

ALIVE AND KICKING

Every woman has a God-given story to tell, says Heather Scheiwe '04, a writer and editor who created *Alive Magazine* to allow women a chance to creatively shape their identities.

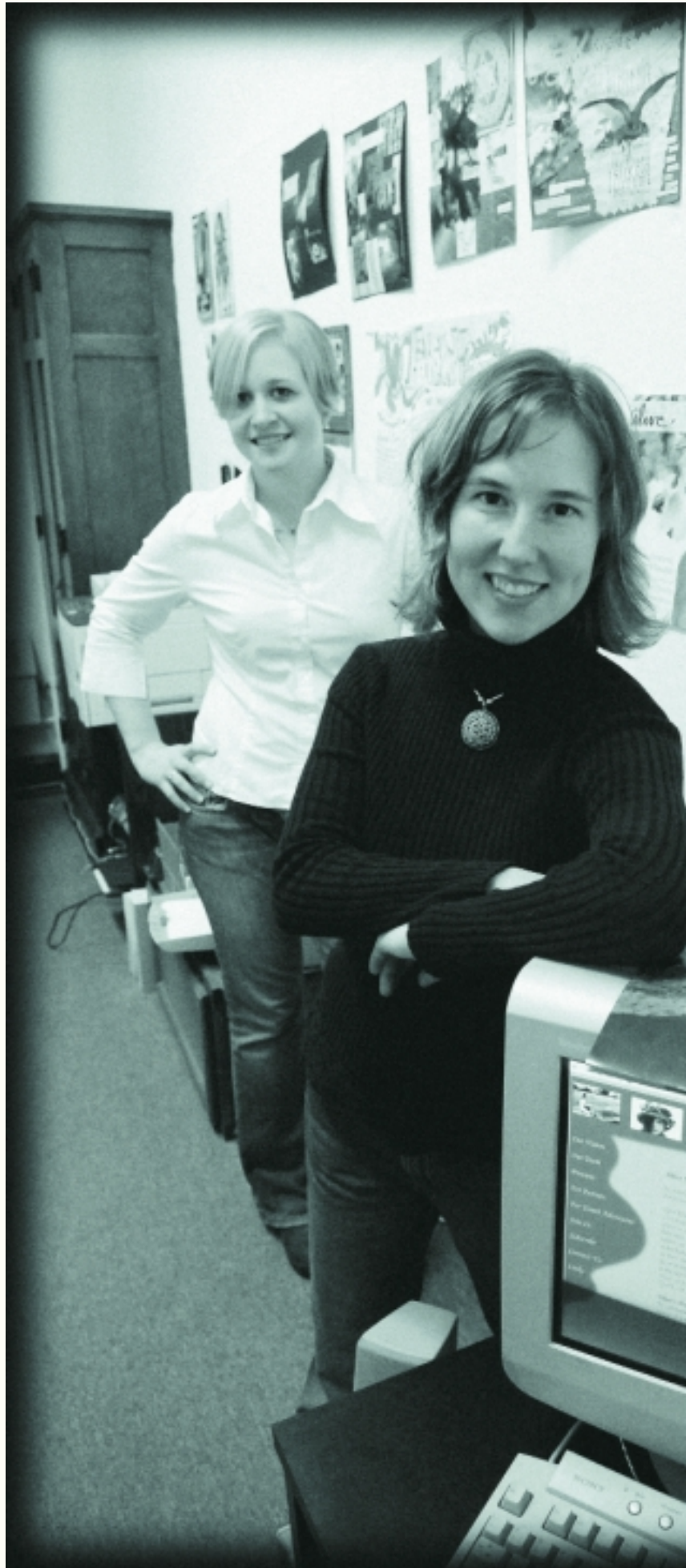
BY TOM VOGEL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM ROSTER

WHEN HEATHER SCHEIWE '04 ENTERS a coffee shop, she's usually thinking about more than the house blend of the day. She's looking at the artwork hanging on the walls, the student with her nose buried in a novel or the girl scribbling in a notebook. Scheiwe wants to discover new creative voices for *Alive Magazine*, a publication for young women that began as a senior project while she was a student at St. Olaf.

Three years ago, *Alive* was a magazine prototype created by Scheiwe as part of her individualized major through the St. Olaf Center for Integrative Studies. Today it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit company, with a print run of 1,000 copies per issue distributed in 28 states three times a year, a website (alivemagazine.org) and submissions coming in from young women around the country. Recent issues have included letters from volunteers working in a Bolivian orphanage, an interview with two 14-year-old girls about their experiences in Prague and advice to college-bound students, as well as original artwork, essays and poetry. The magazine represents not only a creative outlet for young writers and artists, but also the blending of Scheiwe's own Christian and feminist perspectives.

"Every young woman has a God-given story to tell and deserves a safe place to question, explore and share what makes her fully alive," says *Alive Magazine's* mission statement.



HEATHER SCHEIWE '04
(FOREGROUND) AND
JENNIFER DOTSON '05 IN
THE MINNEAPOLIS OFFICE
OF ALIVE MAGAZINE.



Scheiwe's desire to provide girls and women a creative outlet is inspired, in part, by her concern about how materialistic, superficial media messages are affecting young women's lives. Her own struggles with identity, body image and faith set the groundwork for her religion and women's studies major at St. Olaf and, eventually, *Alive's* philosophy.

In an essay titled "Embracing Your Beauty, Moving in Strength," which appears in the book *My Red Couch: And Other Stories on Seeking a Feminist Faith* (Pilgrim Press, 2005), Scheiwe describes her battle with anorexia and her attempts to construct an identity separate from the feminine stereotypes she saw around her.

Disillusioned by archetypes of beauty that other teenage girls were attempting to emulate, Scheiwe sought an alternative in Christianity. "My faith was the only strength I possessed that was socially acceptable for a girl," she says. However, even after immersing herself in activities at church, Scheiwe felt incomplete. Ideas of "good Christian girls" leading "quiet lives of service and submission" left her feeling fettered, rather than liberated.

In an attempt to conform to what she saw as Christian ideals of self-denial and discipline, and to eschew stereotypical feminine images, she began starving herself and exercising obsessively. The result was 20 pounds lost off an already-thin frame, two hospitalizations and still no resolution to what she calls her "personality confusion."

During this time Scheiwe enrolled in her first women's studies class at St. Olaf, "Christian Theology and Human Existence," taught by Associate Professor of Religion David Booth. Although she initially resisted feminist courses because she considered them "too radical to integrate with Christian faith," the subject matter sparked her curiosity, and in the spring of her junior year she declared a major in women's studies.

Still, Scheiwe felt incomplete. "Being 'feminist' without the unity of my body and spirit was just another externally dictated label," she writes in *My Red Couch*.

It wasn't until Scheiwe applied to Oregon Extension, a semester-long program sponsored by Pennsylvania-based Messiah College, that she began to come to terms with the different facets of her identity. The extension course, called "The Struggle for Self and Voice in Community: Women in Literature and Theology," took place in the woodlands of Oregon, where 20 young women — led by "a middle-aged bohemian couple named Nancy and John," as Scheiwe describes them — read

poetry and studied women of the Bible and historical social revolutions. "During that time," Scheiwe recalls, "we spoke our pain through poetry and dance and music."

Upon her return to Minnesota, Scheiwe began learning to trust her inner voice and use it to speak her own truth. No longer at odds with her Christianity, she saw her feminism as a blessing that would "invigorate" her faith.

"I could not imagine my Christian faith without integrating my feminist perspective," she says, "nor could I practice feminism without integrating Christ's model of equality and compassion and strength."

SELF-HELP, SOCIAL CHANGE

WHEN THE TIME CAME for Scheiwe to decide on a topic for her senior project, she found that her own experience merging feminism and Christianity provided a strong foundation.

Scheiwe's academic interests were many and varied, ranging from narrative psychology and creative writing to mass media studies and theology. Additionally, she was fascinated with "narrative theology" — what she describes as "receiving the Word and proclaiming the Gospel in a continuous, storied way that respects the freedom of the Gospel and the integrity of the hearer."

The medium in which all of these passions came together, Scheiwe decided, was magazine publishing. Her senior project would be devoted to producing a magazine for young women. "At that point, all of my studies were reallocated to that," she says.

Based on her own struggles with feminine stereotypes, Scheiwe felt that many mainstream publications marketed toward girls and young women were having a detrimental effect. Many popular magazines encouraged teens to obsess about their physical appearance while neglecting their intellectual and spiritual development, she says.

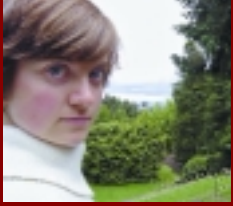
Scheiwe also was troubled by a September 2000 *People* magazine study, "How Do I Look," which stated that 80 percent of teenage girls felt insecure about themselves after looking at popular magazines for three minutes.

"So, the question many girls end up asking themselves is inevitable: 'What's wrong with me that I'm not like those people in the magazine?'" Scheiwe says. "When magazines destroy imagination, creativity, beauty and self-knowledge in less than three minutes, I cringe to think what even three years of reading them during adolescence, the most formative years of one's life, would do."

BRINGING ALIVE TO LIFE

Founded by St. Olaf alumna Heather Scheiwe '04, *Alive Magazine* has ignited the enthusiasm of young women across the country, including St. Olaf students and alumnae.

Publications professional **Jenny Norris Peterson '80**, an *Alive* board member from 2004–05, advised the young staff on how to increase subscriptions, garner charitable support and gain exposure for the magazine through personal and professional networking.



Rachel Winter '04 is the magazine's poetry editor, providing young writers with suggestions and encouragement. An English and religion major at St. Olaf who currently serves at a Catholic worker house in Eugene, Oregon,

Winter contributed to *Alive* during her senior year as part of her own poetry project.

"I knew about it then as Heather's vision," she says. Winter has since become a part of that vision, using her passion for poetry to help other young women writers. "All of the contributions speak to the promise of this magazine," she says.

Alive Marketing Director **Jennifer Dotson '05**, a music major at St. Olaf, met Scheiwe while planning a Christian women's retreat. They discovered a mutual passion for helping young women express themselves and question stereotypes. Dotson enjoys her interaction with *Alive* readers and contributors, recalling a visit to a high school in western Texas. When she asked a group of teenagers if any of them were artists, no one responded. But she caught the eye of one girl, a shy sophomore. "She had a poem about her faith, a beautiful depiction of her struggles that she was able to share with me," Dotson says. "That one interaction got her going."



A number of current St. Olaf students volunteer by providing written and visual content, as well as editing, designing, distributing and promoting the magazine. Pictured at a recent meeting in the Pause are (clockwise from bottom left): **GINNA BAKER '07, Sara Berry '07, Mary Sotos '07, Stephanie Rogers '07, Christina Shults '07 and Heather Scheiwe '04.**

— Tom Vogel



Scheiwe wanted a magazine that inspired creativity and confidence in young women, rather than pushing products or unhealthy images on them. She quickly discovered, however, that passion went only so far, and there was a lot about magazine publishing she needed to learn. Scheiwe studied other publications, from mainstream teen magazines such as *Seventeen* and *YM* to Christian magazines for adolescent girls such as *Brio*, to narrative magazines for younger girls, including the Duluth-based, award-winning *New Moon*. Interviews with professionals in the magazine industry — Krishana Kraft of *Campus Life* and *Brio* and Kate Freeborn,

editor of *New Moon* — helped Scheiwe develop a plan for assembling an editorial staff and soliciting content.

Scheiwe also devised a detailed business plan, including marketing and distribution strategies, risk assessments and budget. She applied for a grant from St. Olaf's Finstad Office for Entrepreneurial Studies, which allows students to start their own nonprofit business. The Finstad Grant is awarded to students for entrepreneurial projects with social and economic potential. Scheiwe's objective — to provide a safe, intelligent, spiritually challenging place for young women to tell their stories — and her research into the complicated and financially risky publishing process met the criteria.

With the help of a \$1,700 Finstad Grant in 2003, *Alive Magazine* was born. The Finstad Grant enabled Scheiwe to distribute the magazine to churches, youth organizations and other religious groups, which in turn generated enough donations to sustain *Alive* beyond its prototype issue. Today it operates out of an office (which it shares with Latreia, another young nonprofit company) in the University Technical Building on the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis.

Nearly all of the work to produce *Alive* is done gratis, testimony to how strongly many women feel about the magazine. In addition to Scheiwe, St. Olaf alumnae such as Jenny Norris Peterson '80, Rachel Winter '04 and Jennifer Dotson '05 (see sidebar) and current students have contributed hundreds of volunteer hours to edit, design, distribute and promote the magazine. In turn, they get real-world job experience in fund raising, marketing, graphic design, editing, web design and event planning, and a chance to learn from others in the publishing field.

The emphasis placed on vocation at St. Olaf was crucial in getting *Alive* off the ground and sustaining it, Scheiwe says. She likes a quote from writer Frederick Buechner: "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the needs of the world."

That sentiment encapsulates what Scheiwe has created in *Alive Magazine*. "There are times when you can't help but do something helpful," she says. "St. Olaf taught me that." 🦁

TOM VOGEL is a communications specialist in the marketing-communications office at St. Olaf College.

Learn more @

ALIVE MAGAZINE

alivemagazine.org

stolaf.edu/depts/cis

CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE STUDIES