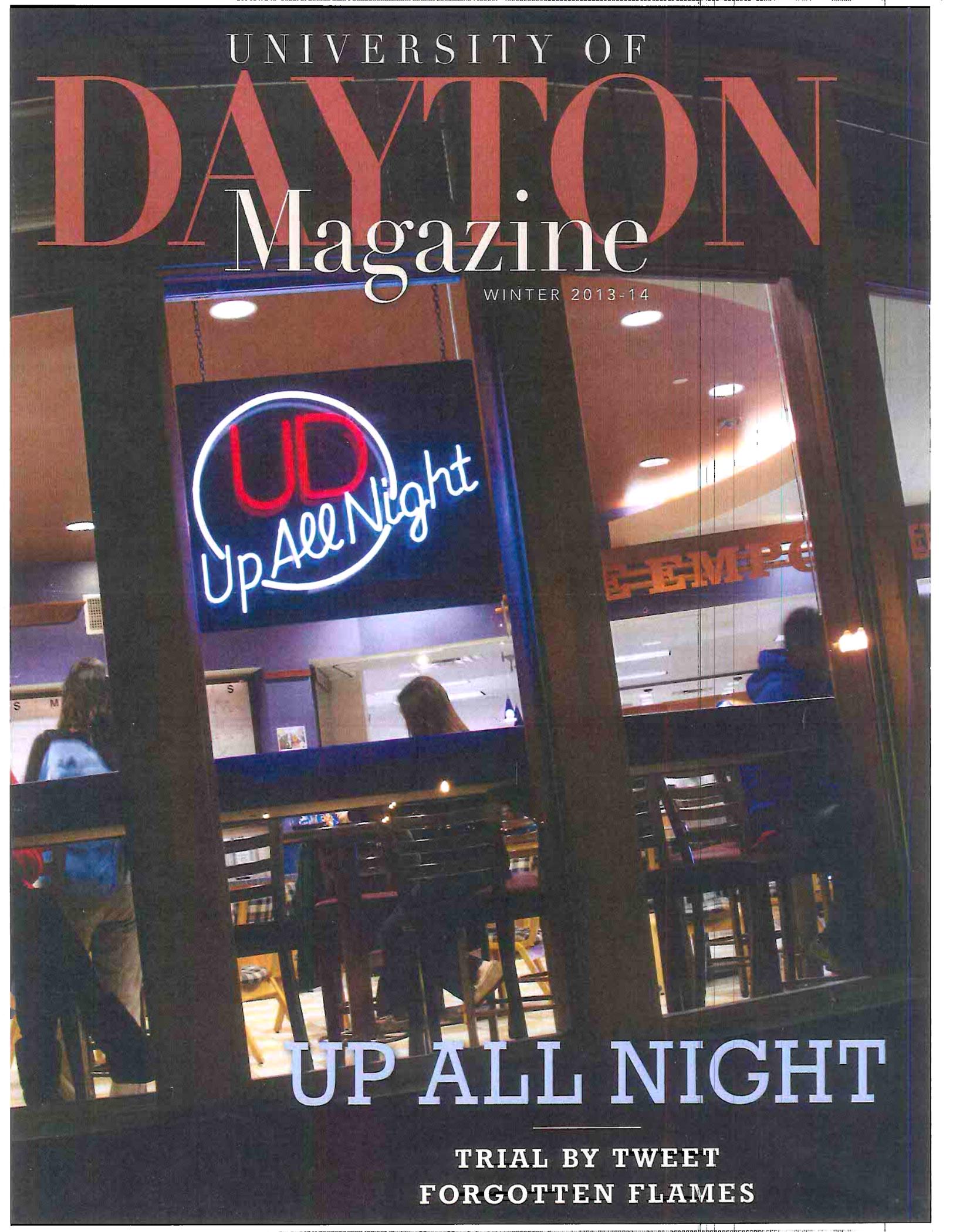


UNIVERSITY OF

DAYTON

Magazine

WINTER 2013-14



UD
Up All Night

UP ALL NIGHT

TRIAL BY TWEET
FORGOTTEN FLAMES

Saluting Maria

By Merle Wilberding '75

I was standing in the background during the graveside services at Calvary Cemetery in Kettering, Ohio, for Marine Lance Cpl. Maria Lauterbach, murdered by a fellow Marine whom she had accused of rape. Standing next to me was a Shar Pei guard dog, his wrinkles and leash both becoming taut as he leaned toward me. At the other end of the leash was Susan Avila-Smith, the founder of VetWow, an organization devoted to victims of military sexual trauma. She had traveled from the Pacific Northwest just to bear witness in support of the latest victim.

Susan told me that her Shar Pei stood guard between her bed and her door every night. She needed this guard dog to deal with the trauma from having been sexually assaulted while she served in the military.

Just two weeks earlier I had been asked to consult with Maria's mother, Mary Lauterbach '94, on the military and civilian legal complexities that came with her daughter's murder by Marine Cpl. Cesar Laurean. At first, I looked at this as a legal case. I had been trained to look at case assignments objectively and analytically — even when the cases were emotional and tragic. In this case, I first viewed Maria's murder as an isolated crime.

But it soon became clear that her death was not an isolated crime. And it was not going to be simply another legal case to be analyzed and intellectually processed. If I sensed this from the presence of the Shar Pei at the funeral, I was overwhelmed by the impact of the memorial service for Maria three weeks later at Camp Lejeune.

Standing in the front of the chapel was the chaplain wearing his Marine colonel's combat fatigues with a simple cross hanging around his neck. After several opening prayers and Scripture readings, a Marine sergeant in the back started the roll call:

"Sergeant Adams." "HERE."
"Corporal Benson." "HERE."
"Lance Corporal Smith." "HERE."
"Lance Corporal Lauterbach."
"Lance Corporal Lauterbach."
"Lance Corporal Lauterbach."

After a long silence, I looked around the chapel and tears were running down the faces of all the Marines, and down my own face. The chaplain then delivered a beautiful homily on the loss of a loved one in the family — in the Lauter-

'The Meeting Room'



—Rosie Huart '97
www.rosiehuart.com

bach family and in the Marine family.

When the memorial service was finished, I walked into the bright sunshine. On the road in front of the chapel was a company of Marines, running and singing in cadence: "Here we go. 1-2-3-4, I love the Marine Corps." The cadence seemed to signal that the Marines were going back to duty.

But the cadence inspired my own desire to pursue change. I wanted to help Mary Lauterbach in her quest to become the voice of Maria. I wanted to look for ways that I could contribute to the national awareness of sexual assault in the military and contribute to legislative changes in how sexual assault in the military is addressed.

The months following Maria's murder only strengthened my resolve. I had calls from a number of parents who were seeking help for their daughters. All of their stories were the same — their daughters had been sexually assaulted within the military and the reaction

within the military "family" only aggravated the trauma of the attack. Their daughters were subjected to taunts and torments. The perpetrators were treated as victims.

During the past five years, I have been part of an effort to change the legal system, to provide more protection to victims and more consistent prosecutions of perpetrators. The initial challenge has been to insist that sexual assault be seen for what it is — not a matter of discipline that is subordinate to the military's mission, but a heinous crime, a crime that has been part of a culture destroying the fabric of honorable service in the military.

I want to be part of the effort to change the cadence of the military culture. I have been gratified to see some success in changing the laws. I am sure some lives have been saved. But the offending culture is deep-rooted. I want to do more, and the mission must continue. I want to make sure one more Marine can answer the roll call, "HERE."