

## Uncommon Good Sends All Four (cont') [continued from page 6]

School of Religion in Berkeley. Her other experience includes having been a professor at Union Theological School in New York, an elementary school teacher, an author for both adults and children, and an artist. After working with Eleanor, Andrea can now rattle off a list of favorite books which includes “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn”, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” and “Water for Elephants.”

Other Pilgrim Place tutors also made an impact on the Bran Family and have contributed to the success of all four of the children going to college. Barbara Rogers tutored Marissa in history after a lifetime of traveling the world, serving in public schools and church communities. “Whenever Marissa would come back from being tutored by Barbara,” Irma recalls, “she’d have a big smile on her face.” Marissa is now a voracious reader. “She’s always reading like ten books at a time!” her sister exclaims.

Jim Lamb, a World War II veteran and Pilgrim Place resident, tutored the Brans’ son, Carlos. Jim had a career in international development in Latin America and in universities in the United States. “Jim would ask my son what his dreams were,” Irma explained. “Then he would get him books to encourage his dreams and they would read them together.”

Another dream that the Bran Family and Uncommon Good have seen come true together is the Whole Earth Building. “I remember the first day you told us families about your hopes to build this building,” Irma told me. “It seemed like such a beautiful dream. And now it is so amazing to see it be a reality.” The entire Bran family helped to build the Whole Earth Building. Andrea remembers spreading earth plaster over the outside walls, embedding her handprints and DNA into this first-of-its-kind green building.

The Brans also were founding members of Uncommon Good’s Urban Farmers Association that has created a number of farm programs to employ, feed and educate the community. In addition, Irma served as one of the Spanish language representatives from the Southwestern United States to the World Wide Views Citizen Forum leading up to the international climate conference

in Copenhagen in 2009. “Imagine,” I told Andrea. “Your mother was an international ambassador!”

This summer Andrea will participate in Uncommon Good’s newest venture, its medical career pipeline program that connects students from our educational program with the doctors in our MED Relief program to help mentor them into the medical profession.

Yet amid all the excitement of long held dreams taking shape in front of our eyes, I felt a bit of concern for Irma. “How do you feel about your last little bird flying from the nest?” I asked her. “Well, Andrea said to promise her I wouldn’t cry when she goes away to college,” Irma replied. “I told her that I can’t promise that I won’t cry, but I can say that my tears will be tears of joy.” 📧



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Members of the Bran family after completing two Uncommon Good sponsored workshops. The parents participated in the World Class Marriage course, and Andrea and Carlos attended the Healthy Relationships class.

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# UNCOMMON GOOD

FOSTERING IDEALISM in EDUCATION, MEDICINE and the ENVIRONMENT

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## Uncommon Good Sends All Four of the Bran Family to College

Irma grew up in an impoverished family of twelve in the tiny village of Piedra Parada in Guatemala. She longed to be a nurse, but education was out of the question. The thought that she might someday have children who would be doctors would have seemed an impossibly cruel dream. And yet, on a recent sun spangled spring day, Irma and her daughter, Andrea, and I met together at our Whole Earth Building, flowers in exuberant bloom in all around us, and talked about the experience of seeing our dreams become a reality.

Irma's husband is a math whiz. But he also came from a poor family in El Salvador and so his dream of becoming an engineer withered like Langston Hughes' raisin in the sun. The parents' disappointments, however, fueled their fierce ambition for their four children.

"Even when my kids were still just in kindergarten," Irma recalls, "I would tell them 'You have to go to college! You have to go to college!' and they would look at me like 'There goes crazy Mom again!' But even though I knew I really wanted

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Photo by Nancy Mintie

Scholarship student Andrea Bran (right) with her mother, Irma, and Carlos Carrillo, Uncommon Good's Education Programs Director

## A Song In Their Hearts

Live long enough and there will be moments in which your heart is pierced with a joy that you can never forget. Some of these moments may be expected, such as the first time you lay your eyes upon your newborn child. Others sneak up on you. One such moment snuck up on me on this past April 11<sup>th</sup>.

It was the night of the Spring Music Recital for our music mentoring program. This program was created by former Pomona College student Gabriel Friedman, with the help of the college's Draper Center. Gabe, a neuroscience major and extraordinarily talented pianist, recruited his fellow musician students and raised the money to buy instruments for the children of

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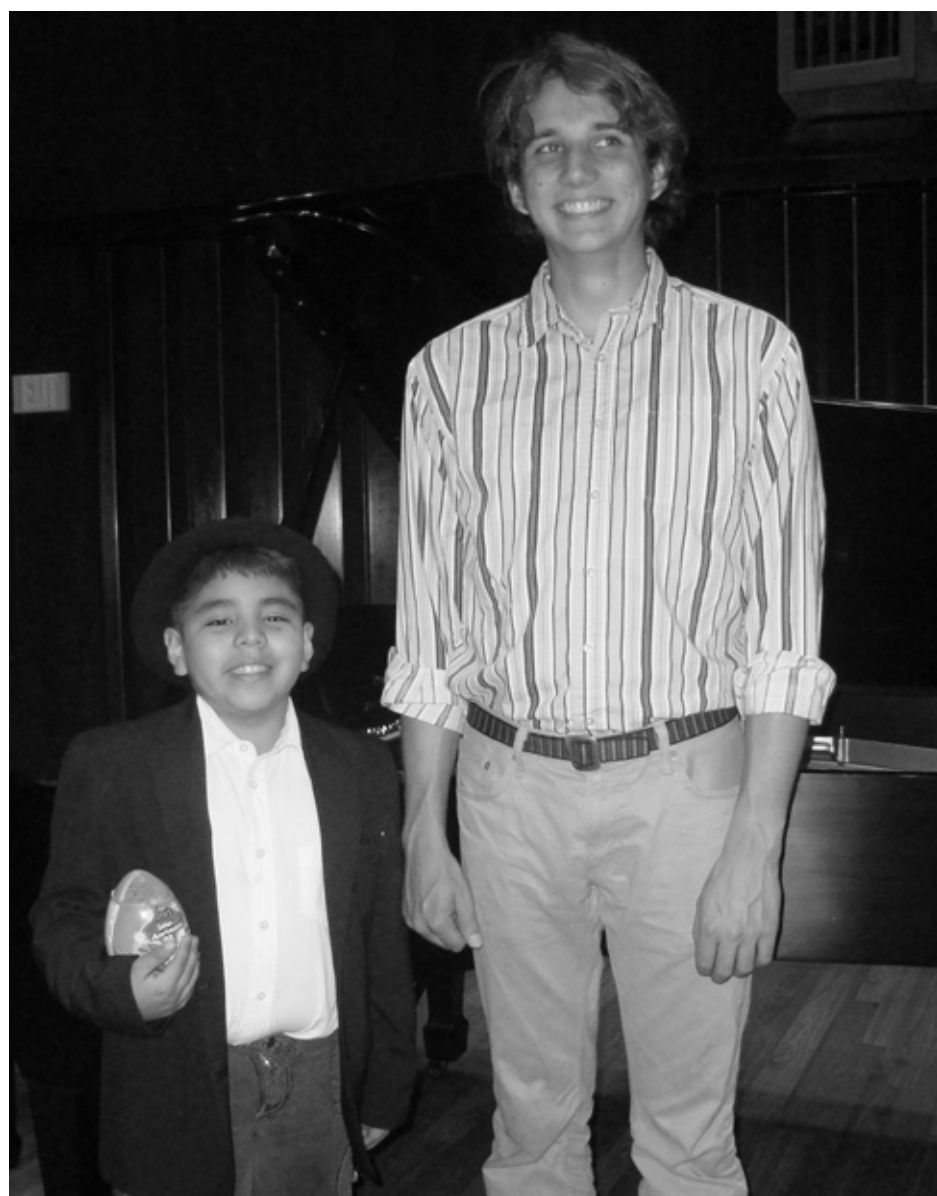


Photo by Nancy Mintie

Pianist Arvin takes a bow with his music mentor, Paul Koenig, a Pomona College senior, who said of his experience, "I really like teaching piano to Arvin. It is very challenging in a great way. I feel like I, too, am learning music all over again."

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# Keck School of Medicine of USC Welcomes Us

Funny where life takes you. I never imagined years ago when I was sitting in law school classroom, that someday I would find myself in yet another classroom cradling a human brain in my hands. And yet there I was last March 24<sup>th</sup> with fifty of the students from our Connect to College program, at the Keck School of Medicine, fondling the aforementioned brain.

We have a wealth of experience and expertise represented by the outstanding physicians on our board and advisory board, and the community doctors we support through our MED Relief program. This year we decided to call upon their help to begin a medical career pipeline program for the students in our education program. We began with our board members from the Keck School. Dr. Raquel Arias is the daughter of farmworkers who became the first in her family to go to college, and then the first to become a doctor. She now is the Dean of Admissions at Keck. Dr. Jo Marie Reilly is the Co-director of the Primary Care Community Medicine Program there. Together with the Latino Medical Students Association members, they orchestrated a tour of the medical school for our students who thought they might be interested in the health profession.

The medical school paid for a bus to bring us out to the campus and then treated us to lunch with Dr. Arias and the medical students. Then we were taken to classrooms and given a variety of hands-on learning experiences by the medical students, including being able to handle brains that were the gift of people who had died and willed their bodies to science. We then were taken to the Gross Anatomy Lab, which in medical-speak means the place where donated bodies are dissected by first year students, and we listened while they told us what that experience was like for them. Lastly, Dr. Reilly explained to our students what the path of a medical education entailed, and all the different specialties available in medicine. She then had students role play how a doctor would interact with a patient to assess his or her health.

The trip spiked our students' interest in the medical field and so now we are planning other field trips and exploring ways that they can volunteer in health facilities to experience the day-to-day reality of a doctor's work. Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Arias, Dr. Reilly, and the Keck students, what might have seemed an unrealistic dream for our kids, a career in medicine, is now beginning to seem possible. 📌



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good students examine a human brain with a Keck School of Medicine of USC student.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good student Kira poses as a patient as a Keck student demonstrates a neurological exam.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good student Aaron examines a human skull at Keck School of Medicine.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good students with Dr. Raquel Arias, the Dean of Admissions of Keck School of Medicine and an Uncommon Good Advisory Board member (2nd row, just right of center).



Photo by Good Eggs



Good Eggs is the food hub that is distributing Uncommon Good's Fiddleneck Family Farms produce throughout the greater Los Angeles region.

# Eat Well and Do Good

I always knew that our farmers were good eggs, but now it's official. Our Fiddleneck Family Farms is partnering with Good Eggs, a food hub company, to distribute our produce throughout the greater Los Angeles area. Fiddleneck Family Farms is our urban agriculture project that gives half of what we grow to the families in our education program who cannot afford to buy fresh produce, and sells the other half to create a revenue stream to help support the project. Our farmers are the parents of children in our program, and we pay them living wages. The parents and students in our education program work with us to develop the FFF enterprise and also create farm based health and wellness programs to share with their peers.

The way our new partnership works is that we create boxes of our ripest seasonal items, that we grow using organic methods, and deliver the boxes to Good Eggs in downtown Los Angeles, which then delivers them to the homes or workplaces of our customers. People who buy our boxes receive the freshest, most local food possible, all grown without pesticides or chemicals, and with lots of love. The vegetables are picked fresh the day of the customer's order and delivered to him or her the following day.

If you would like to see if your home or work is within our delivery area, check <http://www.goodeggs.com/about/la/deliveries> Basically, the boundaries are from El Monte to the beach, and from LAX north to Calabasas and Burbank.

If you would like to order one of our fresh produce boxes, go to <http://www.goodeggs.com/uncommongood>

If you are not within the delivery area, but live or work near our Claremont office, take heart, for we plan to sell our produce soon from our beautiful Whole Earth Building office during the week. We'd also like to thank those of you who were buying from us at the Claremont Farmers Market and we hope to see you at our Whole Earth Building when we resume our local sales here.

If you would like your food dollar to bring you the healthiest food possible, and also support a good cause, consider becoming one of our customers. Then you can be a good egg, too! 🍳



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Elizabeth Preciado of Uncommon Good with a box of produce from Uncommon Good's Fiddleneck Family Farms



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Representatives of Union Bank visit Uncommon Good's Whole Earth Building after giving a \$10,000 grant to our farming program.



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good student Kira harvests carrots from a rooftop garden at Pomona College where our students, under the guidance of college students, grow food and learn about the environment through our Environmentors program.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good farmer, Miguel Bonilla, catches Peter Rabbit eating our tomato seedlings. After being scolded and given a stern warning, Peter was released back into the wild.



## A Song In Their Hearts (con't) *[continued from page 1]*

our Connect to College program. They then taught our kids how to play them. Afterward they tested the children and found that their academic skills had increased. Since that first year other Pomona College students have carried on the program.

So there we all were for the kids' recital in Lyman Hall of Music at Pomona College on April 11. First up was eight-year-old Arvin, standing in at about 4 feet tall, in a black bowler hat, suit coat, white dress shirt and blue jeans. He perched on the piano bench, feet dangling above the piano's pedals, and played a haunting Mexican folk tune, La Llorona (The Weeping Woman).

As the last note sounded, he leaped to his feet to the audience applause, stood next to his 6 foot plus teacher, Pomona College student Paul Koenig, and the two of them took a bow.

And then it happened. Arvin shot a dazzling smile up at Paul. And in that simple child's smile I saw all that is good, all that is beautiful, all that is happiness. There was the joy of music, the pride of a job well done, gratitude to a teacher, the purity and openness of childhood, the beauty of giving to another, all distilled into one radiant smile illuminating the little boy's face and transfixing my heart. That night The Weeping Woman was me, but I wept for joy. 📷



Photo by Nancy Mintie

The co-directors of the music mentoring program, Pomona College students Mira Howard and Jessica Lin (front), present a cake to Uncommon Good's music students at the end of their recital at the college.

## Sino-us Post Modern Psychology Forum



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Dr. John Cobb presents the opening address at the Sino-U.S. Postmodern Psychology Forum at Uncommon Good's Whole Earth Building.

Uncommon Good hosted the opening session of the second Sino-United States Postmodern Psychology Forum this past May 10<sup>th</sup>. The topic of the conference was "Psychological Health Education and Moral Education from a Constructive Postmodern Perspective."

The eminent United States philosopher, environmentalist and theologian, John Cobb, Jr., gave the opening address on the subject of postmodern psychology. He has been described by his peers as one of the two most important North American theologians of the twentieth century. He is a long time friend of Uncommon Good and was the keynote speaker for the groundbreaking ceremony for our Whole Earth Building. John spoke about the imperative to view ourselves and all of nature as an organic living whole.

John's presentation was followed by talks by distinguished Chinese and American scholars on subjects such as learning empathy, Lao Tzu's ecological values, traditional Chinese harmonious thought, the development of modern school education, and the relationship between moral education and mental health education.

The conference was co-sponsored by:

The Center for Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology

The Institute for Postmodern Development of China

The Center for Science & the Humanities at Beijing Normal University

The Shandong Center for Process Psychology at Shandong Normal University

The Center for Constructive Postmodern Studies at Harbin Institute of Technology

The Journal of Tangdu

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good music student David performs on the ukulele at the Spring Music Recital.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good guitar student Adrian plays a duet with his music mentor Daniel Gonzalez, a sophomore at Pomona College. Daniel attended Montclair High School where many of Uncommon Good's students also go. When he was growing up his family did not have money for music lessons so he found an old guitar and taught himself to play. In addition to sharing the gift of music with our students, he also participates in the Weekly Writing Workshop, staffed by Pomona College students who teach our students creative writing.

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good piano student Abigail with her music mentor Sara Eliason, a junior at Scripps College where she is majoring in international relations and politics



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Our country rock band, composed of (from left to right) music mentor Maya Booth, a senior at Pomona College, and Uncommon Good students Eduardo on drums, Edith on guitar, and Diana performing vocals, plays "Sweet Home Alabama."

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good violin student Evelyn plays "Perpetual Motion."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good flautist Giselle plays "Badinerie." Her music mentor Jessica Lin, co-director of the Music Mentor program, is graduating from Pomona College with a degree in neuroscience and is applying to medical school.



Uncommon Good Sends All Four (con't) [continued from page 1]



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

The Bran children with their mother in 2007. From left to right: Marissa, Carlos, Irma, Andrea, Esmeralda.

this for them, I didn't know how to make it a reality. I thought college was only for rich people and people like us could never afford it. But when we found you, Carlos was able to show us how to do it." (Carlos Carrillo is Uncommon Good's Education Programs Director.)

Now that Irma's last child, Andrea, is off to Whitman College on a full scholarship, she can laugh at her "tiger mom" intensity. "I think your staff was afraid of me at first," she laughs. "Every time one of my kids failed a test or got a bad grade, I panicked and thought 'Oh no! They're not going to be able to go

to college!' And I would come storming in here. But Carlos would always get me calmed down and explain exactly what we needed to do, what classes to take, paperwork, financial aid, scholarships, everything. I am so grateful to this program and I will always be a part of it. You have showed us how to make our dreams for our children come true." True to her word, Irma has promised to stay involved with us, passing along her experience to the new parents entering the program and continuing to serve as one of our parent leaders.

Irma is the first to admit that she was hard on her kids as they grew up.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Irma Bran poses with Uncommon Good's Parent Book Club members and the author, Maria Amparo Escandon, of the book they were reading, Santitos. Irma is 3rd from the right in the second row and the author is 5th from the right in the second row.

Once when her son asked her if it would be ok if he got a “B” grade instead of an “A” she barked, “No!” But her daughter, Andrea, defends her. “I’d rather have a tough mom than one who didn’t push us to get an education,” she admits.

When the Bran family entered Uncommon Good’s Connect to College program, the children ranged in age from 9<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The two eldest girls, Esmeralda and Marissa, graduated from the program and went to college, Marissa on scholarship to Mount St. Mary’s College. The son, Carlos, is at California State University at Sonoma, following a pre-med curriculum. Andrea, who will attend Whitman College on scholarship in the fall, would like to become a pediatrician.

Andrea and her mother remember the Uncommon Good mentors and tutors who worked with their family very fondly. We’ve always known that the mentor who is assigned to each child in our program is the “secret ingredient” that is the key to our program’s phenomenal 100% success rate in getting our students to college. The transformational power of the mentor-mentee relationship is miraculous. Andrea and her family confirmed this. Andrea’s favorite part of the program was being mentored, first by Yael Friedman of Scripps College. When Yael graduated, Alec Faggen started tutoring her and then also became her mentor. Alec was a neuroscience major at Pomona College and it was conversations with her that first sparked Andrea’s interest in medicine. That, and watching the medical drama “House” on television! Andrea blossomed under this attention. She started doing very well in school as she explored the world with her mentors, studying, playing soccer, hiking, visiting museums and exploring other cities. Irma welcomed her children’s mentors as members of her family, and that is what they became. Her son Carlos was mentored by a Pomona College student named Adam Cabrera. Adam has become a good friend of the family, continuing to visit Carlos even after he went away to college, and even after Adam got married. “Carlos isn’t my mentee anymore,” explains Adam. “He’s my little brother!”

Despite the attentions of her mentors, however, reading remained a challenge for Andrea. Irma has been an avid participant in Uncommon Good’s Parent Book Club in which the parents of children in our education program read books that their children are reading in school so that they can model reading behavior and discuss books with their children. “My kids knew,” Irma laughs, “that if they wanted a movie, they had to go ask their dad. If they wanted a book, they came to me!”

But Irma had never been able to get Andrea interested in reading. Sometimes, to appease her mother, Andrea would pick up a book, turn the pages and move her head to mimic the motions of reading. But she wasn’t a very good actress and all her mom had to do was to ask her to describe what she was reading and Andrea’s ruse would be exposed.

It was not until she began to be tutored by one of our volunteers from the Pilgrim Place retirement community, whom I fondly call “the world’s most overqualified tutors”, that Andrea’s love of reading was ignited. Eleanor Scott Meyers, the Pilgrim Place mentor for Andrea, is the retired president of the Pacific



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Andrea Bran, a member of Uncommon Good’s Teen Green, helps out on the rooftop garden at Pomona College.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Carlos Bran (left) helps install the rooftop garden on Uncommon Good’s Whole Earth Building, along with other Uncommon Good students and parents.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Irma Bran with other Uncommon Good parents who were chosen to be citizen representatives for the Spanish language community of the southwestern United States to give input for the international climate conference held in Copenhagen in 2009. From left to right: Celia Gonzalez, Juana Uribe, Irma Bran, Norma Rodriguez.