

# Humans of WACO





# Who are they?

*He serves you coffee in the morning.  
She works around the corner from you.  
He sits diagonally from you in Calculus.  
She walks behind you on the way to class.  
He cleans the bathrooms in the hotel across the street.  
She is an international student from Nigeria looking for a friend group.  
He stands on the corner holding a sign that says, "Homeless. Need food. God Bless."*

These are all people. People who you see every day, but who you may have never gotten the chance to meet. It would only take a second to add a friendly "hello" or "how are you," but more often than not we go about our days, focused on what we need to accomplish. We pass the same sights every day — Pat Neff Hall rising over campus, the Alico Building shaping the Waco skyline, the Suspension Bridge glowing vibrantly at night. For us to walk the same streets, it seems we should understand what it's like to walk in each other's shoes. But ultimately it takes a conversation to truly learn what motivates and shapes a person. The stories that fill these pages are those of people like you and me — people who walk and drive the same streets, but who are from very different backgrounds. Take the time to read their stories. Perhaps you'll run into them and get a chance to speak with them personally. It takes a second to start a conversation that could affect you for a lifetime.

—Linda Wilkins  
Lariat Editor-in-Chief

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# Raising the Bar

The trainee becomes the trainer, shares his love of bodybuilding with other students

By DANE CHRONISTER | REPORTER



PHOTOS BY DANE CHRONISTER | REPORTER

Bilal Siddiq assists a weightlifter at the McLane Student Life Center. His interest in sports caused him to pursue weightlifting after high school.

Native Wacoan Bilal Siddiq is a personal trainer, a Group X abs class instructor and a fitness model. On top of all these things, Siddiq still finds time for his degree in pre-med health science studies and time to stay involved at the McLane Student Life Center.

Siddiq had a vast background in high school sports, including powerlifting, basketball and football, which were coming to an end. He wanted to see what else he was capable of outside of typical high school sports.

"When I first started in high school, I was an avid powerlifter lifting heavy, heavy weights until I was 16 years old and my joints are paying for it now," Siddiq said. "I use to be a really heavy guy, I was really strong, but that doesn't necessarily mean I had abs."

Over time that became his goal, and he worked to shape his mass to 8 percent body fat.

Siddiq decided to take his talents from hobbies like he did in high school and adjusted his focus on what he was truly passionate about: weightlifting.

After taking part of his summer to study and prepare for his personal training certification out of high school, Siddiq was determined he wanted to change his fitness level and help influence others to become more aware of their own health.

Featured on [bodybuilding.com](http://bodybuilding.com), included in Train Magazine and sponsored by the iTunes app PumpUp, Siddiq has received high accolades for his determination and grit in turning himself into a fitness model.

Siddiq said he felt that under the guidance Van Davis, the assistant director for fitness and nutrition education, he could make a difference in the community by working at the SLC.

"Before Bill became a freshman here at Baylor, he called and emailed me about working as a personal trainer

at the SLC, which made me see he was a very tenacious young man," Davis said. "I'm a pretty good judge of character when it comes to people and within the first five minutes of speaking with him I knew I wanted him on my team."

One of the youngest trainers on staff, Siddiq impressed his boss with his resume and was hired to be a part of the SLC staff as a personal trainer. In this role, Siddiq helps to create a workout strategy and diet plan for fellow students.

"This is definitely a way of life. You cannot just turn on and off. If I decide to taper off for a week or two, I'll lose substantial amount of progress," Siddiq said. "This lifestyle generally does affect every aspect in your life, but I would say in a vastly positive way it forces you to stay disciplined in all that you do."

With weightlifting and fitness modeling constantly pressing and challenging Siddiq's life, he found that the strictness of this regime actually helped him maintain a 3.9 grade point average.

Houston senior Hassan Dagha has known Siddiq not only as a trainer, but a friend. He knows even some of Siddiq's smallest quirks, like an obsession with beanies and hats. As one of Siddiq's clients, and a member of his Group X abs class, Dagha said he has confidence in Siddiq's abilities.

"I've known Bill since freshman year and he is the guy who is a real workout junkie and he is passionate about it," Dagha said. "To me, he is just a guy that really knows what he is doing, he truly cares about me and my progress and I've seen the results on him personally."

Siddiq credits visualization as the key to his own success in his physique and his schooling.

He learned this from Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is one of the most well-known and glorified bodybuilders in the world. Heroes such as

Schwarzenegger and Hugh Jackman, who have taken this lifestyle seriously, have inspired Siddiq's outlook on life.

"I never was the smartest kid growing up, but lifting and learning the discipline that goes into it helped me to control my personal life and academics as well," Siddiq said.

He has seen these heroes demonstrate determination in their own careers with acting through strict eating habits and avid weightlifting as well.

"I hope to continue what I am doing to increase my own progress, help my clients grow in their efforts and promote the staff at the student life center in gaining further recognition," Siddiq said.

He said he hopes others look at his efforts and know that they too are capable of achieving their own goals if they work for it.

Siddiq said he is doing everything he can think of to build himself into what he wants to see and what will inspire his peers.







## Baylor student's life takes shape in unexpected ways

By Rae Jefferson | Arts & Entertainment Editor



PHOTOS BY RAE JEFFERSON | LARIAT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

There's no reason I should have survived and then gone on to be functional. And I still have things that come up that are a result of it all. It's only my complete dependence on Jesus that makes anything good."

I stared at the final sentences of a text that stretched well beyond the length of my phone's screen. I was fully realizing the significance of what Waco junior Alice Fry, a dear friend of mine, had allowed me to be a part of in the previous weeks. I was blown away, but not at all surprised, by her humility.

Ali is a typical Baylor student. She is a ceramics art major. She goes to class and studies. She spends time with family and friends. Attending Baylor was not necessarily part of Ali's plan, but neither was having a family to call her own.

"It's powerful to realize what God can do with anyone's circumstances and use them for good," said Cindy Fry, Ali's second adoptive mother. "She's amazing and you can so clearly see the hand of the Lord on her life."

Ali was born in Louisville, Ky., to a mother who has what is most likely paranoid schizophrenia. The two spent approximately the first six years of her life in and out of homelessness. Although Ali loved her biological mother, she said their life together was chaotic.

"Being someone that was mentally disabled, she just, didn't have a lot of people advocating for her," she said.

Child Protective Services placed Ali into foster care for the first time at the age of 6.

"I didn't really understand what that meant," Ali said.

In the next few years, Ali's younger sister Katie was born, and the two moved back and forth between their mother and CPS. Ali saw her biological mother for the last time at age 10 during a volatile supervised home visit.

"The judge ruled that she wasn't compliant and there was nothing more that they could do, and it was for the safety of the children that they terminate her rights and put us up for adoption," Ali said.

When Ali was 12, she and Katie were adopted.

"Pretty quickly into the stay, it became apparent to me that it was a bad placement," Ali said.

She and her sister moved to Fort Hood with a military couple. Ali's adoptive father was deployed to Iraq for much of the time she spent with the family. The relationship between Ali and her adoptive mother was rooted in "mistrust, anger and control," Ali said.

"The more she pushed, the more I pulled, and it just built into something that was devastating," she said.

In foster care, Ali had developed a habit of hoarding food, but her adoptive mother suffered from anorexia. Ali lost about 60 pounds during her first year with the couple because of the demands her adoptive mother placed on the

children regarding food and exercise. Ali said she began to steal food from her own home.

"She started to restrict me more — 'You're grounded because you stole food. You can't go in the kitchen anymore. Now you can't go downstairs by yourself anymore,'" Ali said. "She put a buzzer on my door so she'd know when I left the room."

Her adoptive mother eventually took Ali and her sister out of public school so she could have full control of their lives, Ali said.

"It was hell," she said. "It wasn't even the punishment that was so bad — it was that she genuinely hated me."

Ali began to run away from home, further straining the relationship between herself and her adoptive parents. Eventually, both parties reached their ends. When she was 14, Ali moved to Waco's Methodist Children's Home (MCH), a residential care facility offering school and board to children from birth to 18.

Ali said even though she was exposed to a lot of harsh realities at MCH, she thrived in that environment.

"I loved every minute of it," she said with a laugh. "It was refreshing, and it was real."

Although Ali's adoptive parents had exposed her to God, MCH is where Ali really began to find her faith. With the help a staff member at the home, Ali was able to grieve for her family and all the devastation she had faced for so long.

"It was crazy to hear from God, the things he was saying," Ali said. "I was so sold, and he was healing me."

Ali developed a desire to attend Baylor during her senior year of high school. Ali said the situation seemed impossible because of finances, but she was awarded money by the university and moved five minutes from her home at MCH to a dorm.

"Living in trauma, you don't think past the next day. To be honest, coming into Baylor, I thought I'd drop out the first year, and I didn't think I'd make it this far at all," Ali said. "I had no idea what I was doing, and I was alone, absolutely alone."

But she wouldn't be for long.

### FINDING HER PLACE

During her freshman year at Baylor, Ali was invited to Acts Church in Waco. Ali said she experienced deep healing during her freshman year, and was able to begin the process of forgiving her adoptive mother, with whom she had cut ties after entering college.

"I was so for our family being reunited," Ali said. "By this point they were incredibly distant. They had moved and didn't tell me. When I graduated they pretty much dropped off the face of the earth because they were done. [There were] just so many woundings in that."

Ali said her life was radically changed during her sophomore year. Ali said she felt God tell her he was releasing her from her relationship



with her adoptive parents, who had not communicated with her in months. The Lord said she was being released from the old so she could freely recognize the new things he was bringing to her, Ali said.

"I just wept and wept because I had no idea what that meant," she said. "I'm ecstatic. I'm free from something I thought I would be carrying for the rest of my life, so I was completely satisfied there. I was free. I was alone, but I was free."

Katie Fry, Ali's best friend and a Baylor alumna, and her family also attended Acts Church. Just days after Ali said the Lord released her from her adoptive family, the Frys, with whom Ali had grown close, took her out to lunch and told her they felt like they were supposed to adopt her. Cindy Fry, Ali's mom and a senior lecturer in the School of Engineering and Computer Science, said her husband Joe invited Ali to live with their family, but explained what that would entail for her.

"There are all kinds of pluses to that, but there are also some things you need to really strongly consider," she said. "Being part of a family means you are responsible to that family. Being part of a family means you are under the authority of the head of that family."

Ali said she was in shock.

"Immediately my first reaction is, 'No. I've been there, done that,'" Ali said. "But then next, in my spirit I felt, 'This is the Lord,' because only he would do it in that time."

Ali was adopted for a second time on Dec. 16, 2011.

Cindy said although adult adoptions are finalized faster than minor adoptions, there are other challenges associated with the process.

"With her schedule as a college student, and with everybody else's schedules, it's really tough to have time to talk and get to know each other," Cindy said. "You know, you don't have to do that with your regular kids because you've had them all your life, so our process has just been getting to know our daughter better because we didn't have those years with her."

Ali's presence has encouraged her family members to think in new ways, Cindy said.

"Ali, because of her life and upbringing, is very passionate about helping people who, for one reason or another, can't do things for themselves," Cindy said. "She has forced us to re-examine how we feel about a lot of issues because she brings a new perspective that we haven't even considered."

Ali said being part of her family has been a learning experience for her as well.

"It's been this journey and process with my parents, them having so much grace for me, and learning to trust again," Ali said. "To trust the Lord and their presence in my life, and allowing the fullness of redemption because family is something that I never wanted, but that was always the Lord's plan."

Ali said she readily credits the Lord with the radical transformation that has occurred in her

heart and life. Despite the seeming "happy ending" of her life, Ali said she is still being renewed and healed by God.

"There's a process in that, and there's still things that the Lord brings up, and places of pain that will cause bouts of depression," Ali said. "But the Lord is so faithful to meet with us and to set us free and to heal. He just loves to redeem. That's who he is."

#### ART FOR THE PEOPLE

Ali has encouraged members of the Baylor and Waco communities with her story for years. Greg Lewallen, lecturer in the art department, said he met Ali during her freshman year.

"She's a creative individual," he said. "I found what was intriguing to me, and what made me pry deeper to get to know what her story is and everything, is she's very honest and really very open about sharing. She doesn't try to hide."

Although he generally tries to get to know his students on a deeper level, Lewallen said Ali's story was particularly interesting and inspiring to him.

"For her to have this beautiful demeanor about her in spite of the really tragic circumstances of her upbringing is pretty much overwhelming," Lewallen said. "She has every excuse in the world to be an entirely different person, but she's chosen to not let that bring her down an entirely different path."

Lewallen said Ali has a lot to teach others.

"If you can't see what forgiveness does in a person's life, through looking at Ali, then you're not ever going to understand it," Lewallen said.

A ceramics art major, Ali said she desires to create with people in mind. Art is a useful tool when working with the poor, and it also helps instill a sense of community in the group as they work together, Ali said.

"Because my life experience has shaped me to really value people and to care about the poor and the oppressed, I'm just interested in doing things that change the world, that affects people, that heals and brings life," Ali said.

Ali recalled a critique in which her ceramics professor criticized her work, asking why she had created a nonfunctional bowl with high walls. Ali's personal aesthetic often involves creating bowls because they facilitate community.

"I started talking about it," Ali said. "And he said, 'I think it's fine that it's not functional, and knowing that there's a reason why your work looks like this, and you're going to learn something about yourself from it.'"

Ali said being an artist allows her to embody an important part of God's character.

"Creator, you know, is the first way that God revealed himself to the world," she said. "I think we were made in God's image. He's our dad, and our dads love it when we're like, 'I'm being like daddy.' I'm mimicking my father. I just believe that it's reflecting him, and the Lord finds so much joy (in it)."

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Ever wondered how ceramics are made? Check out a video of Ali in the studio at [baylorlariat.com](http://baylorlariat.com).

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# LITTLE ITALY, BIG FLAVOR

By Hannah Neumann | Contributor

**B**aris, the waco-famous, family-owned Italian restaurant, opened its doors in the 1980's and still today maintains the same home-like atmosphere and rich taste that keeps its customers coming back time and time again.

With ingredients picked fresh daily, everything from the pizza dough to the savory sauce is made from scratch, using family recipes tracing back multiple generations through Italian lineage.

As a young adult born and raised in Italy, owner Mary Baris, who dreamt of exploring countries, came to America and soon-after opened a restaurant in New York.

"We started in New York, but then it got too crowded, too busy and I didn't want to live in a big city," she said.

Her nephew who lived in Waco at the time convinced her then to move the operation south.

"So I came, and Waco was a perfect place. Not too crowded, not too small- perfect."

Though Baris experiences the inevitable stress and hardships that come with managing a demanding business, she says she can think of nothing she would rather do.

"Meeting the people, talking to the people, seeing people enjoying the food, liking the food, that's the best," she said. "I grew up in the food business. My grandparents, my parents, they were in the restaurant business. I like people, I like cooking, this is my dream."

Baris said the restaurant serves people from all over the country.

"I see people from California, from New York, from Chicago, from everywhere due to Baylor," she said. "A lot of parents come to visit their kids."

Conveniently located only five miles from Baylor's campus, and with affordable meals including pizza by the slice for \$1.25 and entrees as low as \$4.50, Baris is especially popular among students and staff of the University.

Baylor journalism professor, Kevin Tankersley, first ate at Baris in 1980,

but the close proximity to his job, while a perk, isn't what has kept him going back for decades.

"When Baris first opened, I was the restaurant critic for the Waco Tribune-Herald," he said. "My wife and I ate there the week it opened, and have been eating there ever since. The food is always good. We've never had a bad meal there."

Tankersley said although the location is convenient, there is much more to what continues to attract customers.

"It's absolutely the food. Quality food every single time. There are places closer to campus to get Italian food. It's the quality of the food that keeps everybody coming back. And it's inexpensive."

For Tankersley and his family, another appealing attribute of the restaurant is the community atmosphere.

"Miss Mary, as our kids call her, is great," he said. "She always has big gumballs for the kids. Miss Vanessa, one of the wait staff, is one of the nicest people ever. And Dee, Miss Mary's daughter, is funny. We like her a lot. We've watched her kids grow up, just like she's watched our kids grow up."

Regular customers like Tankersley look forward to Baris almost inevitably waiting for them at the front desk as they finish their meal, with a sweet smile on her face.

"There's only one Miss Mary. I can probably count on one hand the number of times we have eaten at Baris and she has not been running the cash register. She was out for a while a couple of years ago after hip or knee surgery. I can't remember which one. But that's about the only times we've been there and she hasn't."

Aside from her love for Baylor and its population, Baris said the reason for the restaurant's permanence in Waco is the quality of people.

"I think Waco has the nicest people you could see anywhere," she said. "I mean it. The people don't judge you. At least my customers, they are really, really nice people. I have all these people; I have middle class, I have students, I have high school kids, and all of them are really nice and respectful."





# A Girl's Best Friend

By Skye Duncan | Lariat Photo Editor



Libby Sisson plays with Maliah, a pit bull, in the outdoor play area at the Humane Society of Central Texas. "I'm a huge animal lover. Getting the opportunity to save lives is just really what I love about being here. It's really rewarding when you have an adopter come in and they're just ecstatic about getting a new dog." **BELOW:** Sission plays with the cat Beyonce in the Cat Room.



**L**ibby Sisson is the Adoption Coordinator at the Humane Society of Central Texas where she handles the adoptions, processing, marketing and adoption events.

Libby originally came to Waco to attend Baylor, but started to volunteer at the Human Society and fell in love with animals. She wants to one day own a pet daycare facility and kennel that will board and foster animals for a local animal shelter or rescue.

"I love to be here and save animals. That is my passion," Sission said.



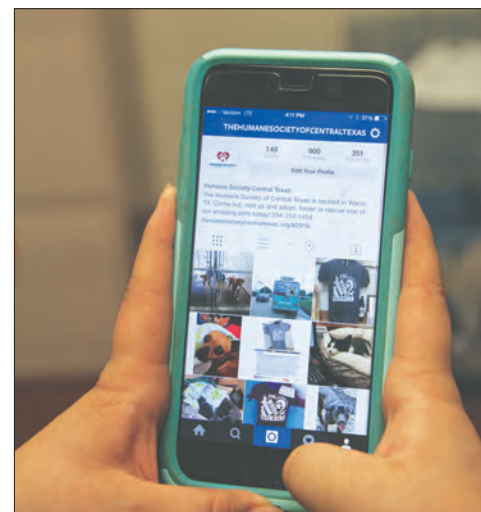
Sission tries to get Marley, a lab, to pose for the camera by giving her treats.



The Humane Society takes animals to different events in this trailer so that they can be adopted and gain exposure around Waco.



Russ, an American blue heeler mix puppy, loves to be cuddled and wouldn't let go of Sission. The Humane Society houses dogs and cats of all sizes. Russ lives in the Puppy House with several other puppies.



Sission posts pictures of dogs and cats on the Humane Society's Instagram. She hopes that people will share the posts and adopt more animals.



# Dr. Jonathan Tran: Professor, Author, Refugee

By Jenna Press | Assistant city editor

*“College is an important time to emotionally come to terms with who you are, and, more importantly, who you’re not.”*

Dr. Jonathan Tran, an associate professor of religion, and his family came to America in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam War when he was a toddler. They left Vietnam in the midst of death and war.

“It affected and devastated everything about my family’s culture. Our family was from the north, and therefore landowners, fairly wealthy and educated, but in the blink of an eye, all that was taken from them,” said Tran.

Tran’s mother was left with the difficulty of raising four kids, who would traditionally have been raised with nannies and servants, on her own.

“The next thing you know, we’re in America,” Tran said. At age 2, Tran would be growing up in a world totally different from what he would have experienced in Vietnam.

“The Emergency Immigration Act allowed 10,000 American-friendly Vietnamese to come over, and I think within a matter of 30 days, 140,000 people came to America,” he said. “America was ill-prepared for this insurgence of immigrants, especially war refugees. I think that gives a good context for what life was like in my family.”

After only a few years in the United States, Tran’s brother died crossing the street in front of the family’s house.

Tran witnessed his death.

“That’s the first thing I remember in life, so life was kind of like that. You throw in the combination of being a political refugee and the realities of poverty and racism ... those are pretty difficult realities,” Tran said.

Over the next years, Tran grew up in a household greatly affected by poverty and myriad of other difficulties, including moving several times.

“Moving is an incredibly traumatic thing

for little kids. So it was a lot of loneliness, and all of us were in the same boat, so it wasn’t like we were able to be great resources for each other,” Tran said.

“I think we were all just trying to survive. And my mom was working multiple jobs to take care of us, and that is why, to this day, I think she’s our hero, my hero.”

He wrote his first book on time and war, and he dedicated it to his mother.

“I realized while I was writing that book that the Vietnam War, that was her story, more than mine.”

Tran and his family moved 14 times before he went to high school. He dealt with a lot of bullying during his elementary and high school years, both for always being the new kid and for being Asian in non-Asian communities, which was especially hurtful to Tran.

“That was pretty rough, because if the one identifying thing that you can make sense of is your family, and the way you distinguish your family from other people, is ‘they’re Asian,’ if that becomes the chief point of violence against you, then that’s a pretty hard way to negotiate who you are in the world.”

Tran learned to fight as a result of the bullying against him, and he had to fight a lot.

“When I became a Christian, that was one of the hardest things to overcome, not fighting. Or just learning to be a peaceable person,” he said.

Tran became Christian at age 19, early on in his undergraduate years.

“I became Christian at about the same time, and maybe because of that I started to actually begin to think about my world and think about my life in it.”

During his undergraduate years at University of California at Riverside, Tran found friends, stability and a chance to form his identity.

“College is an important time to emotionally come to terms with who you are, and, more importantly, who you’re not,” he said. “I thought my life ought to matter in some way

to God and the world. I realized — I have a brain, I ought to use it.”

After college, he did full-time ministry for five years.

“I didn’t know what in the world to do, so I went to Christian seminary, and then, not surprisingly, three years later I still didn’t know what to do, so I applied to graduate school,” he said.

After graduating from Duke with a doctorate in theology & ethics, he came to Baylor. Tran will have been here for 10 years this fall.

Tran is the faculty-in-residence in Dawson-Allen Hall, home to the Leadership LLC. He is assistant director of University Scholars, sits on the faculty of the Renaissance Scholars Program, and teaches undergraduate and graduate religion courses.

“I’ve been fortunate to do be able to do a lot of things at Baylor,” he said. “Probably the thing I’m the most proud of is I think students like me, so just being able to come alongside students and hear about their stories, how they figure out who they are and why they matter ... that’s probably the thing I count as my greatest accomplishment.”

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One such student is Purdon junior Makenzie Fitzgerald, a University Scholars student who met Tran through the Lead LLC at Dawson-Allen.

“He’s one of those people who, once he cares about you, he inserts himself as much as he can into your life to try to love you and take care of you,” she said. “Dr. Tran is one of the best humans I know.”

Fitzgerald wants to be a professor someday, and she’s been very inspired by Tran’s ability to balance being a professor, researcher, husband and father while still being there for students and being involved in the world as a Christian.

“He somehow does it all,” she said. “It gives me some hope that maybe it’s possible. If I’m half the professor that Dr. Tran is someday, then I will be very happy with how my life has turned out.”

Fitzgerald said Tran’s involvement with



students is “incredibly refreshing,” citing his intentionality, his willingness to be vulnerable, and how deeply he cares as key aspects of his character that make him the great mentor he is.

“He’s brilliant and he has an extraordinary background, but none of that matters if he isn’t using them to care for people, but he is, and that’s what makes him extraordinary,” she said.

Tran’s passion for forming close friendships with students, colleagues, mentors, family and God has made a difference in his life, so much so that he cites it as his most valuable life advice.

Tran said Christians have a unique way of spending time together that was nothing like anything he experienced before joining the church.

“The thing that is the most important to me is the gift of friendship with people and the world around us,” he said, “and friendship with God keeps me able to keep going on.”

A relationship with God is central to Tran’s everyday life, and he says the place he feels closest to God is the church.

“You know, the church is about as messed up as we know it to be,” he said, “and yet it is evidence that God is real and will take all the time in the world to make us whole, healed, good people.”

Tran said that he loves being at Baylor, as it represents “an amazing moment in the history of American education,” combining elite sports, ambitious academic goals and a Christian lifestyle to create a fantastic school that “understands itself as serving the church.”

Among his friends at Baylor is Jennifer Massey, the assistant dean for Student Learning and Engagement, who has known Tran for several years.

“We’ve served on a variety of different committees together,” she said. “I’ve worked with a lot of faculty on a lot of campuses in three different countries. Dr. Tran is truly exceptional.”

Massey said Tran’s all-in personality is something that she really admires.

“If he is committed to something, he is committed 100 percent to it. He always pushes for excellence. He works incredibly hard; he’s an incredibly passionate person,” she said.

Tran is passionate about the church, his family and his students, among many other things, but particularly has a heart for diversity.

“We have such a problematically small percentage of minority faculty. What that means for us is that we’re overburdened with certain tasks but we’re also privileged to have access to certain things,” he said, “and so in my

time here ... I’ve been given a lot of opportunities, and I’m very grateful for this.”

Although Baylor has over 30 percent non-white students, its faculty is still lacking in that regard.

“Baylor has increasing diversity among its student population, but faculty and staff have not increased along with it,” Massey said. “All of our faculty and staff need to reflect on their own sense of purpose. I think we want a campus that brings people with different perspectives into our community to nurture our students.”

Tran has dealt with the results of the lack of diversity as a minority faculty, including the assumption that he teaches math because he’s Asian.

“While we have a good number of minorities on this campus, we’re still a pretty politically naïve place,” Tran said. “I worry about whether we’ll move forward in the area of cultural competency.”

Having a minority as a professor and a mentor has helped students like Fitzgerald expand their worldview and have a more open mind.

“It really informs my understanding of how much universities still have to grow,” she said.

Fitzgerald thinks Baylor could benefit from having more professors like Tran.

“He has a heart for not only racial issues, but women who are oppressed, people who are first generation, people who are in poverty ... he cares so deeply for anyone who needs it, and I think that that has helped me love Waco more, that’s helped me be a better person all around,” she said.

In the fall, Tran will be transitioning from Dawson-Allen to the Honors Residential College. As far as other plans go, Tran says he has no idea what the future holds.

“I’ll keep on in the department of religion, the Honors Residential College and go on from there,” he said. “I’ll still be raising kids on campus, which is a tremendous opportunities but comes with its challenges.”

Massey said moving to the Honors Residential College is a good move for Tran.

“The Honors Residential College is a great decision for him and an amazing decision for the HRC,” Massey said.

Fitzgerald said he agreed Tran is a good fit.

“Dr. Tran’s story is very inspirational, but I think that who he is and how he lives his life is even more so,” said Fitzgerald.





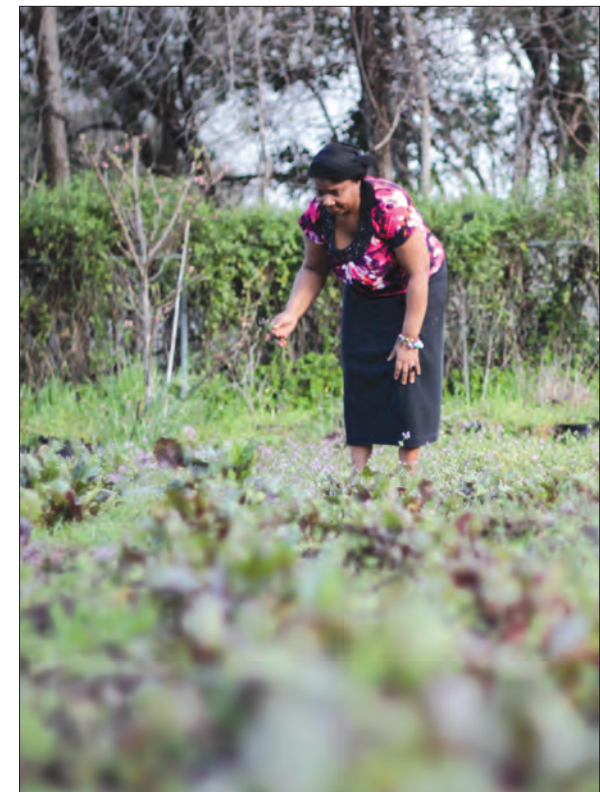
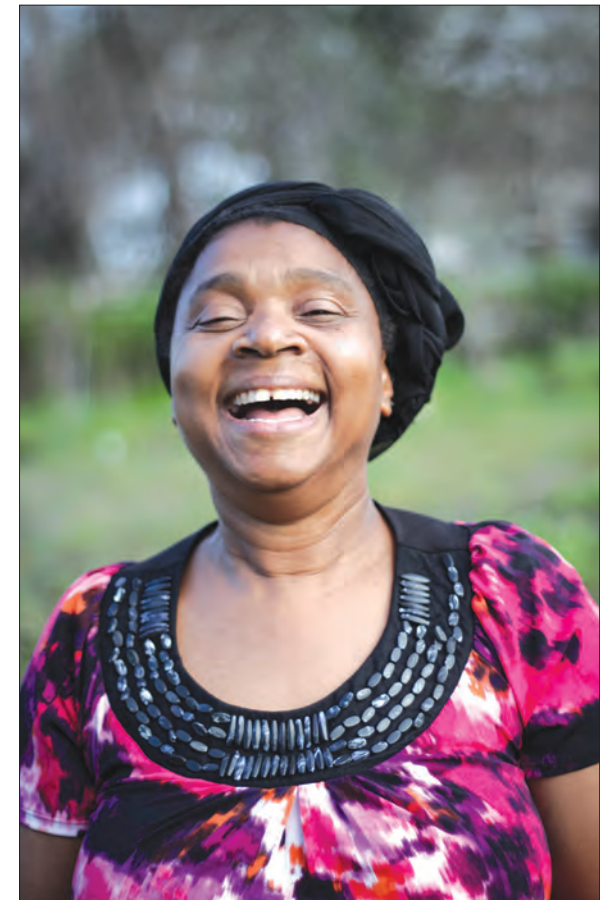


Kay Bell, originally from Jacksonville, is a local vender at the Downtown Waco Farmer's Market. She and her 93-year-old mother, (pictured far right) sell home grown tea. Kay, her mother, and her husband (pictured above) live across the Brazos river in East Waco and grow various products in their garden, including radishes, beets, onions, red potatoes, kale, sweet potatoes and more. Kay is a fifth-grade science teacher. She is also known around Waco for her herbal teas and lotions.



# Kay's Passion Garden Tea

By Jessica Schurz | Lariat Photographer



Kay Bell became interested in growing her own products at home after she was diagnosed with cancer in 2001. She began treatment by taking medicine, but only began to feel better through natural healing. She is now completely cancer-free and wants to spread benefits of natural healing, or natural medicines, all around Waco. Kay is hoping to open her own tea house soon where people can come together to eat, drink, and learn about the power of a taking health into your own hands.





# BRING IT ON

Senior Dakota Ethridge never thought he would cheer, but that changed when he came to Baylor

BY JEFFREY SWINDOLL | SPORTS WRITER

Hand pick any Baylor sporting event over the last four years and he is likely to have been there, leading the cheers and chants for fans. Starting with Baylor's epic win over TCU in 2011, Percy, Ark., senior Dakota Ethridge, two-year captain and four-year member of Baylor's yell leaders, has become a special part of Baylor history.

When Ethridge walked into the McLane Student Life Center for his interview, he began by saying, "I'm afraid you won't have much to write about ... I don't know if I really have a story for you." As he opened up about his time at Baylor and his experiences as a yell leader, Ethridge inadvertently revealed that his story is found in the subtleties. There is, in fact, a story from him.

You have likely seen Ethridge at these sporting events. He's hard to miss: tall, strong, blond hair, blue eyes. He even admits he sticks out like sore thumb, as he is the only blond male member on the team. Judging from his prototypical physique and natural skillset for cheerleading, one may assume he has been doing it for years, certainly before coming to Baylor.

It is quite the opposite, though. Ethridge's

journey to becoming the face of Baylor's yell leaders is a long and winding road. His "post-boy" status of Baylor yell-leading came close to never happening at all.

In high school, Ethridge was a championship-caliber competitor in track & field. He focused mainly on hurdles and competed with the high school's tennis and swim teams in his off-season. During those years as a track star in high school, he did not foresee cheerleading in his future in any capacity, he said.

He and his teammates would often play during downtime at track meets or practices, trying different flips and such in the high jump pit. Ethridge learned how to do a backhandspring, one of the essential stunts with which every cheerleader is familiar. This caught the attention of his peers. Many of them told him he would fit right in as a cheerleader. His answer? A flat-out no.

It was not the first and it wouldn't be last time Ethridge's future as a cheerleader was foreshadowed by his friends and family begging him to give cheerleading a try.

Students from outside the track team also pleaded with Ethridge to join the cheerleading team during his junior and senior years

in high school. Even his own mom told him to try out, but he continued to reject the propositions.

"I came to Fall Premiere one year and my mom saw one of the cheerleader guys and was like, 'You could do that,'" Ethridge said. "Then I was like, 'Nope. Not doing that.'"

He turned down the opportunity to join the track team at the University of Mississippi and had his sights set on Baylor. After he had already chosen to enroll at Baylor, a friend from high school started to show

interest in Ethridge's potential future as a cheerleader. His friend competed in cheer events all through high school and was planning on trying out for a college team herself.

"A month away from tryouts, my friend from high school had a look at the requirements and she was like, 'You can't learn all that. You're not going to be able to in a

month,'" Ethridge said. "At that point, I was like, 'I'm not going to do it,' which was a month before tryouts. Then, two weeks before the tryouts, a week before the last clinic, I was just like, 'I'm going to tryout. I'm just going to go for it. Why not?'"

Ethridge practiced for a week with his

friend, but he couldn't really learn much in just a week. After a last-ditch effort of practicing before the cheerleading clinics at Baylor, Ethridge stunted with some of the girls already on Baylor's cheer squad, returned home for another week of training, then came back the

next week for tryouts. He made the team, changing the course of his college career.

From refusing to participate with his high school cheerleading team to now making the cut for a collegiate co-ed cheerleading team, Ethridge had already come a long way. All of which happened in just a matter of weeks.

"When I was in high school, if I had

*"I enjoy leading by example, especially on that team because a lot of us started with nothing."*

Dakota Ethridge | Percy, Ark senior







HANNAH HASELOFF | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Pearcy, Ark., senior Dakota Ethridge was a track and field athlete in high school and learned different flips during his free time at track meets. These skills would help him later on in his cheerleading career.

looked a month, or two months in the future and would've been asked, 'Would I have been on the cheer team at all?' I would have never even thought it would happen," Ethridge said. "And now, once that happened, four more years. I'm the captain of the cheer team. It's so weird to think my past self would have never seen this coming. It's been the best thing ever."

Ethridge's four-year career as a cheerleader started quick. From day one, he was forced to learn on the fly. His first two years were a whirlwind of growth and discovery.

"Having no experience with cheer at all in my first year, I was just surviving, trying to figure what the heck I'm supposed to do," Ethridge said. "In the second year, I was more comfortable with what I was doing. I was able to still go with the flow and have fun, but obviously I was still learning and growing."

There was a different burden of responsibility that Ethridge had never felt before yell-leading for Baylor, not even during his competitions as a

state-level hurdler.

"When I played sports in high school, it was about you just doing your job, and you try to do it as best as you can. When you mess up it's just on you," he said. "In contrast, there's really the pressure of perfection in cheer. You're in front of a crowd and if you mess up you're showing weakness of yourself, your partner and your whole team."

There were many variables, namely tradition and pressure, that prohibited any time for rest as a new member to the team, Ethridge said. Eventually, though, Ethridge climbed the ranks, improved as an individual and developed into the shoo-in as the team's next captain.

Ethridge was nominated as a candidate for captaincy by his teammates during his sophomore year, a year in which he said he was not deserving of being the team captain. He knew he still had things to learn and authority above him in his sophomore year. Consequently, Ethridge did not become captain in his second year.

"Although not a big talker, he's always used his actions to speak for him and pushes others to have the same work ethic and determination he has," said Burke Millard, Houston sophomore and former teammate of Ethridge. "I would bet anyone currently at Baylor or a recent graduate who knows him would have a similar story to tell."

One of Dakota's greatest traits is his ability to bring potential to fruition, Flower Mound junior Courtney Schafer said. Schafer was Ethridge's stunt partner on the co-ed team this year.

"I will never settle for good, because Dakota has shown me I can be great," Schafer said. "He believes in you, he believes in everyone. His personality is addicting to be around."

His junior year was a completely different situation. Ethridge knew he was the most qualified candidate for the job and what being the captain would entail, not because he's arrogant or bossy, he said, but because he leads by example.

"I don't necessarily like having to tell people what to do," Ethridge said. "I enjoy leading by example, especially on that team because a lot of us started with nothing. Everyone kind of gets to the same skill level at some point, so there's really no point of being like a boss. Setting that example gives me the authority. There's a new batch of people, every single year. Being on the team so long, I've had the ability to form the team in a sense; the dynamic and the work-ethic of the team."

Ethridge flourished into a high-level cheerleader in his four years at Baylor. Ethridge has received a few offers from professional cheerleading teams to tryout. Though he thinks his yell-leading days have likely ended with his time at Baylor, what he takes away from his college experience goes deeper than his abilities as a cheerleader.

"A lot of it has to do with the people on the team," Ethridge said. "I feel like this whole experience has been like, 'Yeah, I've learned a lot and I got to do cool things,' but the people I've met have been amazing. They're my best friends at Baylor."



HANNAH HASELOFF | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER



# Head of the House

By Allie Matherne | Reporter

## Pastor forgoes career in athletic training to minister to students

Omari Head is easy to approach, easy to talk to, but impossible to interview for a feature story. He takes an interview as he takes most things in life — as an opportunity to compliment and lift other people up. Talking about himself is the last thing on his mind.

Students silently walk on the stage and rhythmically move to the beat of “Brother” by NeedToBreathe. They dance as if telling the Gospel with their feet. Sixty or so kids from the Kate Ross Apartments, low-income public housing near Acts Church in Waco, watch the college students in complete silence — a rarity.

Head, the college pastor at Acts Church, stands just out of sight with his hands crossed, smiling like this performance was his first time seeing a Broadway show. When you walk into Catalyst, a local spring break mission trip organized by Head, you won’t see him up on the stage much — and not for lack of charisma.

“The first thing I ask someone is, ‘What do you love to do?’” he said.

Head seeks to illuminate the light of others, and everything he says can be read with a lingering exclamation point. He doesn’t say anything half-heartedly.

“He goes above and beyond in every way. He’s not a guy that it matters how many hours he works,” said David Booker, lead pastor of Acts Church.

Head’s supposed “off-time” mirrors these words, considering he lives with six male college students in a discipleship house near Baylor campus as part of his ministry.

“I live with my college pastor,” said San Antonio junior Trevor Taylor. “I never thought about it, that I literally wanted to do that. I would have been upset if I didn’t get to live with my college pastor.”

After college, Head interned with the Seattle Seahawks football team as an athletic trainer. He eventually turned down a full-time job with the Seahawks to move back to Kansas.

“I recognize how I could easily be focused on something else,” Head said, recounting his college years. “But our call for the Lord doesn’t need to wait four years.”

Head ended up in Waco studying at Truett Seminary, fully realizing God’s call on his life into ministry, he said.

“We spend too much time on things that we’re not passionate about in order to feel more well-rounded,” Head said.

He now leads a college service for students, started a discipleship house with college men and put an outreach program on the path to success.

“He doesn’t just say, ‘This is what we need to do.’ He does it,” said Donnell Smith, Head’s close friend and colleague.

When Smith began working with the Kate Ross community, it was primarily her and her son. She started a program called

“Kidz Jam,” which involved visiting the complex on Wednesdays with snacks and games to invest in the kids from the Kate Ross community.

“Omari saw the need here,” said Round Rock senior Emily Phillips.

He pushed the college students to get involved, and it changed everything, Smith said.

The program grew from 10 kids to 60 kids. Head fought to keep the program alive as people questioned the sustainability of Catalyst. The college students used to travel to Florida for missions, but Head was convinced the real mission was here in Waco, Smith said.

“We need to be here,” Head told the college students.

The community has held onto the Kate Ross housing as they have seen paradigm shifts in thinking.

“It’s about loving people consistently, and Omari embodies that,” Phillips said. “He’s really authentic even when he doesn’t want to be.”

Smith said she agrees.

“I’m telling you, it’s all Omari,” she said.



**“It’s about loving people consistently, and Omari embodies that.”**

- Round Rock senior Emily Phillips



PHOTOS BY SKYE DUNCAN | PHOTO EDITOR

**TOP:** Acts Church college pastor Omari Head studies the Bible and journals as he prepares to minister to students in the Waco area. **ABOVE:** Baylor alumnus Josh Flores hugs Head. Flores learned from Omari during his time in college. **RIGHT:** Head seeks knowledge and understanding from the Bible to teach college students, his true passion.



# Good eats made with love so sweet

By Rebecca Flannery | Staff writer

Behind the counter of Lula Jane's, whisking eggs into a meringue or slicing up a decadent layer cake, you'll find a woman in flour-dusted overalls named Nancy Grayson.

If you get the chance to get her off her feet, asking about her life experience may get her right back up on them.

"Life is there to experience," Grayson said. "And I think in daily life there are ups and downs, but it all helps build character. It's something I embrace, something I enjoy rather than see as hurdles or disappointments."

Grayson earned a master's from Baylor and a Ph.D. in psychology from Texas A&M. Soon after, she was asked to be one of six people nationwide to write the Advanced Placement exam in psychology.

"Academically, that was extraordinary and a very rare opportunity," Grayson said. "I worked for 10 years after that with the AP program. I continued writing some questions, but also training people to read. I was always on-site doing the grading of the psychology AP exam."

During the same time, Grayson was in the process of developing what would become Rapoport Academy in Waco. The desire to start the charter school grew out of her passion for and belief in East Waco.

"There were two of us, and we opened the Rapoport Academy in 1998," Grayson said. "I did that as community service, so there was no salary. I didn't do it to make a living; I did it to make a difference. We certainly did that and did some extraordinary things along the way. It's listed among the top high schools in the nation."

Grayson said test scores in East Waco were dismal before beginning Rapoport. She said 30 percent of third graders in East Waco could pass state testing and only 10 percent of fifth graders could pass.

"I knew that something unhealthy, education wise, was going on in East Waco," Grayson said. "Children's scores should not go down, and they should never be as low as a 30 percent pass rate."

In the midst of her anger about the test scores, Grayson said she knew education was the only way things were going to be able to change for their community. The academy opened as a public charter school in the fall of 1998 with 16 students, according to the school's website.

"To say that an equal education cannot be provided and made use of is certainly an inappropriate thought about education and children," Grayson said. "I'm a firm believer that education is the great equalizer across all people."

Gaylene Reed, director of community relations for Rapoport Academy, said Gray-

son's grassroots efforts starting the academy give an in-depth look to the person she is. Reed said by opening the school, Grayson and her co-founder, Willa Jones, created a catalyst for change in their community.

"Her vision is continuing to bear fruit every year as the academy flourishes and offers Waco area children an excellent choice in public education," Reed said. "Further, she's always loved East Waco and is committed to helping fulfill its potential—to come alive."

Grayson's love for East Waco runs deeper still as proven in her dedication to her business and local food haven, Lula Jane's. She said through the work she puts in there, she is able to give back and rejuvenate the community.

"[My husband and I] very much believe that when you live in a community, you use the resources of the community. And you can make two choices: you can choose to use up the resources and not refill them, or you can choose to refill them," Grayson said.

That love runs deep for Grayson and is shown in her life at Lula Jane's. What is a quaint, quiet study spot for some is also an incredible means of outreach for others.

"This community helped us raise our children, they've helped us make livings, they've helped us be the family that we are and we're very indebted to Waco for that," Grayson said. "We have a deep love for the community here."

Grayson continues to live out her passion, continues to grow her community and continues to believe in giving back. She and her co-workers foster a sense of belonging in an area where some wouldn't have felt that way otherwise. Her fervor for living is evident through her daily hard work.

"What fun to wake up every morning and get to be. And it's our choice how we face how we want to be. It's our choice," Grayson said.

Before going back to a regular day's work, Grayson spoke to the opportunities presented to every person throughout their life.

"There are possibilities out there for everyone. There are pathways," Grayson said. "And sometimes you do things that you think will lead nowhere, but it actually prepares you for a different path as well."

If there was anything Grayson wanted to get across about living life, it was to know the importance of each person's worth.

"Every individual, regardless if they're male, female, a child or adult, they are valued," Grayson said. "For anyone to lessen the notion of value is just wrong."



PHOTOS BY HANNAH HASELOFF | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

During the day, Dr. Nancy Grayson, owner of Lula Jane's, tends to the vegetables grown in the Lula Jane's garden. However, when she is not outside, she can be found behind the counter preparing sweet treats to make sure her customers enjoy their Lula Jane's experience. The quaint bakery is bustling with business from customers coming to enjoy her tasty treats.





# Who's next?

Santos 'Tito' Martinez reflects on the nearly half a century he has clipped and trimmed patron after patron in his downtown Waco shop

By Amanda Yarger | Reporter

Settled quietly along historic Austin Avenue, a small shop is nestled in a tall business building with no fancy decorations besides a painted red and white pole and a name: Tito's Downtown Barbershop.

Tito's, located at 900 Austin Ave., has been bringing in business for 46 years with owner Santos "Tito" Martinez, who has over 58 years of hair-cutting experience.

The business draws in both Baylor students and Waco residents, with some clients visiting Tito's since his barbershop school days.

"It's been 50-something years," Martinez said. "I've been married 51 years and these guys I was cutting their hair before I even got married, so it's been a while. I enjoy talking to them — they're pretty interesting people. They've been coming in here for a long time."

The 79-year-old Waco native began his career as a barber in his early 20s after being laid off from a previous job. A friend convinced him to join barber school because the job paid well.

"We had a barber school here in Waco and I was walking around downtown [to the barber school] and he got me interested," Martinez said. "After I started going to school I started looking at things and said 'I'd like to have my own shop, it's good business.'"

In addition to the history captured by his scissors, the location of Tito's marks a trip into Waco's history.

"I worked in a little part of town they used to call the Town Square," he said. "It was

over there on Second and Third Street by the river. I worked there in a big shop with eight barbers and we all had business — everyone would come in."

Martinez's haircutting education was cut in half when he was drafted into the military.

Upon his return, Martinez earned his Master's license in Austin and opened his own shop between Third and Fourth streets on Austin Avenue in 1963.

The demolition on those streets in 1969 caused him to move to the location the business has resided at ever since.

As his business grew, popular hairstyles also caused his business to shift.

Previous generations of men regularly sought haircuts bi-monthly, but with the influence of the hippie movement of the '60s and '70s, longer hair became much more acceptable and in demand, he said.

In order to stay up-to-date with the current styles, Martinez re-enrolled in barber school to review techniques for cutting long hair.

"I went back to take a refresher course in long hair and the guy said, 'You know the basics of hair cutting, it's not much different — it's easier,'" he said.

San Antonio senior Adam Ortiz said he visited Tito's for the past year because he en-

joys supporting a local business with such a skilled barber.

"I can be really vague with my descriptions for haircuts, but he still understands what I'm trying to get and what would look good on my head shape, without me even knowing that," Ortiz said.

Martinez said he finds it funny that he's seen styles repeat during his experience.

"The hair-cutting business moves in a cycle. These kids used to want these haircuts that we hated when we were kids — in the summertime they used to cut it all off and now, they get it all cut off, too."

With the amount of education and experience Tito possesses, his barber shop also offers a quality haircut at a reasonable price, Dallas junior Collin O'Brien said.

"I support local businesses and I think that Tito's offers more unique services than chain stores like Super Cuts," he said. "I like getting a trim [at Tito's] because sometimes I don't have the option to go home and it's not very expensive."

After an impressive career, Martinez said he may be approaching retirement.

With his lease renewal coinciding with his upcoming 80th birthday, the doors of Tito's Downtown Barbershop may see the last of its customers soon.

"If Tito retires, it would be a loss because his business is such a part of local culture," Ortiz said. "You see more Supercuts than barbershops, so for a place to close that has such pride in their work, it would really be a loss."



ALL PHOTOS BY JESS SCHURZ | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Santos "Tito" Martinez trims the beard of a customer at Tito's Downtown Barbershop at 900 Austin Ave. Martinez has been cutting hair for nearly a half-century.





PHOTOS BY JESS SCHURZ | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

# Au naturel: Vendor creates chemical-free products

By Shannon Barbour | Reporter

Every Saturday morning, if the weather permits, Jill Boman and her husband, David, toss up their canopy and cover their table with sweet smelling treats.

When even most natural beauty brands contain harsh chemicals, Boman creates her own products using only ingredients that are safe to eat.

From 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Boman, founder and owner of Happy Stuff, sells her homemade and handmade products to friends, students and natural product enthusiasts.

"I decided I'm not going to buy anything anymore," Boman said. "If I can't make it myself, forget about it. I'm not going to use it, because I'm a purist. And I like to make that stuff for other people. I think it's important for people to not be dependent on the system that's making them sick."

The Happy Stuff creator sells her products at the Waco Downtown Farmers Market every Saturday with her husband, who helps Boman set up her booth.

Boman has been selling her homemade beauty and household products at the farmers market for three years.

Happy Lips, Happy Pits, Happy Clothes

and Happy Hands are Boman's lip balms, deodorants, laundry detergents and salves.

Brian Rundle, a fellow farmers market vendor, always stops by Happy Stuff to pick up his personal care necessities. Rundle often sends men who are looking for natural products to Boman's table.

"I send a lot of guys over there who are looking for something like that ... especially deodorants are the things they're most likely to use," Rundle said. "It's very good for skin, especially if you have sensitive skin."

Marengo, Ill., senior Jenna Hill doesn't usually buy natural products, but said she likes the products that Boman makes.

"Her orange-flavored lip balm is my favorite product," Hill said. "It's probably better than the manufactured products because it doesn't have all the chemicals."

Boman was a homeschool mom and worked in sales in the beauty industry. But when Boman's youngest child graduated high school, she decided to start her own company in something she was familiar with, the beauty business.

"I asked my husband what am I going to do when I'm not a homeschool mom anymore," Boman said. "I didn't know what to

do with myself. And he said, 'You know that stuff you like to make? Why don't you do that?' So that's how I started. I started selling at the farmers market."

Happy Stuff is a new company, but Boman has been experimenting and creating her products for years.

"I've been making a lot of my own stuff for years," Boman said. "Just because I liked it, it's fun. Through the years I've just been adding other things."

Boman has also sold her products at The Village Herbalist Herb Shop and Spice Village, but she now happily sells Happy Stuff at the farmers market and Homestead Market.

"It's just always been fun," Boman said. "I'm an extrovert. The farmers market is an extrovert's dream come true because it's all these people and it's a friendly atmosphere and friendly camaraderie among the vendors."

Boman gets her inspiration and ideas from books, blogs, her husband and customers who give her suggestions on what to make next.

Hill said she would like to see Boman make more soaps and body wash, especially because natural products are gaining more

popularity.

Stephanie Hanson purchased natural products from Boman during her first trip to the farmers market, and was pleased with Boman's selection.

"I use them [natural products] on my little girls a lot and I like to be sure there aren't too many chemicals and other things I don't understand in the products I'm putting on my kids," Hanson said. "This kind of product is perfect for us. I was excited about the booboo salve and the mosquito repellent."

Boman has used local company Deuxtone, a graphic design studio that helps businesses with branding and designs, to help brand the company, which she hopes to expand in the future, but only once she has a larger production capacity.

"If all of a sudden I got a call from a major chain, we're not there yet," Boman said. "But I'd love to have a presence like that."

But for now, Boman is keeping her business small and manageable.

"We're working on the website this year," Boman said. "So we'll have an online presence. We're wanting to expand."





# Le voyage à Baylor

By Cody Soto | Sports Writer

Attending college at Baylor for the first time presents many challenges. From learning to live alone to balancing a lifestyle of school, work and a social life, it becomes a daily struggle for young adults.

But imagine coming to college from another country. Sophomore men's tennis player Maxime Tchoutakian not only experiences the common college problems, but also a language barrier, different customs, and a culture shock since arriving in Waco in January.

Tchoutakian is a 21-year-old French native from Marseille. Although he did not compete in intercollegiate athletics in Europe, Tchoutakian received an opportunity when he was offered a chance to play in the U.S. for Baylor. He heard great things about attending school in the U.S., and he is glad he got to experience it firsthand this year.

"For me, it was a good opportunity, and I wanted to discover a new culture and atmosphere, so I think I made the best choice," Tchoutakian said. "We all know in France that here you have huge facilities, a lot of money for the university, and the student-athletes are always recognized here, so that's why I decided to join Baylor."

Tchoutakian didn't hear about Baylor on his own. With friends who had experience attending school in the U.S., he decided to go on tour with the Association of Tennis Professionals, or ATP.

"I have a lot of French friends who are players," Tchoutakian said. "They told me always good things about a university.

I was playing on the ATP tour, and it's so expensive, but I decided to join to go here."

The English language was a foreign concept for Tchoutakian until he learned how to speak the language as

a preteen. Since then, he has tried improving his speaking skills in his secondary language. It hasn't been a smooth road.

"I learned English at school, but in France we don't school [until] around 12 years old, not before," Tchoutakian said. "That's why our English is so bad. It's because we didn't practice at school. It's only about writing, not speaking. For us, it's hard when we came here in the United States to speak."

A new language isn't the only thing he sees as different. The sizes of buildings, stadiums and universities is unbelievable, he said.

"We don't have this kind of university in France; even the top university in France is not like Baylor," Tchoutakian said. "Also, McLane Stadium is really impressive. It's huge and big. The only word I can use to talk about America is big. Everything is big."

According to tennis head coach Matt Knoll, Tchoutakian has been able to adjust to the new atmosphere thanks to his positive attitude of overcoming any challenges that are ahead of him. His personality makes the difference.

"The thing that you notice with Max as soon as you talk to him is his maturity level, and his focus level is pretty fantastic," Knoll said. "He carries that into everything that he's done here: his academics, his role within the team, his work ethic in practice, the way he's competed. He's just a fantastic guy, and I think he's going to continue to improve."

It is impressive how fast Tchoutakian has embraced the American culture. Without missing a beat, he is able to bring consistency to the men's tennis program, senior tennis player Mate Zsiga said.

"[He] got here in January and the first thing he did was jump in and play, and it's not easy to do, but Max did an exceptional job with adjustments from playing in a pro tour to college," Zsiga said. "It's different because you work on a team; you don't work by yourself. It's definitely different, but he's made really good adjustments, and he's playing really well. He has a bright future here at Baylor."

Everything is bigger in Texas, espe-

Jess Schurz | Lariat Photographer





SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR



JESS SCHURZ | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

LEFT: Tchoutakian returns a point during Baylor's 4-0 win over Oklahoma State on April 12. ABOVE: Tchoutakian celebrates a point during Baylor's 4-3 loss to No. 1 Oklahoma on April 10.

cially the food choices. Tchoutakian has noticed a big change in the types of foods that he eats on a daily basis, and after only a semester at Baylor, he found a burger that he has not had before: Whataburger.

"I love that place. It's incredible. In France, we have a McDonalds, Quick, and now Burger King. That's good too," Tchoutakian said. "I've been here in Waco two times at Whataburger, and it's just amazing. I love that."

Amid the excitement of living in a new country for the first time, Tchoutakian knows when it's time to head to work. He and the second-ranked Baylor Bears are on a mission to win another national championship.

"We all make good job here and we all fight at every match, every practice," Tchoutakian said. "We all try to give our best, so I think that for our team and our coaches, [a national championship] could be the best thing that could happen to us."

Tchoutakian is not the only foreign player on the team. Several teammates originate from Hungary, Croatia, Germany, Chile and Colombia, so he has the chance to learn new customs from them. On the court, he will yell in several different languages.

"I say everything from 'vamos,' 'come on,' 'aller,'" Tchoutakian said. "I can speak pretty much any language on the court, it just depends on the day what I say. It goes from my heart."

Some things don't always translate exactly how it is pronounced in Ameri-

ca. As a matter of fact, Tchoutakian does not know how to pronounce a popular campus phrase in French. Sic 'em Bears, what's that?

"I have no idea," Tchoutakian said. "Bears is 'ours' in French, but sic 'em ... I don't even know what it means in English. I'm not sure."

Tchoutakian has already learned more about tennis since he has arrived on campus, and the value of teamwork has really caught his eye.

"I've learned to fight for the team because when I played on the ATP tour, I played only for myself," Tchoutakian said. "Now, we play for the team. We play for the university, so I now fight for only myself, but for everybody at Baylor."

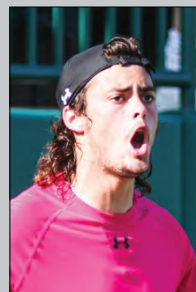
The recruiting process is all about bringing in foreign players to experience the American culture, and Tchoutakian has now joined a family of men who have learned to call America their second home.

"We think Baylor is a special place, and to have guys come here and experience it is unique and wonderful," Knoll said. "[Recruiting overseas] is a big part of what we do, and Max adds a ton to our team and our school. We're still helping him grow and get used to this new environment, but he's a home run."

Tchoutakian will have the chance to be a significant role in the Bears' quest for the 2015 national title, and with the NCAA Championships in Waco in May, he's ready to give it everything he has. In the words of Tchoutakian, "Aller Baylor!" (Let's go, Baylor!)

## Where are they from?

Baylor tennis features players from around the world. Here's a look at the furthest travels:



### Felipe Rios

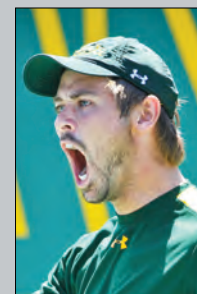
Hometown: Vina Del Mar, Chile

Distance: **4,745 miles**

### Julian Lenz

Hometown: Giessen, Germany

Distance: **5,201 miles**



### Mate Zsiga

Hometown: Szeged, Hungary

Distance: **5,802 miles**



