

UNSUNG HEROES

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES OF WOFFORD ALUMNI MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

by Jo Ann Mitchell Brasington '89 and Kelsey Aylor '18

In January, Wofford President Nayef Samhat sent out a notice to Wofford graduates asking for stories of unsung heroes from within the Wofford alumni family. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Stories came in of Peace Corps volunteers, teachers, coaches, clergy, volunteer firefighters, military personnel, public defenders and health care professionals, among many others.

Some people sent in notes of praise for the idea even if they did not suggest a particular graduate to feature. "I greatly appreciate your direction on this project to

spotlight Wofford heroes. Any initiative to recognize, inspire and elevate our Wofford family is good medicine for the world," wrote Barton Aiken '80 in one such message.

Samplings of the stories of unsung heroes are included here. Others are listed online, and still others will turn up in future issues of Wofford Today. Please keep the stories coming. If you have a recommendation of an unsung hero from the Wofford community, please share. Send stories to woffordtoday@wofford.edu or call 864-597-4183.



CORRECTIONAL CHAPLAIN MIKE BROWN '72: SHARING GOD'S SHALOM IN PRISON

On a rainy and cool day in December, Chaplain Mike Brown '72 stepped out of his car on Wofford's campus. It was a workday, and he was between stops. He had just picked up the remains of an inmate that he would return to Columbia for a memorial service and the spreading of the ashes in an inmate cemetery. His next stop was Livesay Correctional Institution to talk with the chaplain there. Wofford was close, and the visit brought back good memories.

"I couldn't resist a quick stop at my alma mater," says Brown, whose lifelong call as a correctional chaplain began during a Wofford summer internship. "Wofford College offered me the opportunity to critically look at what I wanted to do with my life. I became a lifelong learner with a zest for involvement in the community. Of course, it led me to prison for life (he grins), but here I get to watch people grow and change in positive ways, people whose lives have been horribly fractured by their behavior. There's a deep satisfaction in that."

During his 41-year career in the ministry, Brown has served as a church pastor, hostage negotiator, industrial chaplain, hospital chaplain and Army chaplain in addition to his almost 40 years of work as a correctional chaplain. The experiences have led to pastoral care in the extreme circumstances of executions and for military units at war. Although Brown has retired from military service, he still keeps the list close at hand of the 110 soldiers who died in the units he served.

"It's been an honor to walk with people in the midst," says Brown, who has done more than his share of notifications and funeral services. "Life is fragile, and it's been my task to strengthen and encourage people to face their reality,

It's the only way that they can be at peace and do the work that they need to do."

Brown's kindness and calm demeanor preach peace more effectively than any sermon. He has promised to perform a memorial service for a pagan soldier in case he became a casualty of war. He has served the final communion to people awaiting execution, and he supervises religious programming for an interfaith setting, which includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Wiccans, Hindus, Buddhists, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Asatrus and Rastafarians.

"Christ calls us to love, not judge," says Brown, who believes that there is no question that a faith and a faith community help people grow positively through their time in a correctional system.

Brown retired a few years ago, but returned to work because of the need. Even now, the South Carolina state prison system currently has three openings for chaplains. According to Brown, correctional chaplains not only go through seminary training, but they also must do clinical pastoral training. There is no typical day, and each of the state's 24 institutions is uniquely different. In addition, Brown serves as one of four captains in leadership for the state's nationally recognized hostage negotiation crisis response team.

Although Brown has been involved in a variety of intense situations, he says that he has never felt threatened.

"I just turned 66. I'm not on any prescriptions, and my blood pressure is 120 over 80," says Brown. "God's shalom is a powerful thing."



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