Semere Tsegey revisits a harrowing past and spells out his plans to return to similar environs to treat those who shared his experiences in a new capacity.

Semere Tsegey enters an office at the Student Centre at CentreTech for an interview wearing a crisp, buttoned-up plaid shirt and a matching pink tie. This isn’t a job interview for the CCA student; instead, he’s about to chronicle to someone he’s just met what has been a remarkable journey.

Dr. Jennifer Hellier, director of the Colorado Health Professions Development Scholars Program, lets out an audible cheer when informed of Tsegey’s noticeable fashion sense for the chat.

Hellier designs and runs the CO-HPD scholar program which, last July, included Tsegey as one of its participants. The program focuses on rural, underserved, minority, and first-generation collegians. Tsegey secured one of 65 slots out of 180 applicants while he pursues a future in a health-related field and was one of just four community college students admitted to the program.

Dress code at Anschutz Medical Campus requires professional attire. But Dr. Hellier often reminded her students that they needed to dress for success every single day. “If you don’t believe you’re a professional,” she told them, “no one else will.”

Of all the things about Tsegey’s life, which he tells with a passion and conviction that immediately resonates, the notion that success lies ahead is the easiest to believe.

It’s the struggle that marked much of the last decade, before he carefully tied his Windsor knot that, for many people hearing his story, may be unfathomable. For others inside the eclectic mix of nationalities that comprise CCA, it may only serve as an all-too-common, yet unfortunate reality of innumerable pasts.

War. Sickness. Poverty. Forced relocation. Tsegay seemingly left all of it behind. He’s not fit to be tied, in that sense. He laughs readily and often while describing events that would have brought many to their knees long ago.

“Sometimes it doesn’t feel real that I went through what I did, now that I’m at such a high level with such great people here,” Tsegey said.
summing up his path to present-day student.

"I think it’s just hope and being focused on your plans, just being attentive, and never giving up. It wasn’t because I was special. I kept up hope."

Into the world, out of the country

Tsegey (pronounced Tez-guy) grew up in Eritrea, located along the Northeast African coast, nestled against the Red Sea. He was born in Keihmnata, but he moved to the town of Asmara in the fifth grade with his mother, Syriat, and father, Solomon, and two siblings.

Size-wise, Asmara fell between town and city, with a population around 400,000. Cabbage, onion and potato farming are common jobs in the local workforce. However, the most burgeoning industry is the military.

Life was relatively comfortable for Tsegey until he reached his early teens, when, like many his age, it becomes time to leave family and enlist, which is a national requirement.

The well-heeled or uber-intelligent could potentially get into Asmara University. But, for the masses, there would be not even a high school diploma in hand until one has first served country. There has been only about seven years of peace in two decades between Eritrea and bordering Ethiopia. Fighting that ongoing battle takes a steady supply of soldiers.

Tsegey can recall when he was only about six when the Ethiopian Air Force dropped bombs near the apartment where he lived. Fields were burned. Two women were killed. The fear that schools and hospitals would be targets often meant long periods out of the classroom. Many of the skirmishes, as time passed and he grew older, happened near the border, far away, but the impact nonetheless was deeply felt.

“It’s a grudge I’ll never forget,” he said.

Still, Tsegey wanted no part of fighting the supposed good fight. He desired a peaceful life, far away from the gnawing fear and possibility of death that was sure to grow had he, like so many others before him, taken the military route. Joining was the choice his father had made. Tsegey was uninclined to follow. He had his own pursuits and interests in life.

His friends were equally disinclined when they all hatched a plan to flee. Many have tried, both successfully and not, to escape Eritrea.

It is a process made inherently difficult. In order to travel within the country, a pass permit is required to move unimpeded from one area to another. Those staffing the blockades could ignore red tape with piles of green, a fortune Tsegey lacked.

But good and bad fortune intervened simultaneously. His grandfather died at his home near the Ethiopian border. Tsegey was given the pass necessary to clear the four checkpoints to make the trek. Five friends who had similar thoughts of leaving greased palms to travel alongside him.

Tsegey’s parents, grandmother, uncles, aunts, and cousins gathered for the funeral unaware they would be experiencing two goodbyes. That night, Tsegey was leaving, surmising himself. But it’s hard to avoid – really hard.

Sometimes I try to avoid those thoughts in my mind to get forward. But it’s hard to avoid – really hard.”

Just a glimmer of hope

Tsegey’s journey out of the only country he’d ever known began about 8 o’clock the night of his grandfather’s services. He and his five schoolmates needed about eight hours to cross the border. Tsegey says today that he “was really stupid not to be scared.” He should have been.

The Ethiopian army immediately confronted his group once it exited Eritrea. The language barrier added gravity to the situation. Soldiers shouted at them in Tigrigna; they
Refugee

From Page 2

Answered in Amharic, desperately trying to tell them who they were. “They thought we were spies or something.”

Handcuffs affixed to their wrists, they were shuttled to an underground prison.

“It was so dark in there and really short,” Tsegey recalled. “You couldn’t stand up. And there was no light.”

A translator helped their case with prison officials and at least got them to see the light in a couple of different fashions. Having been ultimately dismissed as young, impetuous kids, the group was sent to an above-ground jail facility in another town.

“It was really hard there,” Tsegey recalled. “The hardest was that one, because once they put you in the prison, they don’t give you anything. They don’t give you any food. They don’t give you any water. It’s by yourself. We didn’t have money.”

Fellow countrymen at the prison did have the funds to placate the corrupt guards and ended up in a sharing mood. “We never knew who they were. But they were our guardian angels. There was no help without them. The guards in the prison were throwing us around and said, ‘Don’t even ask about that,’ when we’d ask about water or food. They were treating us bad. The guards were really hard. They were insulting us, even worse. They were like, ‘You traitors, why did you leave your country? You didn’t come here for me. You came for your self.'”

Harder still was lacking knowledge about whether they were in the prison for the long haul, or what they would do to them.

“It was a blind future, just walking around,” Tsegey said.

In reality, this was a collection site for refugees. Once there were enough people to justify a trip to the refugee camp, they would be on the next vehicle out.

Tsegey’s journey to what would become the next 3½ years of his life occurred in the bed of an open truck. Packed with people, bouncing through terrain so wildly, the masses huddled in back often threw up. Storms pelted the prisoners, the raindrops hitting their bodies like fallen glass.

“It was one of the worst moments of my life,” Tsegey said. “But there were worse things that happened after that.”

A new life, but what life?

The Shimelba Refugee Camp, where Tsegey spent ages 15-19, should only hold a couple thousand people. There were five times that many people shoehorned into a small piece of desert land that regularly invited temperatures in the 130s.

One of the first lessons learned from camp officials upon his arrival was how to build a house out of bricks and mud. A tent is provided as a shelter.

Semere Tsegey at the Shimelba camp in September 2011.

PHOTO COURTESY SEMERE TSEGEY

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hot, I started having dizziness and when I'd stand up, I'd fall down. A lot of people had that in there.”

And, through it all, Tsegey somehow managed to keep his wits about him.

Even presented with a chance to possibly flee again, during the hospital visit outside the refugee camp fence, he never considered it. This time, he had no idea where to go, where to turn. And he was looking at life differently than the child who left his grandfather’s funeral years earlier.

He had hope. Of what, perhaps he’s not even sure of today.

“When you look at things that you cannot see right now, when you look at things that aren’t currently present in your situation, and when you look farther than the curtain in front of you and can see the future behind it, that’s hope,” he said.

“All those years I was hopeful that whatever bad was happening now was going to pass and I’d make it through it. There were times I felt so bad, for a moment, hopeless. But one hour later, I felt like I should be strong.”

### The future calls

One tangible sign of hope was the prospect of resettlement in another country.

In the summer of 2008, upon his arrival at Shimelba, Tsegey signed a paper stating that he agreed to move elsewhere, if provided the opportunity.

The only reason he’s even in the United States to attend CCA is because the person in front of him in line checked “USA” as his resettlement option. He just as easily could have landed in Europe, Australia, or Canada. Those were other options on the form. He simply parroted what he had seen.

That paperwork, though, became the carrot at the end of the stick.

It prevented him from attempting to smuggle himself into another country and steered him to endure the hardships he often experienced in camp.

Tsegey’s signing of the paper had an element of luck attached, too, as he narrowly beat a cutoff date that offered possible resettlement as a choice. Those who wanted to affix their names even a couple of months later were too late. They, in turn, couldn’t share the same sense he did of a future.

Even so, Tsegey knew that he probably would have to stay at least a decade before getting that chance. Receiving notification of a positive outcome regarding resettlement came only after a lengthy process and was hardly guaranteed.

He’d need to pass multiple interviews and medical exams to even have a chance. And when it came to the interviews, Tsegey would have to remember answers to questions he gave years before because those in charge of his fate were checking to see if all the information aligned perfectly.

After 38 months, his lottery ticket cashed. He was going to be allowed to leave for the U.S. “I had seen people that had been in camp 22 years. So when people look at me they’d say, ‘Three-and-a-half years? That’s baby time.’”

It had become easy to decipher the information contained within the letter informing refugees of their fate. “Yes” meant a thicker envelope, filled with papers. “No’s” were light – too light. A friend opened Tsegey’s letter for him.

“I felt like my dream had come true,” he said. “I forgot everything I had been through within five seconds of opening it.”

He would be 20 years old when he would walk out of Shimelba, a man now without a true childhood. A two-day trip from Ethiopia through Cairo and into New York gave him his first glimpse of America. He still remembers the cars moving at high rates of speed and all the noise. The cold and snow at first were beyond his imagination. The number of people, the architecture of the buildings and bridges resonated.

He’d soon be off on a plane to Denver to meet a case manager through Lutheran Family Services. Tsegey wore a badge in the airport that read, “International Organization of Migration.” It might as well have been a passport stamp.

Into what field Tsegey eventually settles remains an unknown. But where he’ll practice down the line and the patients he’ll treat is no secret.

“What I’ve seen in my life in the refugee camp changed me a lot,” he said. “Seeing people going through such difficult situations and being part of the suffering that happened made me think about how I could change the future.

“Going to school and getting into health classes – whether it’s being an M.D., P.A., or nurse – I’m going to go back to help at a refugee camp, any refugee camp. I just want to go back, not necessarily where I came from, because I’ve seen how life in the refugee camp looks like, and I believe there is a lot of suffering and shortage of health services and diagnostics. I feel like it’s something I need to do, because I remember what I’ve been through.”

Somehow, it isn’t hard to picture Tsegey, dressed in a shirt and tie covered by a lab coat while he once again endures the searing heat with a warmer heart.

“I think about the people currently living in refugee camps,” he said, “and if they can get the help I didn’t get, I’m sure they’ll be a great help to other people, too.”
Financial Aid area assumes larger role

The Community College of Aurora entered its second semester under a revamped scholarship protocol Oct. 24.

Early reviews have been positive regarding changes that brought the process into the Financial Aid Office, and specifically, into Gina Campbell’s hands as the college’s new scholarship advisor.

The switch that began July 1 was prompted by feedback from students, who sought a more streamlined approach. Campbell’s old role was general financial aid advising, and that background has been helpful in aiding with the scholarship application, awarding and administration processes.

Among the benefits is that the college’s Foundation now can concentrate on fundraising while Campbell and her department work directly with students on the administration of financial aid and scholarship pieces simultaneously.

“The nice thing about having it in the Financial Aid Office is we can double dip, in a sense,” Campbell said. “While people are working on their FAFSAs and applications, we can see if they’re eligible for something on the scholarship side, too. It seems like it’s made it easier for students, since they only have to visit one place now instead of multiple locations.”

Previously, students applied for financial aid as a separate entity from scholarships. They were referred to the department that worked with the scholarship, a third party, or CCA Foundation to apply. And even though applications still may go through those entities, Campbell and Co. can work directly with individuals on accessing the scholarship process more directly.

Students interested in obtaining scholarships can do so via CCAs homepage, MyCCA or through the Financial Aid Office. By beginning in Financial Aid, students can obtain help with navigation through online applications (for Foundation scholarships) or the paperwork associated with other scholarships.

CCA provided nearly $600,000 in scholarships last academic year. Numbers for the current year are still in process.

“Application questions, research, that’s what I’m here for,” Campbell said.

According to Vice President of Student Affairs Elena Sandoval-Lucero, a side benefit of the procedural shift has been a reduction in wait times between the application process and notice of awards.

She added that earlier notification has become a recruitment and retention tool, as well, since incoming students’ decisions whether to attend CCA could be impacted by quickly learning of a scholarship award and continuing students could be better informed on whether they could attend the next semester.

Another plus is that Financial Aid can cross match available funds with the applicants who previously didn’t fit specific criteria for certain scholarships, but possibly did for others.

“It’s nice that this can be my sole focus now,” Campbell said.

Campbell already had worked with the Foundation on applying the awards when the former was doing the administrative side. So, despite a lag time of just weeks between interviewing in late June and beginning her new responsibilities, she had a head start.

“There’s been a lot of positivity, actually, from students and staff alike,” Campbell said.

“The response has been really promising that it’s going to be easier all around on our students, and that’s the most important focus, to get them the money that they might qualify for. And being able to help them in the same place instead of sending them all over the school to find these resources, I think it’s in their best interests and worked well so far.”

The changeover from fall semester to the spring scholarship cycle happens quickly, with only two weeks between the Oct. 10 cutoff date for fall and the new start date.

There will be one other noticeable switch in late October.

CCA has been assigned Ethiopia as the country it will represent in New York, which was requested by the college, given Auror’s Sister Cities ties to Adama in Ethiopia.

An eight-month journey of hard work, academic rigor and sacrifice is ongoing to prepare students for the national conference, including the Model UN event on CentreTech campus Oct. 24.

Some students had the opportunity leading up to the Model UN locally to meet international policy figures, such as Andrew Wolff, co-founder of Children’s Future International; Barbara Bates, founder and executive director of Technology Partnership; John Beyrle, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia and Bulgaria; and best-selling author Thomas Friedman.

Mark Leon Goldberg, a writer, blogger and consultant to several prominent national and international nonprofit organizations, was the keynote speaker at the CentreTech Model UN event.
The Community College of Aurora in collaboration with Aurora Public Library is the first higher education institution in the United States to employ new technology that provides students access to over 30 million library holdings, while affording direct access to items in and around its home state.

SmartLocker equipment pioneered by Bibliotheca Library Technology Company (www.bibliotheca.com) is the delivery system allowing students to log in, make their requests, and a couple of business days later, receive reserved items in hand.

The process occurs by requesting a library item through Aurora’s online system, which is in the end facilitated by a courier who will place the requested books, DVDs, audiobooks, and more into one of 18 drawers that comprise the Smart-Locker.

The three-tower unit with a center electronic console can store about 90 items at a time. The machine is located in the student common area in the Student Centre on CCA’s CentreTech campus. A soft launch occurred in September before going fully online in October.

“This has been almost two years in the making, so to see this collaboration come to fruition is a landmark achievement,” said Joanna Powell, director of Library Resources at The Community College of Aurora.

“The Aurora Public Library’s willingness to support CCA has made this possible, and the college is greatly appreciative of their generosity and willingness to include us in this trailblazing effort.”

APL already had access to the powerful and expensive database Prospector, which is a consortium of libraries in Colorado and neighboring Wyoming and includes the catalogs of numerous colleges such as the University of Colorado and University of Denver.

CCA previously didn’t have the funding to offer that massive repository. But with the addition of SmartLocker, CCA’s capabilities have been raised exponentially.

The video screen in the center of the SmartLocker’s three towers is linked to APL’s computer system.

“This pushes CCA above their fingertips. APL in turn can benefit from increased traffic created by this endeavor.

“Having access to Aurora Public Library’s holdings and giving our students access to Prospector’s consortium of libraries is huge. And having that sense of community involvement and collaboration is important,” Powell said. “The bottom line is that this will be a huge benefit for our students, in terms of the number of quality resources they can get.”

CCA students now can receive Aurora Public Library cards directly on campus, access the locker’s touchscreen technology, and have a large piece of the written world at their fingertips. APL in turn benefits from increased traffic created by this endeavor.

“SmartLocker systems as late as last March had previously only been up and running at three other North American locations: two in Topeka, Kansas, and another in Winnipeg, Canada. The technology already has gained traction in Europe and has been making its way to the West.

The Topeka Public Library used Smart Locker in concert with a community center, whose longer hours of operation allowed for additional library access. A similar setup existed in Manitoba. The other Kansas machine resides outside the library itself.

“It’s extending a library, basically,” said Harold Sams, an installation engineer for Bibliotheca.

CCA students with the addition of APL’s holdings now have access to JSTOR and EBSCOhost databases for scholarly journals, AspenCat and Prospector for print materials, eBrary for e-books, in addition to its own DVD and print collections.

In the big picture, this is yet another outward adaptation made by libraries to the advance of technology. Card catalogs morphed into online integrated library system catalogs that can show titles on hand. Computer displays then allowed users to see the title of books and electronically flip through pages.

Smart Locker is another step forward.

“I could just see since we were losing facilities but the demand was still there that this would be a wonderful thing, and it’s relatively inexpensive,” Bateman said.

She was partially sold on the technology after a demonstration several years back during which a child scanned a card, saw the drawer pop open and delivered a book. The boy called it “the magic box.”

“There were rumors several years ago about the demise of libraries because of e-books,” Bateman said. “But people forget libraries have absorbed, adapted and included all manner of technology changes over the years. This is just another way to provide services and reach out to people the way they need it.”
Partnership only Phase 1 of CFWD makeover

CCA has long embraced serving non-traditional students and adult learners, and the opportunity to make some fundamental visions a reality have materialized after wide-scale changes occurred over the summer at the Center for Workforce Development (CFWD).

The Center since experiencing the expiration of two key public assistance contracts has found a willing partner in The Learning Source and begun the process of retrofitting its area to best serve the community.

The short-term result is that nearly 100 students needing General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation have been relocated to Lowry campus, and discussions are ongoing on further ways to scale and grow at a rapid pace.

The Learning Source closed its local sites at schools, libraries, churches, and even a Goodwill store, centralizing its GED preparation services at CCA.

Resources are potentially available in the future to create exponential growth in the numbers of people aided in the community through the agreement.

“We have much more technology in the classrooms than they had before, and we’re doing a lot of hands-on instruction,” said Joyce Benson-Fox, director of CFWD. “We’re really talking about what it is to be a student, student success, and study habits, things that you would get in high school. We’re making it more like, ‘This is what you need to know when you go out in the world.’ This is not just, ‘Get your GED.’”

Evans already knew the lay of the land at CCA even before talks progressed on forging new educational opportunities to assist high-barrier and high-need students through a collaborative venture with the college. He previously served as CCAs adult education coordinator for the Center for Workforce Development in the late 2000s.

The Learning Source – a 50-year non-profit – already had been working with CCA on some adult basic education coursework during his time at the agency, whose focus is on literacy, ESL and GED prep classes.

“I knew what CCA was. I knew the people there and how much they care for the community,” Learning Source Executive Director Josh Evans said. “So I knew it was a place where hopefully we’d be able to find common ground and build a partnership, because I thought that it would be one of the strongest partnerships that Learning Source could have.

Long-term success stories were a foundational principle for CFWD as it executed state grants within the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of clients were helped across Arapahoe and Adams counties until those two key human services relationships ended this summer. That prompted the Center’s reboot.

The GED offerings are just part of the overall analysis of services ongoing at the Center that it hopes to eventually provide the college and community. One of those upcoming moves is likely to include Career Services moving alongside CFWD at Lowry as a streamlining measure. Career and College Readiness classes offered on Fridays is another tangible step to get participating students to think beyond their GED and about long-range success planning.

Conversations are ongoing with past and future partners on how to evolve new pathways for adult learners.

But, simply having the GED prep classes at CCA is sending a strong message, to start.

“I’ve taught GED classes before and I think being part of the community college community is helpful, because people feel like real students,” instructor Paige Wenzivsky said.

That was a message CFWD adjunct Danielle McCarty also heard in her classroom when the changeover first occurred. Getting on a campus, some for the first time, seemed to have a tangible effect on attitudes.

“It all goes back to the messaging for a student that’s in a GED program who may just be thinking about getting that GED,” Evans said.

“The more we’re able to show them the next steps in a system, the circle grows, and they start to understand why they are there.

“Not only are they there to get a GED, but for the next steps, as well. What are they going to do for the future? And how is it going to be a long-term success story for them?”

Morning and evening GED prep classes currently are offered. Afternoons may soon be filled with more of the same, or additional adult education and career training classes.

“We’ll continue to encourage students as they’re ready to move into a career or college to help them find their way to CCA or to find some other certificate or training program,” Benson-Fox said.

“A lot of them need work now.”

CCA nabs nine regional Medallion Awards for marketing, communications

Marketing and Communications won nine Medallion Awards at the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR) District 4 conference, held in Oklahoma City from Sept. 28-30.

CCA’s recognition included three gold, two silver and four bronze awards.

CCA’s total was tied for second-most among participating community and junior colleges from Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming.

Overall, 125 awards were doled out in categories including printed publications, advertising, writing, visual arts, electronic media, media/public relations, and miscellaneous.

Earning top honors was Oklahoma City Community College with 17 awards.

South Texas College and Lone Star College – Kingwood also won nine apiece.

CCA’s awards were as follows:

Gold: Printed Publication, Postcard, ACT Variable Postcard Mailer; Novelty Advertising: CCA Movie Theater Advertisement I, Print Advertising, Single Ad; Graphic Design Advertisement in the Aurora Sentinel.


Lt. Gov. given a taste of ‘Success’

The importance of data is immeasurable.

But when Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia visited CCA and was given a two-hour presentation about its Student Success Center on Oct. 14, the words of students who were succeeding was equally pertinent.

“Absolutely,” Garcia said. “When you can put a human face on some of the data, it really helps. It’s still important to gather data. We want to know if we’re doing better from one year to the next. But talking to the students and having them say, ‘This is what worked for me and this is why I’m still here,’ that’s really compelling.”

CCA was one of three community colleges selected statewide as part of the Colorado Department of Higher Education’s Colorado Completes! campaign. There were 33 colleges and universities that originally submitted best practice proposals in student retention, completion and transfer. Eight total were chosen for a visit from Garcia, a former community college president.

The Student Success Center was an initiative that was three years in the making, putting all of the college’s retention programs in the same space with oversight from a single director. The area has officially been identified as a “Center” for about 14 months and encompasses advising and academic support, community engagement and college visits. It now serves more than 400 students.

The focus of the Center is on the importance of seamless transfer between two- and four-year colleges, while focusing on underserved populations of students, including first-generation college students, those meeting federal low-income guidelines, and others underrepresented in higher education.

“It is really multi-dimensional and it really talks, not only about academic support, but all kinds of other things that really makes students feel connected to the campus. And that’s ultimately what it seems to take for students to be successful.”

The positive results can be measured, in part, by an 87 percent persistence rate for students from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014. That number is a sharp increase from the 65 percent figure posted from Fall ’13 to Fall ’14. Almost 90 percent of the students in the Center are in good academic standing.

All students have a dedicated advisor and coach, and it’s a requirement to see an advisor up to three times a semester. A transfer success course, AAA 101, also is mandatory. Academic support is available and gauged largely through tutoring, progress reporting, and the use of data that informs outreach and interventions.

And the transfer focus is evident, not only through the college visit program, but the use of transfer planning stations, D2L Virtual Campus, and individual transfer admissions appointments.

“We want to simplify things. We want to make it easier for people to navigate that transfer process, which isn’t intuitive, and when you’re looking at different schools, and you’re talking to different advisors, it gets overwhelming,” Garcia said. “When you talk to a lot of students who want to transfer, ultimately they just don’t because they can’t navigate the process. Here, they centralize it. They provide all the resources in one place, and someone can advise them in one place and then invite the institutions to come in and compete for those students. That’s what works.”
“Mockingbird” themes allow race to be examined within ‘14 prism

“To Kill A Mockingbird”

WHEN: Nov. 6-8, 13-15 (7 p.m.); Nov. 8, 15 (1 p.m.)
WHERE: Larry D. Carter Theatre, Fine Arts Building, CentreTech campus (16000 E. CentreTech Parkway, Aurora)
TICKETS: General admission, $10; students/seniors with valid ID, $7; free for CCA students
MORE INFORMATION: www.ccaurora.edu/mockingbird; 303-340-7529

“To Kill A Mockingbird” has appeared in various iterations since 1960.
The story of Tom Robinson, Jem and Scout, Atticus Finch and other memorable characters has been required reading in classrooms across the country for decades.

And as CCA’s Theater Department presents its stage adaptation of Harper Lee’s novel from Nov. 6-15 at the Larry D. Carter Theatre at CentreTech, the core story set in 1935 remains unchanged.

But with the subject of race still a hot-button issue in modern day America – see Ferguson, Missouri – director Stacey D’Angelo and her cast are “mining a little deeper” on what the color of one’s skin means and meant, then and now.

The novel deals with issues of rape as well as racial inequality, and Finch’s heroism is framed within that uncomfortable backdrop.

D’Angelo’s production, written for the stage by Christopher Sergel, doesn’t shy away from the core issues.

It presents them frothing at the surface.

“The point of theater is to engage people in conversations, often not publicly, but if people on the way home in the car are talking about their personal answer to the question of initial perceptions, I feel we’ve done our job,” D’Angelo said.

The means to that end will include a more pronounced exploration of some of the play’s African-American characters. Imagery and other means will be employed in order to find out the cultural biases at play that led to the false accusation of these characters relating to the commission of a heinous crime.

Digging deeper also means poring further beneath the surface via an epilogue inspired by triggers in the script that, at its core, explores what people see when they look at someone and what, if any, judgments immediately come to mind.

A bridge moment between the story’s time and place morphs into the subject of race in 2014, prompting visceral words from the actors in the form of poetry, imagery, and, hopefully, the provocation of thought from the audience.

At selected dates in the production, crowds will be asked to stay after the play to examine the subject of race in the here and now, framed by what they have just witnessed on stage.

“We’re taking the world of ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ and thinking about what Harper Lee was after. What are we supposed to do with this story now? What does it mean in our hearts and minds now?” D’Angelo asked.

“So we’re echoing some of this language of the past, which then brings us into the responses that students created after hearing the harsh language of the play in rehearsals and identifying what that instills in them emotionally now,”

D’Angelo picked “To Kill a Mockingbird” because of the importance of engaging in a deeper dialogue about race, which often gets brushed aside by individuals for fear of saying something that potentially offends.

The play was selected as the fall production before the racially-tinged violence in Ferguson, but the outcry over the shooting of an unarmed black man presented the perfect springboard for deeper reflection on this socially relevant issue.

“I knew we had to go further in investigating this play’s relevance in 2014,” D’Angelo said, adding, “What I’ve been surprised about is how much pain there is and how hard it is tackling this subject, because I’m asking individuals to go beyond their comfort zones. And it’s been hard and sometimes painful for both for our black actors and white actors, who have to play these hateful people.”

No easy answers are offered relating to the pain, loss, bloodshed and hate that encompass any racial divide.

“There was a fair amount of ‘nobody understands,’” in the students’ writings and reactions to this play and what evolved from it. But I posed, ‘Why don’t we give people a chance?’” D’Angelo said.

“And I think overall the willingness of this cast to be those that take a first step – to say, ‘This feels awful, but I’m still going to perform this really raw piece’ – is the solution.”
Forget me not

They were obstetricians, FBI agents, Hollywood sound techs, dentists and homemakers. They fostered children and had their own. But with dementia and Alzheimer’s wreaking havoc on their memories, their stories risk being lost as history. No longer, thanks to an inventive writing project by Rachel Blue Ankney’s beginning composition class. The students’ charge: capture these stories before they fade away.

A large group from the Emeritus at Denver care facility visited CCA twice in a two-week period and talked to students about their lives, a challenge for different reasons for both parties. The next two pages chronicle in pictures the trips to campus made by these seniors, who proved without a doubt that they were more than what they did for a living. These are people, with families and even now, stories to tell. Robert “Dan” Dillon. Bettie Van Zetten. Lynn Massa. Paul Schoolcraft. Erla Copeland. Maude Mills. James “J.C.” Richardson.

These are some of their names. A small portion of their journey will be captured in the students’ writings. A big debt of gratitude is owed to all these seniors, in some fashion.
CCA celebrated National Writing Day with an all-star lineup of eclectic authors Oct. 20. Jovan Mays, Aurora's poet laureate and nationally acclaimed spoken word poet, kicked off the festivities with an interactive session with the audience. Michelle Theall, memoirist and author of “Teaching the Cat to Sit,” was up next. Bobby Lefebre and Suzi Q. Smith presented a spoken word poetry performance, followed by Helen Thorpe, award-winning author of “Soldier Girls: The Battles of Three Women at Home,” “At War,” and “Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age.” Mystery writer Mark Stevens closed the day’s events. 

The bi-annual Sherlin Lecture Series in Astronomy and Space Science took place Oct. 17 with an event entitled “Zooming in on the Stars.” Dr. Harold A. McAlister, director of the Mount Wilson Observatory, located in the San Gabriel Mountains of southern California, was the featured speaker. The Mt. Wilson facility has been the site of numerous astronomical discoveries and housed many famous astronomers. Perhaps the best known today is Edwin Hubble, who along with his assistant Milton Humason, published a paper in 1929 showing that the universe is expanding.

Other prominent visitors have included Albert Einstein and Sir James Jeans. Mt. Wilson observatory continues to be one of the world’s great observatories and is home to the Center for High Angular Resolution Astronomy (CHARA) array of telescopes. Dr. McAlister is the designer of this facility.

CCA students can learn about their transfer options at the CCA Fall Transfer Fair, slated for Oct. 29 at both CentreTech (11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.) and Lowry (3:30–5:30 p.m.). Students, staff and community members can meet face-to-face with representatives from more than 30 four-year colleges and universities.

Among those expected to attend are Metropolitan State University of Denver, University of Colorado-Denver, Regis University, Johnson & Wales, University of Denver, Colorado State University-Pueblo, University of Northern Colorado and University of Colorado-Boulder. Students can speak to specific schools about transfer requirements or ask questions about individual programs, tuition, class size, and more. Pizza and beverages will be served.

CCA presented its first Safe Is Sexy event Oct. 23 in the Student Centre Rotunda on CentreTech campus. The original program focused on providing information on sexual health, consent, assault prevention, and healthy relationships. Several speakers attended, including Kori Willford of Beforeplay.org, Daniela Valdez of Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, and Doug Hasty from the University of Denver and Rape Aggression Defense (RAD). These knowledgeable professionals shared expertise about making intimate relationships safe and fun, while providing the tools and information to make that possible.

The LGBT Student Alliance hosted two major events in October. “National Coming Out Day” asked students who are part of the LGBT community or a straight ally to wear rainbow gear and decorated the entryways of the Classroom and Fine Arts buildings. “Anti-Bullying Day” on Oct. 16 asked students, faculty and staff to wear purple along with name tags adorned with the names of people who were bullied and no longer had a ‘voice.’

The Student Success Center has begun making its annual trips with students to visit four-year campuses. This semester they have taken 36 students to Colorado State University-Pueblo, eight students interested in health careers to Anschutz Medical Campus, and 65 students to The University of Northern Colorado. CCA’s partnerships with transfer institutions are key to the success of this program. At each campus these transfer partners coordinate presentations on support services and programs available to students, and they often provide lunch. Several more visits are planned for this academic year.

CCA President Dr. Nancy McCallin on Oct. 22 took questions from faculty and staff as part of her visit to campus with members of the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. Board members were given presentations on the college’s Student Success Center, Translation and Interpretation program, and Theater Department.

A group of 31 students will be honored at the annual Student Success Awards, to be held this year on Dec. 5 from noon-2 p.m. in the Student Centre Rotunda. Award-winners had the opportunity to apply for one of four $500 scholarships applicable to the spring 2015 semester at CCA, offered by the Community College of Aurora Foundation.

A Women and Violence Workshop will be held Thursday, Oct. 30 from 3:30–4:30 p.m. in the Student Centre Rotunda at CentreTech. The event is presented by Gateway Women’s Services and sponsored by CCA Counseling Services. The discussion will touch upon the cycle of violence, which can include the honeymoon phase, tension, explosion/improve students’ information literacy skills, and marketing the library’s reference services.

The Division of Student Affairs has held several professional development training sessions for all of its staff members this semester including: teaching students about financial literacy and working with Advancing Students for a Stronger Economy Tomorrow (ASSET) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students.

Sun spotted
An Astronomy 101 class uses the Solar Max hydrogen alpha telescope (right) and the five-inch Maksutov to view the Sun. Students later used these telescopes and three others owned by the college to catch the solar eclipse Oct. 23.
Around campus

Clockwise from top, members of The Core Ensemble (actress Cristina Isabel Lucas and musicians Ju Young Lee (cello), Byron Sean (piano) and Michael Parola (percussion) perform Tres Vidas at the Larry D. Carter Theatre on Oct. 6; Civil Support Teams from Arizona and Colorado along with local emergency services personnel conducted a joint training exercise on Lowry campus; Mathematics adjunct Bonny Chandler tells her personal story as her image peers over her shoulder during a Breast Cancer Awareness Month event at the Rotunda on Oct. 7; Belinda Marshall poses with her retirement cake at a celebration Sept. 19; Randall Painter’s drawing of John Lennon was among the featured works at the faculty art show that ended Oct. 23 at Donna Moravec Gallery.