



BIOLOGY/ALLIED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

By Toby Imler, DDS, 2006 Biology Graduate

Life takes so many twists and turns that it can be hard to comprehend. If I could talk to my younger self and outline the path my life would take, I wouldn't believe it. The journey started at Southern in 2001. From the beginning, I knew I wanted to be in the medical field and major in biology, but I hadn't fully settled on which discipline. It wasn't until I went to Alaska in the summer of 2002 to work as a dental assistant that I chose dentistry. That was my first taste of the "Last Frontier," and it whet my appetite for more.

My years at Southern flew by and left me with many memories related to the Hickman side of campus: Human Anatomy, Genetics, and Cell labs as well as field experiences with Dr. Ekken's Vertebrate Natural History to Okefenokee Swamp all stand out as highlights. In addition, the year I spent as a student missionary teaching on the island of Pohnpei was a pivotal one in my life and a time I wouldn't trade for anything.

I married Tanya, my grade-school sweetheart, in 2005 and graduated from Southern in 2006 before heading to the University of Nebraska for dental school. All of my basic science courses were easier than I'd expected because of the excellent foundation I received at Southern. For my second Alaska experience, I did a summer rotation providing dental care for the Alaska Native population in Bethel, the largest city in western Alaska. The beauty



Toby and Tanya Imler and their sons Eilef (8) and Henrik (6), enjoy the wildness of Alaska.

and wildness of the state struck me again.

When I graduated, I wanted to go someplace new and exciting. More than anything, I didn't want to go to Minnesota, where I grew up. I looked at places all over the country and, wouldn't you know, I ended up in Minnesota. Not just anywhere in Minnesota, either, but back in my hometown, working at the same Indian Health Service clinic where my dad worked as a dentist for 21 years.

That move and the next 10 years in Minnesota turned out to be a tremendous blessing, but I still had an itch for someplace exciting and was always on the lookout. After one last opportunity fell through in 2019, I decided I was done with my search. I was content to call it my home. At this point God must have laughed, because He was just getting us ready for something new.

In 2020, during the early days of the pandemic, I was asked to apply for the dental director position at the Tanana Chief's Conference Dental

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Life
in
Alaska

Clinic in Fairbanks, Alaska. Moving to Alaska was my dream, but I'd given up hope that it would ever be an option. Beyond that, I never expected to be asked to take the reins of such a large clinic. The responsibility was daunting: a main clinic with 30 chairs, 26 village clinics, a staff of 16 dentists, and a patient population spread out over 235,000 square miles. God was calling, though, and when He calls, He will supply what we lack.

Multiple doors opened, and it was clear we were headed north.

Moving during a pandemic is not something I would recommend, but it went relatively smoothly, and we've settled into life in the north country. We are "sourdoughs" (a nickname for those who have lived in Alaska for several winters) who still enjoy getting outside as much as possible. My work is a whirlwind of practice, administration, and travel

throughout the region. We relish time spent with our two sons, Eilef (8) and Henrik (6), surrounded by the beauty of God's creation, the shimmering aurora, and the amazing wildness of Alaska. As I consider our journey, I see God's hand at each step and am constantly reminded of how blessed we are to have Him guiding in our lives. I wouldn't change a single twist or turn.

JOURNEY TO SOUTHERN

By Paulo Dias, MD

(Professor of Anatomy & Physiology, Human Anatomy, and General Biology)

"Paulo, what are you drawing?"
"Daddy, it's the map of the countries I will go to as a missionary when I grow up!"

My dad tenderly smiled, picked me up, placed me on his lap, and looked at the sheet of paper divided with multiple lines in random directions, outlining multiple shapes, all labeled with country names, in a pattern with no geographic logic... China right beside Angola, followed by Brazil, etc.

"That's interesting son. What will you do?"

"I am going to be a surgeon so that I can help people!"

Those are great plans for a 7-year-old boy. Put Jesus first always, and He will lead you to what He wants you to be!

I was blessed to be born into a solid Christian family with my dad a pastor, my mom a biology teacher, and my grandparents as missionaries. At home, service to God and others was the motto, led by the example of my parents' lives.

As a pastor's family, we moved very frequently. By the age of 15, I had already lived in three different continents. Growing up, I was exposed to various cultures, people, and customs, which produced in me flexibility and an open-minded attitude.

I graduated from high school in Entre Rios, Argentina, took undergraduate studies in Montevideo, Uruguay, and went to medical school in Lisbon, Portugal, before completing my general surgery residency in Portugal.

From big district hospitals in urban areas to remote sites in the middle of the jungle, I have had the opportunity to work

in very diverse work environments. I served in peace as well as in conflict zones across countries in Europe, Africa, Southeast-Asia, and the Pacific.

Teaching has been part of my life since the early days as a med student, working as a part-time science teacher in med school, or later as one of the trauma/emergency instructors training doctors and nurses at the National Emergency Institute in Lisbon, Portugal.

God has blessed me abundantly, and I owe ALL to Him. I am so grateful God opened the doors for me to join the Biology/Allied Health Department at Southern. I want to bring into the classroom all of my accumulated life and professional experience and with intentionality show how the concepts apply to future professional practice. I enjoy being part of the adventure of training young people to be excellent professionals and, above anything, helping them to grow in their knowledge of God through the study of His creation, become builders of His kingdom, and serve others until His soon second coming. God bless!



Professor Paulo Dias teaching Human Anatomy Lab.

JOURNEY TO SOUTHERN

By Abhishek Thavamani, PhD

(Professor of Principles of Biology, General Biology, and Anatomy & Physiology II Labs)



Professor Abhishek Thavamani teaching Principles of Biology.

I grew up in Madurai, a historical city in South India known as the “Temple City.” Tradition, culture, and values had been an integral part of my upbringing, as I was surrounded by ancient temples, relics, and palaces, some of which date back to the third-century BCE.

My family greatly appreciated the importance of education, and my father was the first in his whole family to go to college. My grandfather, a former slave under the British, had escaped along with his family to settle down in Madurai. He supported my father throughout his college studies, because he was convinced that proper education was the only way for an individual, and ultimately a whole generation, to progress.

During my high school days, I had wished to one day become a physician but faced a formidable obstacle. During that time, our government held a common examination, and only on the basis of

this score could anyone get into medical school. The exam, which took place over two days, was always held on a Saturday and Sunday. This effectively ruled out any possibility of entering medical school without breaking the Sabbath. My father was not an Adventist, and he couldn’t understand why someone would consider a specific day as more important than medical school. It created a fairly tense situation in the family. I chose to pursue a biochemistry major for my bachelor’s degree, with the hope that I might go to medical school one day and that a knowledge of biochemistry might come in handy at that time. However, that hope has not materialized so far.

After completing my bachelor’s degree, I pursued my master’s degree in molecular biology and human genetics. I still did not have a clear idea about what profession to pursue, but this changed when I started working on my master’s thesis. I

joined Tata Memorial Center in Mumbai, India, and as a research trainee there I heard talks by international researchers and also got to use high-throughput techniques for biology research. This experience sparked in me a passion for doing research, including planning and designing experiments, performing these experiments in controlled conditions, and then analyzing and interpreting the data. I decided then to pursue my PhD and chose research as a profession.

After completing my master’s degree, I kept working at Tata Memorial Center as a project coordinator and continued my research. Simultaneously I was applying to PhD programs at various institutes. In India, research institutes and universities usually held an exam to screen possible PhD candidates and then conducted an interview with each before choosing

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candidates based on their performance. Every institution where I had applied, I was able to successfully clear the exams but performed terribly during the interviews. I grew very disappointed with myself and was at a really low point when I received an invitation to go to Germany and participate in an interview conducted by the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science. I was excited but felt even more anxious. By the grace of God, I was offered the PhD position and completed my doctorate there.

After various job assignments, I got an opportunity to work as a post-doctoral researcher in a fellowship funded by Harvard Medical School. At a certain point in the journeys of all post-doctoral researchers, they are presented with a choice regarding their next career step. Some choose to go into industry, and others choose to go into academic research. As I was contemplating this, I also wanted to know what God would want me to do. Given my training and experience thus far, I really didn't know

what profession I could pursue to serve God more directly. That is when the thought came to my mind about teaching in an Adventist college.

At first I was surprised by this thought, because I had never studied or worked in an Adventist institution. All along in life, be it at home or at school/work, I was always surrounded by many people who didn't believe in Jesus, let alone believe in the Advent message. But I started exploring those opportunities when I came across the opening for a biology professor at Southern. Before that, I was aware of only a handful of Adventist universities, such as Andrews or Loma Linda.

I eagerly applied but soon got a reply politely informing me that I did not have the qualities of the ideal candidate. I was not too discouraged, because previous experiences had taught me that rejection doesn't mean the end of the journey.

When I started looking at other opportunities in the industry and academia, I got an invitation to speak as

part of the E.O. Grundset Lecture Series at Southern. I always love to talk about my research and enjoyed giving the talk and answering the questions afterward.

After a few weeks, Southern opened another teaching position, and a few people encouraged me to apply for it. I felt a bit conflicted, because I thought God had closed this door to me. It reminded me of how Jesus' disciples returned to shore after an unsuccessful fishing expedition and were immediately asked to go fish again. I decided to "throw the net" in faith anyway, and this time I received an invitation for an in-person interview, which included teaching a specific topic to a class of students. This was different from anything I had done before, but God helped me prepare for it by giving me some cool ideas for how to explain the concepts.

When it was time to teach the class, someone offered a prayer before I began, which blew my mind away! This was the

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STUDENTS IN SERVICE

By Logan Johnson, sophomore biomedical major and student missionary at Kendu Adventist Hospital, Kenya, Africa

As a student missionary, the most important thing I have learned is to always keep my head up. I'm not talking about the cliché, "stay motivated" way, which is sometimes needed, but in the observational sense. A lot of times we focus on the things closest to us, in the moment, without looking out and observing everything as a whole.

I first recognized this issue during my stay here in Kenya, where I have the opportunity to serve kids, teach them about Jesus, and instill heavenly values in them. I have observed amputations, hysterectomies, and even the birth of a baby, though my brain shut down during it. It was in Kenya that I first recognized my capability to be a role model to others while still a student of Christ.

At first these activities seemed only unique and exciting, but as I brought my eyes upward, I finally saw the true

message. Oftentimes in difficult classes I would scramble to write down every word spoken by the teacher with a fear of missing something important, but doing this forced me to focus so hard on typing the little tidbits of knowledge that I failed to grasp the bigger picture. I constantly had my head down and never looked far enough away to see everything as a whole.

Being able to work in Kenya as a student missionary is what truly corrected this metaphorical nearsightedness. Working here, I finally learned to see the bigger picture—that God's name is written on everything: the uniqueness of the kids, the medical knowledge of the staff, and especially in the quality of the leaders. In everything I do, I see God's handwriting. This is my student missionary experience.



Logan Johnson, student missionary to Kenya.

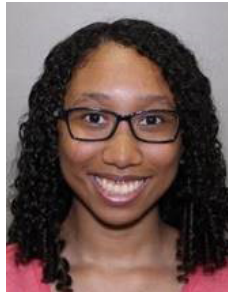
Biology Graduates 2022-2023



KC Alegrado Cabil
BS Biomedical



Javiera Alquinta
BS Biomedical



Elan Anderson
BS Biomedical



Junyul Baik
BS Biomedical



Eunice Cha
BS Biomedical



Grace Chan
BS Biomedical



Lilly Cheneweth
BS Biomedical



Nathan Chung
BS Biomedical



Noah Collins
BA Biology



Brandon Desouza
BS Biomedical



Emma Fenwick
BS Biomedical



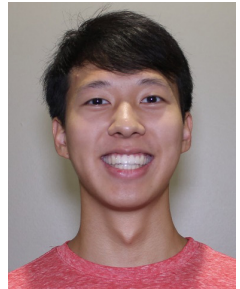
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BS Research



Alex Hongo
BS Biomedical



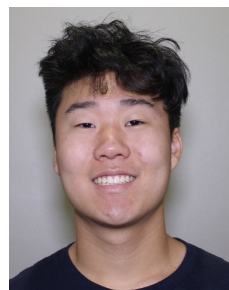
Daniel Im
BS Biomedical



Dustin Kim
BS Biomedical



Josh Kim
BS Biomedical



Lucas Kim
BS Biomedical



Madeline Kim
BS Biomedical



Kimberly Kra
BS Biomedical



Jessica Leal
BS Research



Jae-Yong Lee
BS Biomedical



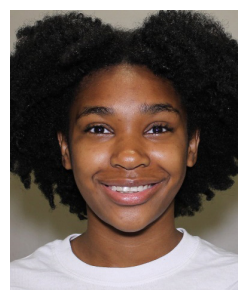
Rachel Marpaung
BS Biomedical



Megan Marquez
BS Research



Grant Milano
BS Biomedical



Leann Montaque
BS Biomedical



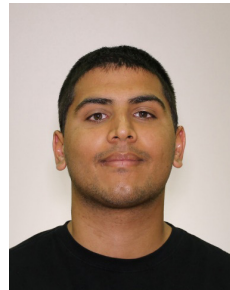
Hannah Moody
BS Biomedical



Ji Won Moon
BS Research



Hyunah Park
BS Biomedical



Daniel Patil
BS Biomedical



Olivia Perry
BS Biomedical



Wade Pierce
BA Biology



Gwyneth Reams
BS Biomedical



Hannah Reimche-Vu
BA Biology



Marie Rodriguez
BS Research



Eduardo Saldivar
BS Biomedical



Amber Salibio
BS Biomedical



Camryn Scott
BS Biomedical



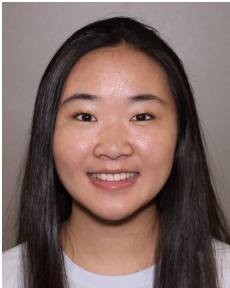
Jessica Stern
BA Biology



Arek Taylor
BA Biology
AS Physical Therapy



Aiste Valentavicius
BS Biomedical



Erin Yoon
BA Biology



Jonathan Yoon
BS Biomedical

Allied Health Graduates 2022-2023



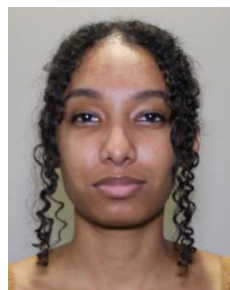
Isabella Abugan
BS Medical Lab Science



Shannelle Bennett
BS Medical Lab Science



Caroline Crank
BS Medical Lab Science



Lorie Godoy
BS Medical Lab Science



Krista Griffith
AS Speech Pathology
BA English



Bianca Guarino
BS Medical Lab Science



McKenzie Hanon
AS Nutrition/Dietetic
BS Health Science



Alyssa Harriman
AS Physical Therapy



Eduardo Hernandez
AS Physical Therapy
BS Health Science



Andrew Kim
BS Medical Lab Science



Julianna Magan
AS Speech Pathology



Jordyn McLean
AS Physical Therapy



Gabrielle Mendonca
AS Nutrition/Dietetic
BS Health Science



Eden Nerness
AS Dental Hygiene



Elsie Pak
AS Dental Hygiene
BA English



Kelsey Perez
AS Nutrition/Dietetic
BS Health Science



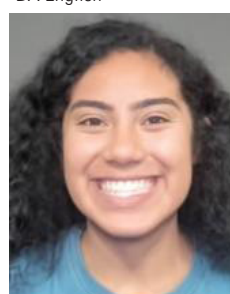
Raul Ramirez
AS Physical Therapy
BS Health Science



Calvin Scott II
AS Physical Therapy



Arek Taylor
AS Physical Therapy
BA Biology



Mariana Velasquez
AS Physical Therapy
BS Health Science



Jack Wheeler
AS Physical Therapy
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first time in my life I had experienced public prayer at a classroom or workplace. I was so amazed at how spirituality was openly discussed inside and outside the classrooms. Most of my life—at school or at work and sometimes even at home—I had to keep my faith to myself, lest conflicts or disagreements arise. I was used to keeping my spiritual life completely separate from my personal and professional life.

Seeing the personal, professional, and spiritual experience blended together at Southern was so amazing. The next surprise for me was when I heard that the university closes at noon on Fridays to allow for Sabbath preparations. All through college and at work, keeping

every Sabbath was very challenging. I had to find someone else to fill in for me, or sometimes I had to perform experiments where I kept working on Fridays right until Sabbath began and then continue immediately after Sabbath ended. During my college or university days, I had to walk often to the dean's office to request permission to change exam dates or times in order to honor the Sabbath. This sometimes led to my being the focus of ridicule or teasing from other students (and staff, as well).

The Southern policies for me were so unreal; I never knew anything like this would be possible in a large institute. I wondered at how Southern

was creating a safe space for all students and staff to express their faith without fear of any repercussions.

Being here at the campus felt like being in heaven itself, because I had very rarely been in a place where so many people around me shared my beliefs and had similar values and practices. I praised God for just this glimpse that I could work in a wonderful place like this! I was elated when I later received an offer to come and work here.

I thank God for bringing me to Southern, and I hope and pray that He will also help me fulfill the purpose for which He has prepared me all along.