



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
SAN ANTONIO

TOGETHER

OUR MISSION CONTINUES



CELEBRATING OUR A&M-SAN ANTONIO ALUMNI!

ALUMNI IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

When does art become entertainment? When does entertainment become art? How does art happen? Is it a passion, a vocation, a hobby or the proverbial “day job”? These three alumni profiles aim to answer those questions with thoughtfulness and audaciousness. Many people daydream about becoming a writer, a musician, a filmmaker; these accomplished graduates have succeeded in pursuing their passions and making their daydreams a reality!



A Message to our Alumni



This fall 2022 Alumni Update proves again that a Texas A&M University-San Antonio education can take you places you have never dreamed. While working full-time jobs, Priscilla Rodriguez '20, Brett Wilson '16, Blaine Beckman '15 '17, and also create art and entertain people, both locally and globally.

For all of them, it's a family affair (including a fur baby!). In addition, these graduates demonstrate the grit and resilience that many Jaguars learn throughout their educations and lives.

As I continue to share profiles with you of your fellow graduates in future Alumni Updates, please forward your stories to me at alumni@tamusa.edu. You just might be the next smiling face we see glowing out of a Jaguar profile.

Go Jaguars!

Dr. Mary Kay Cooper

Director of Alumni Engagement - Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Priscilla Rodriguez



BACHELOR OF ARTS-2020

When Priscilla Rodriguez '20 B.A. adopted her dog, Tito, six years ago, she had no idea it would inspire her first children's book and help set the course for a career in writing. Rodriguez developed the concept for telling the tale of her beloved pet for nearly two years and in the summer of 2021, she drafted her first manuscript for *Life according to Tito*.

"I wanted to share his story on how he found his 'FURever' home. I took a risk and began researching on how I could bring this idea to life," said Rodriguez. "I must admit that it was scary for me. What if people didn't like it? But that was a risk I was willing to take."

Independently published in 2021, *Life according to Tito* not only brings to life the story of Tito's journey of finding a home, but it also holds a deeper meaning. Rodriguez said the book helps to bring awareness about abandoned animals trying to survive.

"The sad reality is that most animals aren't as fortunate in finding a home as Tito. The book comes from his point of view about his surroundings and first-time experiences," Rodriguez explained.

Earning her associates degree from Northwest Vista College, Rodriguez took a three-year break, but was inspired to attend Texas A&M University-San Antonio (A&M-San Antonio) by some of her former coworkers who shared their journey at the University.

Rodriguez said her experience as a student at A&M-San Antonio was one where

she felt supported and welcomed, with Dr. Marcus Palmer, assistant professor in the Department of Language Arts, serving as a mentor.

“I loved my experience as a student. The professors were amazing and extremely supportive. The community was welcoming,” said Rodriguez. “Dr. Palmer inspired me to work hard to achieve my goals.”

Soon after graduating with a major in Spanish and minor in education, Rodriguez began working for Northside Independent School District as a bilingual instructional assistant. Though her team faced many challenges due to COVID-19, she said it was rewarding to be able to work and learn something new everyday as part of the PreK group.

Born and raised in San Antonio, she admits she experienced challenges in achieving an education.

“I’m a first-generation graduate, which is something I am extremely proud of, especially because I was raised by a single mother; this made things challenging, particularly with my education,” she said.

Rodriguez, who has been writing for 10 years and predominantly writes short poems, draws her biggest inspiration for writing from reading to students and watching their eyes light up when she shares a book with them.

Her second book, *Hooray back to school!*, is about the proverbial first day back to school and encourages students, who may feel nervous about their first day back, to enjoy and celebrate the beginning of a new school year.



Not only does Rodriguez write, but she also illustrates, which is the part of her process she finds the most therapeutic and rewarding when working on her books. Her writing process starts with an idea or message she wants to send and then shifts to thinking about her target audience. Next, she dives into researching the average word count and recommended pages, then drafts the sequence for her book, and finishes with illustrations.

A decorative border at the top of the page featuring a repeating geometric pattern of squares, circles, and stars in shades of gray.

Currently, Rodriguez is working on a “coming of age” book, which she plans to publish soon. She hopes to eventually revisit Tito’s journey by writing a children’s book about his first Christmas. In addition to her writing, she is also focused on her business, Cilla’s Crafts, where she makes custom tumblers, shirts, mouse pads, jewelry and more.

If she could offer professional wisdom to aspiring writers and artists like herself, Rodriguez said to work hard and never give up.

“There will be times that you may feel defeated or discouraged, just take a break or breather and come back with a clear head,” shared Rodriguez. “My advice would be to go for it!”



Brett Wilson

BACHELOR OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES-2016

When renowned film actor and director Robert Redford calls you to ask to work on his film, you should take the call; this is a lesson Brett Wilson '16 B.A.A.S. knows all too well.

"I auditioned for a film back in 1978-1979 called *Brubaker*," said Wilson. "After the audition, I was hired by a tree trimming company, which was my first real job. The movie called my house several times and I kept saying 'no, I had a real job.' Then a guy named Robert Redford called, talked to my sister-in-law and wanted me to work in the film. I never returned his call. Not the best move!"

Flash forward to 2014. Wilson, who has a son and daughter, was looking for something to do as a family. After seeing an advertisement for extras in the film, *My All American*, Wilson, his son, Brett, and daughter, Brandy, all became extras in the film. Meeting several actors in the area, he then had the opportunity to continue on to other projects.

"*My All American* was with Aaron Eckhart as the star. We were both rounding a corner and physically ran into each other at Southwest High School during filming. I was kind of shocked to find that so many professional people were there as extras. I met professors, a doctor, a lawyer and business owners."

Though he has been an actor and director, Wilson, who works in the security industry, has a primary job outside of his artistic pursuits.

"Very few have a career in filmmaking. Most people work another job while acting or working in the film business, hoping for that one film or break," said Wilson.

Prior to films, Wilson joined the military after moving to San Antonio in 1980

and was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base, where he completed his four years. He has worked in sales, owned his own company, and became a property manager for many years at the San Antonio Housing Authority. In his 50s, he decided to substitute teach and enroll in college, which he admits came as a surprise to his wife, Diana.

Wilson transferred from Palo Alto College to Texas A&M University-San Antonio after completing his associates. He graduated in December 2016 with a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences, and then completed alternative certification through Texas Teachers. Needing more of an income, he went into the security field, though his love of film continued.



Wilson directed several short films and worked on a few feature films before directing his first feature, *Abduction of the Fourth Kind*. He has won a number of awards for both his acting and directing, including winning Best Actor for his role in the film, *Havoc 114*, at a film festival in India. The film also received awards at festivals in Chicago and Paris, including Best Cinematography for his daughter's work on the movie.

In addition to his daughter's cinematography, Wilson's wife serves as a location manager and his son as an actor in his films. For *Abduction of the Fourth Kind*, released in 2022, Wilson wrote the script, directed, and edited. The movie stars San Antonio actor and producer, Jonathan Joss, known for films such as *The Magnificent Seven* and *True Grit*.

"The cast was amazing. Everyone, except two, was from San Antonio. The talent level in this city is huge," Wilson shared. "The opportunities are going to be there for actors and all areas of filmmaking. The movie capital of the U.S. is moving from California to Texas, and it's very close to San Antonio."

If he could offer professional wisdom to aspiring actors and filmmakers, Wilson said perseverance is key.

"Just do what you can, when you can, but follow your passions," he explained. "It's a tough business and hard to get noticed, but not impossible. The rewards from creating a piece of work, a piece of art, is priceless. The more you do it, the better you get."

Blaine Beckman



BACHELOR OF ARTS-2015 | MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION-2017

Blaine Beckman '15 B.A. '17 M.B.A. grew up listening to his parents singing while playing the piano and guitar, but it wasn't until he discovered his dad's VHS collection of Elvis concerts that he found his passion for music and performance.

"I would watch his concerts over and over and I would sing in front of the T.V., mimicking his moves and deliveries as a performer," said Beckman.

Since those early days, Beckman has played some of the most well-known venues in the world and has shared the stage with talented musicians.

"Growing up in California provided opportunities for me to play at clubs in Hollywood along the famous Sunset Ave. I can remember playing the Roxy and Whiskey a Go Go, seeing pictures on the wall of some of my music idols playing the same stage I was playing and thinking how did I get this chance? I thought at that time that it couldn't get any better," recalled Beckman.

Eventually moving to San Antonio for a construction opportunity, Beckman played the top circuits in the city by singing in cover bands. In 2010, he was approached by several musicians to work on an original, modern-rock project; this parlayed into what is now his current band, Our Waking Hour. The band has since written and released music that streams on all major music platforms, including their first album, *Seconds to Save Her*. The band at one point even covered Adele's "Set Fire to the Rain" by filming the cover track with GoPro cameras.

"We uploaded the video for fun to YouTube and began to receive notifications that it had gone viral with over a million plays," explained Beckman. "This appeared to be a major catalyst to our music gaining popularity around the

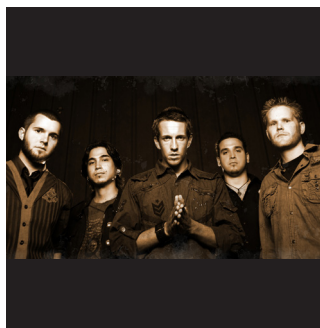
world, specifically in the U.S., United Kingdom, Russia, Japan, and several other countries. To this day, I am so thankful for the many fans and friends that I write back and forth with around the world.”

In addition to his musical pursuits, Beckman, a husband and father of three, is also the president of F.A. Nunnelly, a full service, commercial construction company in San Antonio. Along with a business partner, he is nearing the completion of purchasing the firm from the current ownership. In fact, the firm is celebrating its 100th year in business.

Beckman's road to Texas A&M University-San Antonio was inspired by his wife, Mimi Morrison '11 B.S., who completed her Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University.

“I researched the business program and was impressed with the hybrid programs which allowed me to continue working full time and pursuing my career goals all while providing me with the opportunity to complete my educational goals,” he said.

In 2015, Beckman graduated with a Business Administration degree and went on to earn his Master of Business Administration with a concentration in business management in 2017.



He continues to write and release music with Our Waking Hour, which recently released their latest track, “Sanity,” a song that addresses challenging situations surrounding the pandemic. The band is currently working on a new track they hope to release in several months.

Beckman's passion for music also translates to his family, who, returning full circle to his childhood, has a favorite song.

“My kids love to sing and are a major inspiration for me,” he said. “We have a group of songs we love. One was a song my father would sing to me, of course sung by Elvis. We love to sing ‘Can’t Help Falling in Love’ as a family.”

If Beckman could offer aspiring musicians words of wisdom, he said to never give up on your passions.

“Time and time again I hear of people quitting or giving up on their passions and hobbies,” explained Beckman. “Often it is because they feel they have outgrown or are getting too old to continue them. Some quit out of frustration that they haven’t succeeded. I will never give up on my passion for writing and releasing music.”



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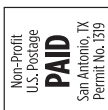
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