

A RIVIER CONNECTION AT EVERY TURN: SUE CATER '88/'11G (From *Rivier Today*, Summer 2012)

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Photo by Jodie Andruskevich

John Lennon said it best: “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” Just ask Sue Cater '88/'11G, who always dreamed of being a teacher, but switched to nursing early in her career.

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- Sue Cater '88/'11G, Clinical nurse manager, Manchester Community Health Center

There have been other thwarted plans in Cater’s life as well, though some might call it simply being open to change and a willingness to go where life and other people have led her. Take, for example, her college search process in the 1980s. The Nashua native had pretty much dismissed Rivier because it was so close to home. Then a co-worker persuaded her to attend an Open House where she met [the late] Sr. Joseph Landry. From that point, everything changed. “We made an instant connection, and I knew I was going to come here,” says Cater.

Since that chance meeting with Sr. Joseph, Cater has completed two degrees at Rivier and is currently working on a third. In 1988, she earned a bachelor’s in social science studies with a certificate in education and in 2011, she completed a master’s in mental health counseling. She is now enrolled in the Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Program.

Cater’s Rivier experience seems to run deeper than most. At nearly every turn in the road, there’s been a person connected with Rivier who has made a difference, stretching all the way back to her fifth grade teacher, Pauline Jambard '59, who first inspired her to want to be an educator. “Pauline had a passion for learning and the ability to reach her students by thinking outside the box,” notes Sue. “She was willing to find another way to explain a concept to those of us who couldn’t grasp it.” As a junior high student, she also recalls her father, Robert Cater '83, typing papers at home as he earned a degree in business in Rivier’s evening program.

Today, her passion for Rivier centers around people like Sr. Joseph who taught and mentored her, and her fellow students who she still counts as close friends. “I’m not sure that students today really appreciate how much the Sisters sacrificed to make Rivier what it is,” she says, her eyes filled with earnestness.

Lessons in Management

Cater is now a registered nurse who recently accepted a job as clinical nurse manager for the Manchester Community Health Center, which provides primary care services for the uninsured and under-insured. In this role, she met another person connected to Rivier—her supervisor, Director of Operations Kris McCracken '99G, who earned an M.B.A. from Rivier.

In her new role, Cater supervises nurses and medical assistants, handles a department budget, and is responsible for nursing competencies. She’s had no formal business training, but says that her management style has been influenced by Dr. Jacqueline Landry, who was Dean of the College when she was an undergraduate.

“To this day, I remember her telling me: ‘If you are consistent and you are fair, they may not like you, but they will respect that you are fair,’” says Cater. Dr. Landry was a strong role model and inspiration for Cater. “I always wanted to be like her,” she says. “She was smart, quick to think on her feet, and she had a presence and made a difference.”

From Teaching to Nursing

Sue started her career in 1988 hoping to make a difference in the lives of high school students by sharing her passion for history. But the job market at the time did not support her dream to become a classroom

teacher. After a short stint at Mascenic Regional High School, she found herself teaching basic life saving classes for the American Red Cross. That position, combined with a job as a nursing assistant at Nashua's Hunt Home, eventually led her to pursue a career in nursing.

She earned her LPN at St. Joseph's School of Nursing. One of her instructors there was Dr. Paula Williams, now Chairperson of Rivier's Division of Nursing.

At one point in her nursing career, Sue took a job as Head Nurse at the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary's Provincial House in Manchester. "It was the most humbling job I've ever had," she says, explaining that she found it difficult to witness the suffering of some of the dedicated women she had come to know on campus.

Reassessing Dreams and Goals

Her career in nursing clearly calls for compassion and caring, two traits she learned from her mother, Marge. The two shared a mother-daughter bond so close that, "I could think about her and my phone would ring," says Cater. "She taught me to always find at least one good thing about someone...to focus on the good in people and to find common ground."

When her mother passed away in 2008, she began to reassess her life, a process that led her to enroll in Rivier's Mental Health Counseling program. "I've always had a passion for psychology and always wanted to become a mental health counselor," she says. While some have tried to steer her away from the field, she is holding on to her dream to one day open a private practice.

As part of her 1,000-hour internship, Cater served as an intake counselor at Nashua's Keystone Hall, which she describes as "a great agency that does so much with so little." She also briefly worked in the Harbor Homes Veterans First program before accepting the more clinical position at the Manchester Community Health Center.

Travel and Reconnecting

In her free time, Cater loves to scuba dive and hopes to someday explore the depths of Dublin Lake in Dublin, N.H. She also travels, sometimes with Rivier friends. She recalls one memorable trip to Italy when she became enthralled with the Poor Clares, a cloistered order in Assisi who opened their doors to Jewish refugees during World War II. "It's an inspiring story about women of deep faith," she says, with the same reverence she uses to talk about the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.

As for her Rivier connections, they are as strong as ever. Cater is still surprised at the success of her 20th reunion. "It's amazing how many of us were in the area and didn't know it. A ton of us reconnected and five years later, we're still talking," she says. ■