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By Gillian Panigot

God Behind THE SCENES

Gena Gordon grew up with her mother and father in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Her mother, in particular, placed a high priority on Gena's spiritual life. Gena was at Sabbath school every week, even if she was the only one there, and she was always at church, even if her mother was unable to attend.

◀ *Gena and Margaux pose for a photo in the Rec Center — Gena was helping to prepare breakfast, and it was Margaux' first time teaching Sabbath school.*

Courtesy Gena Gordon



▲ Gena speaks for Proximity Vespers in March 2018.

Clarissa Carbungco

When Gena was very young — ages 3, 4 and 5, she would line up her teddy bears like they were in pews and preach to them. “I would do the whole church service,” she laughs. “I would go back and forth between the ‘pews’ and the ‘front’ to do responsive reading.”

As Gena grew, she joined Pathfinders and attended Adventist Youth (AY). At first, she felt pressured to participate. But, as she made friends, she began to enjoy the activities and chose to become more and more involved, eventually accepting leadership positions in both programs.

Once in high school, Gena planned to study Business in college. During her final year of high school, she suddenly decided to study Theology in college as well. As Gena began to review school options, she received an Andrews University pamphlet in the mail with photos that advertised study abroad opportunities. This greatly appealed to her, as it had been something she was looking for in a university.

She also had hoped her college years would allow her to meet people her age who were serious about their Christian walks. “In high school, a lot of my friends were Christian but from different denominations. This meant lots of different opinions, and I was confused. I still

wanted to surround myself with Christians and further be able to flesh out spiritual topics and issues.”

Eventually, Gena’s college choices narrowed down to Cornell University and Andrews University. Gena’s parents favored the Ivy League Cornell, while Gena felt that Andrews was right for her. And then the decision was made. “Cornell sent me a rejection letter, and I was the happiest person ever,” she says. “I ended up at Andrews because every other school rejected me or messed up my application. Corrections would mean I would have had to wait another year. I took it as a sign that God really wanted me to go to Andrews.”



MARGAUX TAN GREW UP IN BERRIEN SPRINGS, Michigan, with her mother, father and older brother. Like Gena, Margaux was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home so was very familiar with the beliefs of the Adventist church. However, she was never strongly encouraged to be involved in church programs. On her own, she chose to join Pathfinders, but eventually she stopped enjoying the experience.

In fifth grade, Margaux told several adults that she did not believe in God. However, no one took her seriously because she was only 10 years old. “For a while there, I didn’t even feel like I was connecting with the God I was raised with,” she says, “so I didn’t care. I didn’t see a need.”

Then, at age 15, Margaux lost her best friend who took his own life. “That shook me. I didn’t see how it correlated, because he loved God.”

As Margaux began her process of deciding which college to attend, she felt limited in her choices. The tragedy she had faced in high school resulted in difficult junior and senior years, and she did not feel academically or mentally prepared to attend most schools. Andrews University was close to home and, because her mother worked at the University, Margaux would receive financial assistance.

She chose to attend Andrews, not because it was even close to her first preference but because it could serve as a steppingstone. Margaux planned to major in Global Studies, get her grades up and transfer out.



WHEN GENA STARTED AT ANDREWS (her first experience in a Christian school system), she signed up for a Business major and a Theology minor. During the second semester of her freshman year, she switched to a Theology major with a Business minor. Finally, she stopped fighting God’s prodding and dropped Business altogether so she could graduate in four years with a degree in Theology. “I thoroughly enjoyed the experiences I had in my church helping with youth ministry,” she says. “I was able to make a difference and thought I could do so much greater if I really knew about the Bible.”

Gena was at a high point in her spiritual walk and became very involved in the spiritual life on campus, even starting her own small group. Eventually, she took some time away from Andrews and, when she returned, she took on fewer responsibilities. Because she was less active, she found herself wondering how God planned to use her until one of her friends told her she should be the Andrews University Student Association (AUSA) religious vice president (RVP). A few nights later, Gena

woke up and felt God telling her to pray for the campus. “I thought to myself, ‘Only RVPs do this.’” Gena ran for RVP, and the other two candidates dropped out on the day of the speeches. Gena was affirmed that God wanted her in this role, and she began to pray for even one person to come to Christ over the next year.



ANDREWS WAS ALSO MARGAUX’ FIRST EXPERIENCE in a Christian school system and, by her sophomore year, she decided not to return. She made plans to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology to major in Advertising and Marketing Communications. She even filled out an application. But then plans began to fall through.

Because she was still signed up for a European study tour at Andrews, she was convinced to return and take Global Studies classes. The only class she enjoyed was her Intro to Film course. “It was hard work, but after every single project I had a feeling of accomplishment and pride in what had been created. That consistency had never been felt before,” she says. “A couple of the film people told me I should think about switching majors. It was the only thing I really wanted to do, and that was the first time something felt right about my major.”

Shiekainah Decano



▲ The 2018–2019 AUSA officers, including Gena and Margaux, are recognized in Pioneer Memorial Church on Thursday, April 26, 2018.



▲ Gena and Margaux prepare to tell their story.

Darren Heslop

Margaux began to feel a tweak of a change in her spiritual life, as well. For the first two-and-a-half years she had been at Andrews, spirituality and Christianity were not on her radar, but then she began to notice just a bit of God's presence. After many conversations with a close friend about spirituality and different churches and religions, Margaux's interest to join a church resurfaced. So she made a deal with God. She would make an effort to bond with Him for an entire week; if He did not respond, she was going to leave the church and never come back.

Margaux spent the week talking to God daily about anything and everything happening in her life, and He did draw near to her. "God gave me what I didn't know I needed most — peace," she says. "That week completely changed my life."

IN JANUARY 2018, MARGAUX STARTED ATTENDING CHURCH AND VESPERS SERVICES. A couple months later, Margaux heard Gena preach at one of the vespers services. Afterwards, Margaux approached Gena and told her how meaningful the message had been. Gena says, "I always hope at least one person is blessed, so I was really glad to see that happen."

Gena and Margaux officially met during the 2018–2019 school year when they both became involved in AUSA — Gena as the religious vice president and Margaux as the student services director.

On AUSA, their work allowed them to form a real relationship. Whenever they were setting up for events, they seemed to always end up in close proximity to each other and would begin to make small talk. Over time, the dialogue easily deepened and they learned about each other's spiritual journeys.

Margaux made a comment to Gena about becoming a youth pastor. Margaux said, "I mentioned to her that ever since I was little, somebody was like, 'You should be a youth pastor.' Even when I was an atheist. And I was like, 'how is that possible? What? A youth pastor of what?'"

Gena adds, "I told her, 'Yeah, you're gonna be a youth pastor.'"

They also began to discuss the Adventist church. Margaux had completed an internship with the Western Australia Conference and, during that time, worked in a Baptist church. She became friends with the people there, who told her that Adventists really seem to keep to themselves. She wished that the Adventist church could connect with other Christian churches overall. When she shared her experience with Gena, the two began to consider how different methods of evangelism and discipleship might appeal to more people.

Eventually Gena asked Margaux to teach Sabbath school. Margaux became increasingly involved in spiritual programming, continuing to volunteer for Sabbath school and other events. When she studied to lead a Sabbath school about the story of Saul in Acts, she had a major change in perspective.

Margaux had always thought you had to be meek and complacent to lead someone else spiritually, but that's not her personality. "With the story of Saul, God didn't ask him to change anything about himself. God just asked Saul to change the team he was fighting for. God can still use people. He made you the way you are for a reason. Realizing I can be the way I am and still be a servant for God has really helped my spirituality and how I carry myself."

Gena had still been praying that one person would connect to Christ during her time as RVP. It turned out Margaux was that person. But Margaux' connection to Christ did not happen through what many consider to be typical evangelism.

"Usually it's like this seminar, this presentation and then people come into the church but then they don't really stay because they don't make friends," says Gena. "I think that's why I didn't like church when I was younger. I had no friends at first. With Margaux, I never approached this thinking, 'I'm going to bring her to God.' I've learned that with evangelism, we should never skip the friendship stage."

"The time spent with Gena really cemented my beliefs in God," says Margaux. "I feel that's the intended nature of evangelism and discipleship. It's not supposed to feel forced or anything. Just be friends — be patient and pray — and then God will do the rest. Never underestimate what God is doing behind the scenes."

Gena, now a graduate student studying Theology, and Margaux, a senior Documentary Film major, both want to continue reaching out to people who are not Adventists and who may not even be Christians.

Margaux specifically wants to focus on youth development in the church. "I want to be the person I didn't have when I was first questioning spiritual things. A lot of people told me to just pray about it, but that wasn't enough for me. I want to experiment with different ways to disciple and try to see God in ways I haven't typically seen. For me, going forward, it's more about showing the characteristics of God in all situations and not just where the label of 'God' might not be welcomed. You shouldn't have to say that God lives within you for other people to know."

Gena advises others to try something new and allow God to show you a different side of Himself. She realizes that in the past, had she known Margaux's journey from the start, she might not have chosen to be friends with her. But now she has seen how God can use anyone and work in anyone. "Connect with others," she says. "When you get to hear other people's thoughts and their convictions and experiences, it helps you on your own journey. Be a friend, be kind, and God will work." ■

Gillian Panigot, Media Communications manager and FOCUS editor, University Communication

Be a friend, be kind, and God will work.

COMMITTED TO WORSHIP

By Hannah Gallant

The lights faded as the sounds of the welcome video filled the expansive space of the Howard Performing Arts Center. Keyboardist Trey Bosfield sat on the stage, sandwiched between two other keyboardists, watching the video from an angle.

“We did not come to be entertained or seek a show. We came to worship Yahweh,” said the narrator in the voiceover, the congregation quiet below. For Trey, and many others in that auditorium, this was true.

Trey has been playing as a keyboardist for New Life, a Sabbath worship service on the Andrews University campus, for the past year, and this experience helped him grow closer to God.

“At first when I started playing on the Andrews campus, part of me wanted recognition for it, but I’ve learned when playing for God, don’t play for recognition,” he reflects. “When I play at New Life, I play the best I can because I’m playing for the Lord, so I don’t try and overpower other band members or be a showboat.”

Now, graduation weekend Sabbath, was Trey’s last time to play for a New Life service. He sat quietly, in a white shirt and tie, graduation cords draped over his shoulders.

Chaplain Michael Polite walked onto the stage to greet the congregation and congratulate the graduates. Trey and the other members of the band provided soft accompaniment.

Following an ordination of eldership and a passionate prayer, Trey began playing the lead part of Kirk Franklin’s “He’s Able.” The singers entered the stage from the left and the audience stood in worship, hands interlocked across the aisles, as the sounds of the song filled the space.



Music has been in Trey’s life as long as he can remember. Born in Freeport, Grand Bahama, in the islands of the Bahamas, he grew up with his parents and younger brother. Trey’s mother works at the container port in the commercial department and his father owns a solar power business, providing and installing solar panels for clients.

“Both of my parents each have a lot of brothers and sisters, resulting in me having a myriad of aunts and uncles and a variety of cousins,” says Trey.



Darren Heslop

▲ Trey playing for New Life on graduation Sabbath



Sheikainah Decano

▲ Trey playing for Chapel on Thursday, April 4

PLAYING AT NEW LIFE ALSO ENSURES THAT I AM IN CHURCH AND, SINCE I'M THERE, I LISTEN TO THE SERMONS WHICH USUALLY IMPACT ME ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

"Music was always a part of my mother's side of the family. All of my mother's siblings could play at least one instrument or sing. They were all actively involved in the church back home. And my father's mom was a music teacher, however, I never got a chance to meet her as she passed away before I was born."

As a child, Trey sat in church and tapped his hands to the same drum beat being played for praise and worship. "My first memory of music was my mom and dad buying me a toy snare drum for Christmas when I was like three years old," he explains. He played on that drum until it broke. Trey also tried piano lessons at age five. That lasted for two whole weeks. The most formal musical training he had was from his aunt who taught him to play scales on the piano.

Before coming to Andrews, Trey played at church functions near his home. "I started playing the drum set in church when I was 15. I practiced and learned the songs using pillows in my room until my parents bought me my first actual drum set. Because I loved the drums, I decided to join the steel pan band at school."



Trey played along with the New Life band, and the song leaders shifted into a powerful rendition of "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow." Eventually the music faded and Chaplain Polite stepped onto the stage again.

"Graduation is no small thing," he said, inviting each graduate to stand. Behind him, Trey stood with a few other members of the praise team. The auditorium swelled with applause, as Chaplain June Price joined Chaplain Polite to offer another warm welcome to the graduates.

When the vocalists started the praise set, the musicians followed. Trey focused on his playing, enjoying the worship as the singers and those in attendance lifted up their voices.

"Experiencing New Life praise and worship is always pretty good, but there is just something different about it when you play for it," Trey says. "In my case, it feels like I get to express my worship through my playing, and this helps other people get in the mood to worship."

The praise time continued, moving into "Victory is Mine" and then "In the Name of Jesus." Members of the congregation lifted their hands in praise as Trey and the others played the opening notes to "Oh, Lord, How Excellent."

"Playing for New Life one last time felt almost nostalgic," Trey reflects. "I remember thinking how nice it was to be playing my last service in the Howard Center and how good it felt to see the audience standing up and worshipping as well. It's always good to see the impact music has on the audience during praise and worship."

The song service ended with a moving rendition of "Hallelujah, Salvation and Glory." As the singers left the stage, the speaker walked on, inviting the crowd to stand and join hands. He read a passage from the book of Esther and began to talk about seasons of life. "It's true that this might not be your season," he explained. "The reality of the matter is that some of us will have to go through a little bit of hardship for just a little longer . . . but the good news is that no season lasts forever."



For Trey, his season at Andrews University would end when he graduated the very next day with his Bachelor's

degree in Mechanical Engineering. Years ago, he had decided to attend Andrews because he was interested in meeting new people from different cultures, he hoped to grow in his relationship with God through the Andrews experience, and the snow!

"I heard it snowed over here all the time. As a Bahamian boy who's never seen snow, that was a very enticing reason," he recalls.

While at Andrews, Trey continued in his love for music by playing for the Deliverance Mass Choir (DMC) and for the Black Student Christian Forum's Impact vespers.

In addition to playing music, Trey also enjoyed other extracurricular activities. "My favorite and most memorable non-music extracurricular activity was doing the Passion Play my freshman year," he recalls. "It was really tiring but really fun and I would've done it again."

During his junior year, Trey tried out for a spot as a New Life musician and didn't make the cut. Prior to this, Trey had only played for New Life as part of the DMC Band and had been hoping to play regularly for New Life. However, during his senior year the music director decided to give him a chance to play. Since then he has played whenever the music director asks him to.

"Music is really important when it comes to worship, in my opinion," says Trey. "New Life doesn't necessarily have one specific band, so jamming out with different musicians was always fun and was a great way to make new connections and friends!"

His experiences at New Life taught Trey several things but especially dedication. "I had to be dedicated to learn the New Life songs in the week and then wake up early on the Sabbath mornings I was playing so I could move and set up the very heavy instruments."

"Playing at New Life also ensures that I am in church and, since I'm there, I listen to the sermons which usually impact me one way or the other," he states. "Overall, New Life was most definitely a commitment for me — a joyous one though."



As the sermon ended, Trey and the other musicians began to play softly, and the congregation stood in worship for the closing song: "You are the source of my strength, You are the strength of my life, I lift my hands in total praise to you."

The graduation Sabbath service came to an end as the final notes of "Amen" rang out.



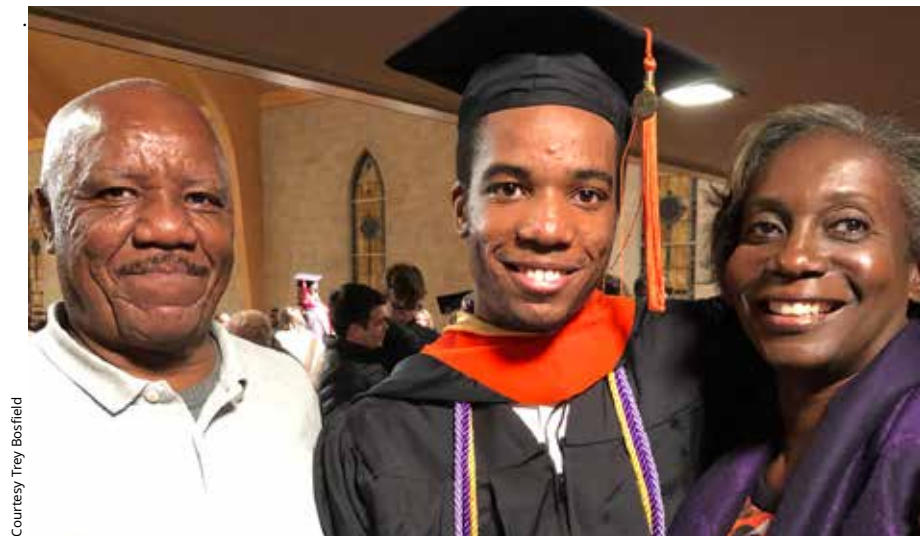
Although Trey has completed his time at Andrews, he will continue to find ways to be involved in music. He loves getting into the moment when he plays and always hopes that what he plays will make someone's day a little better, even if only briefly. "Music is my way of expressing my feelings, expressing what I can't or just don't want to say," he says.

After graduation, Trey plans to play in his local church and work with music software to broaden his skills at making tracks and beats. He also is interested in learning to play the bass guitar.

His advice to others who like music is, "Practice constantly and try to get yourself out there. Try playing music whether it be in church, a small band or anything. Music is a great way to connect and make friends."

Trey also recognizes God's hand in his time at Andrews. "God has been leading throughout my life at Andrews, just based on the people I interact with and friends I've made. He's put them in my life to help guide me. Even though it's pretty scary going off and trying to be an adult now, I'm ready to face the next chapter in life. God hasn't led me down the wrong path yet, so I know I'll be fine no matter how He chooses to lead me." ■

Hannah Gallant, University Communication student writer



▲ Trey poses for a photo with his parents, Carlton Bosfield and Thelma Sturrrup-Bosfield, at the spring graduation Consecration service.