A Childhood Dream Becomes a Lifelong Career

While growing up, Carol Keith didn’t spend much time wondering what she was going to be when she grew up—she knew she would become a pediatric nurse. Before heading off to study at Salisbury State College, she announced her plans in her high school yearbook. Four years and many clinical-training hours later, Carol fulfilled her dream by earning her college degree and nursing pin.

Twenty years later, pediatric nursing is the only work Carol has ever done and she voices no regrets.

Carol’s first job out of school was as a registered nurse at Children’s Hospital in Washington, D.C., but she held it only a year, until she married fellow SSC alumnus Steve Adkins (Psychology ’79, Business ’82) and returned to the Eastern Shore.

Except for a stint as a child advocate with the Wicomico County Health Department from 1987 to 1992, Carol has spent her career in pediatrics at Peninsula Regional Medical Center in Salisbury. Besides direct patient care, Carol educates patients and their families on in-hospital and follow-up treatment plans, an aspect of her job she particularly enjoys.

“I think I enjoy interacting with the children and their families the most,” said Carol, who has two children of her own (daughters, ages 15 and 10). “And, in most cases, I also enjoy watching my patients’ health improve so they can get to go home.”

Carol believes that being able to take enjoyment in the job is the key to lasting contentment. While she sees the current shortage of nurses as troubling, she believes only truly caring and committed nurses need apply.

“Nursing is not such an enticing career as it was when I went to school. Today, there are just so many more options open to women, as well as men,” said Carol. She agrees that better pay and benefits might attract more people to nursing, but she cautions that having the knowledge and skills is not enough to keep you in it.

“You just have to be drawn to it,” said Carol. “You either have the heart to do it or you don’t.” Clearly she does.
Sabrina Drakeford ’97
From Biology Major To Forensic Toxicologist

Since graduating with a B.S. in biology in 1997, Sabrina Drakeford (pictured with her fiancé Shawn Wynn) has been working for Pre-Trial Services’ Forensic Toxicology Drug Testing Laboratory in Washington, D.C. She tests clients for drugs both pre-trial and post-trial for the Superior (Federal) Court for the District of Columbia.

“Just about everyone locked up in D.C. gets tested for drugs,” said Sabrina. “Our agency does the testing.”

One of the most important tasks for Sabrina is drug testing convicted felons or people guilty of misdemeanors who are on probation or out on parole. “Our agency serves to provide programs for these individuals for the safety of the community,” explained Sabrina.

Though their crimes may not have been drug-related, drug testing is often a condition of their release or their sentence. Typically, clients get tested weekly or bi-weekly to show compliance. They graduate from the program after three consecutive negative tests.

Considered an expert witness, Sabrina is frequently called upon to testify in court. “Probably the most rewarding thing about my job is when I go to court and I hear there are clients who are graduating from the program—that they successfully completed it, that it was truly rehabilitative so that they can go on in life and have the opportunity to pursue their dreams.”

A desire to protect the community while helping others appears to be the driving force behind Sabrina’s career thus far. Having served as a forensic toxicologist for five years, Sabrina is now considering “venturing off into the EPA or, possibly, homeland security.” She’d like to be involved in protecting the environment and lives from harmful toxins caused by bioterrorism or pollution. She’s studying online for her master’s in forensics from the University of Florida while she decides her next move.

“Back when I was in school at Salisbury, the big push was to go to medical school. I was on a pre-health track myself. But I decided in my junior year not to go onto medical school, not to be so focused on that. There are just so many other areas to branch out into.”

Cynthia Mumma Kleeberger ’79
Researcher Sees AIDS Become a Treated Virus

While Cynthia Kleeberger’s most important job has just begun—she delivered twins this winter—she’s had plenty of experience managing crucial projects. For the past 10 years, she served as senior research program coordinator for the Department of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health. As such, she was responsible for coordinating the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS), an ongoing study of the natural history of the HIV-1 infection in homosexual and bisexual men.

Cynthia is now working as a consultant on the MACS project from Chapel Hill, NC, where she recently moved with her husband, Steven, also a scientist and the chief of the Pulmonary Pathology Laboratory at the National Institute of Environmental Health Science.

The all-inclusive MACS project, which began in 1984, has followed the HIV virus in 5,622 patients thus far, with another 1,000 men currently being recruited. MACS has served as the hub for data collection on these patients from multiple clinical sites (Baltimore, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles). Fortunately, the 18-year-old study has evolved from simply trying to gain an understanding of the disease to collecting and sharing data on effective treatments.

“The AIDS epidemic has taken a turn, so that now it is studied more as a treated virus,” said Cynthia. “Originally, when I started in the field, everything they tried was really disappointing. There were no drugs that really worked. The most exciting part of my research has been seeing medications that actually worked, actually started to delay the progression of the disease.”

Cynthia began her career at Johns Hopkins after graduating from Salisbury in 1979. At first, she worked in the Department of Environmental Health Sciences, mostly with studies related to asthma. Earning a master’s in administrative science from Hopkins in 1991 gave her the credentials to manage the MACS program, but Cynthia has continued to rely on her biology training, especially the laboratory component.

“I think a lot of people end up not using their undergraduate degree,” said Cynthia. “I have used my biology degree from Salisbury every day for the last 22 years.”

For more information on the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study, visit www.statepi.jhsp.edu, then click on MACS.
Steven C. McKinley '87/’89

True Success Follows A Career Change

By most standards, Steven McKinley had a successful career. For a decade he worked in the defense industry, designing electrical and atmospheric systems. But several years ago, Steven came to a fork in the road. Rather than take the path well traveled, he chose the high road.

Steven, who currently lives with his wife and three children in York, PA, graduated in 1989 with a physics degree, the second degree he earned at SU—the first was in social work two years before. He went on to earn a master’s degree in engineering from Penn State.

After college, Steven moved from Salisbury, his hometown, to Pennsylvania because of the scarcity of local job opportunities in his field (a situation, he notes, has since changed) and went to work for the defense industry.

He never quite enjoyed his career as much as he thought he should, however, so two years ago he returned to school to get his teaching credentials.

He’s now serving as a substitute physics/science teacher for three school districts—and he loves it. He said he has finally found a way to combine his social work and physics training into meaningful work.

“Becoming a parent changed the way I see things,” said Steven. “Now, I find it very rewarding helping children learn.” He expects to find a full-time teaching position soon.

Steven has been following the expansion of SU’s science programs and sees it as a real plus for the Eastern Shore community. “There’s been a number of microwave companies move to the Shore in the last decade or so—Salisbury University has a responsibility to support those companies. It also has a role to play in attracting other employers to the area,” said Steven. “The new emphasis on research means there may be some great new opportunities for the University to partner with area businesses.”

Beth Sansouci Chamblin ’98

Helping Make Sick Cells Well Through Gene Cloning

Beth Sansouci Chamblin, a 1998 biology graduate, recently made a move from Cogent Neuroscience to Tranzyme, a biotechnology company focused on genomics-based discovery and development of drugs to treat neurosensory diseases. Neurosensory diseases affect the sense organs that mediate vision, hearing, balance, taste and smell.

Beth was the second researcher to be hired at the company’s new facility at the Research Triangle Park in Durham, N.C. Beth lives in Cary, N.C., with her husband, fellow SU alumnus Andrew Chamblin (’94, biology), whom she wed in November. Andrew does validation work for Diosynth, Inc., an intermediary manufacturer of biologicals used by major drug companies during clinical trials.

Beth met Andrew on the job at Intervet—she worked in the company’s vaccine-producing lab while she was still a student at Salisbury. From there, she went to Diosynth and then Cogent before landing her current job.

“What I’m doing right now is really interesting because I’m doing a lot of molecular biology, whereas in the past I did more microbiology and actual physiology—looking at cells and cell types,” said Beth. “Now I’m looking at genes and gene function and doing a lot of cloning—not the kind that’s in the news, but the kind we use to produce DNA to drop into the vector.”

Translation for the scientifically challenged: Beth is helping Tranzyme use virus-based technology to develop effective ways to deliver therapeutic genes to ailing cells. Tranzyme uses modified viruses (i.e., rendered safe and carrying spliced-in DNA), which are highly efficient at getting into cells and staying in cells, to deliver genes to cells. Beth studies and manipulates the cells in order to see the different functions and effects of these genes.

Beth views the work as exhilarating and a rare opportunity. “It’s really exciting learning about the different pathways and how small alterations in either the genetics, cell metabolism, or cell interactions can have such a huge impact on the whole system.

“For me, it’s been a really good experience to work for a younger, smaller company, because I’m able to work on my own projects and also be a part of so much collaboration. At a larger company, since I just have my bachelor’s, I might be stuck working on the same thing all the time. That’s not true at Tranzyme.”

Even with such opportunities, Beth plans to continue her education. She has taken classes at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and hopes to someday earn an advanced degree.

For more information on the research underway at Tranzyme, visit www.tranzyme.com.