



### **From Strangers to Friends**

*Baomei Zhao*

The University of Akron is a great place for people to develop friendships. In March 2005, I was a stranger at the University when I applied for a position at the School of Family and Consumer Sciences, College of Fine Arts and Applied Arts. I was invited to campus for an interview where I had the opportunity to meet school faculty members and the Dean, Dr. Mark Auburn.

During my interview with Dean Auburn, I asked "I noticed on the website that one of the previous president's last name was Auburn. Are you related to the family?" His answer was "Yes!"

I looked up to Dean Auburn not because he is so tall and handsome, but because he did many things as a dean and then as a friend. He provided me a list of Chinese faculty members who served as resources for a new resident to Akron, and he volunteered to be a guest speaker joining me for community service events on multiple occasions. He introduced me to his family and friends when he retired in 2006, and he and his wife, Dr. Sandy Auburn, established the Wang-Zhao Scholarship when I lost my mother, Simin Wang, in 2015. He and his wife came to my US citizenship ceremony to celebrate my becoming a citizen in 2017.

Dean Auburn has been both a mentor and a friend as an outstanding representative of The University of Akron.