

MU R M U R

ALUMNI MAGAZINE | WINTER 2020



AGAINST ALL ODDS

- ISAAC'S JOURNEY -



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

A few things have changed since the last edition of Murmur at the close of 2019. You may have noticed. Confident you are not starved of pandemic discussion, there is little need for me to wade into the news-drenching juggernaut of 2020. Indeed, any such attempt would run the risk of both sounding glib, and failing to reflect the true impact for individual readers. Some of you will have lost loved ones, some of you will have your career in ruins, and some of you may be currently adrift from family and friends. Yet for others, it has meant merely a struggle to find flour, the temporary loss of a hobby, or little change save the symptoms of a Netflix overdose. I think it is fitting therefore to suggest you take a moment away from the news cycle and dip into some of these Murmur stories that feature resilience as a common thread.

It is a theme laced throughout this edition. Kicking off with cameraman Dan Stone, who took the brave decision to put aside the security of regular income in order to invest in himself. The return to study paid dividends, opening the narrow doors to a career in film. The theme is also exemplified in the feature on Tanaka Mutambandazo, whose encounter with grief came at the apex of his undergraduate study. Tanaka's quest to keep going, even when quitting appeared an inviting option, is also reflected in the interview with Nadia King, who faced rejection on a daily basis. Nadia became a published author in middle age, refusing to put down the pen until the little girl in her head had her story told. But it is cover star Isaac's account that shines brightest when looking for triumph against overwhelming odds. Containing life-threatening drama, soul-crushing racism and criminal trap doors, it is a stirring read. It brings home the sheer lottery of birthplace and the grade of challenges that thus transpire.

His story reminds us all of the power of education. It is another illustration of how Murdoch can truly be a force for good and a consciousness-shifting roadmap for people who arrive with a burning ambition to change course as their only resource. Yes, Isaac self-educated with voracious reading, but he also used our university as a potential path to a new landscape. As well as being a timely tale of strength in adversity, it is a potent reminder of how the corridors of learning we walk among can lead to completely unimagined outcomes and be that shining fork in the road.

Enjoy.

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If you have any comments, feedback or ideas for future stories, please drop the Murmur editor a line:

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COURSE OPENS SHUTTERS FOR LENSMAN DAN

Playing around with cameras, taking his first photographs and even attempting Lego stop motion animation, Dan Stone (B Media 2015 Grad Dip Media Production 2017) had no idea he could build a career doing something he loved. During these high school forays, Dan was encouraged by a media teacher to experiment with the equipment, but back then he had a stronger passion for space (the planetary kind) and believed he'd end up as a physicist.

Admittedly hopeless at maths, Dan studied like mad to make the grades, but fell short and realised he would need to consider another vocation. Though barely 16, Dan was quite mindful and reflective when assessing any future path.

"I thought what am I good at, what do I enjoy and what could possibly lead to a job? I enjoyed cameras and had a media class and decided then to give it a go," said Dan.

Living just outside Joondalup, Dan assumed he was headed for Curtin University. He'd been to their Open Day, but skipped the Murdoch one because he didn't think it was a viable commute.

However when first round offers came out he had been accepted at Murdoch.

"I was struggling and stressing over whether I should see if there were second round offers from other universities, but realised I didn't want to take the risk and so I took the Murdoch offer. Lo and behold it turned out to be the best risk I ever took."

So in 2011, without ever having set foot on the campus, Dan commenced his Bachelor of Media (Screen Production).

"We covered everything to do with media – documentary, short films, even YouTube, and the deeper you got into the course, the practical work increased. To be honest I found the theory frustrating a little at first, but I now realise how vital it was to get a grounding before you picked up a camera. We looked at

issues, sex and violence in media, representation of disabilities, media bias etc. There were no right or wrong answers and it was essential to become aware of the values that underpinned the industry."

Though enjoying the course, and especially the chance to work with other university disciplines and meet people outside of his social circle, Dan had business success doing videography outside of university. The work demand meant he failed several units and was forced to take an additional year to finish his degree. He struggled.

"Repeating the last year was difficult. I was growing tired of study and just wanted to be out. All my friends had graduated and left. I wasn't tired of the course, but the commitment required. I talked to Murdoch's counselling service which was lovely. They worked with my tutors, who were very supportive and adjusted my study pattern. I had no idea that was possible and that counselling service could work with disciplines to help students. It was really good and as a returning alumnus, I have often mentioned this to other students who are struggling."

“

I thought what am I good at, what do I enjoy and what could possibly lead to a job? I enjoyed cameras and had a media class and decided then to give it a go..



Dan's mother Kay visiting him on set of feature film 'Below'.



Shooting 'The Furnace' with fellow alumnus Arthur Bienkowski and current student Anaïs Bellini.

Approaching completion, Dan was still a couple of points short. Not wishing to do summer school and unable to cram a fourth unit into his final semester, Dan was thrown a lifeline when he discovered the option to complete a professional placement instead. Completion of 200 hours of work would give him the points needed to finish.

"Luckily there was a friend of mine from my high school who had done photography, flown drones and secured work at a company called Coptercam in Malaga. Principally it was real estate photography using huge octocopters, but they had worked on the aerial shots for the feature film Paper Planes amongst other video productions. I was there for two months at the end of 2014 and at the end they offered me a job. The placement opened the door, enabling me to show what I could do for free. This was an early lesson that I took into subsequent lower end or free jobs, realising that all are an opportunity to show your skills."

In this first post-Murdoch role, Dan went on a steep learning curve. Transitioning to a 9-5 existence, he was initially shocked at editing demands, the speed work had to be delivered and the need to prioritise competing jobs. Always looking to deliver original, creative content for clients, Dan began to have differences with his boss and his mantra of "just do the same thing Dan, with the same music and get it out."

Frustrated at the inability to bring his array of skills to the work, Dan took time out and headed off on a European trip. Taking along heavy camera equipment, the trip was a reminder of what drove him.



I thought it was crazy, but I also felt like I had never wanted anything that much before.

"I'd drive for miles and clamber over rocks just to get that magic shot, be it Mykonos or Paris. It was heaven, filming whatever I wanted and experimenting with style."

Returning with an acceptance of the demands of commercial filming, Dan adapted back to the role, albeit with the feeling that the role was just a step and his future would be elsewhere. An email from Murdoch lecturer John McMullen changed everything.

"He sent an email to all graduates saying they had developed a post-graduate course and road tested it for three years. There were a few spaces left for those interested. I remember I replied immediately saying hold a spot and I will get back to you in 24 hours."

Dan was scared. Saying yes would mean going back to study, intense work and giving up full-time employment and income. But he was drawn to the discipline it would provide and working with people completely committed to joining the industry.

"Four years later I still have the pros and cons list I quickly drew up on my wall at that time. I thought it was crazy, but I also felt like I had never wanted anything that much before. No essays, no theory, and 100 % practical. Everything in my gut was telling me I should do it. I thought I'm going to learn relevant skills, use professional standard equipment, make connections that can get me into the industry, and work with passionate people who will help me grow. The only con was loss of income, but I thought I could always earn money back."

To develop the course, McMullen co-partnered with a producer named Brad Major. Drawing in specialists including cinematographers and sound recordists, they developed a unique mix of education and industry knowledge. At the start they asked the students which technical role they were aiming for and supported them throughout the year-long journey. This included industry introductions and throwing them on professional shoots.

"I knew I loved cameras and wanted to be a cameraman and perhaps ultimately, a Director of Photography. They need to know how something works and execute it as well. They know the intricacies of a lens, apertures, the way light works, how to manipulate it, how certain cameras have a certain look about things, framing and how to represent characters.

"I really appreciated the facilities, which we could access 24/7. I would come to Murdoch, do editing, do rendering, and practice with the equipment sometimes all night if I wished. Often I would come in between 8.30pm and 4.00am, grab a coffee and a cookie and it was fun, even by myself."



Appropriately attired on set of 'The Furnace'.



Dan at work on 'The Dustwalker'.

Following graduation Dan knew, even with his new industry contacts, that it would take a while to get established as a professional camera assistant. He did some videography to pay bills, went to networking functions, social events and talked to as many new people as he could. Knowing he had the skills, he also realised that nobody knew who he was, so he wouldn't initially be trusted on paid jobs. So to prove he was trustworthy, he took on work on student films, music videos and passion projects; some offered a bit of cash, many did not.

"It was a lot of work with up and coming film people. But each job, your confidence goes up a little, you hone your skills, refine your equipment, but also assess your own performance - I could have done that better, I was a bit slow there, I didn't get that job because I lacked that skill which I will need etc."

Bit by bit, he secured a little more pay, got to work on better equipment and got exposed to more industry names, but it was over a year before he felt he was finally 'in' the industry.

"My big break was in July 2018. I was in bed, 10am on a Monday and got a call..."

"What are you doing for the next five days?"

"Nothing"

"Can you be in Cue (7 hours north east of Perth) by tonight?"

"Er"

"You need to be ready to be picked up in 2 hours."

"Ok!"

Quickly scrambling to find cover for a one day shoot he had that evening, Dan drove up with the producer for a two week shoot on a low budget independent film. The shoot had an ACS accredited Perth cinematographer and most of the crew were from Sydney, offering Dan an amazing work and networking opportunity. He worked as the Focus Puller on the Steadicam.

"On set it's like an ants nest with everyone doing their job. I love it. All hands on deck and quick shifts and military precision and a hierarchy. You have people above you, you've got a specific job to do and you have to prioritise. Things will constantly change and you have to be able to adapt quickly. I learnt in post-grad that I loved all those elements."

After this shoot Dan was asked to work on Koko – A Red Dog story, a mockumentary about the making of the feature film. The combination cemented for him that he had finally made the grade.



I feel I learnt so much in that one year of post grad, because the lecturers poured so much into it. I grew enormously because there were no limits.

"Living away from home, getting paid to travel, to do what I love, learning about local Indigenous cultures and working with my friends and within a team that works so slickly. Amazing."

Self-employed from the outset, Dan found that reputation was integral to building his career in film and was based on his skills, personality and work ethic. He has only sent out his resume twice since graduation. Operating in a similar fashion to a brand, he's found once you are 'known' you are trusted and have a much higher chance of securing work. Eleven years on from those first thoughts on the possibility of a media career, Dan is exactly where he wants to be and grateful for the risks that he took to get there.

"I feel I learnt so much in that one year of post grad, because the lecturers poured so much into it. I grew enormously because there were no limits. The cinema camera I learnt on, I still use today. I also learnt you need to have fun and enjoy what you are doing. Damian Fassolo and John McMullan who were head teachers of film at the time were amazing. I still reach out to them and catch up every Open Day. They were so supportive of me, still are, and the attitude they gave off was so positive and infectious. Taking a risk and listening to your gut was also a good life lesson. Contemplating post graduate study, I thought 'hey, I've taken the risk of coming to Murdoch before'. I took the risk again and it proved to be the best thing I ever did."

STORYTELLER'S *Story*

Australian author Nadia L King (B Commerce 1994) exemplifies the mantra that it is never too late to pursue your dream. Encouraged by her high school teacher to pursue English Literature, Nadia filed away the suggestion until her early forties when it could be silenced no longer. Despite picking up a pencil with trepidation, Nadia's persistence and determination have led her to become a published author. Her children's books include *Claire Malone Changes the World* and *Jenna's Truth*, and her short stories are engaging audiences across the globe. Time to find out a little more...

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I call myself a local Perth writer, although I was born in Dublin, Ireland and spent my childhood living in a few different countries. One bright, sunny morning in the early 1980s my family and I landed in Perth. When I graduated from high school a few years later, the economy was in dire straits. I somehow convinced the editor at Community Newspapers to take me on as a junior journalist, but I eventually found my way to university. I was at Murdoch for quite a while and used my undergraduate years as a tasting platter. From my vast array of subjects, I cobbled together a Bachelor of Commerce and went out into the world. I moved to Brisbane and had a career in public and media relations, and in 2000 my husband and I returned to Perth to start our family.



The most exciting part of creative writing for me is waiting for the surprises to transpire. It pays to be open-minded about where the journey may take you.

Did you always dream of producing a book?

It took me a very long time to find my passion. My English teacher suggested I study English Literature after high school. In hindsight, I should have listened to her and studied what I most enjoyed.

But it wasn't until 2015 (when I was 44), that I grabbed the proverbial bull by the horns, gave it a swift kick and hung on for dear life. In less exciting terms, I sat down and began to write. I sat hunched over a notepad and wrote as if my life depended on it. I wrote for five hours straight and haven't stopped writing since. I've had to make up for lost time!

I used to play a writing challenge on Instagram twice a week. I got friendly with the publisher running the challenge and Cory suggested I write a short story. Short stories are tricky, believe me. There are experienced and talented authors who won't touch short stories with a barge pole. I thought of all the brilliant writers behind my favourite short stories (Raymond Carver, Angela Carter, Flannery O'Connor, Albert Camus, and Shirley Jackson) and I froze. But then I picked up a pencil because there was a girl in my head, and I thought if I wrote her story down she might leave me in peace. I was right, and Disappointment became my first published piece of writing. It was published by Cory Martin of Write Out Publishing in Venice Beach, California. Cory's belief in my writing was the push I needed, so never underestimate the power of an encouraging word, or the advice of high school teachers.

Q+A



One day I would sing like
Grand. I would know all the
words at mass, and I would know
when to kneel, when to sit, and
when to stand. I would have a
sophisticated perm and high-
heeled shoes that would make
a lovely sound on the
pavement when
I walked. I wouldn't
be a skinny,
caramel-skinned
kid in North
London who
skinheads liked
to chase with
a big chunk
of two-by-four.
I would be a
respectable
lady. I thought
when I grew up,
I would be the
lady my mum
should have been.

“

I deal with rejection on a daily basis and it's something that goes hand in hand with writing. You won't get published without first having a lot of your work rejected. But despite this, you have to keep working, keep learning, and not give up.



How did your studies help you to become the writer you are today?

For any course of study, hard work and perseverance will get you through, and sometimes dreaming big helps, too. I'm not scared of working hard for a long time. To achieve any degree of success with writing, I think you have to play the long game; writing is a marathon rather than a sprint. Although isn't any successful career based on years and years of working hard and learning as much as you can about your craft? For writing, and maybe for other careers, it's important to have your eyes on the end goal and to be resilient. I deal with rejection on a daily basis and it's something that goes hand in hand with writing. You won't get published without first having a lot of your work rejected. But despite this, you have to keep working, keep learning, and not give up.

What authors have had the biggest impact on your career as a writer?

I've mentioned Cory Martin previously because she was the writer who definitely kick started my writing career. By the age of twenty-five, Cory had garnered writing credits on the hit television show, *The O.C.* and had been asked by Scholastic to write three young adult novels. If Cory hadn't encouraged me, I'm not sure I would be writing today. Five years on from penning *Disappointment*, the writers who have the biggest impact on me in my everyday are the writers in my writing group. We write across different genres and categories, but we critique each other's work, share information, and meet regularly to bounce ideas, commiserate, and celebrate our achievements. Incidentally, two of them are also Murdoch graduates.

What has been the highlight of your writing career so far?

This may seem strange but the highlight of my writing career hasn't been the publishing deals. Last year I won the Stuart Hadow Short Story Competition run by The Fellowship of Australian Writers WA which was a huge achievement for me. It was such a thrill to have my story, *Mariko's Mouse*, described by the judge as "an exquisite miniature tableau" with "nuance and complexity woven like filigree into the simple language that makes the telling look so easy." Another highlight was recently being awarded the Geoff and Lyn Field Prize in Australian Studies for my Honours thesis, and coming back to Murdoch after so many years and being awarded a First Class Honours was another achievement of which I am very proud. But the icing on the cake for me is being accepted for a PhD in English and Creative Writing. So it seems that my English teacher really did know what she was talking about all those years ago...

You've written two very different books directed at two very different audiences. What experiences have you had adjusting your writing style? Which do you prefer?

All writing (creative writing or otherwise) is tailored towards its audience and each genre has its own conventions. As a children's writer, I am very particular about the language I use and that the themes and concepts in each piece of work are appropriate for the audience. For early readers, repetition and simple sentences are effective. For young adult readers (14 years +), the protagonist should be an adolescent and although adults can be in the periphery of the story, the narrative should spotlight the adolescent. I enjoy writing across genres and audiences, which may not be the best commercial approach, but the joy I get from writing far outweighs any commercial gains.

How does the writing process begin? Do you have the plot mapped out before you begin?

My writing process begins with an idea and ideas can come from anywhere or anything. Each story germinates with a different idea and my process seems to change with each story as well. I am currently writing a short story for my PhD and I have the whole story planned out; I wrote as much as I knew about the story before I started writing and identified the gaps I need to research. Although the story is well planned out, the characters and events will most likely change in the writing and I won't know what those changes are until they emerge. That's the most exciting part of creative writing for me – waiting for the surprises to transpire. For other stories, I've sat down with a bit of a roadmap in my mind and the final story has hardly reflected the roadmap at all. I guess like anything, it pays to be open-minded about where the journey may take you.

What do you believe are your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

My biggest strengths as a writer are my willingness to learn, to keep on learning, and my tenacity. I don't think you can ever arrive and say, right that's it, I've learnt everything I need to know. There is so much to learn about this craft which makes creative writing an exciting adventure. I genuinely enjoy creating stories, so I think that helps, too. If I didn't feel the magic during the drafting process, my writing would come across as flat and the mechanics of the narrative could intrude upon the reading experience. My weaknesses include procrastination, and I also have a lot more to learn about structuring narratives and editing. I love sharing my stories and it's wonderful to see readers engaging with a story which used to reside within the confines of my imagination.

What are your goals for the future? Do you have another story in the works?

I previously mentioned that earlier this year I began my PhD at Murdoch so my main goal at the moment is to complete that course of study. Fortunately, I recently signed a contract for another children's picture book called *The Lost Smile* which is due for release late 2020 or early 2021. Generally, I am constantly working on stories; either short stories or longer pieces of work. I hope I always have a story in the works.

Can a reader become a writer? What is your advice for avid readers who want to explore writing?

To be honest, I don't think you can write without reading. Reading is probably the best way to approach writing. Reading widely and learning as much about storytelling as you can is a great way to learn about becoming a writer. It's amazing how much you can learn just by paying attention to the books you would usually read. If you're reading, you're halfway to becoming a writer. The next step is to write, and then to keep on writing.

In your opinion, what is the best way to organise your bookshelf?

Ha-ha! Well, there seems to be a couple of approaches: either aesthetically organised, mainly based on the colour of the spines, or by categories of books. I have a mix of colour – why are there so many red spines? – and categories, one of which is my shelf of favourite books. I may be the only person who can find a book in my personal library but that works in my favour because they don't disappear! To be honest, I am not very pedantic about organising books and there are literally piles and piles of books in my study and library waiting to be read. But isn't that your idea of heaven?

Photos by Jess Gately



It's amazing how much you can learn just by paying attention to the books you would usually read. If you're reading, you're halfway to becoming a writer. The next step is to write, and then to keep on writing.

Violet watches as a dark blue mist settles over Kapiti Island and she notices the breeze pick up, just a little bit stronger, a little more forceful. Goosebumps form on her arms as clouds roll in from the Pacific.



TRIALS & TRIUMPHS OF A MAN



This is the story of Makuer Chagai Matet, now known as Isaac, an alumnus who has overcome incredible adversity to be where he is today.

In the late 1980s, his mother decided that the raging civil war in her home country of Sudan was no place to bring another child into the world. Heavily pregnant, she walked for many months until she finally crossed the border into western Ethiopia. Makuer was born in a small town called Jima on 24 November 1990.

His father was not around that much, as he was participating in the ongoing war. This meant he was to be named by his mother, something very rare in Sudanese culture. As she was intending to head to Addis Ababa, she chose the name Makuer which means 'the way'. However, just a few months after he entered the world, Makuer and his family were invited by his Uncle, Professor Isaac Cuir Riak, to join his family in Nairobi, Kenya.

Barely having time to settle, the family returned to Sudan to collect their cousin, who had been left behind in the chaos of war. It was an overwhelming ordeal for all.

"We were constantly under Atonov bombardment by the Sudan Armed Forces, and while in Ashwa in 1992, when I was barely two years old, I fell sick. I was hospitalised at the Ashwa Hospital, with 12 other kids, 10 of whom died in the course of one week, from a mysterious illness. At one point, I was declared dead and covered in a white sheet. However, my mother refused to believe that I was dead and held on to me until I sneezed," said Makuer.

Miraculously, Makuer recovered and eventually the family made it back to the safety of Nairobi. He began his schooling, but life wasn't easy. Makuer suffered continuous teasing and discrimination from the other kids who called him names such as makaa (charcoal) because of his dark skin, or 'Garang', after the Sudanese political leader.

"It was really disheartening to get mistreated by our Kenyan brothers. There was one time a Kenyan kid was hit on the head with a rock while playing at lunchtime. He was bleeding as they took him from class to class after lunch to identify who had struck him. When he arrived in my class, he looked around and pointed at me. I got punished for something I never did. But overall, I'm thankful to the Kenyan people for accommodating us and keeping us safe from the war, and even allowing us to study in their schools," he said.

There were a few brief visits from his father, but at the end of one in 1997, Makuer sensed that it would be the last time he saw him. A prophecy that proved true, as he never saw him again before his passing in 2012.

“

At one point, I was declared dead and covered in a white sheet. However, my mother refused to believe that I was dead and held on to me until I sneezed.

Despite the constant struggles, including his mother attempting to make ends meet in a foreign country without any income, they pushed on in hope of better days.

“On some days, we went to bed hungry, and the electricity was cut from our house. At one point the landlord evicted us, and we had to go and stay with my Uncle Mager Achiek’s family for a brief period. I was around 6 years old at the time.”

Professor Riak was made aware of their plight and intervened, not only taking care of outstanding bills, but also paying for Makuer’s primary education when they returned to Nairobi.

The family were incredible grateful to him once again, but thought he had done more than enough. As soon as she could, Makuer’s mother make the decision to take the whole family to Kakuma Refugee Camp, to apply for a Humanitarian Visa to Australia. The family spent two years at the camp, where Makuer was able to continue his primary school education.

“While in Kakuma, I was playing football with my friends one afternoon, when my mother came to fetch me, to get baptised at a church. My turn came up and the bishop asked me what my Christian name would be. I wasn’t very familiar with biblical names, so the only name that crossed my mind was my uncle’s name. So I told the bishop I would be called Isaac. He smiled and then proceeded to baptise me,” he said.

After multiple rejections to acquire an Australian visa, they were ultimately successful. Following interviews and medical clearances, they arrived in Perth in July 2004.

Very soon after, Isaac as he is now known, was enrolled at a Perth Catholic college. The only South Sudanese kid in his entire year group, Isaac took the mainstream English class, not as a second language, and successfully completed Year 8 with just a few hiccups here and there. The following year he started hanging out with the rugby boys.

“One day a year 11 student approached me and handed me an envelope, made from exercise book paper, and told me to give it to one of the rugby boys. In the culture that I came from, younger boys are sent around by older boys. I never enquired as to what was inside the envelope.”

The contents turned out to be marijuana and Isaac was immediately expelled from the school. Despite angry protests from Isaac expressing his innocence, there was no room for movement.

“I was kicked out and told to never come near the school up to a distance of 100 metres, or the police would be called. It was a sad day for all of us. I felt like I was being targeted and used as a scapegoat, and this made me bitter towards everyone and everything that resembled an established institution. This event built up anger inside of me.”

Kicking around at home for a few months, Isaac tried applying to five other high schools, but discovery of why he was kicked out from an elite, private institution closed any future academic doors. A situation only addressed following a visit from representatives of the Western Australia Department of Education, seeking to discover why he wasn’t attending school.

Upon hearing his story, they eventually placed him into a local senior high school. During this period, Isaac was living in Koondoola and slipping into a lifestyle that could only set him back further.

“I was hanging around idly, and got caught up with the wrong crew, some local teenagers from the KGB. It stands for Koondoola, Girrawheen and Balga Boys. By the time I started at my new school, I already knew some of the boys from KGB who were going there,” said Isaac.

Despite warnings from his new principal to not get caught up with them, it was too late. He slipped into a life of truancy, violence and graffiti. At one point, he was caught spray painting an entire wall at the back of the school, which landed him yet another suspension.

“We were just teenagers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, dealing with multiple societal pressures, and venting and raging the wrong way. I kept getting suspended over fights, and eventually the school found out that home suspension was not helping, as I would just be at home playing video games. So, they resorted to sending me to detention mostly. During one of these detentions, my History teacher came into the room, asked why I was in detention again and enquired what I wanted to do with my life. I told her I wanted to go to university. She laughed at me and told me to get real, explaining that with failing subjects and always being in detention or suspended, it was an unlikely prospect.”

Isaac continued the destructive cycle, getting into regular fights, including one that saw him chased by a local crew with baseball bats, bottles, and bricks. On his final school warning, he got involved in another fight with a student and found himself facing his second expulsion.



I was expelled yet again, for the second time, from my second high school in less than two years. I walked off kicking all the rubbish bins and cursing and threatening anyone who crossed my path on the way out.

During this period Isaac’s only father figure, an elder brother, who tried to keep him in check, left for the army. The absence giving him free reign to get up to no good. The result saw him slip further into life with the KGB. One that drew him into underage drinking, parties, slipping into Northbridge nightclubs, multiple drunken fights and a series of arrests. Yet another brawl with a local group of boys saw him admitted to hospital, after being hit on the head with a whisky bottle.



This event really gave me a reality check. I had to step back and think about my life - Is this who I really am? Is this the life I want to lead? I questioned myself.

“I woke up in hospital the next day surrounded by my mum and some aunties. I had been unconscious the whole night. This event really gave me a reality check. I had to step back and think about my life - Is this who I really am? Is this the life I want to lead? I questioned myself.”

He managed to leave the KGB just as the crimes started getting more and more serious, involving breaking into cars and houses, stealing jewellery, phones, and any valuables that could be sold for money. Friends started going to jail, stealing cars, motorbikes, and burning them afterwards to remove fingerprints.

“I think now some of this was influenced by the lyrics we were hearing in hip hop music. We would be drinking and listening to Tupac, B.I.G, Nas, 50 Cent, and Jay Z. I was convinced that white people were racist and were treating us unfairly. This was fuelled by what I went through at the Catholic college. I was also hanging out with Indigenous boys, sharing stories of the historical injustices committed against their people in Australia. Sometimes, I would be told to go back to where I came from. All this just reinforced the ideas in my head. We felt we were fighting institutional racism. We were listening to song messages and comparing them with our daily lives. We thought we were doing the right thing.”

After a while, sensing the repeated agony he was putting his family through, Isaac came to the realisation that it was no life for him. This was cemented after the sudden loss of friends. One died from a drug overdose, another died after a hit and run, and another was stabbed.

“I had had enough, and started on the journey to transform my life. I started having positive thoughts and hanging out away from the gang, and they didn’t like it. They started accusing me of snitching on them to the police. They started fighting me. But I never looked back. I went to Mirrabooka Library and I started reading a book called A Long Way Gone, Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, by Ishmael Beah. It was about a child soldier from Liberia. I couldn’t put it down. It reminded me of the war stories my mother used to tell me,” he said.

After finishing that first book, he moved on to his second, Sudan by Jok Madut Jok. He continued reading and started getting interested in military and political history and decided to see if he could go to university. Hearing that Edith Cowan University was running a bridging course for those looking to return to study he applied, but did not get in.

Knowing that giving up would probably see a return to gang life, Isaac applied to join Murdoch’s On Track, the 14-week enabling program that prepares students for undergraduate degrees. He got in. Upon completion, he enrolled in a BA in Politics and International Studies and started his first semester in February 2009. This was the period his reading accelerated exponentially.

“I found my passion in reading. I have so far read over 1,000 books, on Politics, History, Social Psychology, Philosophy, and even the Occult. I was on a mission to gain knowledge - the only way to beat the system, not through gangs. In October 2011, my son Benjamin was born. It was a defining moment in my life, for it gave me more reason to change for a better tomorrow; it wasn’t just about me anymore. A year later, in October 2012, we received news that my father had passed away in Africa, from an illness. I hadn’t seen him since 1997, so it was a big blow to me, on a personal level. I had so many questions to ask him.

“My focus became sharper at Murdoch. My resilience allowed me to study more. I had turned my anger towards the system into pursuing a political course. I became active in the Student Guild, and the Socialist Alternative Group, which was a revolutionary anti-capitalist organisation, advocating left-wing political activism and educating people in socialist ideas. We were involved in a broad range of left-wing campaigns for education and student rights, refugee rights, and supporting workers’ rights. I would help man their stall on campus, selling second-hand books to raise funds and attend public debates on various social and political issues. I also became a committed observant of Marcus Garvey’s teachings, which I follow to this day.”



Above: Isaac meets former Minister for Training and Workforce Development, The Hon Dr Kim Hames, in 2014
 Right: Working with the Australian Army Reserve



I found my passion in reading. I have so far read over 1,000 books, on Politics, History, Social Psychology, Philosophy, and even the Occult. I was on a mission to gain knowledge - the only way to beat the system, not through gangs.

The journey of transition he was on was brought home to Isaac during his last semester. He ran into the year 11 student who set him up back at the Catholic college. Clearly now a mess, and a full-blown heroin addict, he chatted with Isaac and ultimately apologised for what had transpired back at school.

Isaac graduated in 2013, one of the youngest South Sudanese citizens to do so. Applying for over 50 Government roles without success, he went for a trainee position with the Department of Training and Workforce Development and was successful. Working as a Records Management Officer in Osborne Park, his role was to manage Apprenticeship and other Traineeships Contracts within their database.

The traineeship was supposed to be for 12 months, and then he would get a job if there was any opening. Not wanting to risk it, he started applying for jobs again. This included the Australian Army Reserve, but he failed the aptitude test and was told to try again in six months.



Isaac at State House, Juba, South Sudan

Isaac secured a new job as a Document Services Officer with the Insurance Commission of Western Australia which he enjoyed. After six months, he resubmitted an application for the Army Reserve. This time however, Isaac practised the aptitude test online, commenced an exercise program in order to pass the fitness test and stayed off alcohol to pass the medical test. The work paid off and he secured a position with the Australian Defence Force Army Reserve, as an Infantry Rifleman. He headed off to Wagga Wagga to complete his basic training. A successful endeavour, but on the very last day Isaac faced a massive test of his resolve.

“On my last day of basic training, one of the recruits racially assaulted me verbally, calling me incredibly offensive names. I nearly punched him in the face, but then I held myself back. I controlled my anger. It seemed like he had always wanted to say that to me, but waited for the very last day. I realised that if I reacted violently, I would probably be kicked out of the army, before I could even begin my service. I walked away. It hurt me deeply though, that I was still being racially abused, knowing that I had sacrificed to serve in the Australian Army Reserve, and if war ever came to Australia, I would have defended it with my life,” said Isaac.

He served in the reserves for nearly four years, and when his contract came to an end at the Insurance Commission in 2016, he opened the next chapter of his life. He decided to move back to South Sudan, his homeland, to help develop it. Returning to the very place that saw him dodging bombs and bloodshed all those years before, Isaac now works in the Press Department of the Office of the President of Sudan. The closing of a monumental, trial-ridden circle.

“I want all of my brothers and sisters who are still in Australia, and all around the world, to know that anything is possible. If I could make the impossible possible, then you can too. You need to keep your head up. Don’t take any challenges personally, including racism. Stay away from the wrong crowd. Set goals for yourself and focus. I do not regret the experiences I went through, they made me who I am today.



I want all of my brothers and sisters who are still in Australia, and all around the world, to know that anything is possible. If I could make the impossible possible, then you can too.



“It’s great to be home.”

“You can, and you will make it, and perhaps return home one day like I did. When I was a kid I never thought that I would make it out alive, let alone to university, to working for the Australian Government, to joining the Australian Army, and ultimately moving back home to work in the Office of the President, after all the challenges and all the road blocks I encountered simply because of the colour of my skin.”

INTERVIEW

Getting more **A**'s care





of Miss B

“

I have always gravitated to creative methods of learning, and children exploring through the arts.

In 2013, alumnus Catherine Byers (Grad Cert Education Studies 2014) made the leap from a teaching role to establishing her own personal tutoring business. The resultant company, Miss B's Student Services, has grown exponentially and is now helping hundreds of students realise their potential. Passionately blending creativity and the arts into tuition, Catherine's business develops unique, tailored programs for each student that are delivering amazing results.

You are based in Launceston. How did you come to do your Grad Cert at Murdoch?

Yes I was born in Launceston and undertook my undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Tasmania. In 2010 and 2011, I was employed by the Department of Education and Training Western Australia, working in a remote aboriginal school in Meekatharra. Whilst teaching in this area I chose to extend my own learning through online learning with Murdoch University.

Was your initial plan to become a schoolteacher?

I had a great love of performing and visual arts throughout my schooling and always wished to find a career in this field. On leaving Year 12, I went into education as I felt this would be a way to always continue to work in the creative field. I have always gravitated to creative methods of learning, and children exploring through the arts. Whilst teaching in Meekatharra I taught music and art and followed this up with teaching music in Harrow in London, UK. Now I have built a business on teaching music and art and also numeracy and literacy and I love my work. I am very passionate about ensuring children are passionate about their learning and becoming engaged in their learning process.

How did you manage the growth of the business from 2 students to 150+ in 6 years?

It was a little bit of a shock when the business grew very rapidly from a handful of students, whom I saw after school hours in the spare room of my house, to 150+ students. At the time I was still teaching at a local high school and noted that there were significant gaps in the learning of these students. Once I noted that the demand was growing, I had to make the decision to give up my job and focus completely on the business.

In addition to my Bachelor of Education from UTAS and my Grad Cert from Murdoch, I have a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and a Masters of Education from the University of Southern Queensland, a Teaching English as a Foreign Language Educators certificate from TEFL USA and a Certificate III in Children's Services, so I thought I could always return to the Department if I needed to. However this was never required, as the business expanded to the need for an assistant employee and then another, until we had a workforce of 9 staff members working casual hours with students throughout the week. Many of our staff are currently studying at university and feel this job is an excellent way to get on-the-job experience working with children who require additional academic or re-engagement assistance.



I have always said that if I were to ever undertake my doctorate I would focus on the notion that children have that it is better to be the village murderer than the village fool.



The company was a 2019 Telstra Business Awards Finalist in the social change maker category and is an Australian Small Business Champion Awards finalist for 2020.

How do you go about building the individual programs for each child?

Every family that attends for the first time at Miss B's Student Services has a free induction which is a no obligation chat and a chance get to know one another! Students and their families can see Miss B's Student Services learning space, meet with our educators, and ask as many questions as they like. Educators provide an overview of expectations, costs, possible goals, and explain how lessons work from here. If the prospective client chooses Miss B's Student Services, the next step is to undertake standardised tests in reading, writing and maths to see the student's strengths and highlight areas which need work. This allows us to create a focus on these areas, coupled with 1:1 lessons with an educator who has learnt the students' learning styles, strengths, focus, and interests.

How would you say your service differs from 'traditional' academic support?

As schools teach students in large groups and most traditional academic support organisations do the same, we find the element that makes us unique is our one to one approach. Students can sometimes use very clever coping techniques to ensure that their lack of understanding goes undetected in a group situation. In one on one, they are fully accountable and the tutor can ensure they know all aspects of a concept before moving on. This way the student can work at their own pace and not feel ashamed or anxious about their slower speed holding up others in the group. We also use very 'hands on' techniques. The use of games, manipulatives and interaction with a human, rather than a computer program, means the student is getting focused attention on their needs, personality and styles.



What has the past six years taught you about children's learning?

I have always said that if I were to ever undertake my doctorate I would focus on the notion that children have that it is better to be the village murderer than the village fool. Children have become so good at alternative techniques which distract the teacher from their lack of understanding. It is easier to call out, or pinch the student next to them, or throw furniture and get sent out of the room (where they don't have to undertake the task which caused their behaviour in the first place) than admit that they were struggling, or they didn't understand.

The embarrassment of failure has very much overshadowed the desire to explore and make mistakes, or admit to not getting it. This is a very sad occurrence as I believe children are born with a real desire to learn, explore, ask questions (we all know the 'why' stage). I think it is so important to ensure children are encouraged to make mistakes and then laugh about it and learn from it.

My other observation and a key aspect to the philosophy of my business is that all the physical objects that can be afforded to children cannot substitute for your time. Our students never ask "Where is the TV?" or "Do we have tablets in tutoring?" or "Where are the computers?" They don't miss having their phones for the duration of the lessons as they have the tutor's time. Someone who is interested in them, and where they are right now. They not only teach, but listen, and this is so important to children.



How do the music and art programs which tap into their creative skills have benefits in wider academic fields?

You do not have to look far in research to discover the benefits of music education on academic subjects. We find our vocal, drama and music students see a wide range of benefits to their academic and wider life skills. Benefits in memory work, history, imagination, emotion, coordination, concentration and above all, confidence, are just some of the skills parents report in their children who undertake music and drama lessons. I would say most of my vocal students alone are very studious and strive for good grades in their school work and report tasks like oral reports are easier as they are practised in presenting to an audience, memorising lines and coping in situations where something may happen unexpectedly. Furthermore, those who have gone on to tertiary studies say these skills have accompanied them through university and also in attaining jobs, as they are confident and calm in interview situations.



Any particular success stories you'd like to refer to?

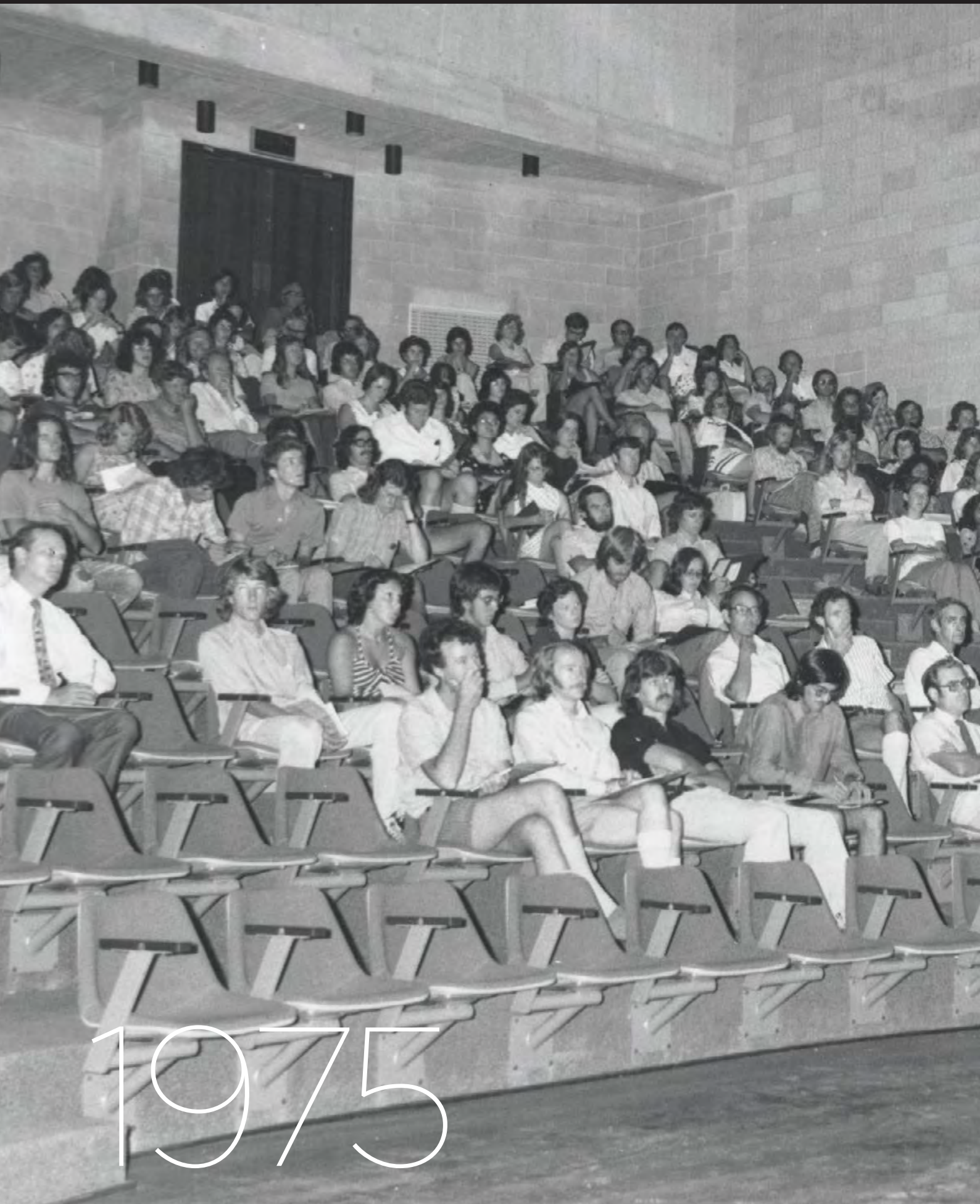
Gosh, where to begin? Is it the young lady who was heartbroken when the teacher at school told her that the picture she drew of a bird "didn't look like a bird", who went on to be encouraged by her tutor to continue to explore drawing as part of her literacy lessons and entered the Oz Kids Art Awards and won the runners up medal for Australia? Perhaps the young lady who was so shy and anxious about singing out loud that she cried and covered her face from the educator for the first 6 singing lessons. She refused to sing a note (leading the tutor to wonder if she even had a voice.) This lady went on to win prizes and trophies in quick succession when she made it onto the stage and is now an unstoppable and very dramatic stage force to be reckoned with at local Eisteddfods. Perhaps it was the student whose parents were convinced he would never amount to anything as he hadn't progressed in reading at school for 2 years and suddenly jumped 15 levels in 6 months under the direction of tutors at Miss B's Student Services. This list of amazing success stories is as endless and as varied as the students (young and mature aged) that we work with.

What's next for your business?

COVID-19 has provided a great opportunity we feel for online tuition for more remote clients and we will be really pushing this for those in remote areas of Tasmania who can't access tuition in larger cities. We have even welcomed some vocal students from Perth to our online platform since lockdowns occurred, so the possibilities are vast. We also would love to branch further into our ideal of being a one stop shop. We would like to partner with speech pathologists, psychologists and counsellors all under the one roof at Miss B's Student Services to provide clients access to a range of services. Currently, services in Tasmania have large waiting lists, especially those within the school system and students can wait a long time for diagnosis and learning strategies and it would be great if we could offer a team of specialists that could work together for the benefit of children and their families.

www.missbstudentservices.com







Are YOU in this shot?

Ah the overhead projector! This historical photo is of the very first academic lecture given at Murdoch University during Orientation Week (24-28 Feb 1975). It took place in Lecture Theatre 1 and shows the late Dr Michael Booth, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Philosophy of Science, delivering a lecture to introduce the course 'World in Transition'. Staff at the Geoffrey Bolton Library are hoping to establish the exact date of delivery that week, so if you were there and you know, please drop us a line at alumni@murdoch.edu.au

Photograph courtesy of Murdoch University Special Collections.



Tanaka and family celebrate graduating a Masters in Professional Accounting in 2019

TANAKA'S TEST

Resilience. A term increasingly bandied around and a common list-topper in discussions of the most important things for children to develop. Whether you are 9 or 90, stories of resilience inspire us and remind us all that we are capable of amazing feats, even when squeezed like a layer of carbon.



Graduation day with Murdoch Chancellor Mr Gary Smith



All I thought was that I have to keep being strong. It was a lesson that my late father always used to tell me. He said even in a situation like that, if it was to happen, that I have to remain strong for the rest of the family.

Alumnus Tanaka Mutambanadzo (M Prof Accounting 2020) showed remarkable resilience back in 2017 when tragedy struck at a seminal moment in his undergraduate course.

Zimbabwe-born Tanaka revealed his resilient character early, leaving his family and moving to Johannesburg to study an economics degree at the city's Monash University.

Tanaka was about to sit the final exam of his penultimate semester when a text from home changed everything. A family member informed him that his father had been involved in a serious car accident.

Frantically texting back and forth to find out the severity of the crash, Tanaka discovered just a couple of hours after the first message that his father had passed away.

Despite the shock, Tanaka somehow managed to complete his final exam that very same day before immediately taking a flight back to Zimbabwe to join his family.

"All I thought was that I have to keep being strong. It was a lesson that my late father always used to tell me. He said even in a situation like that, if it was to happen, that I have to remain strong for the rest of the family. I knew I had to stay focused on the present, on all that he had taught me and stay focused on my education", said Tanaka.

As the eldest of three children, Tanaka felt he had a pivotal role to play in keeping the family united. He stayed a month in Zimbabwe for the funeral and memorial service which fortunately took place during a university break.

However it was the return back to Johannesburg for the final semester that brought the bigger test.

"It was such a challenging semester because the grief intensified upon returning and I was trying to grieve, but also focus on my studies and you can't do both. It was purely the respect I held for my father and his wisdom that enabled me to push through and somehow keep going."

Tanaka completed his degree in early 2017 and chose to travel over 8,000kms to study a Masters of Professional Accounting at Murdoch, commencing in February 2018. The huge transition was aided slightly by Tanaka having cousins in Australia as a support network. Studying full time, he successfully graduated



Tanaka's late father
Edward Mutambanadzo

this year and will remain in Perth to pursue a career in accounting.

His personal journey has taught him a lot about the grieving process and the aftermath of an unexpected loss.

"I am still grieving, I don't think that has passed yet. For me, I think the process has a slow creep to it. At first, you are trying to take care of the ones around you, taking care of their emotions, so you are not affected so strongly at the start. Then you focus on yourself and give yourself time to grieve. It's a process that can't be rushed and can only be managed day to day. Certain triggers will emerge. For example, it was very difficult on graduation day when my father, so committed to my education, could not be there," said Tanaka.

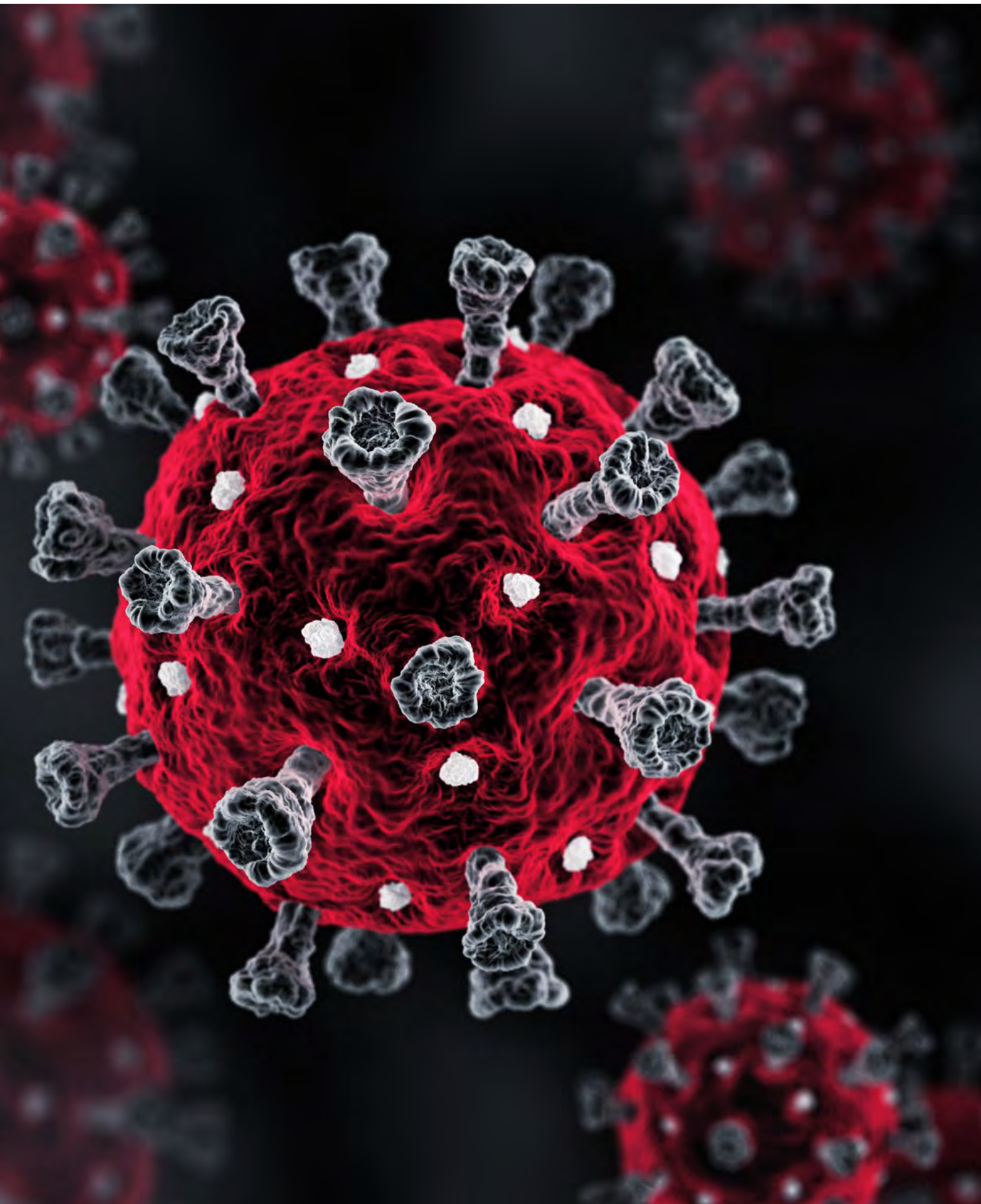
Tanaka has enjoyed his years at Murdoch and found it a very supportive environment as he slowly re-built and took the first steps in his career journey.

"I enjoyed the diversity. I appreciated the openness of the lecturers and the fact that they were always willing to help. It wasn't one of those bureaucratic organisations, the lecturers were friendly and always there to help with any difficulties we had."

Securing an internship and then a part-time role last year, Tanaka is building his experience in personal taxation and company accounting and is well on his way to his dream career as a Chartered Accountant.

Determined to build a life in Australia, Tanaka has drawn strength from his experiences and remains open to sharing the foundations that underpin his resilience.

"One of my key motives is to show other people that no matter what situation you face you can keep going and reach your goal. You just have to stay faithful. Brighter things and brighter days will always come out of it. We are all human and we all face pain at some point, but I think you just have to find your best way of dealing with that pain and channelling it towards a positive outcome. And always remember... 'this too shall pass'.



MAJOR GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS BRING **LIFE-SAVING COVID-19 RESEARCH TO WA**



The Australian National Phenome Centre (ANPC), at Murdoch University, is at the forefront of the global COVID-19 research response, thanks to a major research partnership with the Department of Medicine at the world-renowned University of Cambridge and significant funding support from Spinnaker Health Research Foundation.



Professor Jeremy Nicholson with Spinnaker CEO Dana Henderson

The **ANPC** and Cambridge are working together on a world-leading international study designed to capture the complete COVID-19 journey from health, through the disease response and into recovery, of a group of frontline medical staff and patients.

Vital funding from Spinnaker will enable the development of new and improved methods for studying the recovery of patients that have experienced a significant COVID-19 episode. This will assist each patient's clinical recovery, rehabilitation and possibly help predict long-term disease risks.

ANPC Director and Pro Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University's **Health Futures Institute** Professor Jeremy Nicholson said knowledge of how the virus evolves, the health risks, efficacy of therapies and downstream health consequences are still not well understood.

"This global research collaboration with University of Cambridge will help us understand the recovery process from the perspective of severity and side effects of the disease as experienced by individuals.

"The funding from Spinnaker is vital to enable the research to take place and to manage the long-term disease risks of COVID-19 patients."

Multiple recovery and post recovery samples from Cambridge are shipped to the ANPC with further samples collected through the South Metropolitan Health Service's (SMHS) COVID-19 Research Response (CRR) group by Professor Toby Richards and his team at The University of Western Australia (UWA) through the SMHS CRR.

Professor Nicholson said the breadth of research being undertaken will enable a comprehensive overview of many key immune functions involved in the COVID-19 disease process.



Ultimately, we will be able to better understand COVID-19 and the complex genetic, environmental and lifestyle interactions that give rise to the differential severity of the disease and subsequent recovery.

Professor Nicholson



The ANPC and the Cambridge teams will work together to get a more holistic understanding of the disease process.

“By bringing together the complementary scientific expertise of the ANPC and the University of Cambridge and focusing it on samples from hundreds of patients with COVID-19, we hope to explain and predict the progression and recovery from the disease,” said Professor Ken Smith, Head of the Department of Medicine at Cambridge.

Spinnaker, which supports community responsive research in south metropolitan Perth, believes there has never been a more pressing need for investment in medical research.

“The world is grappling with an unprecedented and deadly challenge and the time for us to act as global citizens has come,” said Spinnaker CEO Dana Henderson.

“The research we are funding puts Western Australia at the forefront of delivering solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic in an accelerated timeframe. For 24 years Spinnaker has served the community, we have funded research to protect and heal them.

“This is a project that will continue that commitment to our local community while we also extend our focus to the global community. This is an exceptional gift from the Foundation which reflects the severity of the situation in which we find ourselves.”

The research builds on that already being undertaken by a collaboration of experts from the SMHS, UWA and the ANPC.

Professor Richards, who is bringing together leading doctors and researchers for the project said a unique platform has been developed in WA to collect patient data and biosamples to enable a thorough understanding of the disease and also response to treatment.

“Through the CRR we have already gathered more information and data on COVID-19 patients than any other state in Australia, capturing over 40% of patients who have presented in WA, and this is some of the best data available globally,” Professor Richards said.

Professor Nicholson said one aim of the project is to develop biological markers that predict who will recover completely and to understand some of the longer term effects of COVID-19 that are experienced by some patients.

“Given the number of worldwide cases this is a globally significant project” Professor Nicholson said.

[Learn more about Murdoch's COVID-19 research](#)



The world is grappling with an unprecedented and deadly challenge and the time for us to act as global citizens has come.

Spinnaker CEO Dana Henderson

WHO WAS THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOU AT MURDOCH?



We conclude this series with two insightful alumni stories that detail the figures who began powerful ripples of change.

After six years of part-time study, I graduated from Murdoch University in 1989 with a Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in Mathematics. At the time I started, the University was still young, having admitted its first students only a few years earlier. The head of the mathematics department was Professor A.P. Robertson, who was also the foundation professor. Professor Robertson was not only brilliant mathematically, but also had a very wide knowledge of other subjects which interested me as well, particularly classical languages and electronics, both of which I had studied myself at an earlier time. He was also very particular about the English language, and sometimes during lectures he would pause to correct some misunderstanding of the exact meaning of a word. One such example was the word 'quite'. Most people, including me, thought it meant 'somewhat', but he explained that it meant 'completely' or 'entirely'. (Today, the Oxford English Dictionary concedes that a secondary meaning is 'somewhat'.) In mathematics, he emphasised the importance of getting back to basic principles, of producing an elegant solution to a problem. This essentially means using the simplest of tools and the least number of steps, not using a sledgehammer to crack open a nut.

Professor Robertson had a quiet and courteous manner, and I have to say that I looked up to him a great deal. During one of the last lectures I had with him, he told us that he intended to retire. One of us asked him what he would do, and he said that he was interested in taking up photography. He stayed on for another year (after I had left) and then retired in January 1990, continuing as an Emeritus Professor. Later that same year, I met him in a camera shop in the Hay St Mall. He remembered me quite well and congratulated me on having graduated. Then in February 1995 I was shocked to hear that he had passed away – he was only 69. This early passing affected me deeply. I still remember exactly what he looked like, his voice, his manner, and his great knowledge of many other subjects outside of mathematics. Although I am now retired myself, I still retain a keen interest in mathematics.



To me, Professor Robertson was an inspirational character, and an unforgettable one.

I should add that there were two other mathematics lecturers at Murdoch at the time, both of whom I admired. One was Professor Walter Bloom, today an Emeritus Professor at Murdoch. Another was Jo Ward, who is today Professor of Mathematics and Dean of Science at Curtin University. She is also the only Australian mathematician who is also a Dean of Science.

When Professor Robertson passed away, Prof Walter Bloom and Peter Boyce jointly wrote a valedictory which was published in the Australian Mathematical Society Gazette. When I read it, I understood why he had been so interested in classical languages and in electronics. It was beautifully written, and I have kept a copy of it to this day.

Mike Ellis
BSc Mathematics 1989





It was an extraordinary way to begin my university career.

I had not expected, Professor (now Emeritus) Horst Ruthrof. A wonderful and generous man, who patiently explained what we could not yet understand. By the end of that session, it was a word that was still hard to say and an idea that was still very puzzling, but an idea that challenged us to think outside our little boxes and confined concepts, about the way we saw and experienced things. It was an extraordinary way to begin my university career. Horst remained our friend and mentor throughout our university life and after, as did many of those first teachers of those early years.

I was a compulsive reader throughout my youth, from Phantom comics to the great classics. I was lucky enough to have a great librarian at my high-school (Swanbourne High) who, when I was bored silly and needed a challenge, gave me Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. Well, I read it but I'm sure I didn't understand half of it, however it gave me an even greater thirst for language, writing and literature. So it was Communication Studies that at that stage I wanted to major in, leading to perhaps a career as a journalist, documentary film maker or writer.

Then in my second year I met, the next person to challenge me in a way I could never have imagined, Professor (now also Emeritus) Didier Coste. I changed course, now more interested in contemporary literary theory.

The reading lists in those first years were wonderful and allowed me to study popular culture (I could now examine the comics I read!), emerging writers from Nigeria, India, the Caribbean and other non-first world countries. Wonderful literature that spoke of social inequity, the results of colonisation and injustice. Didier then introduced me to the political economy of the novel, a new and emerging way of thinking about literature and semiotics, a way that allowed me to understand better not only literature but the way we interpret the world in general. It was fascinating and all-consuming, leading me eventually to graduate in that field. The constant challenges to the way I thought and saw things was invigorating and that joy of investigating and questioning the world in all its presentations, to better see meaning, has never left me.

Those were extraordinary early years with a small cohort of excited and enthusiastic teachers and students, which produced many who are now leaders in their field. It was an educational experience and opportunity to learn in a different and new way that few in Australia had been given until that time. Sir Walter Murdoch would be proud of his namesake, I am sure, being well known for his love of philosophy, literature, his help to students and junior colleagues in difficulties, his sympathy for underdogs and willingness to champion lost causes.

I will be forever thankful to all of those who taught me, in those early years, to question, to challenge myself and others, embrace learning and particularly, to climb out of the box into the exciting world of ideas and different world views. Murdoch University is extraordinary!

Rose Wise Pinter
BA in World Literature 1978



I was lucky to be one of the inaugural students at Murdoch when it was just built and still surrounded by pines and sand. There were 714 students in that first year in 1975, with only around 150 on campus at any one time, many of whom were mature age students from all walks of life and those of us just out of high-school. I had enrolled after an enthusiastic visit by two of the new senior lecturers who were spruiking the new university. It was exciting, a whole new idea and way of learning with exciting ideas and courses taught by lecturers from around the world, a far cry from the stuffy halls of other universities. Teachers from Cairo, France, Germany, the USA and the UK with all the leading-edge ideas of those heady days of post-Vietnam, social justice, feminism, Gough Whitlam and universal education. It had some of the first Australian courses in Environmental Science, Communication Studies and the like, with prerequisites that included Philosophy and ideas that were well beyond the usual.

In that first year we started the Student Guild and published METIOR so named as an acronym for the Murdoch Empire Telegraph and Indian Ocean Review. Exciting days indeed!

I remember one day in particular in my first semester, being introduced to the concept of Phenomenology. It being 'the study of structures of experience, or consciousness or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience' (I had to search Wikipedia for that quote!). Heavy duty as an 18 year old! I had wondered about life and the way things were, but I was completely challenged when asked to do my first assignment on this subject. I could hardly say the word let alone discuss why, or even if, a chair was a chair, or if my experiencing the chair changed the chair.

Thankfully, several of us, including my older, smarter, lived life, mature-age friends all expressed the same concerns. So we marched off, mildly terrified and feeling intellectually inferior, to the office of the first person to influence my mind in ways

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I am incredibly proud of the way our community has adapted at a time of deep uncertainty.



VICE CHANCELLOR'S COLUMN

This edition of *Murmur* features Murdoch alumni who have endured long periods of adversity, but nevertheless gone on to achieve remarkable things.

Take for example the story of Isaac Cagai, the Sudanese refugee twice expelled from high school who was able to re-engage with education through Murdoch's On Track program.

Whether by art or design, Isaac's story of resilience seems appropriate for the challenging times we are all living through. Every one of us is drawing on our own inner strength to work through the disruption caused by COVID-19.

As Murdoch alumni, I know you feel deeply connected to the fortunes of our current student cohort – and I want to share with you the actions we are taking to support them.

When the COVID-19 shutdown began, students were the hardest hit members of our community. Many lost their jobs and found themselves unable to afford food, accommodation and essentials, or maintain access to technology.

Our international onshore students who remained in Australia - far from family and friends and worried about the situation in their home countries – were deemed ineligible for Commonwealth Government income support.

As a University community, we stepped in rapidly to support our students through the economic shock generated by the pandemic, developing a Student Support Package worth \$8.5 million.

Throughout Semester 1, we distributed more than 6000 Technology Bursaries; fortnightly Essentials Bursaries to more than 2300 students; 1350 Student Assistance Fund payments; and 110 IT equipment loans.

The Student Support Package has since been extended to Semester 2 as the economic shock of COVID-19 and its impact on our students continues to play out.

Fortunately, our domestic student enrolments have remained resilient. In fact, our students have stood by us and been both patient and understanding. University staff who have worked with them during this period of disruption have described their gratitude as “humbling”.

It was not only students who had to quickly adjust to the new COVID reality. Our staff began working from home in late March and the shift to online learning and teaching occurred soon after.

I am incredibly proud of the way our community has adapted at a time of deep uncertainty. As a result, high-quality learning and teaching has continued, students have stayed on their study path and as a University, we have been able to stay true to our purpose: *to be a creative force for current and future generations.*

Despite the many challenges we face, the core business of the University has not stopped. Indeed, some unique opportunities have arisen as we continue to support the economic and social fabric of Western Australia and the nation.

The Australian National Phenome Centre (ANPC), for example, is actively contributing to global scientific understanding of COVID-19, partnering with the University of Cambridge as part of an international research collaboration to develop new and improved methods for detecting and predicting the severity of the virus in different people.

The WA Government is contributing financially to this research, which will have meaningful impacts for patients around the world.

Spinnaker Health Research Foundation and The McCusker Charitable Foundation are also investing in ANPC research to enable the development of new and improved methods for studying the recovery of patients who have experienced significant COVID-19 episodes.

In June, we launched a Digital Futures Academy with our first major industry partner Cisco, which will reposition Perth at the forefront of digital education in Australia. The Academy will attract significant numbers of new students – including international students when it is safe for them to return.

The Academy forms part of our ambitious plans to reposition Perth as a truly global city. At the end of last year, we launched a new teaching, learning and training space in the Perth CBD - the forerunner to Murdoch's planned CBD vertical campus project, which we estimate will re-energise our city, create at least 1300 jobs and inject \$300 million in economic activity each year.

Another innovative component of our city plan is the development of Perth's first eSports stadium equipped to host medium to large-scale gaming competitions and position Perth as a global e-sports hub.

Two of our top female researchers have also enjoyed national recognition recently. In June, Professor Rhonda Marriott was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her significant service to tertiary education, Indigenous health and nursing. In July, Professor Elaine Holmes was awarded a prestigious Australian Laureate Fellowship from the Australian Research Council, worth \$3.3 million.

Murdoch is also actively developing plans to celebrate our 50th anniversary with a major program of recognition, story-telling, events, creative installations and more, occurring over 50 weeks from September 17, 2024. This date coincides with Murdoch University's inauguration ceremony in 1974 and will be 150 years since the birth of our namesake, Sir Walter Murdoch.

Alumni will feature strongly, with the sharing of profiles and stories of 50 past and present alumni across all disciplines and walks of life. Alumni are central to the Murdoch story and I very much look forward to celebrating this milestone event with you.

Yours in friendship,

Professor Eeva Leinonen
Vice Chancellor



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

From study partners to business partners.

This is free thinking.

Anna Chan and her Murdoch Uni mates started an award-winning chain of restaurants.

