

# INSPIRED BY HER FATHER'S STORIES, YUAN TRAVELS FROM CHINA TO VALPO TO DISCOVER VOCATION

By Kristin Knoerzer

*This story appeared originally in VALPO, the alumni magazine of Valparaiso University. Vol. 29 No.3, Spring 2013*

Growing up in Hangzhou, China, many children enjoy listening to legends of West Lake, a place where the White Snake, a spirit whose attempt at becoming a goddess failed, has been trapped between mortal and divine realms for more than 1,000 years.

For Ruyue “Julia” Yuan, a somewhat different tale resonates. Looking back to her childhood in Hangzhou, Yuan remembers her father’s stories of his own life adventures, and one experience in particular has played a large part in shaping his daughter’s path — his time spent at Valparaiso University. Yuan’s father was a visiting scholar at Valpo in the early 1990s, and his experience was so profound that he encouraged his daughter to study hard so that she, too, could one day come to Valpo. Now a Christ College student majoring in math with minors in engineering and applied statistics, Yuan has found Valpo to be a truly extraordinary place.

“I just love Valparaiso University,” Yuan said. “You have so many people who care about you.” Yuan was looking for a school that would challenge her intellectually while providing the support she needs to thrive. And in Christ College — The Honors College, Yuan has found an environment that stimulates learning, with professors who challenge her to grow academically and are there to encourage her and give her confidence along the way.

“I really enjoy studying in Christ College,” Yuan said. “Besides my interest in humanities, I just really love the way that they challenge you. That’s the thing I really love, and that’s the way I can improve.”

Aside from challenging and stimulating academics, one of Yuan’s favorite things about being at Valpo is the close-knit community, which enables her to develop meaningful relationships with other students and with her professors. Many children grow up hearing stories from their parents and dream of one day making these dreams become a reality. For Yuan, her father’s tales of Valparaiso University inspired her to travel around the globe to pursue her education and prepare for her career. And just as her father had told her growing up, Yuan has found Valpo to be a truly special place — a place where she has found her calling, and a place where she now shares that joy, that enthusiasm with others as they discover their own vocations.

## *Spillikin Update, August 2014*

Ruyue Yuan will spend fall semester 2014 in Budapest, Hungary, participating with North American undergraduates in the competitive Budapest Semesters in Mathematics program. There she will study under the tutelage of eminent Hungarian scholar-teachers who are members of Eötvös University, the Mathematical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Budapest University of Technology and Economics, the three institutions known for having educated more than half of Hungary’s highly acclaimed mathematicians.

Yuan’s mentor in mathematics at Valpo is Lara Pudwell ’03, associate professor of mathematics and computers. Pudwell was a Christ College Scholar and graduated with a BS in math and a BA in computer science and a minor in humanities before completing her PhD in mathematics at Rutgers University. Recently Pudwell was named a 2014 winner of the Henry L. Alder Award for Distinguished Teaching by a Beginning College or University Mathematics Faculty Member. In 2013 she was chosen to receive a Math and Computer Science Mentoring Award from the Council on Undergraduate Research to honor faculty for their success in mentoring undergraduate students in research.

And what started professor Lara Pudwell on this path? Perhaps her own participation in the Budapest Semesters in Mathematics program in 2002! ■



Professor  
Lara Pudwell '03



Ruyue Yuan '15