The Davidson College application for admission asks students to share something about themselves so the college can get to know its pool of applicants a bit better. Sallie Permar’s essay ended this way: “I pack many activities into a day’s time. I still run from the hot, humid track to a show choir performance, curling iron attacking wet hair, tap shoes replacing Nikes. But I firmly believe that a job or an activity started must be finished, and that determination has its own rewards, the most important one being that good feeling that comes from knowing you have done your best, and that you are not a quitter.”

Sallie’s determination, paired with a passion for medical research and pediatric infectious disease prevention, is saving lives. Following Davidson, where she traveled to Zambia for her first field experience, Sallie received a doctorate from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a medical degree from Harvard. Today, she is a full professor and physician-researcher at Duke University Medical Center, where she serves the greater good and lives out Davidson’s mission statement of preparing students for lives of leadership and service.

As a physician scientist, Sallie focuses on the prevention and treatment of perinatal viral infections and leads a research laboratory investigating immune protection against vertical transmission of neonatal viral pathogens. In 2013, the mom of two made headlines with the discovery of a natural protein in breast milk that fights HIV. Her current work centers on two viruses, and preventing the havoc they can wreak in the health of infants around the globe: HIV and human cytomegalovirus, or HCMV. The latter is a herpes virus that can go unnoticed in healthy people, but can lead to birth defects and neurologic impairment in infants. More recently, she has become involved in the rapid development of maternal-fetal vaccines and therapies for Zika virus.

Sallie is celebrated by her Davidson classmates, her family, friends and colleagues—and by the world. She has received several prestigious awards, including the Presidential Early Career Award in Science and Engineering, which is the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers. She also received the Society for Pediatrics Research’s Young Investigator Award.

Sallie has said she counts daily on the solid communications skills of her Davidson liberal arts education to think critically—and simultaneously—about scientific detail and the big picture.

Sallie Permar, in recognition of your unyielding dedication to improving and saving children’s lives, your passion that has led to positive, lasting change in the world, and your genuine care and concern for the well-being of people, the Davidson College Alumni Association recognizes you with the Distinguished Alumni Award on the occasion of your 20th reunion, June 10, 2017.