in some cases, through obstacles. A second-generation Japanese-Canadian, Morimoto grew up in Fort McMurray, Alta., during the Depression. As the only residents of Asian descent, Morimoto's family stood out among the frontier town's population mix of white, First Nations and Métis. He taught himself how to box to stop schoolyard bullies from calling him "Jap." (It worked.)

As a young man, he worshipped the strength and daring of local riverboat captains and airplane pilots and yearned to be just like them. So at 16, he struck out on his own, working his way across the North — first as a muskrat fur trader on the Athabasca Delta, then as a radio operator, kitchen helper, gold prospector, and miner.

Morimoto parlayed his background in radio operation into a position as a signalman with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals during the Second World War. By June 6, 1944, he was recognized as one of the best Morse code operators in the division and had achieved the rank of corporal. He is believed to be the only Japanese-Canadian soldier to take part in the D-Day invasions, landing on Juno Beach. "We were all scared, but you always figured you wouldn't get hit. You just think the other guy is gonna get it." Morimoto says the loss of so many friends during the war years taught him resiliency.

Morimoto's years in the military changed him, but the world around him was still very much the same. During an exit interview with a lieutenant, Morimoto mentioned that he intended to go to university. The lieutenant scoffed. Morimoto was 27 — far too old to study. Plus, he was Japanese. What university would accept him? "I had discovered during my time in the service that you can say almost anything to an officer as long as you follow it up with 'sir.' So I replied, 'I don't give a damn what you say, sir. I intend to go to university,' " Morimoto recalls in his memoir, *Breaking Trail*, published in 2007.

The University of Alberta, as it turns out, welcomed Morimoto. He enrolled in chemical engineering as part of a special class to accommodate returning veterans. Just before his classes began, Morimoto met Kim Iriye — U of A alumna and the woman who would become his wife of 67 years and counting. It was love at first sight. "Well, for me at least," he chuckles.

Morimoto would become one of the best gas plant engineers in the energy industry, and enjoyed a successful 40-year career that at times took him as far away as the oilfields of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. He will tell you it was his early life — leading other men in the military,

his studies at the U of A — that prepared him for this success. But there's also success in what he overcame to make all of those things happen.

He felt it was important to reinvest in the university that opened up possibilities to a kid from the North, and now Morimoto is helping others overcome barriers through a scholarship aimed at students from northern areas. "When I was growing up in Fort McMurray, some of the First Nations and Métis kids only came to school for two or three months of the year because they had to go trapping with their parents during the winter months, and many of them never learned to read or write," he says. Times have changed, of course, but Morimoto recognizes the challenges for Aboriginal kids pursuing an education today. The scholarship he established — the Dana Morimoto Memorial Entrance Leadership Scholarship, named in honour of his son — is a bridge to success for young people who might not otherwise have that opportunity. "I really do think that a lot of my success has been because of the education I got at the U of A. I'd like to help them in getting an education, too."

The Dana Morimoto Memorial Entrance Leadership Scholarship, named for Tom Morimoto's son, is awarded to students from northern Alberta, preferably of Métis descent, who have attained superior academic achievement, demonstrated community leadership and are entering the first year of any field of study at the University of Alberta. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

Forever Farmers

STORY BY CHRISTIE HUTCHINSON | PHOTOS BY JOHN ULAN

For two brothers born into a farming family, a lifelong connection to nature and community inspired a higher purpose: preserve the land for future generations

John Bocock was only seven years old when he drove a tractor for the first time. His small hands, not yet callused, groped for the hand clutch, bright eyes peering through the steering wheel of the John Deere. Lurching and chugging across the yard of the family farm in Sturgeon County, Alta., young John was brimming with both delight and trepidation.

It wasn't unusual for farm kids to start young, especially at a time when farmers faced a labour shortage created by the Second World War. Eighteen months his senior, John's brother Bill would have been considered an old hand by comparison, having started milking the family's dairy cows at the age of five. John and Bill didn't see it as a challenge, though. They were enthusiastic, keen to learn whatever they could about the family profession.

The Bocock brothers (John, pictured right, facing page, with Bill) are true farmers, born to the calling. True farmers can have great success away from the farm, but they're never entirely comfortable when they're separated from the land, like wearing a suit that isn't cut quite right. Because to a farmer, the land is so much more than just real estate. The land supports and sustains his livestock. It's the very fabric into which he sows his crops. The farmer is tirelessly persistent and invariably hopeful, working both with and against Mother Nature to coax from the soil a healthy, abundant harvest. It provides the very foundation of their livelihood, and so farmers are devoted stewards of the land, compelled to nurture and protect it for future generations.

The Bocock brothers are that kind of farmer.

Of course, even a calling has its challenges. Working shoulder-to-shoulder, every day, rain or shine — milking cows, doing chores, putting in crops, harvesting — and living together on the same property would be a challenge for anyone. John and Bill were not exempt. Early in their farming partnership, John says, he was critical and quick to judge the mistakes of his older brother. And just as quick to hide his own blunders. This self-righteousness caused tension with Bill that couldn't be ignored and threatened their shared goal of owning the most efficient dairy farm in Alberta. The solution would arrive on their doorstep from another continent.

In 1958, a group of farmers from Scotland and Africa visited Sturgeon County on a tour with the Moral Rearmament movement (now called Initiatives of Change). A core idea of this moral and spiritual movement was that to change the

world, one must first seek change within oneself. When these fellow farmers shared their personal experiences of creating positive change in their lives and communities, the message resonated with John. “I swallowed my pride, apologized and asked for [Bill’s] help to be different,” he said.

And it worked. With peace between the brothers, the farm was more successful than ever, and this new irenic approach to life proved pivotal to maintaining personal and professional harmony on the farm. It was key especially as the family grew to include Bill’s wife, Phyllis (who died in 2010), John’s wife, Jenny, and their daughter, Rachel — all living on the family farm with John and Bill’s aging parents. (Jenny is pictured left, facing page, with John, centre, and Bill.)

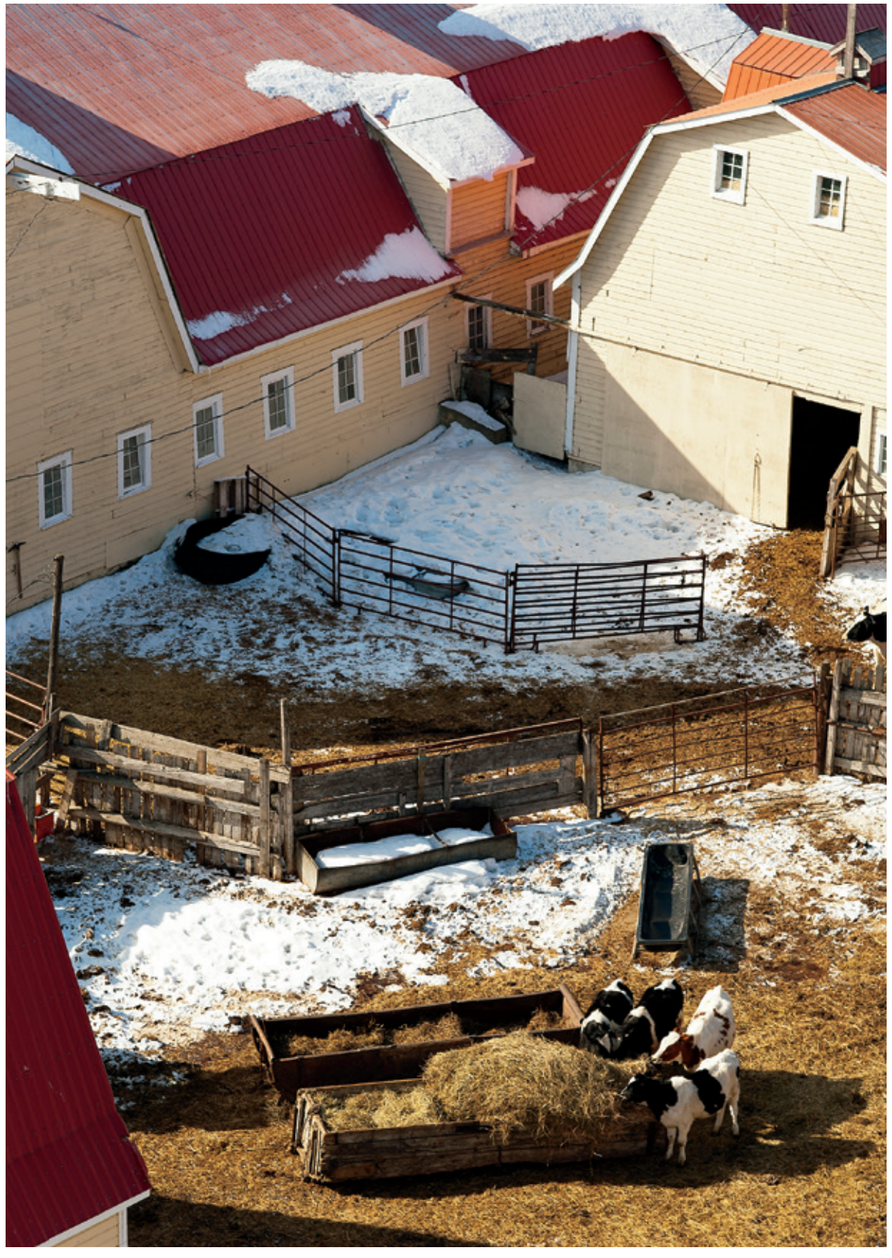
Eager to share their philosophy with others, the Bococks took their life lessons to farmers and communities around the world, including Zimbabwe, Thailand, India, Brazil and Cuba, to name just a few. They learned from these travels as well: lessons from those who tend foreign lands but also an appreciation of what they had back in Alberta. Jenny Bocock recalls a trip to the African nation of Eritrea that brought home the need to protect prime farmland. “I saw these farmers with their three goats on all this rocky soil and it made me think of all the beautiful soil and rich farmland we have in Alberta being built on instead of farmed. It’s shortsighted.”

And so these caretakers of their own land have grown to become protectors of the environment. They’ve been champions in the fight to save prime farmland from urban sprawl. And they’ve worked together with their neighbours, organizing one of the first community groups in Alberta to force an oil and gas company to install a sulphur recovery system at a sour gas plant in Sturgeon County.

By the time they’d reached their early 70s, the brothers saw the need to begin downsizing the farm. But how could they continue to protect their land from developers? A friend connected the Bococks with the University of Alberta, suggesting the university could use the land for research purposes. The Bococks sold — at a fraction of the appraised value — 777 acres of land directly south of their home to the university, which allowed the establishment of the St. Albert Research Station for the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences. Here, a team led by soil and water scientist William Shotyk, the first Bocock Chair in Agriculture and the Environment, has been exploring the linkage between agricultural practices and greenhouse gas emissions, water management, soil erosion and sustainable crop development — the outcomes of which will help farmers everywhere feed the world. “My generation inherited a bountiful, sustainable homeland,” says Bill. “Our greatest gift to the ones we love would be a legacy of productive farmland.”

After nearly 60 years of farming, philanthropy and activism, it would be fair to say the Bococks have earned their retirement to a place in the sun. But that’s not the kind of people they are. They’d miss the fresh smell of the breeze on a clear spring day. They’d miss the low mooing of their herd in the pale yellow dairy barn. They’d miss the feeling of the tar-black topsoil of their fields filtering softly through their fingertips. And they’d miss advocating for their community. For the Bococks, farming is forever.

The Bocock family’s gift of land to the University of Alberta created the St. Albert Research Station. It was also the impetus for the Bocock Chair in Agriculture and the Environment. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*



Shrink the World

STORY BY KAITLIN THOMAS ORFITELLI | PHOTOS BY THE CANADIAN PRESS IMAGES/ALISON YIN

In fast-paced Silicon Valley, where what's next is already old, the man who once made our calls connect faster is now working on the connections that truly matter

As a boy growing up in India, Rohit Sharma would watch the satellites in the night sky and wonder about the people who had created the technology travelling so far above him.

"At the height of summers in India, we often all slept outside on the terrace," he remembers. "In those days, India was not so polluted and we could see the band of stars that is the Milky Way, horizon to horizon."

He can still remember those terrace nights at age eight or nine — the sharp shadows cast by moonlight, the binoculars his father shared with him, the feeling of excitement as they tried to spot a comet.

"I did not have the tools to understand then, but it gave me a reason to think," he says. Boyhood questions about satellites, stars and how long it took light to get from here to there began to take hold and feed his curiosity — to make him realize the world extended beyond what he could see.

Thanks to his father — a Harvard-educated physicist who plied his son not just with binoculars but with magazines such as *Aviation Week & Space Technology* — Sharma was introduced to scientific thought at an early age. Technology was, as he says, "a comfortable companion" throughout his childhood. "Everything was to be tinkered with — toasters to TV," he says. "The great gift of a physicist father at home wasn't figuring out how things are put together, it was that you could always take them apart — and learn." (Sharma's father, in fact, learned to tinker as a boy, regularly fixing his family's Canadian-made Cockshutt tractor. He later paid off the tractor out of loans from his Harvard Fulbright scholarship.)

As Sharma grew older, his intellectual curiosity melded with his drive to connect with what lay beyond that night sky. As an undergraduate, he realized engineering gave him access to what he calls the biggest thing humans have built: the communication network. "This was pre-Internet, but it occurred to me that you could be connected to people all over the world by the phone." It was after graduate school at the University of Alberta that he truly began to appreciate the technology. He had moved to California to be closer to Silicon Valley. Far from friends and family, without the funds to visit in person, his only links were phone calls and Internet connections.

He also gained valuable uninterrupted time to work — time when the kernel of an idea for a new invention began to form. Sharma developed optical switching, which has gone on to significantly improve the reliability and speed

"My favourite part of the day comes early. I help him get ready, make his lunch and have breakfast with him. Then, if it is warm enough, I bike with my son to his school — about two miles away. We talk. We race. We make absurd plans. A current ongoing conversation involves his plans for building a video game for his iPad that involves dinosaurs, castles and bows and arrows. That hour at the start of my day is the golden hour. I am learning the practice of everyday life with him."

of voice, data and video connections. Even today, when he is in certain parts of San Francisco, he knows his phone calls are going over equipment he helped develop. There is something immensely satisfying about that, he says.

The technology came easily, but the lessons of entrepreneurism were tougher. "I didn't know anything about venture capital or how a company was structured or how you raise money or what financing looks like. I knew none of that." Today, Sharma shares those learned lessons with new company founders. Since 2002, he has become an angel investor in seed stage technology ventures.

He also devotes time to passing the gift of curiosity along to his own son — talking, dreaming and helping him make up a game for the iPad that manages to bring together dinosaurs and castles. Sharma says he, too, learns from these interactions.

"Technology is going to change every five to 10 years," he says. "Changing people's lives is much more meaningful. It's deeper, it's longer lasting, it has an impact at a very personal level."

Sharma's gifts to the University of Alberta are also motivated by a desire to build personal and lasting connections. His largest gift endowed the Rohit Sharma Professorship in Communications and Signal Processing within the Faculty of Engineering. The post is currently held by Witold Krzymien, a man who also came to the university from a world away (Poland, in his case) and has brought the university closer to the world through collaborations with colleagues in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom.

"I give because I think I have a fundamental responsibility to enable others to receive the quality of education I did," Sharma says.

"I was fortunate enough to study on scholarships all the way through undergraduate years in India and graduate degrees at the U of A. The freedom of choices I could make as a student receiving scholarships comes with a responsibility to share my learning, my knowledge, my resources. What I give back will never be equal to what I received, but I hope it enables someone to learn more."

The Rohit Sharma Professorship in Communications and Signal Processing makes possible teaching and cutting-edge research on wireless communication networks, specifically, wireless access to the Internet for mobile and nomadic users. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

Being Marissa

STORY BY ERICA VIEGAS | PHOTOS BY JOHN ULAN

Marissa Taylor has known who she is since she was four years old. It was the rest of the world that had trouble figuring it out

Marissa Taylor opens her front door with a warm, welcoming smile despite being nervous. She politely offers tea and a short tour of her home. Introductions are made. Questions are posed. Throughout, she is composed, thoughtful and slightly cautious. And then she is asked to sing.

Suddenly, she has an air of sophistication beyond her 24 years. High soprano tones, honest and vulnerable, soar through the room. She holds her head high as all eyes are glued to her.

Marissa struggled for years to find her voice. Once she did — onstage in front of a crowd at the University of Alberta's Camp fYrefly — she was determined to help others find their own voices.

Marissa was born Chad — a bright-eyed baby boy with thick, ebony curls. Adopted by Carmen Gerrard and her family, his life at home was filled with love and affection. In the community beyond, fitting in was not quite so easy. For one, his racial heritage was different than that of his adoptive parents.

But there was more than that.

As a child, when Chad chose his own clothes, he picked out dresses and high heels. Gerrard brushed it off as a phase, until the day they visited the zoo. Her son climbed onto a high, rocky ledge, poised to jump, and told his startled mother: "I want to die so I can go to heaven and talk to God. I need to tell him he put me in the wrong body. I'm supposed to be a girl."

He was four at the time.

Psychologists confirmed a diagnosis of gender identity disorder, not suprising to Gerrard, who had written her nursing degree thesis on transexuality.

And so began a double life for Chad: pants and T-shirts for kindergarten, tutus and glitter after school. Despite the solace found at home, he struggled to keep up two identities. Depression and suicidal thoughts came frequently throughout elementary school.

The family fought for permission to have Chad register for junior high school as Marissa, a female

student. Her student records were recreated under a new persona. Only select teachers knew the truth, but it didn't take long for word about Marissa's identity to leak out. Some teachers treated her horribly. Even the thrill of being asked to her first sleepover quickly died when she was cornered by classmates demanding to know why she used the staff bathrooms.

Fearing for her own safety, Marissa was forced to continue keeping the secret of two identities, though she was now living only one.

She was 22 when a psychologist first told her about Camp fYrefly. She was skeptical. But even though she'd undergone gender reassignment surgery, Marissa was exhausted by years of living a double life. She thought the youth leadership camp run by the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta sounded like a place where she might feel less alone.

More than 1,000 young people have attended Camp fYrefly since it was founded in 2004. The camp — funded entirely through philanthropic support — offers sexual and gender minority youth the opportunity to develop leadership skills as well as personal resiliency and the tools to challenge prejudice wherever they find it. There are currently camps in Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatchewan, and the University of Alberta is working to raise the funds to expand Camp fYrefly into a national program.

For Marissa, the camp was truly life-changing — an opportunity for her to meet other young people with stories like hers. Her moment of truth came onstage. "For the camp talent show, I planned to sing," she says. "When I was introducing my piece, I said, 'I'm Marissa and I was born a boy.' The feeling of saying that out loud was incredible. A lifetime of keeping secrets, and it was the first time I had ever said that."

Two tear-filled standing ovations followed.

During the car ride home, Marissa vowed she would never be silenced again. Now, she does what she can to inspire others, sharing her story with hundreds of young people through fYrefly in Schools, a donor-funded Camp fYrefly outreach program for both young people and educators at junior and senior high schools. She is also helping her mother write a book about her experiences.

For Gerrard, the camp — and the donors who had the vision to bring it to life — were nothing short of her family's salvation. "Camp fYrefly saved Marissa's life," she says. "We decided to personally support the camp because it could help other young people like Marissa .... They welcomed our daughter and gave her the tools to thrive as the person she was meant to be, and now we are helping others in the same way."

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta and Camp fYrefly are possible only because of philanthropic support. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

The Time to Change

STORY BY LISA COOK | PHOTO BY JOHN ULAN

There's no slowing down for Sameer Dhar — student, philanthropist, entrepreneur. And the scholarships he received at the University of Alberta meant he didn't have to

Some students are destined to make a difference from the moment they set foot on campus — some before. Sameer Dhar was co-founder of a successful charitable organization even before he started his first freshman class at the University of Alberta, and he wasn't through his first year before he had expanded that charity. He was named to the Top 20 Under 20 in Canada by Youth In Motion at the age of 18 and was chosen a Top 40 Under 40 by *Avenue Edmonton* at the age of 20.

So what can an institution offer a student like this? Inspiring professors? Challenging classes? Networking opportunities? All of these, of course, but ultimately the most valuable thing Dhar received during his university experience was time.

The donor-funded scholarships he received throughout his university career meant he didn't have to work to pay his tuition. They gave him the freedom — and the time — to explore possibilities. The scholarships allowed Dhar the time to focus on building the second charitable organization he co-founded, this one during his first year of university. To date, Geomeer has raised more than $800,000 to support more than 300 families throughout Alberta with necessities — food, kitchen staples, toiletries, cleaning supplies and gifts. "I wouldn't have been able to start Geomeer if I had to hold a job for 20 hours a week."

The freedom has also given Dhar the space to think very carefully about his post-university path. The experiences he has had in running Geomeer, and the lessons he learned in leadership studies through the School of Business, have helped him hone his focus.

They have also helped him realize that his future lies in social entrepreneurism. Running Geomeer has taught him that, though he wants to affect change, he doesn't want to do it through the non-profit model. "[Social entrepreneurism] is a sustainable way to make an impact. You're not going hat in hand year after year to get donations."

As classes in his final year wind down, Dhar has dedicated much of his time to the project he's working on with Next 36, a program that nurtures the entrepreneurial potential of 36 students chosen from more than 1,000 across Canada. Dhar and his partner are developing a product that would help health-care professionals handle the challenges that come with managing incontinence — an issue nurses have told him is one of the biggest day-to-day problems in caring for an ever-growing aging population.

So in June, Dhar will convocate from the University of Alberta with a degree and a direction, more prepared than ever to make a difference thanks to philanthropic support. "Not having to worry about working to pay tuition allows you to take initiative and try new things. It allows you to perhaps one day change the world."

The cost of Sameer Dhar's studies at the University of Alberta was covered by scholarships, including the Judith Lynn Millar Memorial Scholarship, endowed by her family in recognition of her affinity for young people determined to reach their full potential. *To learn more about establishing student awards, turn to page 42.*

IN CONVERSATION

A Golden Thread

STORY BY ROBYN BRAUN | PHOTOS BY JOHN ULAN

Through his career, alumnus Lorne Tyrrell, director of the Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology, has witnessed the power of philanthropy to create solutions and save lives

The Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology brings together top researchers and students from around the globe. What's now possible in the field of virology because of the Li Ka Shing Institute that wouldn't be possible without it?
We designed and built the labs to be open, and informal discussions frequently lead to formal collaborations. In fact, we have people from numerous countries, including some that don't get along politically — Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, China — but here the researchers have a very strong social system and they really help each other. Truly, a sociologist could study us.

Mr. Li wanted an emphasis on translating our discoveries to benefit patients, and in this research environment, we are emphasizing the translation of discoveries to products that will ultimately benefit patients.

How will people benefit from the work being done at the Li Ka Shing Institute?
Michael Houghton [Canada Excellence Research Chair in Virology] and I have a new grant and are working hard to develop a vaccine for hepatitis C. This would be a tremendous breakthrough. With the recent advances in treatment and a vaccine, a country could say, "We have the means to eliminate this disease." And the power of philanthropy again helps us to achieve this goal. (The donation and the creation of the Li Ka Shing Institute attracted Michael to the University of Alberta in the first place.)

In terms of the broader community, we need a stronger biotech industry in the province of Alberta and we hope to spin off some successful biotech companies. Right now, a lot of scientists who want to go into industry end up leaving the

province or the country. Successful spinoff companies create jobs in our city and in a province that needs to diversify and retain highly qualified people. The Li Ka Shing donation has transformed virology at the university, and more and more we're recognized as one of the top viral research institutes on the international stage.

The power of philanthropy has been a golden thread through your career. What is the significance of philanthropy to donors and researchers?
The tremendous power of philanthropy is that the money you get is sometimes unrestricted, which can be extremely useful in addressing the university's most pressing needs. When I was dean of the Faculty of Medicine, we had a team working on islet cell transplants. In about 1999, the team lost its grants and I was able to use some funds from unrestricted donations to keep the team together. Six months later they made a wonderful discovery: the Edmonton Protocol and the islet cell transplants, a huge step forward in treating Type 1 diabetes. At the time of the discovery, nearly 250 different media outlets called the faculty to learn more. And when success comes, each donor feels part of the achievement.

You are also a donor to the University of Alberta. Was that the experience that inspired you to give?
I think there are two reasons that I give. First, there are some causes that are required to broadly help people in need — Edmonton Food Bank or the United Way — and it feels good to help. On the other hand, I love to give to causes that help transform something that is good into something that is excellent. We have a very good university, but transformative philanthropy is critical to being truly outstanding. Look at how Canada's Winter Olympic team has been transformed by donations to support the Own the Podium initiative. Results like this make you feel good about donating.

How about outside the university? What occupies your personal time?
I've been an Edmonton Oilers fan since the beginning — I have a lot of the old films and I occasionally go back and look at them and it's still so beautiful. I also farm. So as a farmer and as an Oilers fan, you could say I'm the kind of person who always looks forward to next year.

The Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology was created in 2010 through a gift of $28 million from Li Ka-shing and a $52.5-million grant from the Government of Alberta. It incorporates researchers from the Alberta Institute for Viral Immunology and the Centre of Excellence for Viral Hepatitis Research. *Turn to page 42 for more information.*

LEARN MORE

A gift to the University of Alberta is an investment in the future. An investment in the experiences and potential of our students. An investment in creativity, innovation and discovery. An investment in making our world a better place.

Building Together (page 5)

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A Bridge to Health (page 6)

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Shrink the World (page 28)

ROHIT SHARMA
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Being Marissa (page 32)

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The Time to Change (page 36)

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS,
AWARDS AND BURSARIES

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A Golden Thread (page 38)

LI KA SHING INSTITUTE
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"It takes a noble man to plant a seed for a tree that will someday give shade to people he may never meet."
– David E. Trueblood

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