

Framing Narratives | BY CARMEN LAU

In a time for new beginnings, springtime envelopes my home with a lime green canopy. With varied perspectives, this issue of the journal examines Creation, the beginning that, for us, can foreshadow new beginnings. Recently, a few ideas about Genesis have invaded my awareness.

First is the idea that God uses words and deeds to create people. Chapter One demonstrates the power of a word, when God speaks humanity into existence. Chapter Two presents the power of a deed, when God shapes man out of clay. These two stories show God overseeing creation by using words and deeds, actions of which we too are capable. Could this be a way that each of us could be a part of making something new?

For the *Spectrum* reader, who values worshipping God with the mind, one can approach the study of Genesis in tandem with hermeneutics, biology, history, archaeology, and more. Yet, when any academic field of study is considered in dialogue with the Creation Story, I have noticed that some will tend to fidget and be anxious. Perhaps, this reflects a fear that using an intellectual lens might threaten our *raison d'être*. In my view, Tonstad's *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* gives theological robustness to Sabbath-keeping that can neutralize denominational existential fear. If I could offer a summary of that book, it would be this: By marking one day a week as hallowed, God shows His commitment, from the beginning, to being faithful to all of creation.

Building on Tonstad's lost meaning of the seventh day, I value framing seventh-day Sabbath keeping as a mark of *Constantinian Resistance*, and this, to me,

contributes to a full-bodied reason for denominational existence. Constantine did more than codify a day change, he changed the ethos of Christianity. He changed the emphasis from a people worshipping a loving, faithful God who cared for the "least of these," to an organization aligned with the powerful and willing to act politically and coercively, even to the point of violence.

One other idea about Genesis comes from some conversations with Rwandan genocide survivors a few months ago; I gained profound respect for the power of the creation story as a peacemaking framing narrative. Several people told me of their appreciation, and respect, for an Adventist pastor in Kigali, Jonas Barame, who went door to door twenty-five years ago when violence was beginning in the city. The pastor's message to church members emphasized that there was one humanity and one ethnicity, and he used the Creation

Story to validate the idea. This premise continues to be a guiding story for Christians in Rwanda who seek to live peacefully now.

The Bible, a collection of many sorts of divinely inspired writings, contains many stories. Stories can be used to frame reality, when they shape cognition, emotion, and group dynamics. I heard the power of a story in Rwanda. I pray that those who read this issue of the journal will uncover the framing narrative that God intended in the Genesis Creation Story.

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Wandering, Not Lost

BY BARRY CASEY

I BELIEVE IN ALL THAT HAS NEVER YET BEEN SPOKEN.
I WANT TO FREE WHAT WAITS WITHIN ME.
SO THAT WHAT NO ONE HAS DARED TO WISH FOR
MAY FOR ONCE SPRING CLEAR
WITHOUT MY CONTRIVING.¹

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

During my year of college in England in the early 1970s, I hitchhiked as often as I could. The roads were less crowded then. I dare say it was safer, too, and students wearing their college colors could almost always get a ride with lorry drivers or other travelers. On a fine autumn afternoon, I set out from my college near Windsor, for Stratford (as in Shakespeare), a short hop of less than fifty miles. I was used to getting a ride within half an hour, but I grew impatient as the afternoon waned. So, I crossed the road to the opposite direction and got a lift within five minutes. The driver was headed south and west, whereas I had been heading north. But that was alright, so I went along.

The protocol for conversations ran along fairly predictable lines. I would jump in, the driver would state where their destination was, and ask where I was going, and off we would go. Often, the next set of questions would be, “Where are you studying?” or “What are you studying?” or more generally, “What brings you to this country?”

After my response that I was studying religion, the driver glanced over at me and gave a short laugh. He looked to be in his fifties, wearing jeans and a jean jacket, short, graying hair, a ruggedly handsome face.

“I wonder if you can help me,” he said. “My marriage is breaking up—my third marriage—and I don’t know what to do. I have a cottage out in Cornwall—” he paused, “and I guess I’ll stay there until I figure something out. You’re religious: what should I do?”

I was a sophomore in college, nineteen years old, unschooled in the ways of the world, and near the bottom of the list for reliable marriage counseling. But I did have malpractice insurance and it was this: I had made a pact with God that if I got a lift I would speak of my faith in Christ as the opportunity presented itself. I added a

rider to the agreement that only if the driver initiated the subject would I “witness” to my faith. I’d had enough of running into roaming packs of over-enthusiastic Christian youths in Berkeley and San Francisco to know that imposing or tricking people into listening to a witnessing spiel was not for me.

So here it was, my cue to speak. I should also mention that the final clause in the agreement was that I be given the words to say. Not asking too much, I reasoned, given the stakes. So, we talked, or rather I talked, and he listened as we pattered along in his little Citroën. He listened intently, with a question or two now and then, or he smiled and nodded. Finally, up ahead was Stonehenge, where I had decided to get out, and, with the stones silhouetted against a blazing sunset, we coasted to a stop by the road. We sat for a moment, gazing in wonder at the sight. Then he turned to me with tears in his eyes and said, “Will you pray for me?” “Of course,” I said, and opened the door to get out. “No, I mean now,” he said, and put a hand on my arm. “Here, right now.” I gulped, and then I prayed with him. We shook hands, I got out, he drove off. And I stood there with a full heart and a mind full of questions.

Here’s the thing: when I got out—and even in the days that followed—I couldn’t remember anything of what I’d said, except that at one point I recited 1 Corinthians 13 in its entirety, a passage I had never memorized to my knowledge. Now, some forty-six years later, with a memory I no longer trust out of my sight, that recitation is still all I can remember saying. I don’t know what happened to that man; I hope his life turned around. I know mine did. Theory turned into practice, hoped-for faith into action. It was enough.

We often describe our youth as lost, when they just may be seeking a point from which to launch. If you don’t

have a destination you can't be lost. It's only when we establish a goal or a time limit or a linear point that we become concerned about losing our way. But, on many of our life journeys we don't know the final point and we may not even know the way. Our lives are moving illustrations of faith as a rolling wave, traveling in a general direction without a specific landing point.

Somewhere in his many writings Kurt Vonnegut sardonically tosses out the fact that the universe is expanding in every direction, whistling past our ears, outward at thousands of miles per second. Everything else, he intimates, pales beside that. By contrast, Northrop Frye says in his classic, *The Great Code*, that our default demand for unity and integration, for drawing reality in around us, can only rise as high as our finite imagination.

We choose our metaphors, but, before that, they somehow choose us. Our descriptions of our paths through life (there's one!) are the images of what draws us onward (another one!) at certain points in our trajectory (you *see?*). They may change as we change; the important thing to remember is that we adapt to live up to them.

For many people today, their life metaphor is exile and homelessness. Even if they live in the Hamptons, Aspen, or Palm Beach, they feel themselves to be adrift. Another group, often evangelical Christians, revel in the faintly militaristic strains of "We're Marching to Zion," and, while the route ahead runs off the edge of the map, they plunge ahead with confidence. Still others, as advanced in years as they are free to be both curious and experienced, will see their lives as a guided wandering, neither aimless nor pre-determined.

We need to wander until being "lost" doesn't matter.

We need to wander until our reference points are behind us.

We need to wander without fear or assumptions.

But how long can you travel before it's too far to return?

Frye says that if we *really* want to see past the event horizon, we need to follow a way or direction until we reach the state of guided innocence symbolized by the sheep in the twenty-third Psalm.

Even though I walk through the
darkest valley,

I fear no evil;
for you are with me. —Psalm 23:4

Frye goes on to note that Jesus was a wanderer and that the diffusion of early Christianity "is symbolically connected with the progress of man back to the garden of Eden," the "wandering but guided pastoral world of the twenty-third Psalm."

The "wandering" motif runs against our linear, goal-driven, deadline-clutching lifestyle, and while there's a necessity for all of that, there can also be a place for unfettered curiosity and the luxury of wandering *without* a necessity or obligation.

Try it sometime: take a stroll through the gospels or the prophets or the Psalms, finding a text that lights up the imagination and following its references and associations until you reach a place you've not been to before. What do you find? Who is there? What do they smile or frown about? What makes them laugh and what are they completely serious about?

Try on a new idea or flip an old one around and see what difference it makes. Imagine that God is in search of us; that your co-worker poses no threat but is struggling to get through her life; that a good word in due season is on the tip of your tongue; and that truth still really matters.

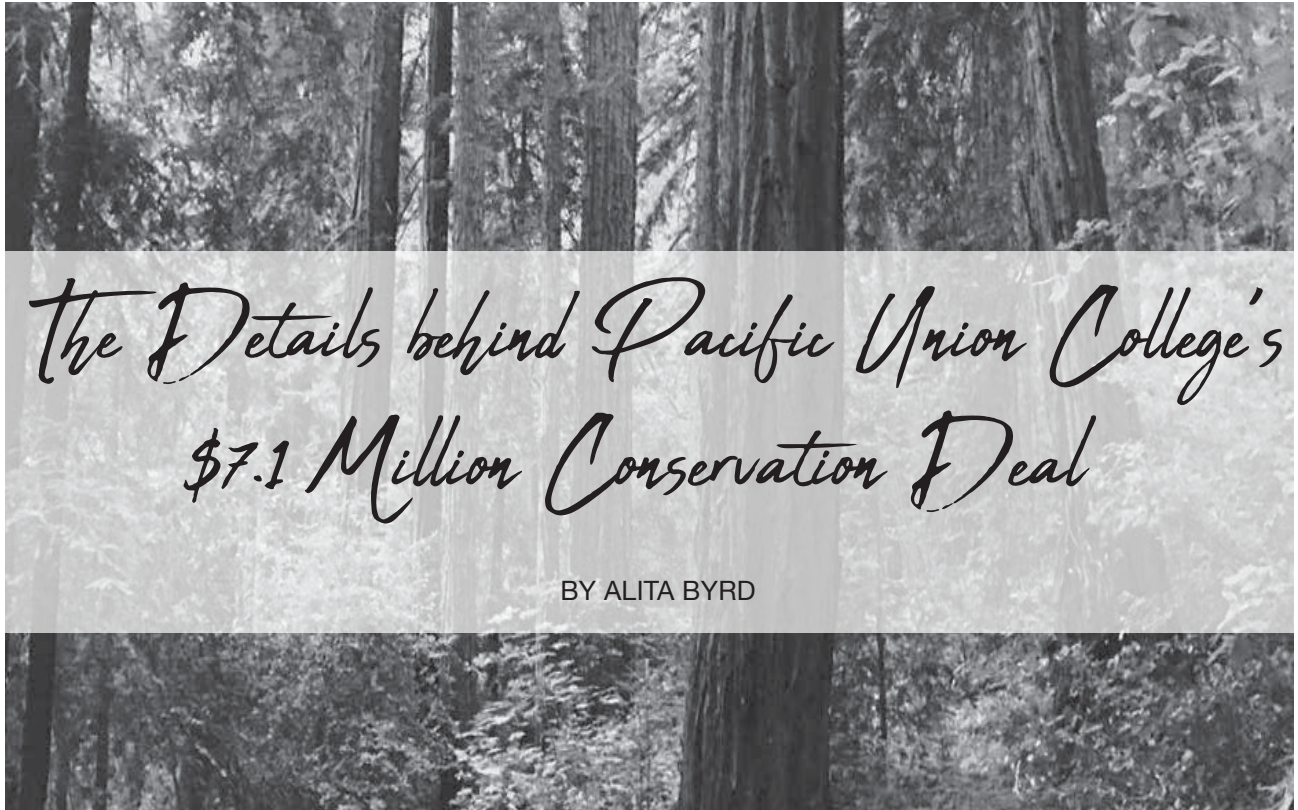
I look back on those hitchhiking days and I marvel sometimes. I would set out with no money and a light heart, sleeping in fields, trudging through the rain, alone on some country road with no traffic for miles—but it was all good. Countless times there were strangers who protected me; friends who gave me shelter, warmth, and a cuppa; country churches and city cathedrals which opened their arms to me; fields and meadows that welcomed me—there was even delight in adversity. What I didn't know freed me, what I was learning strengthened me, what there was to learn lured me onward. Be it ever so.

Endnote

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, trans., (New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1996).



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The Details behind Pacific Union College's \$7.1 Million Conservation Deal

BY ALITA BYRD

Coast Redwoods in the forest.

Editor's Note: *In this interview with Alita Byrd (AB) Pacific Union College's first forest manager, Peter Lecourt (PL), explains how the college made a deal to "have its cake and eat it too"—a payment of \$7.1 million to keep its forest undeveloped and continue to use it as an outdoor classroom across departments.*

AB: Pacific Union College recently announced it had agreed to a deal to keep its more than 800 acres of forest from being developed. The agreement with The Land Trust of Napa County and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) gives PUC \$7.1 million to keep its forest. That sounds like a pretty good deal! Is it?

PL: It is a great deal! With the conservation easement, we generated \$7.1 million to go toward the college's

primary educational mission, yet we also get to keep the forest and continue to use it for educational purposes, such as research and fieldwork conducted by students and faculty in the department of biology. This is a true instance



Peter Lecourt, Pacific Union College's forest manager.

of “having your cake and eating it too,” and has been an amazing opportunity for PUC.

This partnership stipulates that we will not develop the land. As we realize how important the forest is to PUC and to Angwin, keeping the forest to support the mission of PUC—and generating \$7.1 million in the process—are seen as more valuable to the college than the right to develop the land.

AB: Where does the \$7.1 million come from?

PL: Three and a half million dollars came from California’s Wildlife Conservation Board, which has a mission to help protect animal habitat in California. CAL FIRE’s Greenhouse Gas Fund provided \$2.9 million, as a way to help keep carbon sequestered in trees and out of the atmosphere. The Land Trust of Napa County found a donor, who wished to remain anonymous, interested in the project, and this donor gave \$700,000 to finalize the fundraising process and get us up to \$7.1 million.

AB: The amount agreed is less than the appraised value of the property. Explain to us why PUC is happy with accepting an amount that is \$1.5 million lower than the value.

PL: Many individuals who own land placed under conservation easements don’t actively use the land. However, PUC plans to actively use the forest as an important part of the college’s future. I look forward to seeing more and more students using the land for both research and recreation, as well as spiritual renewal. This conservation easement is a big part in that effort.

Accepting a value lower than the appraised value is the equivalent of PUC making a donation to the project and shows that PUC is also investing to protect this vital resource alongside our great partners who helped us to make this happen.

AB: The discussion over the future of PUC’s acres has been a long one. Can you give us just a quick summary of the decades-long argument over what to do with the land?

PL: PUC has long needed to utilize our land to support the mission of the college. As you note, this has been a

lengthy and difficult process. From 1908 (when the college moved to Angwin from Healdsburg) until the early 1980s, the college was using the land for agriculture, including a working dairy. But as agriculture changed and small operations were no longer viable, the farm was abandoned and the dairy closed in 1986.

After that, many ideas about how to best use the land to support the college’s mission have been considered. More recently, there were thoughts that the best way to use the land was to develop it in order to create an endowment for the college.

I’m happy to say that PUC is now in a place where we are viewing our land as our endowment. The forest conservation easement project has shown us there are ways we can keep our land and utilize it to support the school at the same time.

AB: Can you tell us how the recent deal came about? What role did you have in getting it done?

PL: In the fall of 2013, a group of CAL FIRE conservation officials toured the Las Posadas State Forest in Angwin. One member of this group was John Henshaw, a retired US Forest Service Forester and board member of the Land Trust of Napa County. At one point during the tour, the group noticed the fence with PUC’s land, and they wondered about the state of this land.

John Henshaw learned it was for sale, and he reached out to PUC to see if we were interested in putting a conservation easement on our land. The process took about four years to complete, and John’s role was crucial throughout the entire process. I came into the picture just over two years ago (I actually spent about a year volunteering for PUC on forest-related matters) and I have helped with a number of logistical and “boots on the ground” aspects of finalizing the project and getting it wrapped up.

AB: What does the deal mean for the future of PUC?

PL: PUC’s new strategic plan is entitled “Reclaiming Our Past, Reframing Our Future,” and the preservation of the forest is one of the first steps toward both appreciating our roots and creating a vibrant future built on PUC’s unique location and assets. At the dedication of the college



Mossy rocks in the PUC forest. (Photo: Bruno de Oliveira)

in 1909, Ellen White told those gathered that “the Lord designed this place for us.” The college’s founders were especially grateful for the natural resources the land provided for an educational setting. While education and what PUC offers have changed, the land continues to be a great asset for higher education.

AB: Your job is the forest manager for PUC—the first person to oversee college lands. What does it mean to be a forest manager for a university?

PL: I see the forest as one of PUC’s best assets, something that makes Angwin a special place to learn, live, and grow. The forest has the ability to support the mission of the college in a number of ways: academics, student life, spiritual life, and community and alumni relations. My job is partly to help the forest support these various aspects of the college’s mission. I take new freshman on guided hikes in their class on Holistic Living, work with Napa County officials on issues related to forest management, take alumni on tours during Homecoming, and so on. Right now I am finishing work on a

shaded fuel-break along our forest’s ridgeline to protect both the campus and the town of Angwin from potential wildfires.

As one of our best assets, we need to be caring for the forest and making sure it stays healthy and resilient. It takes active management to keep forests healthy. This involves managing the vegetation, roads, trails, community use, and so on.

AB: What is your background in forest management?

PL: Working as PUC’s forest manager is my first experience in such a position. However, I am uniquely qualified for this job for three reasons. First, I have an AS in Forestry, which I received from the College of the Redwoods. The pool of Adventists trained in forest management is limited, and since the forest is so closely tied together with PUC’s mission, it’s also an asset for PUC to have an Adventist in this role.

Second, I grew up here in Angwin, went to PUC Elementary and PUC Preparatory School, and have two

degrees from PUC, including a BS in Environmental Studies. I know the residents, the place, and the system of PUC quite well. This has really enabled me to “hit the ground running,” quickly learning how to direct a small department at the college.

Third, I have developed a close relationship with John Henshaw. John’s input has been vital to the process of completing our conservation easement, and John continues to play a big role in the land as a volunteer forester, helping to guide the forestry practices that are part of the new forest management at PUC.

AB: You have referred to the importance of the land in supporting academics. Part of your job is to tie the legacy of the forest to the college’s education programs. What does that mean?

PL: I like to think of the forest as an outdoor classroom and lab that provides unique learning opportunities for students. We are already using the forest in many classes. New students experience first-hand the benefits of time spent in nature in their Holistic Living class; biology majors identify plants and review photos taken by field wildlife cameras; emergency services students develop rope rescue skills off Inspiration Point; and Geographic Information Systems students use their mapping skills. The possibilities are endless. We look forward to seeing more and more students learning from “God’s second book.”

AB: Why are classes in the environment important for all students to take?

PL: Our modern, comfortable world has largely removed us from nature. It is easy to see nature as an “optional” part of the experience of being a human being. However, science has shown numerous mental and physical health benefits of spending time in nature. Also, the clean air we breathe and the clear water we drink depend on having



Misty morning in the forest. (Photo: Milbert Mariano)

a healthy environment. Getting students out into nature, where they learn about how it works, helps to instill a personal connection to nature, creating individuals who see the preservation of our natural resources as an important part of life on this planet, and who see spending time in nature as part of a holistic lifestyle. As Adventists, an appreciation of nature and its contribution to a holistic lifestyle should be part of the cornerstone of our beliefs.

AB: Tell us a little bit about your history with PUC’s forest. Did you grow up hiking there?

PL: I was born and raised here in Angwin. I have been hiking and mountain biking in the PUC forest for as long as I can remember. I have always seen it as a valuable resource for PUC and the local community, and I am beyond honored and humbled to be given the task of caring for our forest and helping it to support the mission of PUC.



Hairy Star Tulip (*Calochortus tolmiei*) in the forest floor. (Photo: Nancy Lecourt)

AB: I believe there are some redwoods in the forest, is that right? What else of note?

PL: Indeed, interestingly, we have some of the interior-most redwoods in the United States. Redwoods normally live closer to the coast, but given the topography of PUC, and the proximity to San Francisco Bay, the PUC forest gets enough morning summer fog to help support redwood growth in a relatively dry environment. We have a truly unique grove of redwoods that call the PUC forest home.

The PUC forest has very high biodiversity. Many different types of plants and animals call our forest home, including a nesting pair of spotted owls, which are on the federal endangered-species list, as well as foxes, bobcats, and black bears, to name a few.

The PUC forest also serves as an important wildlife corridor between the Las Posadas State Forest to the south and private forest lands to the north, helping to support the movement of wildlife up and down the eastern ridge-line of the Napa Valley.

Finally, Moore Creek, which supplies much of the water for the city of Napa, originates in the PUC forest;

as you read this, people in Napa are drinking water that came out of the PUC forest.

AB: Now that this conservation easement deal has been closed, what are you most focusing on in your job? What are your goals for the 864-acre PUC forest?

PL: I'm happy to say that the work is not yet over! PUC owns an additional 240 acres of forested land that we are working on putting into a second conservation easement. This process has been going on for several months, and we hope this conservation easement process will only take about two years.

My main goal for the forest is to have it support the mission of PUC. In order to accomplish this support, we need the forest to be more “user-friendly” for students, faculty, staff, and the community. I have recently developed PUC’s first official trail map, which has numbers corresponding to intersection markers spread throughout the forest, helping users to find their way around. I am also working on developing a formalized parking area for the forest, complete with a picnic area and a little kiosk to serve as the hub for recreation in the forest. I also hope to develop more informative signage throughout the forest, helping users to learn about the plants and animals that call the forest home. I plan to place benches and picnic tables throughout the forest at strategic locations and install other infrastructure to make the forest more user-friendly.

Alongside this main goal, we’re working to keep the forest healthy and resilient so that it can provide a good home to all the plants and wildlife that live in our forest and continue to support the mission of PUC.

If you would like to follow along with the progress of the plans for the PUC forest, you can like the PUC Demonstration and Experimental Forest page on Facebook at facebook.com/PUCForest. For those wishing to make financial contributions, donations can be made at puc.edu/give. Select “View All Funds” and then select “Forest Conservation Endowment.”



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