Connections and Surprises at Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon

One relationship was obvious: speakers Sue ’86 and Dennis Sgroi ’83 share a last name. The couple, who met at Bowdoin in 1982 when Sue was a first-year and Dennis a senior, were the first married pair of alumni to speak at the annual Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon, which brings together scholarship students and their supporters. Other connections unfolded as the couple spoke to the 400 attendees gathered in Thorne Hall.

“Over the past two decades, Dennis and I have tried to live up to the values of Bowdoin, in some small way to emulate the longstanding tradition of generosity.”—Sue Sgroi ’86

“Dennis was from the rough streets of Lynn, [Massachusetts],” Sue explained in her remarks. Likewise, the luncheon’s student speaker, Adrian Rodriguez ’14, grew up in Lynn, having moved there as a child from his native Dominican Republic. Adrian is a recipient of the endowed fund Sue and Dennis established at Bowdoin, the Sgroi Family Scholarship Fund, and the close bond Adrian, Sue and Dennis share was evident in each of their remarks.

The scholarship fund, Dennis explained, was a way to give current and future students like Adrian the Bowdoin experience that had been so instrumental in his own life and career. Specifically, Dennis recalled the support that his first-year advisor, math professor Jim Ward, had given him early on. Professor Ward, who surprised Dennis by showing up at the luncheon, “believed in me before I believed in myself,” Dennis recounted. Identifying him in the audience, Dennis said of Ward, “now, 34 years after our first encounter, I recognize that he helped me define who I am today.”

Gift Opportunities

Make a gift to support Bowdoin students in a way that makes sense for you.

- You can make your yearly gift to the Alumni Fund, Parents Fund, or other annual fund unrestricted or specifically for financial aid. For more information about annual funds, contact Brannon Fisher at (207) 725-3670 or bfisher2@bowdoin.edu; for information about the Parents Fund, contact Pam Phillips at (207) 725-3269 or pphillip@bowdoin.edu.

- You can establish a new scholarship fund with a leadership gift of $100,000 or more, or you can contribute any amount to one of Bowdoin’s many existing scholarship funds. For more information, contact Hieu Nguyen at (207) 725-3255 or hnguyen@bowdoin.edu.

- You can support Bowdoin scholarship aid through your estate plan, retirement plan, charitable gift, or other planned gift. For more information, contact Steve Hyde at (207) 725-3436 or shyde@bowdoin.edu.
Susan Sgroi Remarks: Excerpts

I was from Lexington, [Massachusetts], where
laws are well-tended and where the heroic
Minutemen launched the Revolutionary War
with the “shot heard ‘round the world,”
and Dennis was from the rough streets of Lynn, which
is known by some as “Lynn, Lynn, City of Sin.” . . .
Initially, I told my parents that Dennis was from the
“North Shore,” because—in fact—Lynn is geographically
north of Lexington.

“Over time, I came to view my college experience for the gift that it was—regardless of who was paying for it.”

Dennis Sgroi Remarks: Excerpts

My education was a gift in so many ways. Beyond the finances, Bowdoin College believes in and supports its students. As a freshman in the fall of 1979, and as a product of a strained public school system, I questioned whether I really belonged. Within several days of arriving, my fears became reality when I performed poorly on a Bowdoin mathematics placement exam. . . . I met with my freshman advisor, Professor James Ward, whom I feared was charged with reading me my academic last rites. Professor Ward finally looked up, and in a professional but paternalistic manner, said that neither he nor the College believed that SATIs accurately predict future success. He then examined my high school transcript a second time and said, as he rubbed his chin, “Dennis, I believe that you are a hard worker. I believe that you are one of those students whose intelligence is not necessarily reflected in a standardized exam, and I predict that you will be successful at Bowdoin.” Wow, he believed in me before I believed in myself. He sensed that confidence was exactly what I needed. . . . And now, 34 years after our first encounter, I recognize that he helped me define who I am today. That is the power of one professor, and the blessing of one college.

“That is the power of one professor, and the blessing of one college.”

As a student at Bowdoin, I was also fortunate to receive financial assistance from the Manton Copeland Scholarship Fund, established by Professor Copeland himself in 1960. . . . I would like to take this opportunity to honor Professor Manton Copeland and his family for helping the underprivileged, like myself, to fulfill their dreams.

It is the generosity of Bowdoin that serves as a beacon—a beacon of hope—for those who may be less fortunate. I am the product of this hope, and Susan and I are committed to carrying on the longstanding tradition of paying it forward with our . . . time, talent and resources.

Adrian Rodriguez Remarks: Excerpts

I was only thirteen when I first set foot in the United States. Coming from the Dominican Republic—a small island in the Caribbean popularly known for breeding good baseball players—I never would have thought that I would ever be here today. When I asked my mother why she had brought me here, she said in her fast-speaking Spanish, “Porque quiero que tengas la oportunidad de tener una vida mejor de la que yo tuve.” “Because I want you to have the opportunity of a better life than I ever did.” A single mother of three, my mother came to the U.S. looking to improve her socioeconomic status.

“It was because of the generosity of the Sgroi Family Scholarship Fund, which funds most of my aid, that I was able to tell my mother that I would be going to one of the best colleges in the country with little financial burden; I was one step closer to fulfilling my promise.”

I made her the promise that I would do anything in my power to help her out financially.

I realized that the best way to help her was to invest in my mind and future. Education would be the key. . . . I dreamed of the day that I would get to college and have the opportunity to break this vicious cycle of poverty that had troubled my family for many generations.

It was because of the generosity of the Sgroi Family Scholarship Fund, which funds most of my aid, that I was able to tell my mother that I would be going to one of the best colleges in the country with little financial burden; I was one step closer to fulfilling my promise. My transition to Bowdoin was not smooth and easy. . . . I seriously considered transferring, or maybe just taking a semester off, but my daily conversations with my mother reminded me why I was doing all of this. They reminded me of the promise I had made to her. I simply couldn’t go back on it.

Although I do not know what exactly I want to be doing when I graduate, I am certain that I want to be sitting where most of you are today; in a room full of successful and generous alumni, contributing to a future polar bear’s opportunity to achieve his or her dreams of higher education.

President Barry Mills on the 2013 Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon:

This luncheon is always one of my favorite events each year, and I know that many others in this room feel the same way. We all enjoy the great food, the terrific company, the thoughtful remarks and wonderful entertainment, for sure. But the reason that this day is so special is not just that we get a Bowdoin log, it’s that we are reminded of what Bowdoin College really is about: educating and providing opportunity for some of the finest young people in the country and, in fact, the world. It never gets old to see students, alumni, and other supporters sitting together and sharing stories about how important this great College is in their lives.