

UNCOMMON GOOD

F O S T E R I N G I D E A L I S M *in* E D U C A T I O N , M E D I C I N E *and the* E N V I R O N M E N T

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Medical Mentors

Uncommon Good’s New Mentoring Partnership with Keck Graduate Institute

Three remarkable people from the Keck Graduate Institute (KGI) have started a medical mentoring program for our lucky Uncommon Good students. The original idea was that of Andrew Alix, a pre-med student at KGI. When he first came to our office to volunteer as a mentor, he offered not only his own services, but also to recruit his fellow students to help our kids to explore the health professions. I was intrigued by his exceptional energy, intensity and obvious idealism. Always curious to learn about the origins of uncommon goodness, I asked him to tell me his story.

Andrew’s family fled the Philippines in the 1980’s to escape the political upheaval of the Marcos regime. His grandparents and parents were compassionate people who, in their own country, had routinely helped low-income families. Once here in the United States they reached out to help other immigrants even as they themselves struggled to establish a foothold.

When Andrew was in middle school his beloved grandpa, Richard Garcia, fell seriously *[continued on page 6]*



KGI mentors with their Uncommon Good mentees at the California Science Center where they viewed the Space Shuttle Endeavour which flew manned space missions from 1992 to 2011.

Photo compliments of KEYI

Medical School Acceptance

Our first Uncommon Good student to graduate and to apply to medical school, Mauricio Bonilla, has been accepted to three: the Keck School of Medicine at USC, the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, and the University of California at Riverside School of Medicine.

As we congratulate Mauricio on this extraordinary achievement, we would like to highlight the contributions of his parents as well. Mauricio’s father, Miguel Bonilla, is one of Uncommon Good’s farmers. He never had the opportunity to receive an education. Born in El Salvador, he was put to work on his family’s farm as a small child. His farming career was briefly interrupted when he was sent to kindergarten. However, on the first day of first grade, his teacher gave out homework assignments. Miguel’s family was too poor to afford paper and so the little boy returned to school the next day without completed homework. His teacher punished him for this by beating his hands so severely that he could not do his farm chores when he returned home. So his family pulled him out of school, never to return. Similarly, Mauricio’s mother, Maria, was born into a poor family in Mexico. She was able to go to school only through the fourth grade. Then she had to stay home to help care for some younger nieces that her mother had taken in. Her family suffered severely from hunger. Mauricio remembers his mother telling him, with tears in her eyes, about one Christmas after her father had passed away. The family was starving and she had to go into dumpsters to find discarded food for them to eat.

Here in the United States, Miguel and Maria have worked incredibly hard to provide Mauricio and his sister with an education. Miguel labors on our farms and Maria stands on her feet all day in a factory. On weekends they earn extra money doing janitorial work. Their aching backs and sore feet have paid the price for Mauricio’s success, a price they have been proud and happy to pay. Mauricio plans to become a doctor who serves low-income families such as his own. When he does, the comfort and healing that he will bring to tens of thousands will be the result of his own striving and supreme efforts, and that of his humble and heroically hard working parents as well. 📌



Uncommon Good graduate and soon to be medical student, Mauricio Bonilla.

Photo by Nancy Mintie

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Angels in Scrubs

Two extraordinary men whose accomplishments have been aided by the California Community Foundation, the California Wellness Foundation, and the S. Mark Taper Foundation, the funders of our MED program

“You are about to meet two of the most remarkable people you will ever meet in your life,” I told our students. We were on an educational field to visit doctors Edgar Chavez and Jaime Lara, two of the physicians in our Medicine for the Economically Disadvantaged (MED) program. Both men overcame almost unimaginable odds to enter the medical profession and establish community clinics for the disadvantaged population of South Los Angeles.

Edgar was born into a poor family in El Salvador. During his childhood that country was torn asunder by a brutal civil war. His family made a number of attempts to escape to the United States, walking across a desert, fording a river, and being apprehended twice and turned back. When he was six, Edgar spent some time in a federal detention center, separated from his family. Finally they successfully made the crossing and arrived in San Diego with only the clothes on their backs. They slept, hungry and cold, in church doorways until they were able to join relatives in Los Angeles. Edgar was twelve at the time and spoke no English. He was put into a school in which there was no assistance for monolingual Spanish speakers. So he taught himself English by watching cartoons on TV. Despite this challenging early life, Edgar excelled in school, earning his way into Pomona College, and then Stanford Medical School.

Edgar’s business partner, Dr. Jaime Lara, was one of five boys born to farmworker parents in Oxnard in California’s vast central agricultural valley. His father, though without formal schooling, was fascinated by philosophy. He used to read Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and would quote them to his boys. Jaime remembers his dad telling him, “You know a lot, but understand little.” His mother also had a thirst for education and started taking classes at a local community college when her sons were in elementary school.

Times were hard for the family as the parents struggled to feed their five growing boys. There often wasn’t enough food, and almost never childhood treats. Jaime remembers as a little boy that when the ice cream truck would come down the street and the other children would run after it to buy sweets, he and his brothers had to stand by and watch. Health care also was in short supply. When the family was actually able to see a doctor, they didn’t get much attention. Jaime recalls when he was doing a third grade art project involving dried beans, being a little boy doing what little boys do, he managed to get one stuck in his ear canal. By nightfall he was in a lot of pain and complained to his mother. The next day she took him to a doctor who gave him a quick once over and sent him home, saying he was fine. When the child continued to cry, his mother took a flashlight, looked into his ear, found the bean and removed it.

When Jaime was in high school he excelled in math and science and aptitude tests indicated that he would be a good doctor. He was attracted to this idea and liked the thought of being able to help others, especially those such as his family who were struggling to get decent health care. However, once he graduated from high school, he knew that soon he would have to step up and help his family financially, and medical school would take too long. So he got his teaching credential in college and then began teaching in elementary school in a poor largely Latino neighborhood in North Hollywood. However, after a few years, his father suffered a stroke, got progressively worse, and passed away. Seeing his dad suffer reignited Jaime’s dream of medical school. He applied and was accepted at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine.

Jaime and Edgar met while both were doing their residencies at White Memorial Hospital in the low-income Latino community of East Los Angeles. Both were heavily recruited by the Kaiser Permanente system. Jaime admits that the offers were tempting. The pay was very good, the hours regular, the benefits generous, and they would not have had to worry about fighting the insurance bureaucracy. On the other hand, Edgar explains that the job interview depressed him. “It felt like going to jail,” he says. “I would have been institutionalized. There



Dr. Jaime Lara with Uncommon Good students Jessica and Karen.

Photo by Nancy Mintie

would have been limits on what I could and couldn’t do for patients. I felt like going to Kaiser would have been cheating myself.”

Realizing that they had a common dream, Edgar and Jaime stepped out on their own and took on the monumental task of running their own community clinic in South Los Angeles, in an area of one million people where only 40% have access to a doctor. They named it the Universal Community Health Center, and they turn away no one for lack of funds. They stepped out in faith to start the clinic despite having daunting student loans to repay and despite the fact that one of Edgar’s children has a very serious illness, cystic fibrosis.

About this time Jaime and Edgar came to our attention at Uncommon Good. Our Medicine for the Economically Disadvantaged (MED) program offers help to community clinic physicians who serve the poor in community clinics throughout the Southland. By helping them to repay their sky high school loans, we make it possible for them to work for the lowest salaries in the medical profession serving the most needy populations. The major funders of this program are the Robert Fraser Fund of the California Community Foundation, the California Wellness Foundation, and the S. Mark Taper Foundation. We brought Jaime and Edgar into our program to help them fulfill their dream of creating a clinic for the underserved. As of today, the two men have been so successful that they now have opened a second community clinic just a few blocks away, with the third one planned.

As I sat with our students in the first clinic’s “conference room,” a small kitchen stacked high with boxes of Vaseline and other clinic supplies, serenaded by a loud radio from a truck in the parking lot outside the window, I asked Jaime why he had chosen this life, when a much more comfortable one was within his grasp. “Why don’t you treat patients in Beverly Hills and draw down a nice income?” I asked. He responded heatedly, “Because the people who really need me are here!” He then added, “I love seeing our numbers of patients going up. About five years ago we had about 7,000 visits from 2,000 patients a year. Now we have close to 6,000 patients with about 20,000 visits a year! Being here allows me to realize my own personal vision of filling needs that otherwise would not be met.”

When I was a child, my church taught that sometimes angels walk amongst us unrecognized. Now that I am older, I’ve learned to recognize them. 🙏



Doctors Jaime Lara and Edgar Chavez, founders of the Universal Community Health Centers and Uncommon Good MED program recipients.

Photo by Nancy Mintie

Farmer Professors

Our Uncommon Good farmers are moonlighting as professors. They are offering a series of classes to our Uncommon Good students and their parents about various aspects of home gardening, such as making compost and starting seedlings. We continue to share half of what we organically grow and glean with our Uncommon Good families and offer the rest to the community for sale. Proceeds support our

education programs. Recently, the City of Montclair invited us to harvest at the 116 year old historic Reeder Ranch. We picked Hass and Fuerte avocados and the sweetest navel oranges we have ever tasted. Come visit us, Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm, or Saturday 9am-1pm, to eat well and do good with your food dollar. Thank you! 🍋

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Heirloom produce, grown exceeding organic standards, for sale at Uncommon Good to help support its programs for low-income students and families.

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good farmers teach our students and parents how to start vegetable seedlings for a home garden.

The Songbird of Uncommon Good

The most famous of Uncommon Good’s graduates is Genesis Codina. The child of immigrant parents in the low-income city of Pomona, she was born with a secret gift. As a young child, she loved to sing and when she was seven she asked her mother for voice lessons. Her parents sacrificed to pay for a mariachi singing coach for their daughter, and soon it was apparent that this little girl had a great big glorious Judy Garland voice. At the age of nine she was discovered by the Grammy Award winning Mariachi Divas, the most famous female mariachi group in the world and was invited to join their company. With this big break, her career soared. She won the Sabado Gigante talent show, which is Mexico’s equivalent of what American Idol was in its heyday. She took top honors at the Texas Mariachi Festival, impressed Grammy winning music producer Keith Olsen, and performed at the International Mariachi Festival in Rosarito, Mexico. Our Education Programs Director, Carlos Carrillo, saw Genesis perform at the Rosarito concert.

“There were thousands of people there in the stadium on the beach,” he remembers. “The sun was setting behind Genesis as she sang. It was magical and the crowd went wild and gave her a five minute standing ovation.”

There is a remarkable YouTube video of Genesis when she was a freshman in high school. The film was shot when she was the headliner at the Noche de las Estrellas (Night of the Stars) Concert Extravaganza in Tucson. She commands the stage, regally poised and enchantingly lovely. Her first song is an infectious dance number. The second is a revelation. Her one-in-a-million voice soars out over the auditorium, the lower registers carmel rich, the high notes pure as bird song.

One month after this concert, Genesis’ grandma pointed out that there seemed to be a lump in her throat area. Her mother took *[continued on page 5]*

Photo by Codina Family



Genesis Codina at her last performance before losing her voice to cancer.

Zen and Now

An Uncommon Good Volunteer Spotlight



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good mentor, Eunice Randal (center) with her mentee, Karen (right) at a rock climbing party.



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good Board Member Dan Randal with his wife Eunice.

When Dan and Eunice Randal first locked eyes across a crowded Zen Buddhist zendo (meditation hall), it was the beginning of a grand romance for them and a great blessing for Uncommon Good. She was an elegant lady with a proper British accent, whose outer polish belied a tenacious inner strength. He was a formerly penniless young man who'd made a successful career, first in the paper business and then in the building trades.

Eunice's parents divorced before she was born. When she was eight-years-old her mother, unable to support her, sent her to an orphanage. She lived there, and in foster homes, until the age of sixteen. Then, desperate to escape her dreary circumstances, she came to the U.S. to work as a nanny for a family with four children, and later as a flight attendant. Highly intelligent, she regrets not having had the opportunity to complete an education in her youth.

"If there had been an Uncommon Good when I was a child, all my dreams would have been fulfilled," she told us. "But no one in my life believed in education. It was not given as an option. I really wanted to be a nurse but that was for 'them' (the well-to-do), not people like me."

Dan says something similar. As a boy he was an excellent student, but his working class family didn't value education. Some relatives even criticized him for getting good grades as if he were doing it to show up the rest of the family. Once he graduated from high school he passed up the opportunity to go to Brown University because of lack of funds. "If someone had gotten a hold of me earlier, I probably would have taken a different path, probably as a teacher," he admits. Instead, he went to community college, followed by Cal State Los Angeles and

then chose a career in business as his way out of the underclass.

However, both Dan and Eunice, after finding each other, also found meaning in giving of themselves in the community. Dan worked with homeless addicts on Skid Row, and with disabled adults, teaching them to function out in the world, and helping them to express themselves through art. Eunice began tutoring all six members of a Syrian refugee family. One of the daughters is now in medical school. Another was valedictorian of her high school and is now a pre-med major in college where already she has discovered a new kind of bacteria in soil. Another is in high school but is taking additional classes at the elite Pomona College.

After being introduced to Uncommon Good, Dan donned numerous hats for us, becoming a member of our Board of Directors, our representative at the Chamber of Commerce, a docent who leads tours of our first-of-its-kind-in-the-world green office (the Whole Earth Building), an event staffer and more. He often says, "Whatever it is that you need, just tell me, and if I can I will do it." I don't think he has any idea of how incredibly helpful and comforting this is for a grass roots nonprofit organization that must meet huge needs with very limited resources!

Eunice became a tutor and then a mentor to one of our students, nine-year-old Karen.

"My first impression of Karen was that she was very introverted and quiet," recalls Eunice. "She is very sweet, but difficult to draw out. I remember that when I first asked her to tell me about herself, she couldn't do it. So I told her what I thought of her, what a lovely, kind, delightful person she was. And it made her cry!"

For the past seven years, Eunice has been getting together every week with Karen, whose mother acknowledges, "We think of her as Karen's second mother." They have gone to museums, a safari park, the Hollywood Bowl, and hiking in the mountains. They have shared countless dinners and played hundreds of board games. My favorite memory of the two of them was when we had arranged a rock climbing party for our kids and their mostly college-age mentors. However, Eunice, who is a woman of a certain age, was not to be left out of the fun. She grabbed one of the ropes and climbed 45 feet straight up to the top of the gym ceiling. I thought it was a wonderful demonstration for our kids of reaching for one's highest potential!

We may not be getting the expected El Nino rains here at Uncommon Good this year. But thanks to Dan and Eunice Randal, and all of our other remarkable and loving volunteers, we and our kids are enjoying a great downpour of blessings. ■

Songbird (con’t) [continued from page 3]

Genesis to her pediatrician who told them not to worry, that it was most likely just swollen lymph nodes. But the lump did not go away and so a test was performed. The diagnosis came back as thyroid cancer. Genesis described her feelings in an essay she wrote about the ordeal:

“My surgery is scheduled early the following month, but I’m not scared. I just want this to end. Thyroid cancer is an ‘easy’ cancer as my doctor says. Therefore, it should all be over soon. I undergo surgery and my thyroid and a tumor the size of a golf ball are removed. Everything is over now. It IS over, right? Everything is a blur as I open my heavy eyes after the operation. I see my parents and a blonde haired nurse. ‘Mom.’ Nothing comes out. I try once again and nothing comes out. Where is my voice?”

The doctor who had performed the operation was a general surgeon, not a thyroid specialist. He should have used a special instrument to guard the patient’s vocal cords but did not. One of her two vocal chords was severed, paralyzing it. Genesis’ phenomenal voice was destroyed. Her doctors informed her that she might never sing again.

Genesis underwent radiation but the cancer was still there. She had a second surgery, but the cancer remained. Then more radiation, as the battle against the illness raged within her for three years.

It was then that our songbird became a phoenix, rising from the ashes of her dreams. As her speaking voice gradually returned, she began volunteering with cancer organizations, particularly those that served children, so that she could encourage them and give them hope. She entered beauty pageants and used them to tell her story, to raise awareness about cancer, and to inspire others who were fighting the illness. (Currently she is the reigning Miss Teen Orange County USA.) She threw herself into her schoolwork, maintaining a greater than 4.0 grade point average. She even began to sing again at charity events, sometimes through her tears, even though she knew that her voice was not the same and would never recover its former strength. Here at Uncommon Good she joined our Teen Green club and helped to build our world famous Whole Earth Building. When it came time to apply for college, she was accepted at fifteen of them, including UCLA and the American University in Paris. She chose UC Santa Barbara when it awarded her a full scholarship. When asked who she is today she responded, “I am fearless. I am strong. I am persevering.”

Cancer has stolen Genesis’ peerless voice. Yet now her beautiful soul sings more gloriously still. 📷



Genesis upon her graduation from high school and acceptance with a full scholarship to the University of California at Santa Barbara.



Genesis and Keanu Reeves when both were acting in the film “Street Kings.”



Genesis post surgery.



Genesis as an anti-cancer advocate.

Photo by Codina Family

Photo by Codina Family

Photo by Codina Family

Photo by Codina Family

Medical Mentors (con’t) [continued from page 1]

ill with cancer and had two protracted hospitalizations. Andrew visited him every day through his high school years. Then the year he graduated from high school, his father had a stroke. He watched his dad fight to learn how to walk again, and battle cognitive impairments and renal failure. The family fell into hard times as Andrew’s mother quit her job to care for her husband. The following year Grandpa Garcia passed away of cancer. Because of the family’s financial strain, Andrew went to work after high school to help pay the family’s bills. He also volunteered at a local hospital, and found that he liked the work and enjoyed connecting with patients.



KEY co-founder Andrew Alix with his grandfather.

After working for a time, Andrew applied and was accepted to the University of California at San Diego. At first he didn’t think he had any interest in medicine as a career. “For me, a doctor was George Clooney in the emergency room doing gory surgery,” he confesses. So he explored a variety of subjects and it wasn’t until his junior year as he reflected on the medical struggles of his father and grandfather that he realized that his desire to help others might best be served by becoming a physician. But because he made this decision midway through college, he did not have enough time to take all of the required pre-med subjects before graduation. So after leaving college he signed up for the post baccalaureate pre-med program at KGI which helps students become fully prepared for medical school.

At first when he announced that he had decided to become a doctor, his family was shocked because it was something he’d shown no inclination for in the past. Yet his mother was supportive and understanding, even though it meant that her son could not help her financially for the many years he would be in medical training. To compensate, she started a candy business on top of her full time job.

Once at KGI, Andrew realized that he was in the midst of a very talented pool of students but there was no organized way for them to help kids in the community. That brought him to our doorstep with his proposal for a medical mentoring program.

We responded enthusiastically to Andrew’s idea and he reached out to another KGI student, Laura Cantu, to help him recruit their fellow pre-med students. Laura was a natural, both for this project and the medical profession. As a child in Roseville, near Sacramento, she remembers being sent off to kindergarten with a first aid kit in her backpack. When she returned home after her first day of school the first aid kit was empty. Laura proudly announced to her mother, “I helped all these people and fixed everything. I put Disney princess band aids on everyone!”

In college at the University of California at Davis, Laura read the book “Mountains Beyond Mountains” the incredible story of Paul Farmer, a pioneering doctor to the Third World. Inspired, she decided to become a physician. However, UC Davis lacked sufficient pre-med advisors and she could not get into the few prerequisite lab classes that were offered. As a result, she, too, came to KGI after graduation to acquire the pre-med classes she’d been unable to take in college.

The next day only four students brought their homework and so Joon followed through on his threat and sent the other thirty to the principal’s office!

Together Andrew and Laura recruited 21 of their fellow KGI students to be mentors for Uncommon Good youngsters. They call the program KGI Empowering Youth, or KEY. Andrew also pitched the project to KGI professor Joon Kim, who serves as the Director of the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Certification Program. Andrew and Laura knew that they would be moving on after their pre-med year at KGI and hoped that Professor Kim could provide continuity for the mentoring program by recruiting students in subsequent years to step into their shoes.

Professor Kim responded with enthusiasm and agreed to be the KEY faculty advisor. When I met him I saw that he was genuinely touched that so many of his students had reached out to our underprivileged kids. Once I learned about his own fascinating journey I realized why he felt as he did. Professor Joon Kim was born in Korea. His father was a driven and brilliant man who had been one of the top three students in his country, graduating from Korea University, which is that highly education conscious nation’s equivalent of Harvard University. He became an executive with Korean Airlines, which required him to move all over the world responding to the needs of the company.

In 1981 Joon’s father made a heroic sacrifice. So that his children could have a stable home in the U.S., he resigned from his jet setting job and settled with his family in Gardena, California. To support the family, he started a mom and pop booth at the local swap meet selling toys.

“My sister and I were the business consultants,” recalls Joon. “We would go with our dad to the toy district in downtown Los Angeles. I’d try out the robots and skateboards and my sister would give Dad her opinion about the dolls. I also helped with inventory. I remember writing down lists of things like ‘fruit eraser – 50 cents.’ My sister and I also were the booth’s ‘security’ and we had to confront people who were stealing. One time my sister, who was five years younger than I was, hopped on the leg of a thief to slow him down so we could get our stuff back.”



KEY Club Faculty Advisor, Dr. Joon Kim.

Photo by Alix family

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good mentee, Lisette, with her mentor and KEY co-founder Laura Cantu.

From the age of seven through high school Joon worked at the swap meet every weekend and holiday. Christmas was especially hard because there was so much work and no time for play or celebration. Joon bitterly resented the regimen and did not understand at the time the sacrifices that his parents were making to take care of him and give him opportunities.

Joon's father was very old school and ruled the family with an iron fist. He wanted his children to go to the best schools and become doctors. Dutifully, Joon applied to UCLA and was accepted as a pre-med student. But having grown up with the structure of every minute of his life dictated by his parents, Joon was unprepared for independence. He lost focus and struggled, and ultimately the university dropped him on a misunderstood technicality. At sea in the large educational bureaucracy, Joon did not know how to fight the termination. "The day the notice of my termination came in the mail was the only time in my life I've ever seen my dad in tears," he confesses.

After leaving UCLA, Joon worked for two years as an actor and movie extra. Once the casting company called and asked him if he spoke Korean. He said that he did and when he showed up on the set he was excited to learn that his job was to teach Al Pacino some dialogue in Korean. Pacino was playing the role of Satan in the film "Devil's Advocate" and since the devil is supposed to be able to speak any language, he needed to be able to deliver some lines in convincing Korean. As an actor, Joon learned much about himself, and became fascinated with the subject of human motivation and the psychology of success. So when he had the opportunity to return to UCLA through a special program for students whose studies had been interrupted, he came back as a psychology major. After graduation he obtained an emergency teaching credential.

When Joon got his first teaching assignment in a public school in Rancho Palos Verdes, he assumed that he would be teaching the privileged children of the rich. But the reality turned out to be very different. All the rich kids in that area were going to private school and the public school was full of poor students who had been bussed in. The teacher that Joon was replacing had walked off the job because of the disciplinary problems in her classroom. When Joon took over the class, the students behaved no better. But Joon told them that they were not going to be able to get rid of him by acting up. He laid down clear rules, including that no one would be allowed to attend class if they did not bring the completed homework assignment with them. The next day only four students brought their homework and so Joon followed through on his threat and sent the other thirty to the principal's office! Soon Joon himself was summoned to a very upset principal's office. But when he explained that he had needed to take that extreme action to establish his credibility, the principal backed him up. Joon never had another problem after that with his students turning in their homework.

Joon soon bonded with his students, but chafed under the limitations of the job. Because there were no supplies for his science classes he bought hair gel to make cells and candy for the nucleus. He went to the pier and caught mackerels for dissection because he could not get specimens from the school district. In his second year of teaching, Joon was offered the science department chairmanship,

but he turned it down because he knew that if a young person such as himself were promoted so quickly, it would cause hard feelings among the older staff. He also was becoming interested in working with college students to train them to become teachers. And so he turned in his resignation.

He was asked to mentor the new teacher, Lani, who was going to be replacing him and he agreed. She turned out to be a young person like himself who was willing to go the extra mile, quite literally as it turned out, for her students. She came up with the idea of borrowing her mom's minivan to take six students on a college tour to UC San Diego and UCLA. After obtaining the school's and parents' permission, she and Joon took the kids to the two campuses. The students could not believe the universities were really schools. "No, this is a city!" they protested. At the end of the long day of touring, the kids were hungry and so Joon and Lani took them to a pizza joint. The order was a long time coming and when it arrived, was the wrong pizza. The manager came out and apologized and said that the meal would be free. Joon and Lani breathed a sigh of relief, since the order had cost them their last dollar! This chapter of the story actually has two happy endings. Joon and Lani bonded over their shared passion for students, fell in love and were married.

After leaving teaching, Joon earned a doctorate degree in education while working at USC as a biology and neuroscience advisor, and then as the Assistant Director of Advising for the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. After obtaining his PhD, Joon applied for the position of Administrative Director of the KGI Postbaccalaureate Premedical Certificate program at the Claremont campus. He remembers being in church for Easter week services when he got the message on his cell phone offering him the job. His wife, Lani, initially had misgivings though. "That's in the 909 area code, isn't it?" she asked. "Isn't that just a hot, dry desert?" It didn't help matters when, on their first joint visit to Claremont, Joon got off the freeway too soon and drove through some rough industrial areas on their way to KGI. But once they reached Claremont and Lani saw all of the city's trees, she warmed up to the idea of living there.

When Joon first arrived in 2011, the postbac pre-med program only had 8 students. Under his leadership, there are now 58 and the program is still growing. Joon is very happy at KGI.

"I love the creative freedom and autonomy here that I can use to create strong mentorship relationships with my students," he says. "And I have a wonderful boss and terrific support from our Dean, Steve Casper. In many places the philosophy is 'Do more with less.' Here it is 'Do a lot more with more.'"

Thank you, Andrew, Laura, Joon, and all of our terrific KGI mentors, for enabling us to "do a lot more" for our Uncommon Good kids. 📌



Professor Joon Kim with KGI pre-med student Robert Unger.

Joy to Our World

Uncommon Good offers our heartfelt thanks to all those at Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Claremont Presbyterian Church, the Girl Scouts and Shoes That Fit, who participated in the Adopt a Family program this past Christmas, bringing the joy of the season to families who otherwise would not have been able to celebrate. May the happiness that you brought to our little ones return to you all in blessings this year! 📷



Photo by Carlos Carrillo



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