

Alison Rundlett '03
Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon 2017

First, thank you to President Rose and Brannon Fisher and Scott Meiklejohn, and all of my great contacts at Bowdoin for inviting me here today and bestowing the great honor of saying a few words to this esteemed group.

At the outset I need to make you all aware of a mistake I'm likely to make in grammar today. As I have practiced these words, I keep slipping into the first person plural when I talk about students. I am FULLY aware that I am approaching my 15-year reunion, but somehow my brain keeps pushing my speech patterns in this direction. Forgive me.

I attended this lunch each of my four years at Bowdoin. And I LOVED this lunch. For a few reasons. We all need a jump start from time to time, and I found one here each year.

First, this lunch reminded me each year just how LUCKY I was (just in case the Bowdoin bubble had lulled me into forgetting) how TRULY lucky I was to be a scholarship recipient.

Second, I loved this lunch for the community building that happened around sharing stories. Scholarship donors told their stories, recipients shared theirs—of course it all happened over a meal, which is such a distinctly Bowdoin tradition, and we all felt our common connection around the spirit of giving - and the value of a Bowdoin education.

So I'm going to share my short story, and hopefully my story, and the stories you share over lunch today leave us all feeling reconnected and re-dedicated to this community.

I grew up in a small town in rural Maine: Sidney. Now, if you are scratching your head or picturing a map - that is ok- I have to describe its location to Mainers all the time.

Sidney is a small and modest town. I spent many days riding bikes with the neighbors, often all day, and sometimes would end up on a detour chasing Uncle Dale's cows back to pasture or trying to catch one of Aunt Nancy's horses for the reward of an afternoon ride. I was number 3 in a line of 4 girls-

born in quick succession- we were each one year apart in the school system going through- and my Mom as a school teacher was able to have a watchful eye.

My parents are here today and likely did not know I would be sharing so many details. So, if I waffle on facts, I might pause and ask them for a nod.

My parents had us young- and the demands of a large family meant that their schooling had to be flexible. So, my parents worked multiple jobs, raised four kids, and took college courses at night. One of my earliest childhood memories was watching my parents graduate from UMaine Augusta at the Civic Center. The whole family was so proud, and we were a big family. My Dad is one of six and my Mom is one of seven- they were the first in each family to get a degree.

But they didn't stop there. The struggle continued. Mom got a job as a teacher to match the kids schedule, Dad still had multiple jobs (even after his big accounting position at CMP came through), I remember going with Dad on weekend odd jobs to lay carpet (I was great at handing him tools), or to stack feed coming off the cargo trains (me and the other kids climbing to stacks for fun). And through it all they were taking night classes at Thomas College in business. I remember watching my Mom write her case study analysis on yellow legal pads, red pen, perfect cursive penmanship, late at night at the kitchen table. That spot became my favored homework spot as well.

Promotions came, we moved out of the ranch and into a house where we each had our own bedroom, the belt wasn't quite as tight... and when I was half way through high school, we all came together again and my parents graduated together from Thomas with their MBAs.

Their story is remarkable. But it didn't stop with them. They had planted seeds. I saw the energy and dedication and sacrifice that they put into their education. And I saw the dividends, really, I LIVED those dividends. No matter how long the road – the rewards of an investment in education are certain. I worked as hard as I could to make them proud of my efforts scholastically.

When the acceptance came from Bowdoin, we were overjoyed as a family, and I knew that this place was where I belonged, where I needed to be.

But then came the problem of tuition. Thank goodness Bowdoin was need blind or else that acceptance letter might not have ever come in the first place.

If we emptied the accounts and sold all our possessions we still could not have unlocked the doors here – not with three other sisters with college needs- there was just no way.

But I had applied for federal loans and grants, and a scholarship, and we were just waiting. My high school had a tradition of gathering the scholarship info, keeping it close, and announcing them at graduation. And in my year, they did it in order of size if the award.

My name was the last called, and the Bernard Osher Foundation had given me every penny to fill the gap between tuition and what my family could afford. Every penny. No one ever had a better high school graduation because mine truly was the opening of the door to my next step, to Bowdoin.

Once here, I worked multiple campus jobs (an homage to my parents I suppose), double majored and minored- and was involved as I think any student could be – Baxter House social chair, student government, band, a cappella, you name it- I soaked it all up and made it mine. And this experience was exactly what I hoped, and more than I could have imagined, it transformed and reshape the trajectory of my life.

Nothing, nothing opens doors like education. And there is no short cut for the hard work it takes. I went straight to law school and have worked myself hard at a firm and am chasing partnership, hopefully this year. It is kind of like a pitcher chasing a no-no, you don't talk much about it until you get it done.

I am so enormously grateful—to my parents for instilling their work ethic and their values prioritizing education in me; to Bowdoin for letting me in; and to the Bernard Osher Foundation for the means to walk in these doors and stay here.

And so of course, my highest priority for charity dollars has always been Bowdoin. And when Brannon Fisher asked me and my husband if we would consider endowing a Hyde Scholarship for a student, we looked it over, and made it happen as early in our careers as we could. In the great hope that those dollars would make their way to a student who could not attend Bowdoin without them.

I think that as scholarship students we are the hungriest students- excuse me- YOU are the hungriest students.

YOU are able – more than other students- to appreciate the value of the education you are receiving.

You work harder.

Which means of course, that I am speaking to the room of students who are therefore the most likely to succeed.

What a perfect audience for my final point.

In your future success, because you are all poised to write that story of success however you choose, my greatest wish is for you to come back to the feeling of community you have today, the feeling of thankfulness, and find a way to give back to the next round of aspiring Bowdoin students.

Let's all commit, in ways big and small (volunteering to interview applicants, doing college fairs, making donations big and small to Bowdoin) to opening the doors of Bowdoin to students who can't otherwise come.

Those are the students— I was and you are—who will make the most of this wonderful place: our Bowdoin.

Thank you so much for having me here today.