

Reflections

Fall Semester 2023

Community Engagement: *Your life may depend on it!*

by Christie Bogle

Introduction

It was February—only a few days before Valentine’s Day, 2023. I buzzed with a mixture of hope and anxiety while sitting in a surgeon’s office. It was eerily silent. My son, my friend, and I didn’t talk. I would like to paint a picture with tropes of anxiety befitting my generation, but they were absent—no analog clock tick-tock marked the passing time. But my friend knitted away at a hat as a suitable substitute. My son sat next to me holding my hand. But the comfort of familiar, living people and things was not what held me together. I was focused on questions, planning, preparing. I was ramping up for a battle against breast cancer. I knew I had it, thanks to the app on my phone sending me my uninterpreted biopsy results. I knew the words “invasive ductal carcinoma” and “3+” and “grade 3.” I had Googled them, but I needed to understand. I needed to know how I was going to beat it.

My status as a cancer patient unfolded in literature and gifts. At my mammogram, I was given a cellophane bag from the Breast Cancer Foundation: everything in pink, all themed around femininity, and care. Then, when my diagnosis was explained, I received a binder that was meant to be filled along my journey. It had tabs for resources about non-profit breast cancer organizations, appointment reminder cards, and many spaces for more. I remarked to the staff that this felt oddly similar to my maternity care package. Later on, I was to be showered with soft blankets and hats. I was already embarrassed. This meant I had to bite back some pride and call upon my friends for assistance, knowing I would not be self-reliant. This was hard work to receive, being dependent.



A Multitude of Gifts

Defining Community Engagement

I don’t usually think so much about just taking care of myself. I have worked with a mind to community engagement since childhood. My family had always participated in what we called “service,” and I followed that lead: Bible camps, coat drives, and volunteering at sporting events were common for us. As a young adult, I engaged with non-profits and transformational companies that centered around giving my time. I spent hundreds of hours every year working in my communities. Even my horse hobby finds me volunteering about eight days a year to help the horse shows run well.

My most recent community engagement included animal rescue work, sheltering unhoused families, and working with the U of U’s Shoshoni Language Project. Community engagement, as I had experienced it, was a way to lend my time, skill, and productivity to organizations that align with my values. Being of service was its own moral guidepost for me. I had no framework for a world of receiving.

Cutting Life Out for Healing

That initial diagnosis came through a local clinic. But once I had it, I had no doubt that the Huntsman Cancer Institute was the best care in Utah. I met with their oncologist on Valentine’s Day. I had time to consider what limits I might experience, and was resigned that I could not do my community engagement for a while. As a normal part of rethinking my priorities for work and home, I had to pare my life down. How could I do community engagement work if I was headed into at least a year of physically and emotionally exhausting treatment? My productivity and time would certainly be trained on healing my body. Nothing brought that home more than sharing my diagnosis with my mother. After a pause, and a grounding breath, she said “We have a battle ahead.” It was good to hear “we.” I didn’t want to go it alone. But I was going to be drawing on the communal resources instead of replenishing them.

Trial Enrollment

Right away on my first appointment, my medical oncologist—we’ll call him Dr. V, was eager to enroll me in the CompassHER2 Trials. The explanation of the trial required a ton of time and reading, but I was sold on one detail: less chemotherapy.

First Dr. V explained that most women treated with *standard of care* received four drugs and required chemo before and after surgery. This study promised omission of one chemo drug and reduced the treatment to just 12 weeks before surgery, so long as the cancer responds. There were other differences in the order of care, but the quantity of chemotherapy was the only thing that seemed important. There were some questions to determine if I fit the bill. My tumor was about twice the size required by the study. This study was not a guaranteed success. Still, a regimen promising less chemo while holding the possibility of achieving complete pathological response (the tumor would be cured) was irresistible. I wanted in!

Enrolling required several weeks of questionnaires, phone calls, reading and discussing rules. Then, once I was accepted, I had to recall, list, and report every prescribed and over the counter drug I use—every herb and supplement. The pharmacists had to review and approve or deny each and check my allergies. Dr. V had to work with my insurance to approve the care plan, which included a specialized alcohol-free drug. Finally, I had to plan my daily and work life, apply for federally protected leave for the next several months, buy the things that all fellow cancer sufferers recommend and get set to go. But I was in.

Engagement

Chemotherapy was a lot. It was only one of the five treatments I would endure. After chemo came surgery, radiation treatments every weekday for a month, nine more months of immunotherapy infusions after chemo, and five to ten *years* of aromatase inhibitors to prevent my body from manufacturing estrogen. Imagining the amount of time that I was going to feel sick began to loom heavily in my future. How long will I be dependent? My friends and family had lined up to accompany me to chemo since I had such a long commute to Salt Lake City from Ogden. My parents made up a bedroom for when I was too ill to return home. I was taken care of. But, oh wow! *I was having to be taken care of.* Over time, I began to learn more about the oncologist, his values, and the values of the field. This was unexpected, but welcomed, information. I learned that his medical oncology convention had recently moved their annual event out of Texas due to their oppressive politics around women’s health. I learned that every study done through the

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NIH on breast cancer was given a woman's name. Rightly so! I also was keenly aware that every student, staff, doctor, nurse, etc. in the Huntsman building wore rainbow Pride pins to hold their badge and name tag. What I was realizing over time is that I was being treated in a hospital that shared many of my core values. I began to feel like I was at home in the Huntsman buildings and among the practitioners.

Something began to shift in my thinking about the study. As I finished the main 12 weeks of chemo and moved on to surgery, several times I was so ill that Dr. V hinted at stopping my therapy. I didn't want to. Sure, I wanted to understand the symptoms and side effects, but I would not quit. I waded through unanswerable concerns: What does this blood pressure mean? Should I worry about that heart rate? Why do I have a bloody nose every day? Why am I coughing all the time? (I'll give anyone that can cure my gut symptoms all of my money!) Why do I sleep 12-20 hours every day? It's side-effect whack-a-mole.

During chemotherapy, I began reading *Her-2: The Making of Herceptin, a Revolutionary Treatment for Breast Cancer* by Robert Bazell. Herceptin is the main drug that is credited for treating—even curing—HER2-positive cancer (part of my diagnosis.) I was struck by a passage discussing Ann McNamara's cancer journey. Her doctor gave her faulty advice based on "very preliminary Russian studies." Remarkably, "[t]hose studies were soon discredited, but they illustrated a truth about med-



"I have accepted my bald head."

icine: state-of-the-art practices come and go as medical science proves and then discredits its latest thinking. Even the most immaculately reasoned advice can be faulty" (6). I read on about how McNamara had recurrent breast cancer with HER2+ markers, something that had not yet been understood in the 1970s. But the invention of the Herceptin (*trastuzumab*) drug depended on subsequent decades filled with studies, practice, and revisions of studies to learn about this specific kind of breast cancer. The list of study participants is published in the book. There they were—people like me that offered up their cancer care to a study. And because of them, *trastuzumab* (Herceptin) is saving lives.

Humbled by the contribution of cancer patients before me, I was grateful for my path. As bad as chemotherapy felt, my study was offered as the least terrible treatment available. It did not feel like a choice to do this—unless it didn't work. Yet I knew it was working. Only five weeks in, I could not find the tumor anymore.

A month after the end of chemo, I was due for surgery. It turned out that my tumor did experience a complete pathological response. In other words, I was cancer free. The study had one main question, which I'll paraphrase: *Can a pre-surgical, 12-week regimen of a taxol-type drug (nab-paclitaxel for me), trastuzumab (Herceptin), and pertuzumab (Perjeta) cure this tumor?* Even though my tumor was approximately twice the size of the study parameters, the regimen worked.

As that news settled in and I moved on to radiation, I began to appreciate the success. I began to feel my contribution—my community engagement. Because my inclusion in this study pushed a boundary of the study parameters, my data was a contribution to breast cancer patients in the future. How many people are currently taking more chemotherapy drugs than necessary, and for longer than necessary?

The Rewards

Taking what sounded like the easier path had risks. I had not taken that "standard of care" protocol. Had it not worked, I risked lost time and health in choosing this protocol. It also cost me time and money beyond standard of care. I had to drive farther and meet exacting schedules. Of course, I could have left the study at any time, with assurance that I could stay with the same regimen of care, but I was committed to having my data count. By taking this path of enlisting in a study through the Huntsman Cancer Institute, I had engaged meaningfully with the medical community and the community of breast cancer patients. I feel my engagement helps argue that patients need access to this less aggressive care. As Dr. V expressed, for decades we have prioritized the death of the cancer—whatever happens to the person. We need care that lets the patient live, and live as well as we can, while treating the cancer in a more targeted way. My results may expand this possibility for even more patients with *triple positive invasive ductal carcinoma* breast cancer like my own.

It was rewarding to participate in this study. For the better part of a year, I had to pause my efforts rescuing dogs and contributing to other community efforts that fulfill me. But I realized it wasn't a sacrifice of engagement—merely a redirection. I was engaged like my life depended on it.

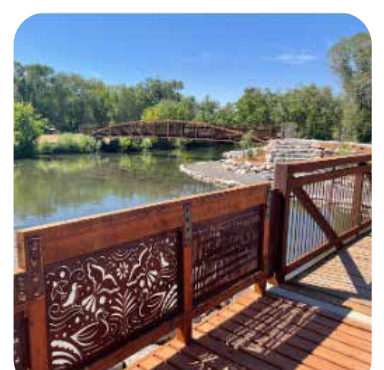
One last thought.
Go get your mammogram.

Bazell, Robert. *Her-2: The Making of Herceptin, a Revolutionary Treatment for Breast Cancer*. Random House: Toronto, 1998.
Wei, Mei. *Research Study Informed Consent Document*. IRB# 135498, ALLIANCE EA1181, CIRB version date: 08/24/2022.

Creeks In Our Community

by Rowan Lambros

It is a crisp fall day in November; I pull my jacket tighter around me as a breeze rustles across the smooth water of the Three Creeks Confluence and runs a chill down my back. Despite the chill, I am grateful for the wooden bridge that I currently stand on, as just over two years ago the entire park was nothing more than an overgrown and neglected parking lot. Thanks to Seven Canyons Trust, and its executive director, Brian Tonetti, the area has been transformed into a beautiful park that brings the community closer together and revitalizes the local ecosystem. I was given the opportunity to talk with Tonetti to discuss his experience as one of the founders of the Seven Canyons Trust and the projects that they have since completed.



How the work of one local organization enriches the environment and brings the community together through daylighting the valley's buried creeks.

Brian Tonetti, a New York native, moved to Utah in 2011 to attend the University of Utah as an urban planning and environmental science student. He described having initial feelings of culture shock due to the lack of accessible water in the area—having grown up near the bountiful water sources in New York State—however, he learned that

the Salt Lake Valley is full of creeks and streams; they are just buried underground. With this knowledge, Tonetti and his fellow students in the 2014 Urban Ecology and Planning class created a plan called 100 Years of Daylighting, in which over 100 years the buried and neglected creeks of the valley would be uncovered and restored. According to the Seven Canyons Trust website, the plan was recognized with a Utah American Planning Association Achievement Award, which inspired Tonetti and a portion of other students to continue on with the project outside of class—thus the Seven Canyons Trust was birthed as an official non-profit (SevenCanyonsTrust.org). Since then the trust has completed numerous projects such as river clean-ups, native plant restorations, and the “flagship project,” as Tonetti described, the Three Creeks Confluence Park.

Environmental revitalization is one of the main goals for Brian Tonetti and Seven Canyons Trust, so in an effort to monitor habitat growth after the completion of the Three Creeks Confluence project, they have partnered with Tracy Aviary to conduct research regarding bird species. An article posted by Tracy Aviary on the Seven Canyons website details that after just two years there has already been a recorded increase in urban-sensitive, riparian, and native bird species. The article states that the percentage of native bird species abundance during the breeding season increased from 60.7% on average in 2017-2019 to 71.9% on average in 2021 and 2022 (Tracy Aviary). In addition to ongoing research regarding bird and mammal species at the Three Creeks Confluence, Tonetti also detailed the education and upkeep projects at the site that will allow the community to enjoy the space and learn about the ecology of the valley for the foreseeable future.



Brian Tonetti, Executive Director,
Seven Canyons Trust

The Three Creeks Confluence Park sits between 900 West and 1300 South in Salt Lake City, in an area that has been historically underfunded and categorically disadvantaged when compared to neighborhoods on the east side of the valley. This disparity has not gone unnoticed by Tonetti who declared, “A good portion of our projects are done on the west side mainly because of how the west is impacted. Restoring that connection [between the east side and westside] is a big part of our work.” It is worth noting that the east side of the valley has numerous locations in multiple neighborhoods

where citizens have access to the natural creeks of the valley, such as the City Creek/Memory Grove Trails, and Liberty Park, all of which are minutes from downtown. These spaces allow community members to connect with the beauty and nature of the valley, and Seven Canyons Trust wants every neighborhood to have the same benefits.

Community engagement and celebration is another major goal of Tonetti’s, which is why Seven Canyons partnered with the Salt Lake City Arts Council to feature original artwork from 20 different local artists at the Three Creeks Confluence. Tonetti feels that by featuring work from local artists, these parks “tell the story of the people and the community and the ecology of the valley.” Additionally, Seven Canyons Trust has partnered with the Roots Art Collective on another upcoming project called the Folsom Trail, which features a large mural that was created by local artists to celebrate the history of the Poplar Grove Neighborhood.

These projects have created immense value for the community and the environment in our valley, and I strongly encourage my readers to visit either the Three Creeks Confluence Park or any other natural creek in your area so that you too can experience and enjoy the beauty that is quite literally in all of our backyards. I also encourage my readers to support Seven Canyons Trust by spreading the word about the work they are doing for our community, and if it is within your means, you may consider donating or volunteering by visiting their website: www.sevencanyonstrust.org.

Brian Tonetti. “Interview With Brian.” Personal Interview. 11/15/2023

“Our Organization.” *Seven Canyons Trust*, sevencanyonstrust.org/organization. Accessed 16 Nov. 2023.

“Community Science Bird Monitoring at Three Creeks Confluence 2022 Project Report.” *Seven Canyons Trust*, Seven Canyons Trust, 5 June 2023, sevencanyonstrust.org/blog/community-science-bird-monitoring-at-three-creeks-confluence-2022-project-report.

A Teacher and an Example:

Proof that having diverse teacher representation can inspire students

by Sarah Spencer

Close your eyes and imagine a teacher in an elementary school in the



Dottie Vea,
Special Education Specialist at Mana
Academy Charter School

United States. What do you see? For many of us, the image that arises is a teacher who is White, and not a teacher of color. That was certainly the experience for Dottie Vea growing up.

However, unlike many other students of color, Dottie found her way into education, and is now an example of what a teacher can look like, inspiring her students to aim high, believe in themselves, and tip the scales on the status quo.

I met with Dottie in the front office at Mana Academy, the culture-based charter school where Dottie works as the Special Education specialist. From the moment I stepped foot into the school, I was ignited by the evident devotion to diversity there. The halls were adorned with art, images, and phrases that align with the cultural backgrounds of the students and teachers, which include Hispanic and Pacific Islander cultures. From one of the classrooms, I could hear the strong voices of young students singing a traditional song in a language I couldn’t recognize but could immediately feel deep within me. I quickly realized this school was a special place.

Dottie and I made our way to her office—which was also decorated with cultural images—where we sat down to begin the interview.

Anaise Toti Dottie Falekietono Paluvava’u ‘Uilani Vea (Dottie for short) was born in Hawaii to Tongan parents. She explained to me that each of her names represent someone her parents wanted her to be like strong women: “Falekietono was entrepreneurial, Paluvava’u was big-hearted, ‘Uilani was smart witted. My parents wanted me to embody these women . . . I was raised by models of strong women. I was taught that women lead.”

Dotti spent her early years in Hawaii. She was always in schools where Hawaiian culture was prominent and where she was surrounded by students and teachers that looked like her. Then, when Dottie was in the 4th grade, her family moved to Colorado for a couple years before landing in Utah. In Colorado, she lived in a small town where the setting and culture was very different from what she was used to back in Hawaii. “We were in a small town where everyone thought we were either black or Hispanic. . . . They didn’t know what we were at all. That was probably when I first started asking myself, ‘Why is it so hard to make friends and why is so hard for adults to trust me?’ All eyes were on me and I didn’t understand why.”

As Dottie moved through school, she began to realize that her culture was different from the majority of the other students, and that most people didn’t understand where she was coming from culturally. Like the time she wore black for a year in honor of her late grandfather (wearing black for a year after the loss of a family member is a Tongan tradition).

“I was raised by models of strong women. I was taught that women lead.”

While she was simply participating in a family and cultural tradition, her teachers were concerned about her mental

health. Their treatment of her at that time affected her learning and impacted the relationships with her teachers. This was just one example Dottie shared with me of feeling singled out based on the cultural differences between her and her educators.

In high school, Dottie attended a math and science-based school. It was there that she developed a love for science and learning in general. However, because pretty much all of the staff was White, she

remembers thinking that teachers and scientists were all inherently White. “I never saw a teacher that looked like me, so I never knew I could be a teacher, until I met a teacher towards the end of my time in high school that looked like me and that had the same last name as my grandma, and I was like, ‘Woah, a Tongan can be a teacher?’”

After high school, Dottie went to study in NYC, where she was finally surrounded by more diversity in her educators and was inspired to dive

“I never saw a teacher that looked like me, so I never knew I could be a teacher until I met a teacher towards the end of my time in high school that looked like me and that had the same last name as my grandma, and I was like, ‘Woah, a Tongan can be a teacher?’”

into her learning. She originally studied social/cultural anthropology but was later empowered to pursue and eventually land in education, specifically special education. She has been working as a Special Education teacher since she came back to Utah and has been working in the education system for the past decade.

Now, working at Mana, she has seen for herself the benefits of having diverse representation within the teacher population. She has seen how having teachers who speak the same language as the parents helps encourage more involvement from the parents in their kids’ learning. She also sees that having an insight into the culture at home can help teachers better serve their students. She sees that the demographics of the U.S. are changing, and that the education system needs to keep up with that. “The U.S. is changing, and education needs to follow that. . . If we don’t have differences in how we think or people coming from different perspectives, we are narrowing our thought processes. Without different perspectives, how are we supposed to grow? How are our children, the future adults of our world, supposed to grow? We need diversity to create strong students and strong people.”

Moab Conference Preview

By Elisa Stone & Daniel D. Baird



Along with SLCC faculty from across the college, English, Linguistics, & Writing Studies faculty Daniel Baird, Kati Lewis, Jason Roberts, and Elisa Stone will join Lucy Smith, Director of Engaged Learning, at Utah State University’s Conference on Community-Engaged Scholarship and Teaching CCEST 2024: Community Voices Amplified in Moab, Utah this coming February. The ELWS team will present on community collaboration via community engaged learning in SLCC’s English Department.

The SLCC English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies Department (ELWS) is a college-recognized Engaged Department, which means that a significant number of our faculty practice collaborative, community-centered approaches to teaching and learning. These include engaged pedagogies like community-engaged learning, a civic orientation across the curriculum, and a department-wide focus on writing as a form of action and an agent of social change. Working with community partner organizations, local organizers, activists and public servants, the engaged faculty of the ELWS Department invite students to see and experience how reading and writing intertwine with community issues, local conditions, and civic action, and how writing outside the boundaries of the college classroom can have a profound effect on learning and growth. Faculty from ELWS will discuss their experiences with community engaged teaching in English classes including composition. They will share how student learning is a collaborative effort between nonprofit organizations and faculty, some challenges encountered and tips for successful implementation in your classrooms.

About Reflections

Reflections is a newsletter for and about community engaged learning published twice a year by the SLCC ELWS Department. We welcome submissions on student experiences, faculty perspectives, pedagogical insights, community partner engagement, civic involvement, staff profiles, and upcoming events. Send photos, events, posters, or articles to: elisa.stone@slcc.edu

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