

SU People



Kenneth O. Miles | A Man for Others

KENNETH O. MILES LIVES HIS LIFE according to the motto he adopted as a student at the all-male Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C.: Be a man for others. Since then, he has stepped up to the task, providing physical and emotional support to the elderly and the young, transcending stereotypes of a black male from an inner-city single-parent home, and modeling the behavior he hopes to see from student-athletes. “You have to be part of the change you want to see happen,” says Miles, executive director of admissions and diversity enrollment management at the School of Information Studies. “I feel blessed to have come in contact with several folks who have had the ability to make change. They inspire me. I hope my legacy is that I leave a place better than I found it.”

A four-year letterman in football at the University of Virginia (UVA), where he earned a bachelor’s degree in stu-

dio art and a master’s degree in social foundations of education, Miles gave equal emphasis to being both a student and an athlete. He used his stature in those roles to be a positive influence on his teammates and community members, mentoring youths through the Big Brother program and befriending an elderly woman through the Adopt-A-Grandparent program. “When you get involved, you develop strong relationships with people and share part of yourself with them,” Miles says. “I enjoy having an impact on people.”

After graduating, he returned to his high school as an art teacher. “I liked helping students realize they could do something they thought they couldn’t,” says Miles, an accomplished painter, printmaker, and sketch artist. He holds the same attitude about sports—that discipline and practice can take an athlete far. Although Miles didn’t play football until his sophomore year of

high school, the admitted bookworm transformed himself into an All-America tackle and track star by his senior year. He called upon his sports experience when working as an academic coordinator to student-athletes at UVA from 1995 to 1997 and SU from 1997 to 2002, explaining how to balance an academic workload with the responsibilities of a Division I athlete. Under his academic direction, the SU football team had a 93 percent graduation rate in 1999 and 2001 and a 100 percent graduation rate in 2000, which earned the team the American Football Coaches Association Achievement Award.

Today, Miles serves as a mentor and resource for all students, especially students of color. He advises such organizations as Black and Latino Information Studies Support and the Black Graduate Students Association. He recently created the Kenneth O. Miles Our Time Has Come Scholarship to help an SU student of color cover the costs of a college education. Impassioned by the educational disparity of minority students, he focuses

his doctoral research at the School of Education on studying first-generation black students who attend predominantly white institutions. “It’s partly an autobiography of my own journey,” Miles says. “It’s also a way of critiquing the campus culture and my discontent with the enrollment numbers, retention rates, degrees granted, and accessibility of college to students of color.”

Through his research and interactions on campus, Miles advances his vision of a stronger, more accessible education system for all students. But perhaps nowhere is his presence felt more than in the community agencies that desire role models willing to invest in their organizations. Miles offers his time, talent, and treasure for the betterment of others. “I don’t like to talk about problems without providing some kind of solution,” he says. “We are responsible for making societal changes when necessary.” —Margaret Costello

Rosemary O'Leary

Guerrillas in Our Midst

AS A SENIOR LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER FOR THE state of Kansas, Rosemary O'Leary G'88 refused her supervisor's order to fire an edgy subordinate who leaked information to the press and environmental groups to pressure the governor to pass greener legislation, and blasted the administration in a public meeting. "This man drove me absolutely crazy," says O'Leary, Distinguished Professor of Public Administration at the Maxwell School. "But I said: 'I won't fire him because he's on the leading edge of the system. He's the anti-bureaucrat, he wants policy changes, and he puts his heart and soul

into everything he does.'" O'Leary suggested positive ways to harness his creative energies. "He wasn't fired," she says, "but that was the kiss of death for my relationship with my boss."

That 1984 incident launched O'Leary on a 20-year study of unconventional public servants who disregard authority to do what they believe is ethical, and led to the publication of *The Ethics of Dissent: Managing Guerrilla Government* (CQ Press, 2006). "The last chapter focuses on expert public managers who said these people are the creative edge—an organization's capital—so give them a voice, but with boundaries," she says.

Her interest in those who buck convention might be traced to her respect for her maverick mother, who returned to college for a Ph.D. in psychology when her seventh child reached kindergarten. "I used to brag to my friends about her," says O'Leary, who serves as co-director of the Program for the Analysis and Resolution of Conflict and as a senior research associate of the Campbell Public Affairs Institute and the Center for Environmental Policy and Administration at Maxwell. "It was a pivotal moment—when I realized how important education was to me."

After completing a bachelor's degree in English at the University of Kansas, O'Leary earned J.D. and M.P.A. degrees there and became a guerrilla in her own right. Resisting the call as "heir apparent" to her father's law firm, she took a job as assistant general counsel with the Kansas state public utility commission. She left that job to become director of the Division of Policy and Planning at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and then enrolled in the public administration doctoral program at Maxwell. Her studies led her to discover a new love: teaching.

O'Leary has won great acclaim as a professor and scholar, often honored for her teaching, writing, and research. She has published six books and more than 85 articles, has won more than 15 research and teaching awards, and has twice been named a Fulbright Scholar. She has also served on numerous national boards and committees, including a 25-member NASA committee that reviewed the *Columbia* space shuttle disaster. She was one of the committee's seven dissenters who issued a report accusing NASA of adjusting mandatory performance standards to avoid delays of future shuttle launches. O'Leary expects to write a similarly candid critique of the environmental policies in the Philippines based on research she conducted during a yearlong Fulbright stay there.

As evidenced by her work, O'Leary is a staunch advocate for social justice, and carries her life's lessons into the classroom with her. "When I'm on my deathbed and look back on my life, my greatest accomplishment will be in the classroom, training future government leaders and career public servants," she says.

—Margaret Costello



Adrea Jaehnig | Diversity Educator

FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN ADREA Jaehnig began her job as founding director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center, she often fielded well-meaning questions like “How are *your* students doing?” Such comments, while they accurately captured the affection she feels for the center and the people it serves, made her pause and consider the compartmentalized ways we sometimes think about diversity—placing people in categories based on assumptions we make about our differences. For Jaehnig, the work of transforming those general-

izations into meaningful relationships founded on empathy and respect is a professional challenge and a personal quest. “I see the center’s role as going far beyond the specific population we serve,” Jaehnig says. “I believe we have created a culture of shared responsibility in which the center is an important partner, resource, and advocate in creating access for LGBT students, faculty, and staff into all aspects of university life.”

Jaehnig’s commitment to providing a safe place for members of SU’s LGBT community stems in part from personal experience. She recalls feeling very iso-

lated when she came out as a lesbian during her first year at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. “The visibility that lesbian and gay people have today just didn’t exist then,” she says. While society has become more open and accepting of LGBT people, Jaehnig knows this community still confronts misunderstanding and prejudice. “A big part of what motivates me is the desire to improve the campus climate for LGBT students so they can achieve their academic and personal goals and make significant contributions to the University,” she says. “The students I have known at Syracuse continue to inspire me to learn and do more.”

Jaehnig delights in the ways SU’s LGBT community has evolved, including the development of such traditions as the fall picnic and the Rainbow Banquet. She is especially enthusiastic about the establishment of an LGBT studies minor and takes pride in SU’s recent inclusion in *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students* as one of the “100 Best LGBT Campuses.” “It’s been exciting to create with other people something that didn’t exist before,” says Jaehnig, who holds a master’s degree from the University of Vermont (UVM) and is working toward a Ph.D. degree at the School of Education. “I think it will be something that’s lasting. And, I hope, something that is always transforming itself.”

Active in the community, she recently helped paint a new LGBT youth center in a Syracuse neighborhood. She is also co-chair of the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education, a national organization that supports professionals in similar positions across the country. In March, she was recognized by UVM with the *Salva Dignitate* (with dignity uncompromised) Award, given annually to higher education and student affairs administration graduates for their contributions to the profession—an acknowledgment she considers a huge honor. “I see higher education as having a responsibility to transform society and create change,” Jaehnig says. “There will always be challenges. But this is a place where, if you have an idea and you want to make a difference, you can.” —Amy Shires



STAFF

Susan Kahn



John Dau | Testimony of Hope

SITTING IN THE QUIET CONFINES OF HIS MENTOR'S office in Maxwell Hall, John Dau '08 is literally and figuratively thousands of miles from the horror of what his life once was. He is a "Lost Boy" of Sudan: driven from his family and home by men with guns, beaten and left for dead during a months-long trek to find safety, and subjected to the desperate conditions of two refugee camps for years before finding refuge in the United States. A tall, gentle, noble figure, Dau tells his story with an intensity not tinged by self-pity, but abundant with messages of perseverance and faith. "Even if you are at the bottom, it is possible you can work up," he says. "I knew one day I wouldn't be in the situation I was in because hope is never lost."

In November 1987, Dau's village in Duk County was attacked by government troops in a civil war involving the Muslim-controlled government in northern Sudan and non-Muslims in southern Sudan. "It is still really vivid in my

mind," says Dau, who was 12 years old at the time. "I remember the sound of guns and bombardments that woke us up, and we just ran into the night." His family scattered, Dau traveled for three months with a neighbor, surviving harsh conditions. "I had to eat mud so I could keep my throat wet," he says. They reached an Ethiopian camp where Dau stayed for four years before fleeing due to war in that country.

Dau and other Sudanese Lost Boys—thousands of displaced boys who wandered hundreds of miles facing starvation, violence, and disease—eventually made it to a Kenyan camp. He was there for several years before members of the First Presbyterian Church in Skaneateles, New York, sponsored him and three others to come to the United States in 2001. "There were a lot of things I saw for the first time," he says. "There were huge grocery stores with lots of food and women driving cars." Dau, now 32, gradually acclimated and sought an education that would help him aid his country, enrolling through SU's University College as a policy studies major. "I want to work hard so that I can give back for all that I have received," says Dau, who works as a security guard.

His harrowing story, including the challenges of adjusting to life in the United States, was featured in the documentary *God Grew Tired of Us*, which won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. He is also working on a book to be published by *National Geographic*, and gives speeches—coordinated with the help of his mentor, public affairs professor William Coplin—to raise awareness about Sudan and show how to overcome challenges. "My story is a testimony," Dau says. "And, in the Christian way, testimonies help others turn their lives around."

His work also involved setting up the Sudanese Lost Boys Foundation of Central New York, which raised \$35,000 to pay for books and medical expenses for Lost Boys in the United States. He helped organize the American Care for Sudan Foundation, which has raised more than \$150,000 for a medical clinic in southern Sudan. Dau returned to Sudan earlier this year to find a site for the clinic and reunite with his father and some of his siblings. "It was a very good reunion," says Dau, who helped his mother and a sister move to America in 2004.

While continuing his work, Dau envisions a better future for his native land, where tensions continue despite a 2005 peace agreement between the government and rebel forces. "I hope for my country to get out of war and secure a good government," Dau says. "I want Sudan to become a place where people are welcome and hope is restored."

—Kathleen Haley

Cheryl Spear | New Beginnings

CHERYL SPEAR, A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE in the interdisciplinary Cultural Foundations of Education Program, has passed through some little-traveled corridors of human experience. As a child growing up in Brooklyn during the 1970s, she received professional home schooling while fighting a multi-front medical battle. Cataracts forced her to undergo a series of major eye surgeries. Hip displacements required her to use leg braces to walk. Chronic digestive problems limited daily activity. With the support of her family, Spear accepted and managed these obstacles, so that by age 12, her vision had stabilized, she walked without prosthetic supports, and her digestive problems were under control. "I was able to actually go to school—for the very first time—in sixth grade," Spear says. "It was wonderful. I fell in love with education."

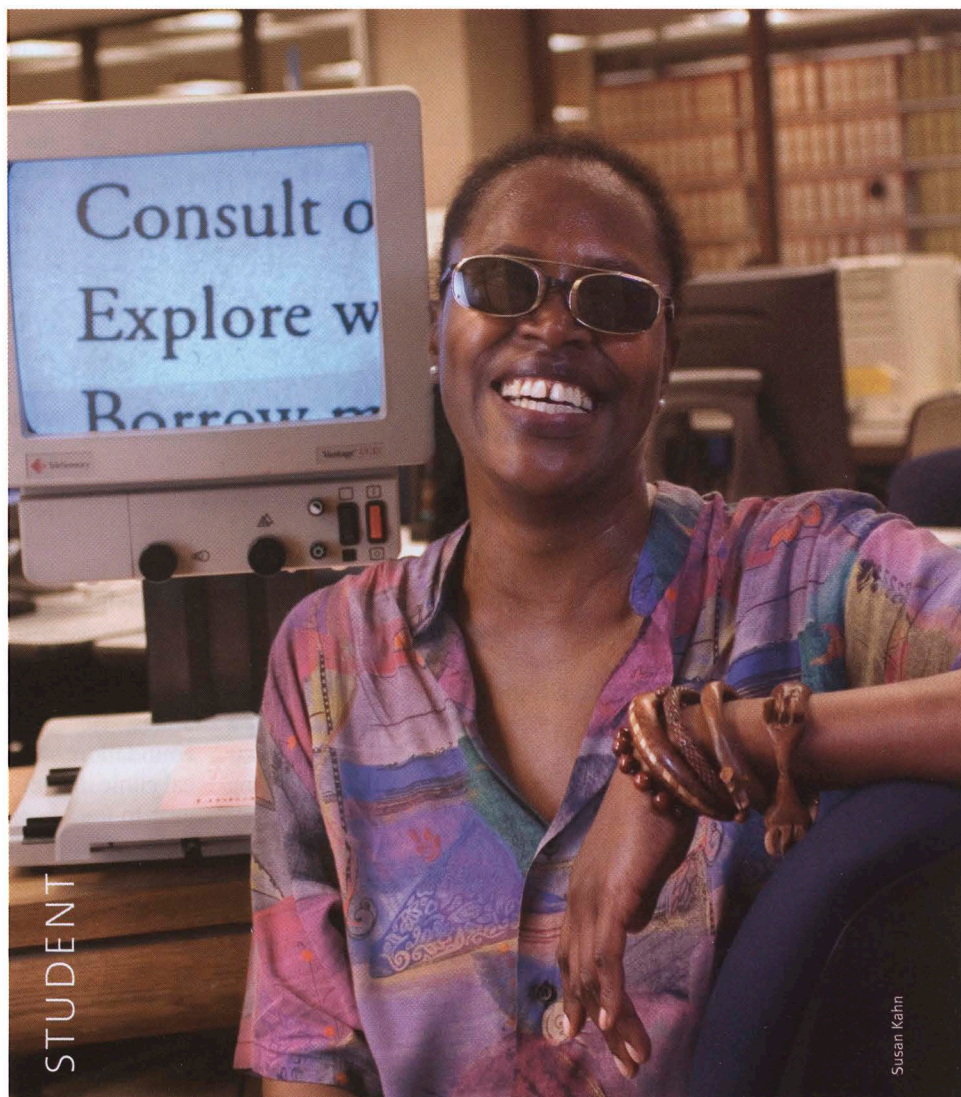
For the next decade, Spear lived a "normal" life, learning to drive a car, graduating from high school, and leaving home to seek her fortune. She was a student at San Francisco State when glaucoma ended that passage of her life by destroying her eyesight. "It was unexpected and catastrophic," she says. "I suddenly had to learn how to live all over again: how to cook, how to get from place to place, even how to read by learning Braille." Moreover, she felt the relationships she had forged had become obsolete. "I had no way of judging how dependent I needed to be," she says. "I couldn't distinguish between needing assistance and exercising power over people. I was a different body, needing a new beginning."

Spear chose a circular path toward renewal, returning east to the site of her earlier transformation. Enrolling in Brooklyn College, she excelled as a clinical psychology major, receiving the Newcomb Scholarship for the Blind and the New York Lighthouse for the Blind's Academic Career Incentive Award. Admitted to the McNair Scholars Program, which helps prepare students from underserved groups for academic careers, she worked as a summer apprentice at the University of New Hampshire. "I told my mentor, Professor Jan Nisbet, about my interest

in studying what students with disabilities really need to succeed—socially, technologically, intellectually, and in every other way," Spear says. Nesbit, a former SU faculty member, advised Spear to apply to Syracuse for graduate school, putting her in touch with professors Steven Taylor G'77, Douglas Biklen G'73, and Sari Knopp Biklen. "It was a great fit," Spear says.

Since coming to Syracuse, Spear has helped the University become a more welcoming and functional place for students with disabilities of every type, serving as a project coordinator for the Technical Assistance and Resource Center. A three-time recipient of the

African American Studies Fellowship, she has presented her work to national conferences as well as community groups. "My dissertation research concerns interactions and overlappings of disability with other traits that tend to marginalize people, such as gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation," Spear says. Taylor, a cultural foundations professor and coordinator of disability studies at the School of Education, believes Spear's work may help the emerging field of disability studies find its place among such established academic areas as women's studies and African American studies. "It's groundbreaking work," he says. —David Marc



Susan Kahn

John D. Caputo |

Passion for Philosophy

“Religion is for lovers, for men and women of passion, for real people with a passion for something other than taking profits, people who believe in something, who hope like mad in something, who love something with a love that surpasses understanding.”

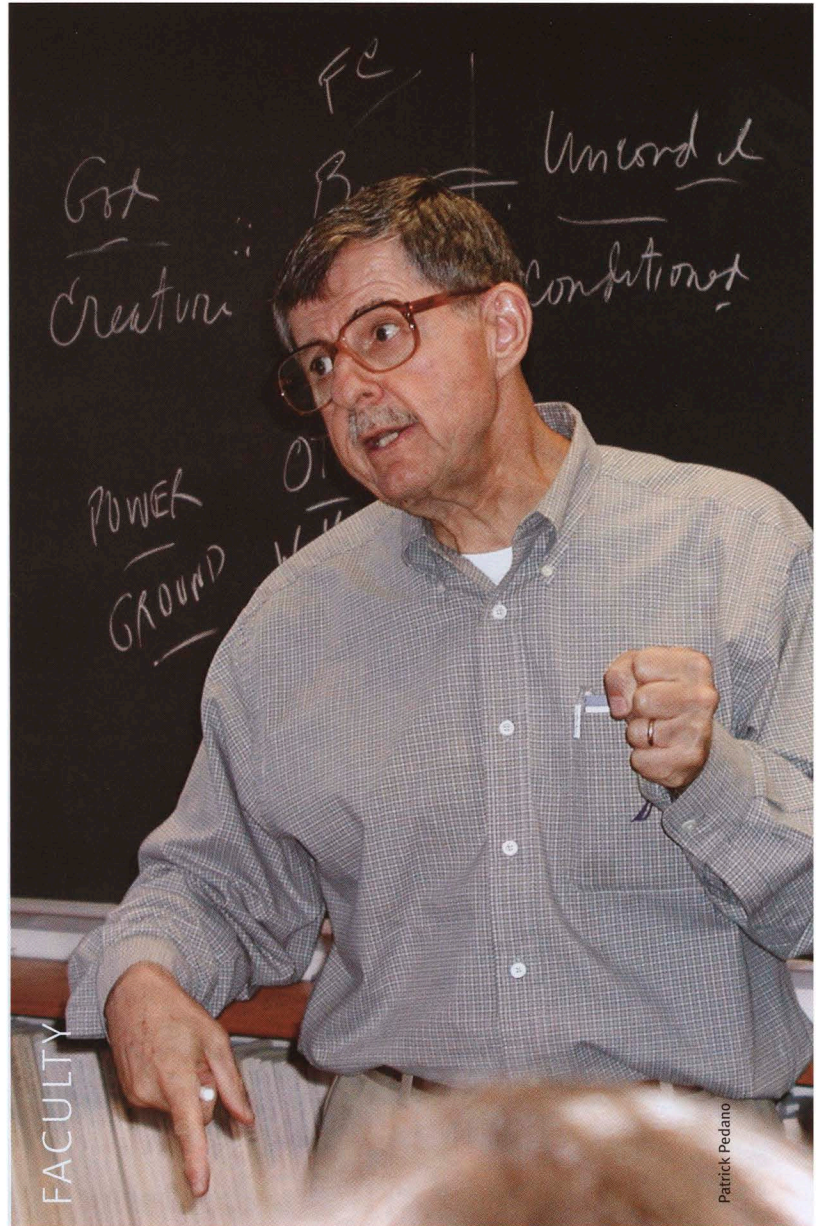
—John D. Caputo, From *On Religion*

JOHN D. CAPUTO IS A PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF Villanova University. End of story, right? Not for Caputo, who was as surprised as anyone else to hear himself saying an enthusiastic “yes” to a new chapter in his academic career at Syracuse University, where he is the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences. “What I did was shocking, to me anyway,” says Caputo, a lifelong Philadelphian who commutes to Syracuse. “I would never have predicted that instead of finishing my career at a place I spent all of my life—including where I got my master’s degree—I would retire sooner than I expected to take a position here and do something different in a context that was very inviting.”

Caputo was attracted by the opportunity to teach philosophy of religion to religion students. “Syracuse’s religion department is well known for doing the kind of work I do as a philosopher,” he says, referring to the department’s focus on European philosophers. “A lot of philosophy of religion in the United States draws from British and American philosophers and is a somewhat technical analysis. Whereas the continental tradition has certain things in common with literature and has a heartfelt, experiential quality I like.” He describes the doctoral students he works with as smart people and excellent students. “They are an interesting group, and I am very proud of them,” he says.

Caputo has experienced an evolution in his personal philosophy of religion through the years. “I started out as an orthodox Roman Catholic, very much a follower of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was the premier Catholic philosopher,” he says. While he has retained great respect and love of St. Thomas, Caputo describes his own views as less traditional and more pluralistic. “I see being religious as an elementary part of being human, much like ‘being artistic’ or ‘being political.’ Without it, you are missing something basic, something elemental. Religion concerns our deepest passion, the thing that concerns us most or, ultimately, the thing we dream of and pray for.”

Widely published in the academic world, Caputo recently began to reach out to a wider audience with his work. “Most



of my books are scholarly texts written for specialists, and that is important, necessary work,” says Caputo, who organized the 2005 conference “St. Paul Among the Philosophers,” which brought leading theologians and philosophers to campus. “But I think it is a shame that the work of academics is kept secret among themselves. So in the last five years or so, I’ve tried to also write things that will reach a non-specialist public: people who are intelligent, like to read, and are interested in these issues, but don’t intend to go to graduate school to learn the whole vocabulary and technical discourse of the discipline.” Caputo’s *On Religion* (Routledge, 2001) has enjoyed widespread success with the general public, bringing him frequent opportunities to speak at parishes. “I see this kind of writing as a way to extend my work as a teacher,” he says, “to touch people and offer them something to get them through the day.”

—Amy Shires