

Bowdoin Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon

Dennis Sgroi

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 thought I was doomed. I met with my freshman advisor, Professor James Ward, whom I feared was charged with reading me my academic last rites. When he reviewed my high school transcript, his face took on a puzzled look as he tried to reconcile my outstanding high school grades with my less-than-outstanding SAT scores.

The fact is, I was embarrassed by those SAT scores. Minutes passed, though it seemed like hours, and that seed of doubt within me swelled into a bolus of anxiety. Professor Ward

finally looked up, and in a professional but paternalistic manner, said that neither he nor the College believed that SATs 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. I left his office relieved, elated, and determined. I knew I belonged.

I worked hard to catch up with my peers, spending nearly every free hour in the Hawthorne library. I viewed this as an opportunity – a gift, really – to learn, to grow, and to chart my own future. I slowly gained confidence and hit my academic stride. In the spring of 1983, I graduated summa cum laude in biology. After the commencement ceremony, Professor Ward actively sought

me out -- he enthusiastically congratulated me and with a wink of his eye, he reminded me of his prediction. James Ward is known by generations of Bowdoin students as an outstanding math professor, but at that moment I knew him for his generosity of spirit. 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.

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 did not have the opportunity to meet the professor Copeland, who taught biology here at Bowdoin for nearly 40 years. However, in 2000, I **was** able to contact his son, Fred, to extend my appreciation. Fred told me how much his father would have enjoyed hearing my story and would have been “delighted” to hear how valuable the

scholarship had been in changing my life and shaping my career. 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.

Until recently, our hectic work schedule precluded Susan and me from attending this wonderful event. The Scholarship Luncheon is a highlight of the academic calendar of Bowdoin College, as it truly captures the very fabric, or DNA, if you will, of this outstanding community. Bowdoin is a community committed to the highest standards of educational excellence; a community that is open to diversity of thought and diversity of people -- irrespective of their socioeconomic background. 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.”

Just as I received help from Professor Copeland, Sue and I are now helping those who follow in our footsteps.

And this brings us to Adrian Rodriguez, who will speak with you in just a few moments. Soon you will learn that although 30 years separate us, Adrian and I have much more in common than you may realize:

- Adrian attended high school in Lynn, Massachusetts and a Bowdoin education would not have been possible without scholarship assistance;
- Adrian doubted that he could thrive at Bowdoin;
- The Bowdoin community embraced Adrian and believed in him before he believed in himself;

- Adrian actively embraces his Bowdoin experience, and Adrian too shares a passion for passing his gifts on to others.

We have had the opportunity and great pleasure to get to know Adrian Rodriguez, who exemplifies the very essence of the Bowdoin College Scholarship program, and why we are all here today. Thank you for listening to our story.