

KUYPER

College News

A Publication for Alumni & Friends

The Kremlin at night, Moscow, Russia

MY STORY

SERGEI SOSEDKIN

A teenager, born into an atheist-professing family in then communist Russia. A grandmother, who although never owning a Bible, fanned the flames of curiosity in his heart for the things of God. A shortwave radio that provided him his first glimpse of the gospel. And a friend's copy of the New Testament which was used to reveal in him the heart of a sinner who needed forgiveness. This is Sergei Sosedkin's story.

Both my sister and I were born into a working-class family in Moscow, Russia (USSR). As a child, I enjoyed spending time

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Alumni Profile

CLASS

1996

HOME

Moscow, Russia

CAREER

**Russian Ministry Leader
of Back To God Ministries
International**

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION



KUYPER.EDU

Foundational and Shared Themes!

I love telling others about Kuyper College—about how God is enabling us to accomplish our mission and vision, about the learning experiences of our students and the ministry and service of our alumni, and about the dedication of our faculty and staff to help our students flourish.

I'm always eager to share these stories, but there's nothing better than hearing directly from our students, alumni, staff, and faculty. As I hear their stories, I marvel at the common themes they share about their experiences at Kuyper and how they are living out their love for God and others.

In this issue of the Kuyper News, you have the opportunity to read about these shared themes, as testimonials of God's good work within our college community and beyond.

Lydia ('20) finds the biblical teaching very exciting and professors who are "diligent thinkers and work hard to be faithful to every part of Scripture." She shares that at Kuyper, "God has been and is so faithful and personal, I wouldn't have thought it possible."

Brittany ('17) wants to "serve the Lord with all my heart in everything that I do." As a donor relations associate at Words of Hope, Brittany credits Kuyper for teaching her, "the importance of being a good steward of people's resources."

Alyssa ('13) describes Kuyper as having a legacy of faith and a commitment to send out legacy builders. Over her nine years of serving in staff positions, she has seen that "faith and love for God and His people" are deeply woven together at Kuyper.

Sergei's ('96) tells of God's leading from Russia to Ecuador to the USA and back to Russia. Discerning a calling to share the gospel through media, Sergei says, "Kuyper gave me a much-needed Christian and theological foundation" and, "I also learned how to be brave and intentional about sharing my Christian faith with others."

And, Dr. Branson Parler sums up these themes in describing Kuyper as "an academic community, a spiritual community, and a community that is engaged around both big ideas and



questions of practical application—we are a praxis and service-focused ministry."

Faithful. Biblical. Service. Calling. Community. Love for God and others. These themes are foundational at Kuyper and reverberate through the life stories of our students, alumni, faculty, and staff.

As we begin a new decade, join me in giving thanks to God for the legacy of faith that he is building in and through the Kuyper College community, as we faithfully serve others for God's glory. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15)

Grateful to serve,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Patti".

Dr. Patricia R. Harris
President

Kuyper Community Notes

Marriages

Jelle (2016) and **Destiny** (Samaroo) **Koersen** were united in marriage on May 4, 2019.

Professional Development

Rob Bergman (2009) is now an adjunct professor of social work at Spring Arbor University.

Ben Hoekman (2017) recently began a position as director of worship arts at Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, MI, as he continues to pursue his Master of Divinity degree at Calvin Seminary.

Naomi Sponable (2004), MA, LPC, made a presentation entitled "Juvenile Trauma" at the Juvenile Justice Association of Michigan's statewide conference in September.

Shelby VanHouten (2014) graduated from Grand Valley State University with her Master of Social Work degree on December 7.

Make a Gift and Receive an Income for Life!

Many Christians assume that a gift to charity will mean that they and their families can no longer benefit from the cash or property given. That is definitely not the case when you select a lifetime income agreement—a win-win arrangement for you and your favorite ministries.

This giving arrangement provides you with a tax benefit now and income benefits for life while supporting the Christian ministries that are important to you. Yes, you can make a gift and receive an income for life!

How do lifetime income agreements work?

With a lifetime income agreement, you make a charitable gift of cash or other assets, such as property or stock, and receive an immediate tax deduction while having an income for life, with the remainder going to your favorite Christian causes.

Benefits of a lifetime income agreement

- An income to you for your lifetime
- Immediate income tax deduction for the charitable value of the gift
- The remainder, which passes to your selected charity at your death, is not subject to estate tax
- If funded with appreciated assets, you avoid the immediate realization of capital gain

To learn more, or to set up a meeting with the Barnabas Foundation to review your estate plans, please contact the Kuyper Advancement Office at 616.988.3662 or email kcapisciolto@kuyper.edu

Kuyper Social Work in Uganda

Since 2010, several Kuyper social work students have completed their internships in Uganda, East Africa. These opportunities are only possible through Kuyper's



partnership with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and the Uganda Studies Program at Uganda Christian University (UCU).

By helping students to move out of their comfort zone, students find creative solutions to implement their social work skills that may be different from what they learned in their textbooks.

According to social work Professor Kelli Hoffman, they are finding answers to the question: "How do I address an ethical dilemma in a completely different cultural context?" This also develops their cultural sensitivity skills, including an attitude of humility.

During their 15-week internship, students complete 400 internship hours. Students can choose from a variety of work, including child services, HIV/AIDS prevention, working with the elderly, and more.

Anna Slomp (2018) completed her internship in Uganda to "understand what it is like for immigrants, refugees and adopted children to leave everything they know and be dropped into a culture that is totally different than their own. I needed to know what it feels like to be a minority who can't understand the language, isn't used to the food, and has to adjust to a brand-new climate."

During her time in Uganda, Slomp was placed with a Compassion International Child Development Site. There, she helped to care for children who are sponsored by people from all around the world. Her duties included ensuring that money sent to the children was being used appropriately, assisting families with paperwork, doing home visit check-ins, and helping the children write letters to their sponsors. As Slomp reflects on her experiences, she said: "One of the most important and influential things I learned was the idea that...our identity does not come from the individual, but rather from participation in the community around them. When I went on home visits, people were honored when I would try to greet them in their native language. It didn't matter that I did it poorly; it mattered that I tried and was not imposing my way of life on them, but rather, trying to understand theirs."

Events

Thursdays

Inspiring Leaders Series

Kuyper Dining Hall at 11:30 AM

- **January 16**
Kinita Schripsema, Founder / CEO, of Seema Global Consulting
- **February 13**
Attah Obande, Director, Dream Fulfillment at Spring GR

March 19

Angel Rodriguez, Yo Puedo Program Coordinator at Cherry Health

Lunch n' Learn Series

Kuyper Dining Hall at 12:00 PM

- **January 30**
Chip Huber, Associate Vice President of Student Development & Athletics, Cornerstone University

February 27

Zoraida Velez, Curriculum Development Manager, RDV Corporation

March 26

Mark VanDellen, Principal, MVD Coaching

April 16

Dave Rahn, VP and Chief Ministry Officer, Youth for Christ

April 3

Honors Convocation and Student Scholar Day

April 20

Spring Celebration Gala

April 24

Commencement

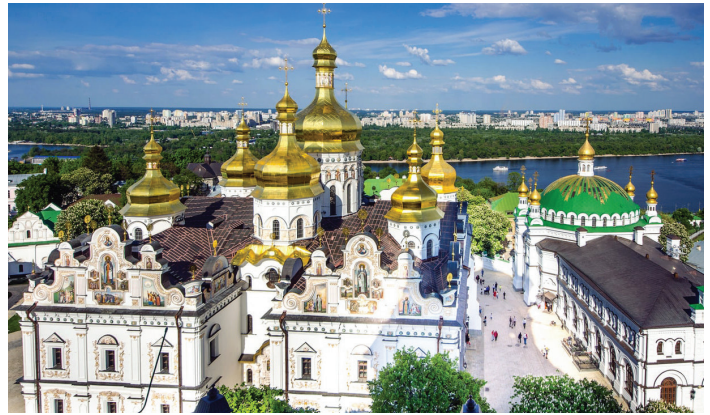
with my grandparents—especially fishing with my grandfather. My grandmother was a devout Russian Orthodox Christian. She would pray and go to church regularly. She also made sure that I was baptized as an infant. Everyone else in my family, including my parents, claimed to be atheists—a very typical attitude back then.

I was a straight-A student through much of my teenage years and enjoyed reading all kinds of books. During my early teens my mother was concerned that I was reading too much. At the age of 14, I received a shortwave radio as a gift. It was then that I started listening to Christian radio broadcasts in Russian coming from outside of the Soviet Union. I listened to Christian radio messages for about four years. Then, when I was 18, I went through a spiritual crisis. My life started to look meaningless to me. I really wanted to read the Bible, to learn more about Christianity, but I didn't have access to it. Bibles were very rare in Russia during this time. My grandmother only had a few handwritten pages of Psalms and parts of the gospel.

When the Soviet government began to allow religious literature to be sent to the USSR from abroad, one of my friends shared with me a copy of the New Testament he received from a Russian church in Australia. I read the whole New Testament. Reading the Gospels for the first time was a very powerful experience for me. I don't consider myself to be a very emotional person, but when reading of Jesus' crucifixion, I was literally moved to tears. I prayed to God for forgiveness of my sins, then I began to look for a local church since I didn't know any Christians except for my grandmother. It wasn't so easy to find a church since the local phone directories didn't include any. Eventually, I found a Baptist church which was the only official evangelical church in Moscow.

As a teenager I studied hard and mostly kept away from the “wrong crowd.” After coming to Christ, I didn't experience an abrupt change in my behavior. Initially, the biggest change was internal. To me, Christian faith was about finding hope and meaning for my life. As a new Christian, I was very much into witnessing to others.

After finishing secondary school—high school here in the States—I went to college where an apprenticeship was part of the curriculum, so I jumped at an opportunity to work at a radio factory as a radio



The city of Kiev, Ukraine

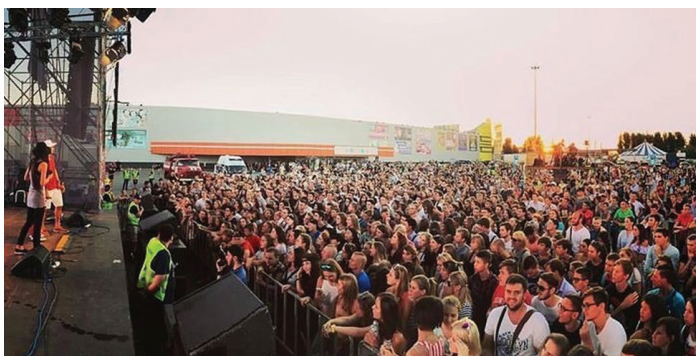
technician. At that time Russian media was experiencing more freedom and opening up to the Christian message. So, besides my apprenticeship, I started hosting a talk show at a local radio station—which was my real interest. I wanted to share the gospel and promote Christian faith through the use of media.

Due to my interest in radio evangelism work, I also wrote a letter to HCJB Radio in Quito, Ecuador, the first Christian missionary radio station in the world. For many years HCJB Radio carried Russian Christian broadcasts, and I enjoyed listening to them. In my letter I said that I'd like to come and work there as a Russian broadcaster. To my surprise I received a positive response. And in October of 1992, I went to Ecuador.

During my very first day in Ecuador, I was invited to talk to a group of HCJB supporters. Among them were Roy Vander Vennen and his wife, Gerry, from Grand Rapids, Michigan, who were also strong supporters of Kuyper College. After my short speech, my new supervisor at HCJB's Russian service, Wally Kulakoff, spoke to that group about my need for good Biblical training. I was surprised to hear him say that, as we had not discussed it beforehand. Afterwards, the Vander Vennens approached Wally Kulakoff and told him that they felt God's calling to help me with Biblical education in the US, namely at Kuyper. A year-and-a-half later, after I received news that Roy and Gerry had underwritten my scholarship, I came to Kuyper.

One of the requirements to continue with HCJB on a full-time basis was taking at least one year of studies at a Bible College. So, initially, I thought I'd spend just one year at Kuyper. But I enjoyed my studies, and after I learned that I could transfer my college credits from Russia and get my four-year degree in a little over two years, I decided to do just that.

At Kuyper I found top-notch professors and a supportive student body. I learned a lot about the Bible, Christian doctrine, and history of the faith. It was a very helpful overview that provided a solid foundation for my seminary studies later. I also learned about sharing my Christian faith through word and deed. Thanks to Kuyper, I matured in my faith and social life. I also found some close Christian friends with whom I keep in touch to this day.



BTGMI, together with dozens of churches in Ukraine, conducted an 11-city youth mission tour with 39,000 participants and more than 12,000 responses

During my first summer break from Kuyper I worked at KICY Radio, a Christian radio station in Nome, Alaska, broadcasting gospel messages to listeners as far away as Chukotka, Russia, over 650 miles from Nome. That time in Nome added to my desire to spend the rest of my life doing just that.

In the middle of my last semester at Kuyper, I got a phone call from Dr. Joel Nederhood, who was then leading The Back to God Hour (BTGH)—a radio ministry program launched in 1939 by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and the forerunner of today's Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). Later, after we had a meeting, I learned that the ministry was looking for a Russian minister to oversee their Russian-language outreach. I was very interested in this position, in part due to the fact that back in Moscow, first as a non-believer and then as a new Christian, I used to listen to BTGH in Russian. However, I was told that to join BTGH, I had to go to seminary—Calvin Theological Seminary—first, then be ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament in the CRCNA.

While going to seminary I started working part time for BTGH. After graduation from Calvin, I was ordained as a minister in the CRCNA and was appointed to oversee the Russian language outreach of BTGH.

Today, I serve as a Russian ministry leader of BTGMI, the denominational media ministry that is charged by the CRCNA with proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide, in various languages. In the Russian Department we use the internet, radio, TV and printed materials to share Christian hope and call people to peace with God. I oversee our ministry workers and volunteers in two Russian cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, and in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev.

One of the biggest joys of the ministry is receiving feedback to our programs and learning about people coming to Christian faith and joining local churches. Every day we receive hundreds of pieces of mail as well as online messages. It's humbling to see the Spirit at work. The following short story serves to illustrate how God uses and directs our work.

One of the things we do in our programs is to ask listeners to call in with questions. For our team in Russia, this invitation sparks some of the best conversations between radio hosts and their listeners. But with no delay to our live, on-air radio shows, the invitation also comes with some risk.



Sergei Sosedkin in BTGMI broadcast studio

When one man called in and began asking his questions, he seemed to be on topic. However, the radio hosts were caught off guard when he suddenly went in a different direction, bringing up a controversial political topic. When that happens, we usually just hang up and seek to present a biblical perspective on the subject—and usually callers who have harmful intentions only try to get on the air once. However, this caller was different. Throughout the past year, what turned out to be a 13-year-old from Tomsk, Siberia, called dozens of times to harass the producers. The first time he got live on air, he started swearing. He called continually for several weeks during the on-air sessions and also called after hours, frequently leaving voicemails with angry messages. Then his calls stopped.

Months later, his phone number appeared again on the radio station's caller ID. Our BTGMI's ministry team had been praying for God to work in this young man's life over the previous months, so the ministry team knew they couldn't ignore his call. They were right.

It turned out that he was listening to the short biblical messages the ministry team recorded for their daily voicemail greetings—messages that speak of peace and hope in Jesus—and he began taking these messages to heart. After a long conversation, he tearfully asked for forgiveness and thanked the team for the Christian messages they brought. Today, this young man professes faith in Christ. This change of heart took place because of hopeful messages of God's grace.

This story is a reminder that the challenge for all of us in Christian ministry is not to be discouraged in the face of opposition to the gospel, either political or cultural.

Kuyper gave me a much-needed Christian and theological foundation that later was built upon during my seminary studies. I also learned how to be brave and intentional about sharing my Christian faith with others.

As for the future, I pray to continue serving with Back to God Ministries International.



BTGMI organized an event in Kiev to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Over 300,000 people came—mostly non-believers



Kuyper students in Yosemite National Park

Business in the U.S. National Parks

“How do you treat people and our physical planet in ways that are honorable to the call of God’s stewardship on our lives?” This is the question that Business Leadership Professor Marc Andreas and a group of business leadership students sought to answer during their first trip last year to the national parks of California with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP).

ACMNP was founded in 1951 in Yellowstone National Park with the objective of “providing Christian community for the people working in, living in, and visiting the national parks.” Today, they minister in 25 national parks from Alaska to the Virgin Islands. The ministry seeks to help people in the parks “experience the glory of God by seeing it firsthand.”

During their trip to the National Parks, the 15 students visited Sequoia National Park, Yosemite National Park, and three other California state parks. At each, students met with park leaders to hear how they run the parks. At Yosemite, they learned that the park has almost six million visitors each year and a staff of 1,500 running not only the park, but also seven hotels and restaurants. During their time there, students learned how such a large enterprise is managed—from developing budgets, to handling sanitation, and using social media to promote the Park and communicate with visitors.

In May of 2020, another group of students in the business leadership program will be joining ACMNP to visit Rocky Mountain National Park in Denver, Grand Teton National Park, and Yellowstone National Park.

Professor Andreas hopes that this trip will give weight to the calling God has placed on His people to have an oversight over creation.

In My Words

A LEGACY OF FAITH AND LOVE

In 2016, my family celebrated my grandparents’ 60th wedding anniversary. Prior to our celebration, I gave them a letter, and in it I wrote, “Grandpa and Grandma, Thank you for a lifetime of sharing the importance of faith in a God who is faithful, eternal, merciful and all loving, and for showing



Allyssa Blom

Assistant to the President,
Kuyper College

our family what a life grounded in the Word looks like.” It was with those words that I tried to express my gratitude to them for building a legacy of faith within our family, something that has been passed down through generations. My grandpa, who has journaled almost every day since he was a young adult, read some of those journal entries to us at our family celebration. A common theme of each story was my grandpa’s steadfast faith, quietly woven throughout. I remember thinking that it was extraordinary

to hear his stories, to see them written down, passed from generation to generation, because it told the history and foundation of our family’s faith legacy. It also highlighted the responsibility I have to demonstrate faith for my young family, too.

My family is not the only legacy that I have the privilege to be a part of, to learn from, and to impact. My work at Kuyper College has also given me that opportunity because Kuyper has a legacy of faith too—a foundation that started in 1939 with a small group of individuals that saw the necessity of Reformed Bible Institute and that has continued to strengthen its mission for the last 80 years. I’ve been a part of that mission for the last nine years. During that time, I have been a student and a student assistant, and after graduation, the administrative assistant for Kuyper’s Advancement department, the assistant to interim Kuyper President Carl Zylstra, and now, in my current role, as assistant to Kuyper President Patti Harris. Within each of those spaces, I have had the unique opportunity to see how deeply woven faith and love for God and His people are at Kuyper. Here, we have the responsibility to fulfill a mission of “equipping students with a biblical, Reformed worldview to serve effectively Christ’s church and His world” so that upon graduation they, too, can be sent out as legacy builders—in their families, in their work, and in a world that so desperately needs to know the love and faithfulness of God.

To be a part of something bigger than myself, to be shaped by a legacy of faith, is something I don’t take for granted.

“In My Words” is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

The Kuyper Collective: Learning In and Out of the Classroom

Driven by the question “How do we equip the church so that we can effectively serve?” several of Kuyper’s professors have banded together to create the Kuyper Collective podcast. Their goal is to inform the broader Kuyper community to serve the church more effectively by exploring topics that affect the church and society as a whole.

According to professor of Bible and theology, Dr. Branson Parler, the Kuyper Collective demonstrates that “What we do as a college is not just give people grades and degrees, but that we’re engaged with questions that we all wrestle with in life, culture, society and in our churches.” These podcasts, designed to be a platform to discuss these important issues, are available on Apple podcast, Google podcast, Spotify and Anchor podcasts.

Some episodes featured on the podcast include professor of Bible and theology, Dr. Dan Kroeze, discussing the Gospel of John; professor of youth ministry, Dr. Brian Telzerow, presenting on relational

ministry; and Dr. Parler talking about polyamory and the Bible.

While some of these podcasts are formatted as question and answer interviews, others are recordings of lectures given at Faculty and Alumni Scholar Day, including one given by Kuyper alumna Betsy DeVries (2012) on preaching and eschatology.

“There is a value to equipping and learning that goes far beyond getting a degree.”

The name “Kuyper Collective” intentionally points to the fact that Kuyper is a community of learning and teaching. According to Parler, “Kuyper is an academic community, a spiritual community, and a community that is engaged around both big ideas and questions of practical application—we are

a praxis and service-focused ministry.” The Kuyper Collective seeks to reach students, professors, staff, alumni, church leaders, laypeople and anyone else connected to the church around issues that matter to them.

“There is a value to equipping and learning that goes far beyond getting a degree,” said Parler. “I would love for us to think about Kuyper as an equipping and educating institution first and a degree-granting institution second. The Kuyper Collective is just one very small step in that direction.”

Eventually, the Kuyper Collective would like to feature more alumni, current students, and other members of the Kuyper community. They are also open to topic requests.

As the Kuyper Collective continues to grow, their goals are to produce more content, engage more deeply with the community, and help the church to respond well to current issues. “Our hope is that this will be a tool God uses to further His kingdom. But for now,” said Parler with a smile, “we’re a podcast.”

Using Business Skills to Help Spread the Gospel

Brittany (Nichols) Aldridge (2017) has been putting her business leadership degree to good use in her work as a donor relations associate at Words of Hope in Grand Rapids, MI.



Brittany (Nichols) Aldridge

According to her, while she initially intended to pursue a degree in English at Kuyper, “I found my passion and calling for business in Kuyper’s Business Leadership Program.

Soon after graduating, Aldridge heard the Words of Hope president, Jon Opgenorth, speak at her church about the work they were doing to spread the gospel in hard-to-reach places. Words of Hope began as a radio program, and now they also offer print devotionals, produce programs on YouTube, develop apps, and use social media to reach as many people as possible in their heart language. Aldridge says, “The whole time he was talking, I thought to myself, ‘It would be

so cool to work there. I hope that I can do that one day.” A few months later, she was hired as a donor relations associate.

In her position, Aldridge communicates with donors and churches supporting Words of Hope. She gives updates on the ministry’s work and explains the needs of the organization.

“What brings me the most joy in what I do,” says Aldridge, “is knowing that lives are being changed by the grace of God because of what Words of Hope provides in these hard places.” Aldridge is inspired by the field leaders who seek to spread the gospel in different countries. She loves the challenge of raising money for an organization she believes in.

According to Aldridge, her time at Kuyper taught her the importance of being a good steward of people’s resources, a skill she uses every day at Words of Hope. As she looks to the future, she says, “My hope is that the Lord is leading me to make a lasting impact at Words of Hope. But at the end of the day, I just want to serve the Lord with all my heart in everything that I do.”

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STUDENTS TO WATCH

Lydia Goulet

I have two brothers and three sisters. We grew up in a Christ-loving home with the Bible being read and taught. We would pray before bed every night. We were all pretty busy doing different sports, church groups or after school activities. I was a baton twirler from third grade through my senior year in high school. I participated in marching band, choir, theatre, youth group and honors society. Toward the end of high school, I began struggling with anxiety, exhaustion, irritability and panic attacks. The night before my 18th birthday, I had the biggest panic attack of my life. My dad came in and held me until it stopped. In that moment, on the night before I would become an adult, God gave me this tangible, grace-filled image and memory of my father just holding me and telling me it was going to be okay.

College was not what I needed at that point: God was. He also had, at this point, gifted me with a loving mentor, Robin. She got it—the sadness, the anxiety. She spoke my language and still does. She told me I was loved and valuable, no matter how I acted. In her words, “We are the love of Christ.”

Soon after, my dad decided we were going to visit a friend who had moved with her family to work in a ministry in New Hampshire called His Mansion Ministries, a Christ-centered healing community for men and women ages 18-35 who struggle with all manner of life-controlling issues. While there, my friend had me read Lamentations on my own and Ecclesiastes together. It was the first time I discovered that the Bible held my feelings, my sadness, and my anger in it. I was invited to feel.

I was accepted into His Mansion's program that September. It was a hard place to be with a lot of structure and a lot of work. I met the heart of God, of Jesus Christ, while at His Mansion. As a child I had longed to meet Jesus. I had prayed the sinner's prayer, but it was not until I was desperate, nearly hitting rock bottom in a rehabilitation program, that I met and knew Him. It has been worth it. At times, I still struggle, but I know the Lord above and am working to center my life around His Word.

After graduating from the program in January 2015, I moved home and started taking classes at Schoolcraft Community College and discovered not just a love for psychology, but a desire to help others who struggle. I also rekindled an old love for literature and found the freedom and empowerment to study something the Lord gave me a passion for. So, with that in mind, I began looking for a school that would actively help me pursue the Lord's will in my life.

I googled schools that were Bible-centered, small, affordable, and had my fields of study: literature and psychology. It was love at first sight with Kuyper's interdisciplinary studies program. I never imagined I would find something that would shed light, make room for my complicated mind, and so gloriously match my heart for learning and deliberate nature that pushes against the status quo.

At Kuyper I found a lot of nontraditional biblical teaching, which is very exciting. Our professors are diligent thinkers and work hard to be faithful to every part of Scripture—while showing me a lot of grace. I was also met with clear honesty—students are upfront and authentic, they have integrity, and are genuine. Kuyper is a school where when reading “Grief Observed” by C.S. Lewis and discussing it in class, tissues and chocolate will be passed around as well as hugs and prayers.

When I came to Kuyper, I thought counselor would be the only role for me. Kuyper has opened up the idea of being a minister and more specifically, a chaplain. I don't know exactly where God will take me in my vocation, but Kuyper has altered or clarified the direction. Next September will mark five years since I entered a rehabilitation program, and I will, I believe, be entering my first year of seminary. God has been, and is so, faithful and personal. I wouldn't have thought it was possible. There was a time when I couldn't see past high school, and here I am because of Him.



CLASS **2020**

HOME **Redford, Michigan**

MAJOR **Interdisciplinary Studies—Psychology and Literature**