

What's Your Meliora Moment?

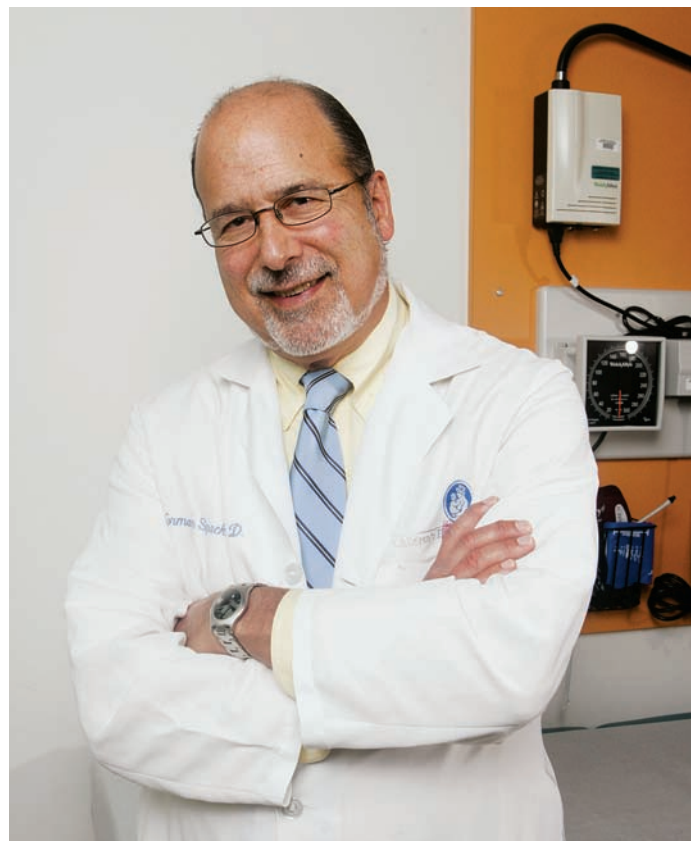
A new initiative highlights the University's influence on the lives of members of the University community.

Where were you when you realized what it meant to be “ever better?” Do you remember when the meaning of

Meliora really struck a chord? If so, leaders of a new project sponsored by the University Advancement Office want to hear your story.

Called Meliora Moments, the project is an online compendium, where alumni, students, faculty, and friends can upload stories of how the spirit of the University's motto has touched their lives and the lives of their families and friends. Part community history book and part social network, the site is designed to showcase—and to share—the larger lessons of the University's influence.

Here's an edited snapshot of a few of the stories collected so far. To read more, or to submit your own Meliora Moment, visit meliora.rochester.edu. —SCOTT HAUSER





◀ Norman Spack '69M (MD)

**Pediatric Endocrinologist and Codirector,
Gender Management Service**

Children's Hospital Boston

In 1967, during patient interview training at the beginning of third year at the School of Medicine and Dentistry, eight of us were blessed to be mentored by George Engel, a founder of the University's biopsychosocial model, one hour a week as a group.

As we left the patient's bedside and retired to a conference room, Dr. Engel grilled us about every item of clothing the patient was wearing as well as the number of get-well cards, the title of the book being read, and all other discretionary bedside articles. As he put it, an inpatient (in the days when patients weren't admitted and discharged a day later) creates an entire world around the hospital bed. Understanding that world provides understanding of the patient.

To this day, I do a "George" with the Harvard Medical School students at the bedside. They aren't any better the first time around than we were. But just as was the case for us, as students in 1967, the current students will never forget George Engel's sensitivity to the individual patient as we attempt to emulate him. I am sure this teaching technique will pass through the generations through multiple medical schools.

Rachel Dickler Coker '96

Director of Research Advancement

Binghamton University

Some of my most valuable UR experiences happened outside the classroom. Editing the *Campus Times* was the single most important thing I did to develop my writing abilities and prepare for a career in journalism. The friendships I formed there continue to sustain me in my 30s. I also had the good fortune to spend a semester in Paris. I improved my language skills and learned a lot about French art, architecture, and culture, but I also gained a new level of self-confidence and a new vantage point on American life. My travels were one part of my global experience; my roommates and friends in the International Living Center were another. Thanks to the ILC, I have friends in Turkey, Malaysia, India, Africa, the UK, Canada, and all over the U.S.

Inside the classroom, I had the humbling experiences of getting some not-so-good grades from some professors who could tell when I wasn't living up to my potential. I read a lot of Shakespeare, the entire Bible, and everything Jane Austen and Toni Morrison ever wrote. I also studied cognitive science, linguistics, biology, and statistics. These offered just a taste of many topics outside my field, but they awakened in me a curiosity that continues to fuel my work as a science writer.

My advice to freshmen: Join at least one club or organization. Don't eat too much. Buy some good boots and a warm coat. Take time to explore the city and go to Toronto, Niagara Falls, and Letchworth State Park. Have fun and take risks! And try a course outside—maybe way outside—your major.

Jill Mestel Squyres '81

Clinical Psychologist

San Antonio, Texas

I met with an academic advisor when I decided I wanted to go to graduate school in clinical psychology during my junior year. I'd skipped a grade so I was going to graduate from the U of R when I was only 20. The advisor gently informed me that I was unlikely to be accepted to a clinical psychology graduate program because I was so young and most graduate programs were looking for candidates with more maturity and experience than I had. I should still apply and do everything I could to put together a competitive application, but I needed to be sure to have a good plan B. The advisor gave me a list of the things I should do to improve my application and even reviewed my personal statement and gave me suggestions before I sent out my applications.

I sent out 20 applications to hedge my bets since these grad programs had only 2 to 3 percent acceptance rates. I formed a backup plan to get a doctorate in developmental instead of clinical psychology because it was much less competitive and my young age wouldn't be considered a liability. I ranked the 20 schools in quartiles and decided I would be happy to get in anywhere and set my expectations low.

The application deadlines came and went and I heard nothing. I breathed a sigh of relief that I had apparently survived the first cut of rejections. Then 10 rejection letters arrived in rapid succession, including one from my first choice, UCLA. I refused to feel dejected. I was asked to interview at two schools. I went to both interviews and was told I'd done very well. And then I waited. Finally three thick envelopes stuffed my mailbox at the campus post office. Not only was I accepted at three of my top five schools, I was offered a full National Institute of Mental Health scholarship to each. In two out of the three programs, only one such scholarship was offered to the entire incoming class. It was mine if I wanted it.

I chose to go to USC. When I arrived I decided I was going to show them just how successful a "young" graduate student could be. I've never regretted my choice. Each year at USC I was "ever better." I graduated with my doctorate at 26 with several peer-reviewed publications under my belt, and I have continued to enjoy a productive and successful career ever since.

I've never forgotten the push to make myself "ever better," to succeed and overcome my limitations to get into graduate school and accomplish goals I'd never dreamed of. I hope I never lose the *Meliora* spirit.



Larry Bloch '75

University Trustee

San Diego, Calif.

In 1974, I was a political science major and thought it would be a good idea to take Classics of Political Thought as background to modern political thinking. The course and professor shared a reputation for being very demanding. For the first half of the fall semester, we read works by Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle. The reading, as advertised, was difficult, and I studied intensely for our midterm exam. To this day, I can remember burying myself in the stacks, reading and re-reading the material covered. I walked into the exam thinking that I was relatively well prepared.

What hit next sent me into immediate panic. There were only two questions on the exam covering topics never discussed in class or covered by our reading. Question 1: from a Thucydidean frame of reference analyze the current (Nixon) impeachment crisis. Question 2: from either an Aristotelian or Platonic frame of reference tell me what you think about Gerald Ford as Nixon's likely successor.

I sat frozen but eventually wrote something that I am sure must have read like total nonsense. I left the exam room feeling sick, not even sure what Professor Bluhm meant by "frame of reference." A few days later, my worst suspicions were confirmed. For the first time in my life, I received an "F."

Thankfully, we were only a few days from Thanksgiving break, and I went home and forgot everything I didn't understand about classical political thought. Unfortunately, I still had to come back Sunday afternoon to face the remainder of the semester.

My next assignment, due Thursday morning following break, was to orally present a comparison of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas on the concepts of "freedom, love, and reason." As one might expect, I approached the assignment with "great" confidence, looking forward to presenting to the class material about which I had no idea.

I remember going to Rush Rhees Library Sunday evening and taking out whatever books I could find on topic and relocating myself to the medical school library at the hospital. I figured if I was going to freak out, being at the Medical Center would be far more convenient.

I spent Sunday night, Monday night, Tuesday night, and much of Wednesday at the hospital library, reading and trying to piece together what I might talk about. Despite intensive effort, I struggled

with the reading. Nothing seemed to make any real sense, when all of a sudden around 11 on Wednesday night, I had an epiphany, an unexplainable "a-ha!" moment. Everything seemed to come together. Inexplicably, I now understood the midterm exam and why I had received an "F." I wrote for an hour and then went back to my dorm. I was relieved. I knew exactly what I would speak about. I set my alarm for 5 a.m. and drove to the Mt. Hope Diner where I worked out the details of my presentation. I raced back to campus for my 9 a.m. class.

As the class settled in, Professor Bluhm invited me to the front of the room. Shaking, I began my argument. Time flew by, and when I finished, Professor Bluhm actually said "very well done." He meant



it. I got an "A" on the presentation and several weeks later an "A" on the final exam. He realized I finally understood the concepts and had learned to think on an entirely new level. He generously gave me a final grade of "A" for the semester.

Looking back 35 years, I realized that what I learned that night was far more important to my life than understanding the thinking of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Struggling with the material, I discovered for myself that all logical arguments must begin with a core premise upon which reasoning is applied to form a sound conclusion. With that discovery I materially strengthened my own powers of deductive reasoning which have served me well in business, as an investor, and in almost every other aspect of my life.



Joan Sapiro Beal '84E

Commercial Recording Artist

Los Angeles

Growing up as the child of a music teacher and Eastman alumnus, the late Erwin Sapiro '54E, '55E (MM), I heard many a Meliora Moment from my dad. He loved to recount his trips with the Eastman Wind Ensemble under Freddie Fennell '37E, '39E (MM), '88 (Honorary), playing trumpet duets with his twin brother, Maurice '54E, '55E (MM), on the Kilbourn Hall stage, or playing in the on-stage band for *La Bohème* in Eastman Theatre. Dad loved to share his treasured memories of his student days at Eastman, and they always inspired me. From an early age, I knew that I would be a musician, just like my dad. If Dad was disappointed when I put down the trumpet and decided I was a singer, he never showed it. He was always proud.

As a student in 1983, I was a soloist for the International Computer Music Conference in Kilbourn Hall. I was premiering a work by Eastman professor Allan Schindler, along with pianist Bryan Pezzone '84E and a pre-recorded tape designed by Schindler. As the lush sonic landscape moved throughout the hall and I added my own voice, I realized that although this was very different from the classical music my father had taught me, it was finally my music. I was finding my own voice. Now a studio singer in Los Angeles, I add my voice to many pre-recorded soundscapes. Working with my husband, Jeff Beal '85E, on his scores is my greatest joy. I love to find new ways to use my sound to connect with the drama portrayed on the screen. And I remember that moment of discovery—finally finding my own musical voice.



Karl Nelson '59

**Retired Health Care Executive
Volunteer Hospital Chaplain**
Pittsford, N.Y.

At the end of my freshman year I was selected from the men's Glee Club to become one of the 12 charter members of a new men's vocal ensemble, to be called: YellowJackets!

What a thrill, for a very young freshman (I had just turned 18 a month before). For the remaining three years there were many other memorable moments: two separate Glee Club performances with the Rochester Philharmonic, one conducted by Eric Leinsdorf, performing on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, touring Colorado; and many other faith-building experiences as a member and president of the Intersarsity Christian Fellowship.

But my most memorable Meliora Moment came 50 years later, during Meliora Weekend 2006. A 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the YellowJackets was planned. There was an outstanding response. There were only two of us from that original 1956 group: Jerry Gardner '58, '65 (Mas), who was the emcee for the Friday evening banquet, and me.

I brought reflections from the earliest days. On Saturday evening, a grand concert was held in a packed Strong Auditorium. A group from each decade presented a set of songs from their era. The two of us from the 1950s merged with the 1960s. The last set of the evening was a massed chorus of all of the YellowJacket alumni who were present. In order for this large crowd to be assembled on stage, the curtains were drawn, and I was asked to kill time by providing some meaningless chatter for the audience. Then, at the appropriate time, the cur-



tain was opened. I turned around to face 125 YellowJackets from every decade of our existence. What a thrill! To have started a group of 12, and to see that over 10 times that number had come to a reunion! I was awestruck. This fall, as the 2011 YellowJackets have appeared on national television, alumni YellowJackets are even more proud.

We celebrate a lot of history at UR. But to have been part of a history-making event which, by now, has a lifespan of 55 years, truly makes me a part of that history.

◀ Loretta Ford '00 (Honorary)

Dean and Professor Emerita
School of Nursing

In 1972, I moved from the University of Colorado, a large, public academic institution, to become the first dean in the newly created School of Nursing at the University.

This autonomous school, long the dream of the alumni and friends, came with great expectations for implementing a unique model of unification of nursing education, practice, research, and leadership under the newly appointed dean and director of nursing. A formidable task I was excited to undertake!

I had a lot to learn about UR's institutional environment and the community. However, no new leader could have been more welcomed or supported by central administration, trustees, the faculties and staff of nursing and medicine, the alumni, and the community. Still it was a daunting task in uncharted waters, and there were many naysayers in other academic medical centers predicting doom.

There were days, I must admit, that made me question why, with so many other career choices, I had chosen Rochester. I had to remind myself that the struggles to change the role of nurses in advanced nursing practice, via the nurse practitioner, were futile unless the environments of health care policies, practice, and delivery changed as

well. An enabling, receptive environment for advanced practice nurses was just as important as the preparation of the practitioner. Rochester offered that environment and an opportunity to demonstrate fully the potential and promise of the nurse practitioner, the clinical nurse specialist, and other advanced nurse practitioners.

Still, coming from a large, public, highly regarded and much politicized institution, as a newcomer with great expectations, I was often confounded trying to get my arms around UR's uniqueness. Faced with preparing comments for the inaugural ceremonies for the new School of Nursing, I reviewed some materials that my "coaches" in central administration had provided on the mission and characteristics of the University. President Allen Wallis's words were my Meliora Moment. He reminded me that the mission of UR was to "achieve and sustain excellence in the academic areas it has chosen to serve." I remember writing that, while being chosen has enormous advantages, it also has huge matching responsibilities. Coupled with the mission were the UR characteristics that Chancellor Wallis identified: UR was advanced, coherent, small, diverse, independent, responsible, and rooted.

This Meliora Moment guided my decisions through many tough situations: it clarified my vision of the mission, value, and worth of UR, gave me direction for the future, and made the motto, Meliora, the holy grail.