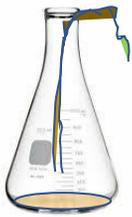




### Autumn News from the Laboratory of Elizabeth Parks at the University of Missouri



#### ***The blooming of a flower, for more than 30 years***



In 1989, after I completed my undergraduate degree in exercise physiology, I had no basic science laboratory skills. Yet two famous scientists at the University of Washington in Seattle, Russell Ross and Elaine Raines, gave me a chance to start by volunteering in their laboratory. On my first day at work, I asked “Where should I put down my backpack?” and one of the postdoctoral fellows pointed to a small chair over by the window. Sitting on the window sill was a dead plant. Really, it was just a dry stick in an Erlenmeyer flask with dirty water in the bottom. I was told that this plant came from a previous postdoctoral fellow who had left the lab a couple of years earlier (“You can just throw it out”). Instead, I replaced the dirty water with fresh water and set the plant back on the sill. Within a week, the plant went crazy. Leaves started sprouting and within two months it was blooming. By that time, I was also blooming. I had been a good worker so the lab formally hired me, paying me a small stipend. I started to go to scientific seminars and journal club discussions. I was sucking up knowledge like a sponge.

The next year, I was accepted to graduate school and the same *angel wing begonia* (picture below) went with me to Davis, CA. Four years later, it followed me around California to Vacaville, Walnut Creek, and Berkeley during my postdoctoral fellowship in the Bay Area. It moved with me to St. Paul Minnesota when I became an Assistant Professor, then to UTSW Medical Center in Dallas (Associate Professorship), and now it sits on the window sill in the lab here in Columbia, MO (Professorship).

Over the years, many undergrads, graduate students, and fellows have taken cuttings from this begonia because it grows incredibly well...*in the right atmosphere*. Russell Ross and Elaine Raines are passed away now and I am reminded of them every time the plant blooms. I was lucky they were willing to provide an environment that could accommodate a person with very few relevant skills.



Sometimes, early learners can't get hired for a job because they don't have experience, and then they can't get the experience without a job. Academic research labs at MU provide just the right environment and many research faculty are responsible for launching young scientists on their careers. As we begin the fall semester, I hope you are in a place that supports your growth. Although things might look a little rough and dry sometimes, we are still blooming!

*Elizabeth Parks*



**New research staff welcomed to the Parks Lab**

A recent hire is **Megan Searles** (right) who just graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology from MU. As a research technician, Megan will begin training to assess liver stiffness by performing the Fibroscan measurement (kind of like an ultrasound test). Outside of the lab, Megan enjoys hikes with her dog and spending time with friends and family.



**Chocolate brownies for a zoom graduation celebration**

**Jillian Otto**, an undergraduate who worked in the Parks lab for four years, has graduated! Jillian is the first in her family to graduate from college and she is interested in going to medical school in the future. For the Zoom party (right), we all made the same brownie recipe at home, enjoyed other snacks, and sang the MU alma mater. This fall, Jillian is taking some time to work and she was recently hired at a Gastroenterology Clinic in Denver, CO.



We can't wait to hear how she enjoys the working world!



**Undergraduate, Graduate, and Fellow Activities**

**Talyia Fordham, BS**, has moved from the top of the page (News from Staff) to the bottom of the page. What's going on here? Our former laboratory technician has now become a graduate student in our



department. We are so lucky she has chosen our lab in which to complete her thesis.

**Naren Nallapeta, MD, Hepatology Fellow**, (right) has joined the lab and is coming up-to-speed quickly. In September, Naren starts an intensive 3-week research rotation with us. It is so great to have his clinical view of our discoveries!



**Alisha Perry, Senior in Biological Sciences**, is continuing to collect data on a noninvasive way to measure liver fat oxidation. She presented a poster virtually at the Summer Undergraduate Research Forum.

**Justine Mucinski, BS, Doctoral Candidate in Exercise Physiology**, presented her research at the Amer. Diabetes Assoc. Justine recently passed her comprehensive exam, which means she has "advanced to candidacy" for the PhD. Nice job! She published her first, first-authored paper this spring; she has been working on other manuscripts, and doing the hard job of writing fellowship applications.



Last year, **Majid Syed, MS, Doctoral Candidate in Nutrition**, won the top graduate student award at the MU competition called the "Three-Minute Thesis (3MT)." Before Covid-19, Majid (below on right) was set to represent MU at the Midwest regional 3MT competition, scheduled for April 2020. Instead, he spent the Covid quarantine writing papers. He co-authored 2 published papers, and has one paper in review, and two more in process. Majid is coming to the end of his doctoral work and has begun to interview for postdoctoral fellowships.



**Emma Baer, Junior in Human Physiology and Translational Sciences**, joined our lab last spring. She is already contributing in a major way. It is also nice to have her slightly wry sense of humor in lab meetings.

**Christian Fenton, Sophomore in Human Physiology and Translational Sciences**, and Discovery Fellow. Christian made it through her first year at MU - she is still walking and talking like a sane person and has come back for more undergraduate fun! As the weeks go by, she is taking on more and more research responsibilities.

**Katelynn Montgomery, Sophomore in Clinical Laboratory Sciences**, and Discovery Fellow, has just joined the lab. She is lucky to have Christian Fenton to help her orient to all the projects we are working on. Welcome Katelynn!