

BREADMAKER, from page 5

farmers or developmentally disabled adults. PSU's website describes social practice as something that "might appear to be more like sociology, anthropology, social work, journalism, or environmentalism than art, yet it retains the intention of creating significance and appreciation for audiences in a similar way to more conventional art." The program was a great fit for Varinthorn, who was now determined to create projects around people.

"It's something that makes the most sense to me. When I first started focusing on sustainability, I visited the UN website and it said "sustainability can't be successful in only one area. It must cover four areas:

human, social, economy, and the environment." Varinthorn's projects were also informed by her own struggles as an immigrant to the United States, trying to find work, and to learn a new language. In her project "Friggen Rich," she helped design new menus for food cart-owners whose first language was not English. In 2007, the Willamette Week published an editorial by her, defending a former co-worker who had been criticized by a food reviewer for lacking adequate English.

"I love the underdog story," she says, "people who go

through something and change themselves, or transform themselves." But it took the prompting of her professor, artist Harrell Fletcher, for Varinthorn to screw up her courage to contact Dave.

"I'm shy so it was a challenge to contact him," she says. But she believed his story was compelling, and saw in it the perfect act project. "I read his story on the bread bag, and thought about it as a larger story."

Her challenge, once she made contact with Dave, was to explain her interest in him. At one of their first meetings, Varinthorn says Dave asked, "Be honest with me: Why are you interested in an ex-con?" Her answer was its own compelling story: As a child, she had eaten some of her grandmother's sleeping pills and heart

medication while her grandmother was away at the market, and it was an ex-con neighbor who discovered her and drove her to the hospital, saving her life.

For his part, Dave liked the idea of creating a larger project around the story of his life. "I've never had any problem telling people about my story. It kind of helps me stay clean and remember where I've been." Varinthorn suggested that they create a book that would expand on his story, and from the beginning, they both agreed that whatever their collaborative project produced, it would be offered free to correctional facilities and juvenile detention centers across the United States. Over the next few years, Dave worked and reworked his story while Varinthorn proposed various book designs. When Dave told her she could use photos from his past, including a string of intimidating mug shots from his more troubled days, she went to request copies at the courthouse in Portland, a particular thrill since she had just become a citizen and it was her first visit there.

This fall, Varinthorn received a grant from the Regional Arts and Culture Council to publish a final version of their book project, which is titled "Good Seed." The book begins with an introduction by Varinthorn, and then Dave's story takes off. Told with unflinching candor, he describes his drug addiction and violent crimes, his incarceration and his eventual transformation. There are photos of his family, of him both in and out of prison, and many of the aforementioned mug shots, some of them showing a defiant Dave, some battered and bloody. The first half of the book is handwritten in No. 2 pencil by Varinthorn, a nod to the tool of choice allowed in prisons. When Dave gets out of prison for the last time, the text of the story is typewritten, a symbolic gesture of the change he's undergone, and the new possibilities available to him now.

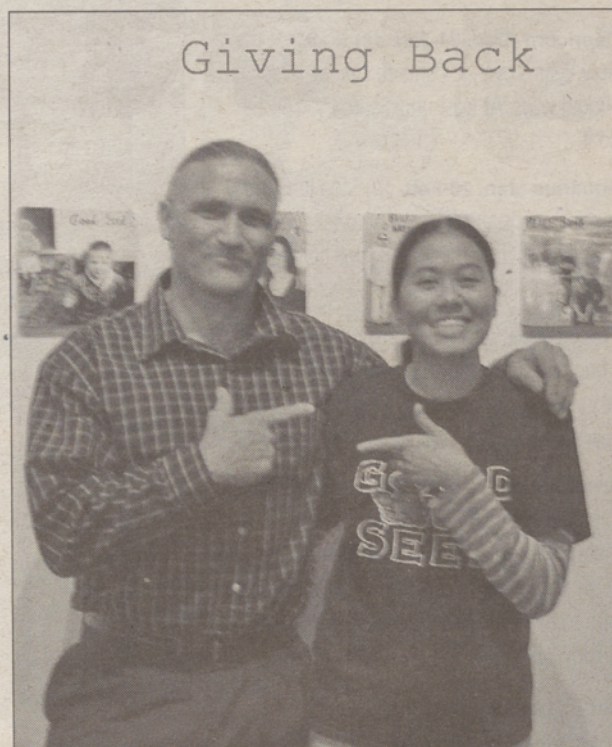
Varinthorn organized an event in December to celebrate the publication and offer free copies of "Good Seed." "When I saw Dave signing the book that day," she says, "I thought it was the most fulfilling project. The moment I saw it, I felt like everything was complete. Everything I have been doing for three years was worth it. Seeing him sit and sign copies of his book was really incredible."

Today, Dave Dahl is vice president of the bread company and continues to advocate for people who are trying to make positive changes in their lives. If there's anything he has to say to business owners and policy

makers, it's that everybody deserves a second chance.

"We have two hundred employees altogether, and fifty of them are ex-cons, so we have a lot of people who were basically on the street when we hired them. I can show them by example that it works hiring these people. Of course you have to do your homework on anybody you hire. But if you hire people who have been through adversity and have come out of it stronger,

"We have two hundred employees altogether, and fifty of them are ex-cons, so we have a lot of people who were basically on the street when we hired them. ... If you hire people who have been through adversity and have come out of it stronger, those people can be some of your very best, most motivated, most accountable people. All you've got to do is give them a chance.




Varinthorn Christopher, right, with Dave Dahl at the book signing for Good Seed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VARINTHORN CHRISTOPHER

those people can be some of your very best, most motivated, most accountable people. All you've got to do is give them a chance. Give them a chance to prove themselves and they will make your company better."


Varinthorn Christopher continues her social sustainability projects, and is an adjunct professor at PSU and PCC. She credits the faculty at PSU for her success. "They are so dedicated to their teaching and they also inspired me and my projects as well."

The "Good Seed" project has reinforced Varinthorn's belief in the possibility of redemption. "Don't judge a person based on the way they look or dress. I think everyone deserves a second chance. Just like the ex-con that saved me. Because he did that, he gave me a second chance to live. And so I want other people to believe in the same thing too."



Albina Community Bank

Meet Your Local Branch Manager:




"Communities aren't just streets and buildings. Communities are thriving places where cultures, commerce and souls grow stronger together."

- Mary

At Albina Community Bank the most ordinary financial transaction can have an extraordinary impact on our local community.

You're going to bank somewhere, why not let your banking make a difference in the places where you live and work?

Mary Edmeades
Social Impact Banking
503.445.2155
medmeades@albinabank.com



SISTERS OF THE ROAD

Winterfolk 23 is February 5th

Benefit for Sisters Of The Road headlined by Tracy Grammer.

Tickets on sale now at the Aladdin Theater Box Office and Ticketmaster. \$28 advance, \$30 day of show

Buy your chance to WIN a Taylor 615 Jumbo Guitar! Tickets \$10 each!




Tracy Grammer

Raffle tickets available at Artichoke Music, Portland Fret Works and Sisters' Office

133 NW 6th Ave. Portland, OR 97209 503-222-5694 www.sistersoftheroad.org

Want a vendor in your neighborhood?

• Call us at 503-228-5657.