

dig deeper

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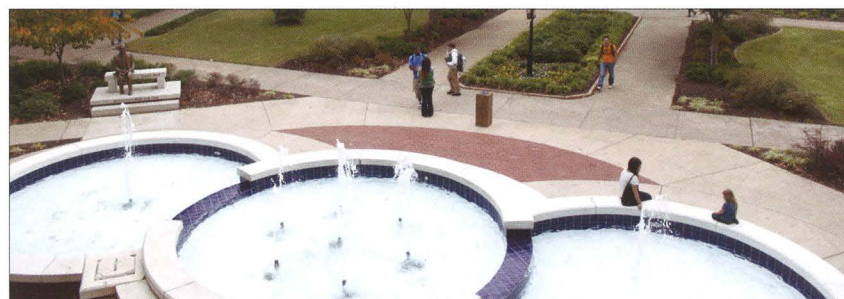
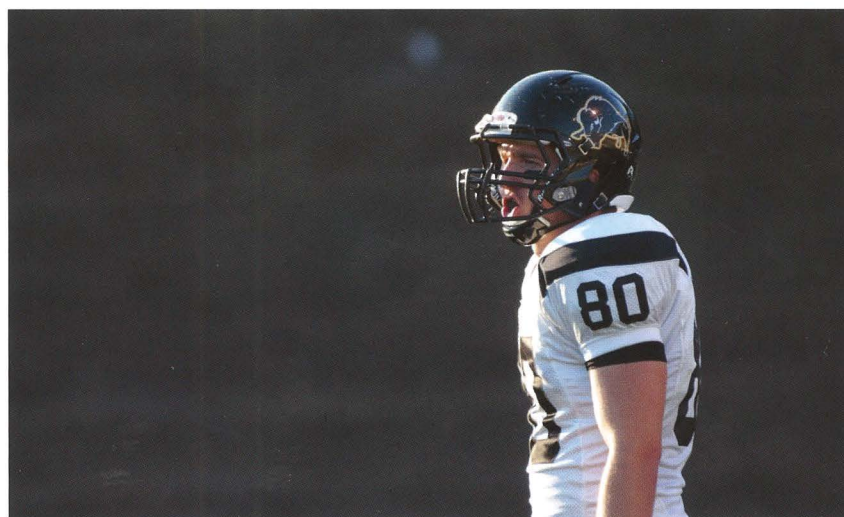
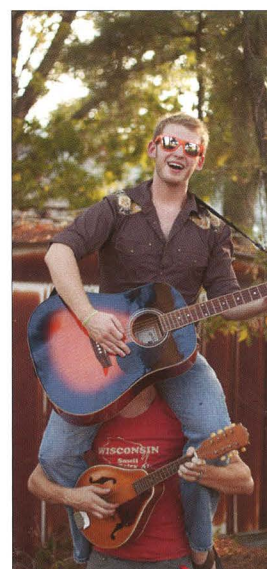
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we often get stuck in a place that becomes too comfortable, too familiar.

we live a shallow life on the surface.

but there is more, and there always has been more.

right now is our time to find something deeper.

find in ourselves the motives behind our actions.

what is our purpose?

why do we want to succeed?

who are we living for?

what are our priorities?

the

it is when we answer these questions, we get a glimpse of the big picture.

we see that everything below the surface is what we have been missing.

we see the potential that cannot be ignored.

the gifts God has given us.

the influence we have on those around us.

and the power of our actions.



re is more

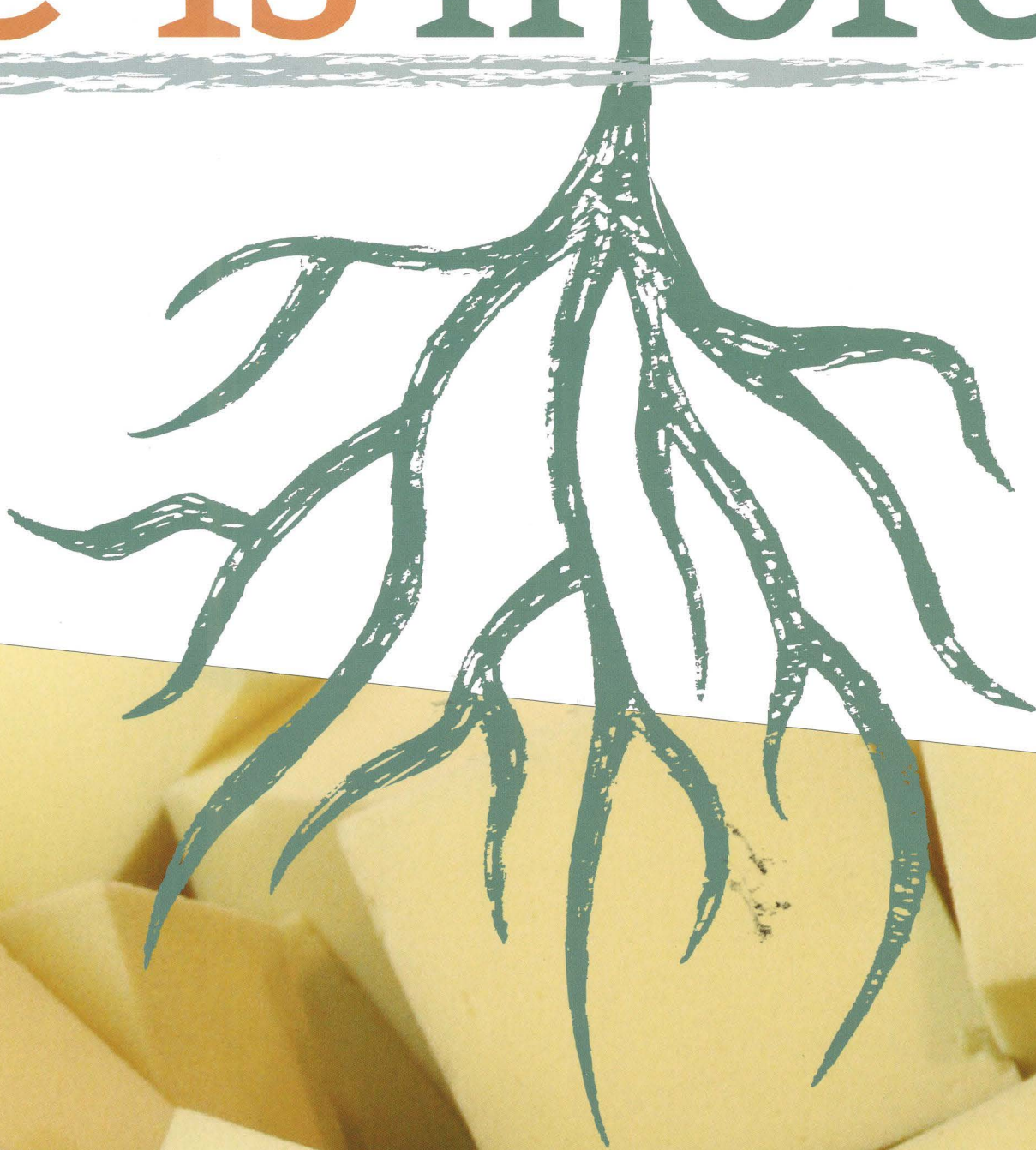


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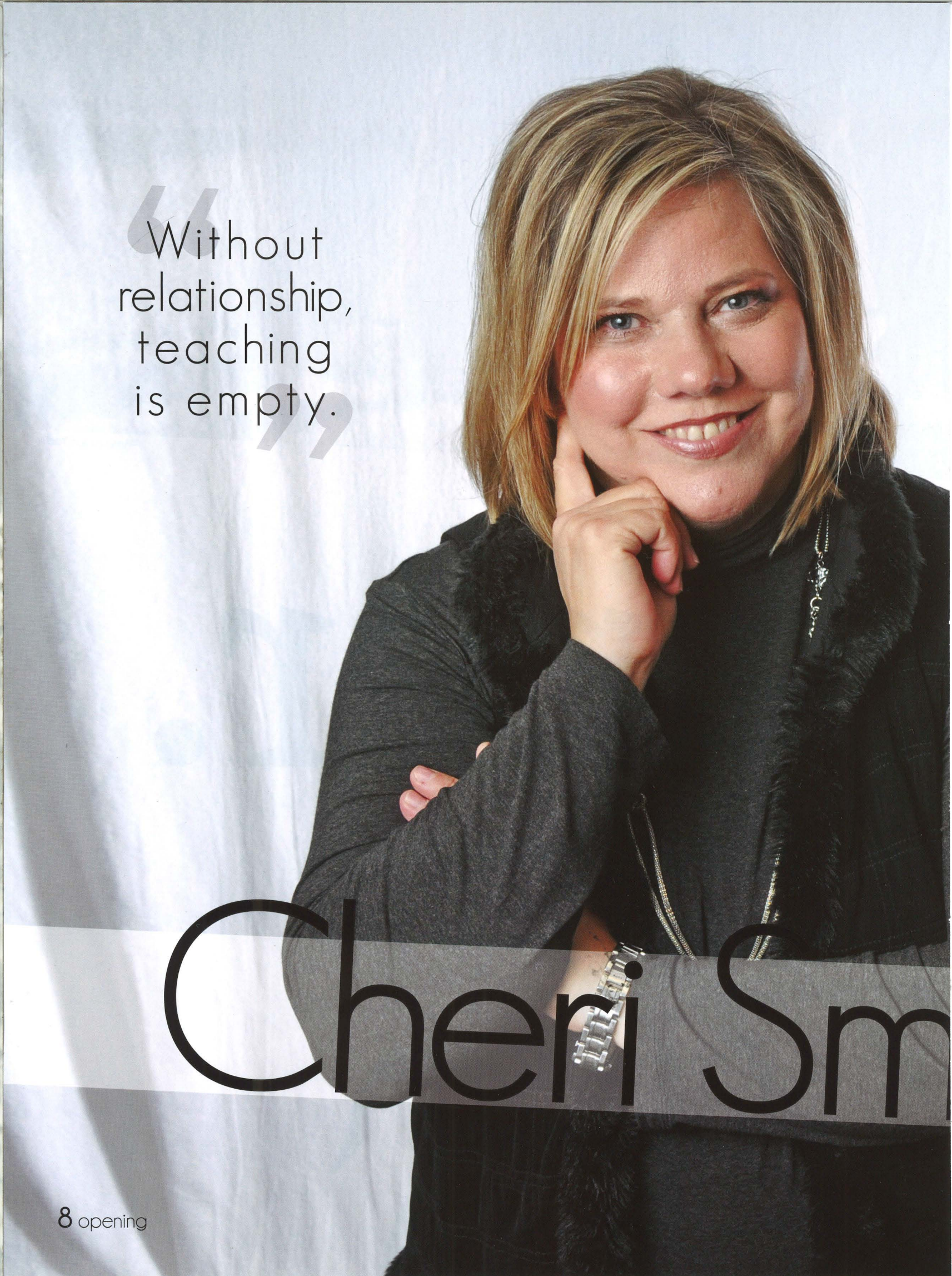
we need to...



Photo by Jon Yoder

eeper.



A portrait of a woman with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a dark jacket with a fur collar. She is resting her chin on her hand. The background is a light, textured surface.

“Without
relationship,
teaching
is empty.”

Cheri Sm

At some point

in our lives we have all been influenced by that special teacher, whether it be at an early age or later in life. This year, the Petit Jean staff has dedicated the yearbook to one such person, professor of education Dr. Cheri Smith, for her unswerving dedication to teaching and her steadfast love for her students and for Christ. Editor in chief Nicole Sullenger had the opportunity to hear from Smith about her passions and experiences in her profession.

N: Tell me a little bit about yourself.

C: I grew up in a family of teachers. My daddy was a preacher, my mother taught elementary music, my two older brothers are preachers and both of my older sisters are elementary school teachers. The church in which I grew up in Jacksonville, Ark., had a huge bus ministry. I taught on the bus and started teaching Bible classes when I was 12 years old. My family taught me to love learning and encouraged me to share that love with others.

N: How did you start teaching at Harding?

C: I graduated from Harding in 1984 with a degree in special education and elementary education. After graduation, I started teaching right away, and although the first years of teaching were challenging, I quickly realized that I had found my calling: teaching and encouraging children to reach their potential. After teaching seven years in public schools, I had my first child and decided to stay home for a while with him. I have never regretted that decision. Another son and a daughter followed. Many people said that I would never advance in a teaching career if I took time off for my family, but I believed that God would give me the life that He wanted me to have, and I am very thankful for the time I had with my children when they were young. Our family moved back to Searcy in 1995. I began my work with Harding by supervising student teachers part-time, which led to serving as an adjunct professor for the College of Education, which led to a full-time position in 2004.

N: What is the best part of being a professor?

C: The best part of being a professor is being able to develop strong relationships with my students. I truly care about them — their interests, their worries, their dreams. Without relationship, teaching is empty.

N: Outside of teaching, what things are you involved with on campus?

C: I am on the executive committee for Bisons for Christ. I love that day of service because I can really get to know the students who are working on the same project with me. It is a way to develop those deeper relationships that I value.

N: In your job, where is the place you get to most influence your students and make a difference in their lives??

C: Sometimes I think I make the most difference when I am counseling and talking to students one-on-one in my office, talking about their goals, their struggles, their hopes. However, I hope that my teaching in the classroom helps my students to develop into teachers who will go out from here and bless the lives of others. As idealistic as it sounds, that is why I teach at the university level. Every August, when the school supply section is overflowing at Wal-Mart, I am drawn to those "first day of school" moments in local schools. I miss having my own elementary school classroom, children with new backpacks, lunch boxes and #2 pencils. I think the day that I stop missing that, though, is the day I should stop teaching here. How can I inspire my students to love teaching if I don't still believe in it as a profession, if I wouldn't want to go back into a public school classroom? So, every August, I still believe I can make a difference for children around the world if I teach my students well.

N: On the same note, how do the students you work with influence you and what do you learn from them?

C: I truly believe that I learn as much or more from my students as they learn from me. I am inspired every day by their desire to improve the lives of children. They teach me new ways to teach, especially with technology, and they broaden my views with their global perspectives. They become more than my students — they become my colleagues, as we all strive to be better teachers.

N: What is the coolest thing you've been able to do in your lifetime?

C: Some of the best times in my life were spent living in France. My sister and brother-in-law, Buddy and Maurine Jones, were missionaries in Nantes, France for 12 years, and I spent almost every summer during my college years living in France with them, serving the church in Nantes and learning from them. They have been a huge influence in my life.

N: What is typically the best part of your day?

C: I have always loved dusk, right before it gets dark. Typically, I am heading for home then, and most days, as I'm walking to my car and then driving home to be with my family, I am looking back on a day full of interactions with students and colleagues that I believe will affect the lives of people for the better. What more could anyone ask for in a profession? That at the end of the day, you know you are where God wants you to be, serving Him while hopefully blessing the lives of others.

N: What would you say your passion is?

C: My passion is Jesus and Him crucified. Nothing else gives me the strength that knowing Jesus does. That passion is what moves me forward and gives me the passion to teach, to live. Without it, I would be lost and without hope. I would have nothing to give. ■

Nicole Sophia Sullenger

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