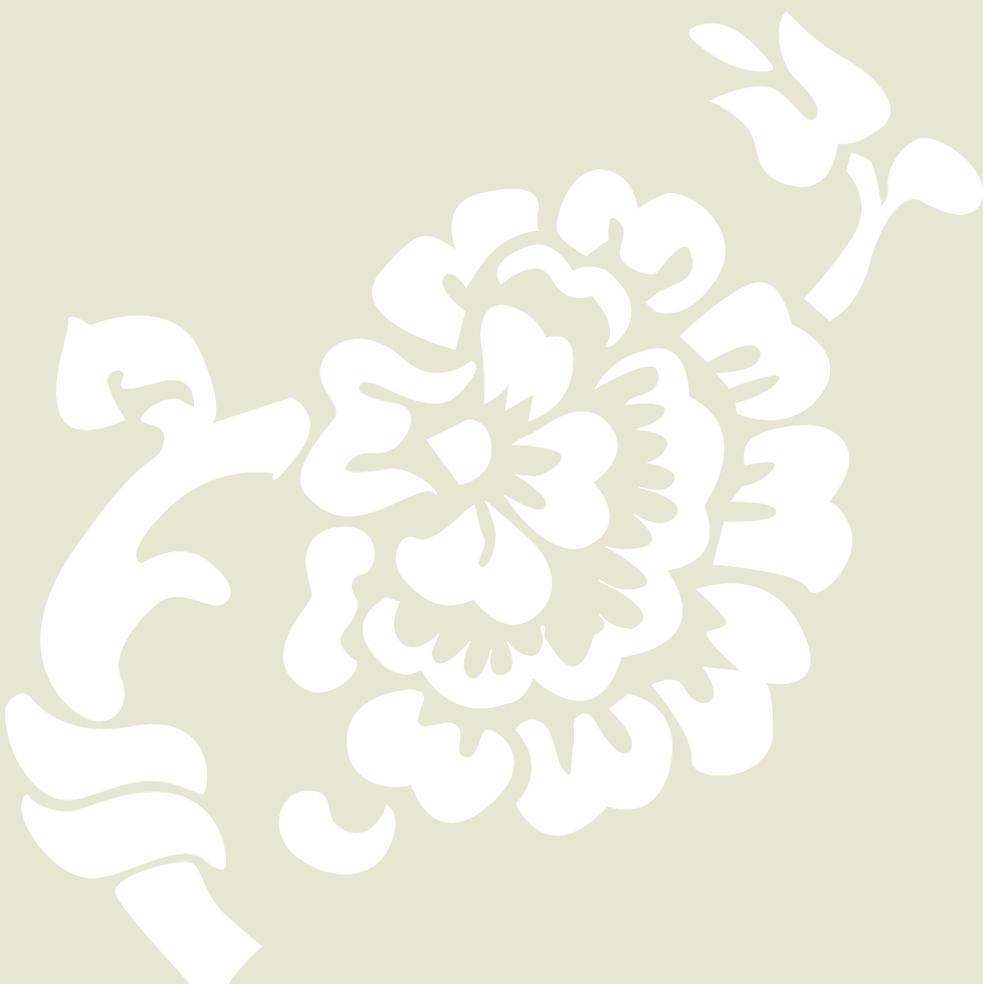


30
years
of rhodes
women



The 30 Years of Women Rhodes Scholars event was made possible thanks to the efforts of many dedicated Scholars. Steering Committee: Jeni Whalan, Maria Cecire and Ashwini Vasanthakumar, with JanaLee Cherneski, Namukale Chintu, Alexandra Conliffe, Ian Desai, Sasha-Mae Eccleston, Ruth Anne French-Hodson, Nadiya Figueroa, Cate Frieman, Sam Gill, Shibani Ghosh, Namrata Harishanker, Eliana Hechter, Lisa Herzog, Christie Hunter, Noorain Khan, Nakul Krishna, 'Makuena Leboela, Katie Lee, Rachel Mazyck, Cynthia Mbaru, Sindiso Mnisi, Anna Oldmeadow, Kate Orkin, Nicola Palmer, Genevieve Quist, Farnaz Sabet, Sarah Schulman, Heidi Stöckl and Katharine Wilkinson.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Rhodes Trust for their support of the event, and of this publication. Our special thanks go to Sir Colin Lucas, the Warden of the Rhodes Trust, for his belief in the importance of this celebration, and to Catherine King, Secretary to the Warden, for her tireless work in making the event and publication possible. Many thanks to Haseena Patel, a freelance designer based in Cape Town, South Africa, for donating her time. Finally, we would like to thank Elizabeth Fallaize, who inspired this celebration in the first place.

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context

30 years of women rhodes scholars

In 1977, twenty-four women arrived in Oxford as the first female Rhodes Scholars. Thirty years later, 878 more have made this same journey. Their presence has significantly impacted the Rhodes Trust, Rhodes House and the University of Oxford. For many, the Rhodes Scholarship made a profound difference in their lives.

In 2006, Professor Elizabeth Fallaize was appointed a Rhodes Trustee. Soon after, she initiated a series of lunchtime discussions among current women Scholars. These discussions, in which attendees shared their personal stories and reflections on being women Rhodes Scholars, significantly strengthened the ties between women Scholars at Oxford. They also emphasised the importance of exchanging stories as one way to understand the past and explore the future. The connections forged as a result of Elizabeth's initiative generated a desire amongst current women Scholars to engage with their predecessors, and to celebrate thirty years of Rhodes women. This resulted in the 30th Anniversary of Rhodes Women event, held in Oxford 30 May – 1 June 2008, and attended by more than 100 women Scholars.

As a way to spread the exchange of stories beyond Oxford, this publication collects 13 profiles and 53 personal reflections, bringing together the voices and stories of three decades of Rhodes women from around the world. It is, therefore, a beginning. The words, thoughts and reflections collected here construct an account of the past. But they also open a window to continued dialogue in the future. Together, our pasts shared in Oxford, and our diverse futures beyond, tell the story of thirty years of Rhodes women.



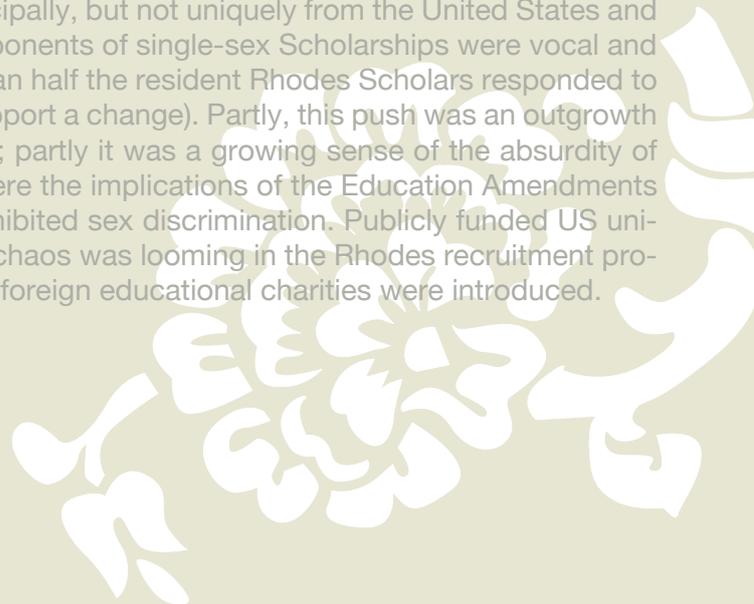
letter from the warden

Cecil Rhodes would not have expected his Scholars to be women. That was simply not part of the world he lived in, a world of rough state-building and individual wealth creation. The Will was quite explicit. The Scholarships were for “male students” and one of the selection criteria had to do with “manly outdoor sports.” Even if the language were thought to reflect little more than an uninspected assumption, it left no room for ambiguity.

The question of scholarships for women was periodically raised in different quarters from the early 1920s. However, whether the issue of women appeared in terms of Scholarships or of marriage, the reaction of the Trustees long remained negative. Despite the existence of eventually five women’s colleges, a culture of single-sex male colleges dominated Oxford during the first three-quarters of the existence of the Scholarships. The Trustees, by and large, thought in terms of young men going into male colleges and saw their participation in full college life as the prime condition of the success of the Scholarship. For the older generation of Trustees at least, women Scholars did not fit into that environment, and wives would take male Scholars out of it, thus diminishing the experience that Rhodes had defined for his scheme.

The 1970s were a decade of profound change for the Rhodes Trust. The extension of the Scholarships to women was part of that. One significant underlying reason for change was undoubtedly the final retirement of some long-serving, traditionally-minded Trustees who saw themselves as preserving the true intentions of the Founder. Another force at work was also the move – slow at first, but then precipitous – of male colleges to mixed-sex status. All the same, Warden Williams and the Trustees remained quite cautious about the idea. They recognised the power of the arguments put to them, but wondered if the colleges would accept women Scholars (not yet sensing the energy for change in the colleges themselves). They were also unsure of the legality of such a change. They had initially addressed the issue of women at the end of the 1960s by establishing Rhodes Visiting Fellowships in the women’s colleges. This scheme certainly brought some outstanding women to Oxford.

However, the real push came from outside – principally, but not uniquely from the United States and from American Rhodes Scholars in Oxford. By 1974, opponents of single-sex Scholarships were vocal and pressing (though it must be said that only a little more than half the resident Rhodes Scholars responded to a poll on the subject and a noticeable number did not support a change). Partly, this push was an outgrowth of the developing women’s movement in North America; partly it was a growing sense of the absurdity of the situation. Perhaps more troubling for the Trustees were the implications of the Education Amendments passed by the US Congress in 1972, whose Title IX prohibited sex discrimination. Publicly funded US universities feared legal liability and there was a sense that chaos was looming in the Rhodes recruitment process there, even though temporary measures to exempt foreign educational charities were introduced.



In order to understand the dilemma in which the Trustees found themselves, one has to grasp a basic point of charity law. Those who make provision for a gift in their will must have the security of knowing that, provided that their wishes are lawful, they will be implemented exactly after their death, however absurd the object. A change in such a testamentary provision can be obtained only by demonstrating that the object is either impossible to fulfill or unlawful. At the time, this had to be demonstrated to a law officer of the Crown (the Lord Chancellor) and then, as had been the case for previous amendments to Rhodes's Will, ratified by an Act of Parliament. At that time also, the proposal had first to be agreed by the Secretary of State (in this case, for Education). We know what Rhodes's Will so clearly stated. Self-evidently, his stated wishes were not impossible to execute. The Trustees were very conscious of that issue, especially since they had just been rebuffed in their proposal to modify the allocation of Scholarships to four specified South African schools on the grounds of their uniquely white recruitment. When she was asked, the Secretary of State had ruled that it was perfectly possible still to award these Scholarships as the Founder had intended.

Relief came in the form of the Equal Opportunities Act, finally passed in December 1975, which enacted against sex discrimination (as well as other categories of discrimination). In reality, the original draft of the legislation related, as a correspondent in the Department of Education noted, "to discrimination in the field of employment; and [...] I would have expected a provision permitting discrimination in the performance of charitable purposes (as distinct from discrimination in the employment of people who perform them)."

This news was too much for the Trustees. They proceeded to lobby for an additional clause that, while permitting any single-sex charity to remain so, allowed such a charity to get an Order in Council to change. The lobbying was successful and immediately the Rhodes Trust applied for such an order, which was granted. The first women Rhodes Scholars were elected for 1977.

The first election brought none of the tokenism that some cynics expected and fairly soon the usual cohort contained about 40 percent women. Shortly before the first women arrived, Warden Williams wrote "No doubt it will all settle down in quite a short time and then we will wonder what any fuss was about." However, it is certainly right to make the fuss of celebrating this 30th Anniversary of the first election of women Rhodes Scholars – celebrating the fact and understanding what the experience has meant and continues to mean for women Scholars. For my part, I shall also be quietly celebrating the sense that it is now quite unremarkable that there are women Rhodes Scholars.

sir colin lucas

Warden of Rhodes House

reflections on the scholarship

During a visit this past Christmas at the home of a fellow female Rhodes Scholar, I was asked if the Scholarship had been a “turning point” in my life. My friend was serving on the selection committee for a new crop of Scholars and, alongside the usual sense of amazement at the increasingly high quality of applicants (which gave rise to the familiar cry “How did I ever win that thing?!”), we wondered if there were some in the pool whose lives would be fundamentally altered by the Oxford and Rhodes experience.

Interestingly, my friend questioned whether that was true for her. Putting aside the deep personal relationships she had formed at Oxford, she was in a profession she had always intended to pursue and which her own family members had chosen, living roughly where she thought she would live, having had the kind of education she had dared to dream about.

For me, however, the feeling was completely different. I had come from a family in which my parents left high school before graduation and in which no one in the previous generation had a post-secondary education (let alone a post-graduate degree). Aside from a backpacking brother, no one in my family had ever been to Europe, and I had never traveled outside North America. In thinking about life after my BA, I had entertained the possibility of law school or even – do I dare admit it? – public service. But I had never believed I would complete a doctorate at a world-renowned university. So, in that sense, the Rhodes Scholarship profoundly changed my trajectory.

Clearly, this story will resonate with many. Over 50 percent of respondents in a study called the Rhodes Project (which surveyed just over 200 women who won the Scholarship between 1977 and 1995) claimed that the Rhodes Scholarship was “a passport to success.” Moreover, comparing the occupations of female Rhodes Scholars with those of their mothers produced an intriguingly different picture. The highest number of female Scholars worked in academia (just over a third of the total sample), whereas only 5 percent of their mothers had chosen this profession.

But “turning point” meant other things for me as well. Having studied Political Science in Saskatchewan – an incubator for publicly funded health care and a comfortable home for left-leaning academics – I had never been exposed to systematic conservative thinking. Oxford, by contrast, offered the full spectrum of political commitments, substantiated by history and philosophy, as well as by passion. I now had to ground my liberal views and defend them, both in tutorials and over the dinner table. The result has been a much stronger sense of what I believe and why I believe it.

Of course, the legitimacy of the conservative disposition seeped over into other aspects of life. While I was the first woman from Saskatchewan to be awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, gender was not at the forefront of my identity upon arriving in Oxford. This was to gradually change. At a dinner at Cambridge early in my first year, I sat next to a young British man who was studying “land economy” (what was this, by the way?), who, when the cigars and port came around, proclaimed: “You must be so pleased. Only a few short years ago you would have been asked to leave the table at this moment.” I remember the hot feeling in my cheeks, the sense of disorientation and, above all, the urge to do something very “colonial,” namely, to grab a cigar and smoke it (which I promptly did, to the horror of my dinner companion).

Oxford in the late 1980s was a place where women were only recent additions and this was reflected in the traditions that had endured, particularly the composition of High Table. Today, there has been progress, within both the student body and the Senior Common Rooms of most colleges. But there is still dogged adherence to the 5 o'clock research seminar (which is the kiss of death for anyone with a small child, like me), the too sparse representation of female candidates on the short list for Fellowships, minority participation by women in student government (it is rare for more than 20 percent of JCR presidents to be female in any given academic year), and a persistent trend of inviting mostly high profile men to speak at the Oxford Union. There is also an alarming gap in Finals performance in some subject areas. In 2007, for example, male candidates in Philosophy, Politics and Economics had a 24 percent chance of gaining a First, while their female counterparts had only a 12 percent chance.

After negotiating their way through this "Oxford system," many female Rhodes Scholars were better prepared to confront and navigate professions that had traditionally been dominated by men (such as law, consulting or academic science). But if my own experience is any indication of a larger trend, the Scholarship also produced a marked increase in career opportunities. In speaking with other Rhodes Scholars over the years, I've learned that this expansion was not always easily managed.

For me, it had a confusing impact. The plethora of choice, coupled with pressure (partly self-manufactured) to "give something back" and "make a difference" led me to jump on the next fast train that came along – wherever that was headed. I had a difficult time distinguishing my abilities and opportunities from my real interests. I empathise with younger female Scholars who I see embroiled in the same process and I marvel at those with the fortitude to figure it out much earlier than I ever did! Only in the last five years have I clarified the kind of impact I want to make in life. Along with this realisation has come a greater understanding of the "roads not taken" (to cite one female Scholar) as a result of the Rhodes Scholarship.

The "Jennifer Welsh" who left Canada for Oxford was not just a political scientist, but was active in partisan politics, played both the piano and saxophone, occasionally wrote short stories, and was an integral member of a sprawling family (with new nieces and nephews appearing every month). Over the years that followed, as I focused on education and career, many of these passions took a back seat. In short, paths were fenced off. Perhaps the longest of those paths was the one back to Canada, where I always believed I would be spending my adult life.

As I've entered my forties, I've found ways to retrace my steps and reclaim some of those roads not taken. My daughter, for example, has helped me to rediscover how central music is to my well-being. I've also found a way to contribute to Canada as part of a diaspora. I believe it is my partial distance from that country which gives me a secret advantage in thinking about its potential role in the world.

As an academic who also engages in freelance writing and policy work, I'm crafting my own path through a traditional profession. Often this means I have too many irons in the fire, but this is a curse which many female Rhodes Scholars seem to share. The Rhodes Project confirms that we are taking on heaps of responsibility: at home, where at least half of us are jointly supporting our families financially; in the workplace, where many of us have taken on leadership roles; and in the communities (local, national, and global) to which we belong. Perhaps these myriad obligations, and the sense of fragmentation that comes with them, are one of the costs of a Rhodes Scholarship.

But surely one of the greatest benefits remains the breadth and accessibility of the Rhodes network. I have found it a powerful resource, whether I am seeking to change policy, discuss career options, learn more about a pressing issue, populate a Board of Directors, or find a guest room to stay in! As I reflect on almost twenty years, I am struck by the degree to which female Rhodes Scholars still constitute a large chunk of my closest friendships, testament, I think, to the imperative to share both the joy and the challenge of those "myriad obligations" we all face.

jennifer welsh

Canada, 1987

Professor in International Relations, Somerville College, University of Oxford

rhodes women arrive at oxford . . .

For the women Scholars who first came to Oxford in the late 1970s and their forerunners, the Rhodes Visiting Fellows, neither they nor Oxford knew quite what to expect

joan leopold usa, 1972

Part of my goal when I became Oxford's first American Rhodes Visiting Fellow in 1972 was to see that women at Oxford would be inspired to follow their own goals and not just "praise famous men." The path was not always as smooth as I might have hoped. I had come to Oxford to write a critical biography of Friedrich Max Müller (1823 – 1900), the Oxford Sanskritist and comparative philologist, who pre-dated and encouraged similar beliefs on race and nationality as Cecil Rhodes. I had my doubts about how it would look for someone who specialised in the critical history of racial thinking to accept an award founded by Rhodes. The Rhodes Trust and my new college, Lady Margaret Hall, nevertheless, supported my work. However, resistance at Oxford delayed its completion, as I was expected to preserve Müller's reputation and was admonished for disregarding the feelings of his admirers. In the end, however, I did have his early proto-racialist essay (1849) on "The Indo-Europeans" published in the *Prix Volney Essay Series* which I edited and contributed to.

The Rhodes Fellowship, for which I left my co-educational graduate college, also brought me in greater contact with the women's colleges and meant that I never had to repeat the joke that I had once made at my former graduate college. When asked, "What was the position of the Warden?", as I saw him lying before us on a sofa, wine glass in hand, surrounded by adoring, beautiful, female graduate students, I had astutely replied: "Prone!"

catherine sweet usa, 1977

Of course, I was proud to win the Rhodes Scholarship in the first year they allowed women to apply. When you are 22, and people show up at your door to do TV, radio and newspaper interviews, there is a moment of "WOW, I'm nearly famous." But the excitement wore off quickly enough once I got to Oxford. Generally, I didn't mix with the "Rhodents," as I thought of them – the American students who huddled together for collective warmth, read the *International Herald Tribune*, played Sunday American football matches and made plans for what they were going to do when they got back to America.

For me, the Scholarship was not the first step in conforming to an American definition of success. After completing an MPhil and DPhil, I didn't go back to America and have made my life in the UK. I've finished one successful career in the City of London and taken up another as a University Lecturer, whilst working on my first novel. I live in a 17th century thatched cottage in a rural village with my English husband to whom I have been married for 28 years. I've started the process of becoming a British citizen. How do I describe success? One word: happiness! Would my definition have irritated Cecil Rhodes? Probably, but then I think he would have resented his money going towards the education of a woman in the first place! I trust the Rhodes Trustees are more sanguine.

lyndall gordon south africa, 1973

At the coming-up dinner at Rhodes House in 1973, I found myself next to the Warden, Bill Williams. He asked who my favourite author was. “Virginia Woolf,” I said promptly. “She was mad as a hatter,” he returned in a way that didn’t invite further discussion. It occurred to me that I might inadvertently have confirmed male fears about bringing women into Rhodes House. That thought represented a common wariness at the time as women entered places which had been closed to them.

I was the first South African woman to benefit from the Rhodes Trust, and benefit I did from the chance to meet the great Eliot scholar, Helen Gardner. That contact and the years in Oxford were vital to my first biography, *Eliot’s Early Years*. On going down, I taught at Columbia University, and in 1976 served on the selection committee for American Rhodes Scholars. They took pains to explain that we were there to carry out the will of Cecil Rhodes, not indulge our own tastes. I was indeed taken aback by the aggressiveness of the interviewing during the final round of selection. That year marked the end of men only, and the committee seemed to be selecting for men who stood up to combat which was not my idea of manliness. I wondered what was in reserve for the women to come.

maura smith usa, 1977

Fall of ‘76. Jefferson Starship’s song, *Miracles*, played on the radio as I completed applications for graduate schools. “First year for women,” I was told by a Vassar professor. “Apply for the Rhodes!” Seemed crazy, but I did. On my way to the state interview, I re-read my essay, beginning with a controversial quote from Cambridge economics professor, Joan Robinson. “The purpose of studying economics is not to be deceived by economists.” What was I thinking! What kinds of questions would they ask? As Vassar’s first applicant, I’d had no “prep sessions.” I said the first thing that came to mind when asked, “Did Christopher Columbus go too far or not far enough?” When the interview ended I considered catching the next train back to Poughkeepsie.

After I was selected as a New York finalist, I began to contemplate the possibility of winning. Talking with fellow finalist, Randy Kennedy (now a professor at Harvard Law School), opened my eyes to the historical significance of our candidacies. We pondered Cecil Rhodes’s likely unfavourable reaction to women and African-American Scholars, and the improbability that both of us would win. We sang *Miracles* right before they announced that Randy, Rick Stengel, Scott Rafferty and I had won. Thirteen women and one African-American man were selected that year. My selection was the beginning of a string of “firsts.” As the first woman general counsel of International Paper, a Fortune 100 global company, I am still experiencing “firsts.”

jeyaraney kathirithamby 1975

- **Country:** Malaysia
- **College:** Rhodes Visiting Fellow, St Hugh's
- **Degree:** PhD, Entomology (Imperial College London)
- **Current Profession:** Senior Research Fellow, St Hugh's College; University Research Lecturer and Divisional Career Research Fellow, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford

Never heard of Strepsiptera? When Jeyaraney's fascination with these tiny parasites began, neither had most entomologists. At the time, Strepsiptera were virtually an unknown order of insects and they generated little interest. But Jeyaraney, who had obtained her PhD in Entomology at Imperial College London, and spent years seeking out live samples, had a gut feeling that Strepsiptera mattered. This feeling was so strong that she even commissioned her father to join her on expeditions into Malaysia's rice fields. From early on, she knew an intensive research culture was essential for drawing attention to her work, and so she successfully responded to an advertisement for a Rhodes Visiting Fellowship, which brought her to Oxford in 1975.

So far, there are about 600 described species of Strepsiptera. The males are free-living, but the females are endoparasitic, which means they live inside a host and, in the case of Strepsiptera, often choose to settle in the abdomens of bees, plantbugs or grasshoppers. Finding the males is a slow and arduous task and requires intensive field research. But finding the females, who never leave their hosts, brings new meaning to the word "challenge." In 2002, Jeyaraney was the first person to discover a live female of a particular species of Strepsiptera, *Caenocholax fenyesi waloffi*, in Mexico.

Only research at the molecular level can improve our understanding of Strepsiptera. Because the males and females are so different from each other, DNA tests can help to match the sexes for the different species. DNA testing also helped Jeyaraney and her colleagues discover that some female Strepsiptera wrap themselves in a piece of their host's skin to avoid detection. Like spies, parasites use many mechanisms to avoid detection and immune responses from their hosts, but this was the first time scientists had observed a parasite camouflaging itself in the host's own tissue.

Research into parasites has major practical applications, especially in areas like biocontrol and pest management. Because Strepsiptera render their hosts sterile, they can be used to limit the reproduction of crop pests. Jeyaraney herself has used Strepsiptera parasites to control the long-horned grasshopper, the main pest of Papua New Guinea's palm oil plantations.

Jeyaraney confesses that being a woman in the sciences has not always been easy: “You have to be very determined.” It sounds like lonely advice, but it’s clear she wouldn’t have it any other way.

Jeyaraney now collaborates with researchers all over the world. She has been a Smithsonian Visiting Scientist in Washington, DC and Panama, is an Adjunct Associate Professional Scientist at the Illinois Natural History Survey and works with partners in Italy, Australia, Mexico, Panama, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Japan and Papua New Guinea. She enjoys the enthusiasm that undergraduate and graduate students now have for Strepsiptera. She wouldn’t admit it, but perhaps there is a small sense of satisfaction that her gut feeling turned out to be right.

Despite her success, Jeyaraney confesses that being a woman in the sciences has not always been easy: “You have to have to be very determined.” It sounds like lonely advice, but it’s clear she wouldn’t have it any other way. Her passion for her work is captivating and her conversation has a happy and easy way of veering back to her research. And Jeyaraney does leave a little room for other interests. When asked why she stayed in Oxford after completing her Rhodes Fellowship, she smiles coyly: “Because I met my husband here.”



banuta rubess

1978

- **Country:** Canada
- **College:** St Antony's
- **Degree:** DPhil, Modern History
- **Current Profession:** Writer; director; producer; actor

For Banuta, studying history at Oxford was not only an academic exercise, but also a chance to understand her personal history. A native Latvian, she first tried to return to her homeland following her undergraduate studies. Back then, it was called Soviet Latvia and the only way in was to study there. The Rhodes Scholarship should have provided her the rare opportunity to peek behind the Iron Curtain, but her DPhil topic was so controversial she became *persona non grata* with the regime and never made it. Instead, Banuta herself became an object of study, attracting the watchful eye of the KGB.

But don't think her Oxford experience was wasted. She spent her time in experimental theatre and actively engaging with her fellow students. "I found Oxford liberating," says Banuta, who had been told she was too left wing to win a Rhodes. "The feminists in England discussed sexual politics and attended demonstrations while retaining a love for fashion and decoration. Compared to feminists in Canada, these women seemed more willing to explore all the ramifications of being human."

After she finished her doctorate, Banuta flung herself more deeply into the theatre. She spent many years in Toronto, where she created and directed everything from strange and wild plays to Jungian operas. Her productions helped establish a feminist theatre company, a youth theatre company and a new opera company. She sat on the Toronto Arts Council Board of Directors and won multiple awards for her plays.

Following the birth of her second child, however, Banuta entered a period of depression that sapped her creative energy. "It was the lowest point of my life," she says. "I felt a piece of me had died." She saw a year-long job posting in Latvia and, in 1998, decided to move. She and her family have lived there ever since.

Now Banuta is convinced that having children teaches one the truth about love and sacrifice, and she ranks among her greatest achievements the chance to celebrate these discoveries while rediscovering her passion for the world of theatre.

On her 50th birthday, the Latvian Minister of Culture congratulated Banuta for her creative vitality, her courage to break stereotypes and her sense of social responsibility.

In Latvia, she has continued to act as a catalyst and trailblazer, in the theatre as well as in newsprint. Whereas her early works focused explicitly on feminist themes, today she casts a wider net, often addressing politics, sex or the nature of grace. On her 50th birthday, the Latvian Minister of Culture congratulated Banuta for her creative vitality, her courage to break stereotypes and her sense of social responsibility. She is currently directing an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical at a theatre which has never had a female director.

Banuta took up the Rhodes Scholarship in order to gain insight into her own origins. It didn't get her there – at least not immediately. But now that she has finally made it to Latvia, how does the Rhodes fit into her personal history? “The label isn't helpful,” she declares unabashedly. “I'm in theatre – it's embarrassing!” But she is quick to acknowledge that her Rhodes experience likely launched her theatrical career.

And the KGB? Well, some things are better left in the past.



denise thal & david scobey

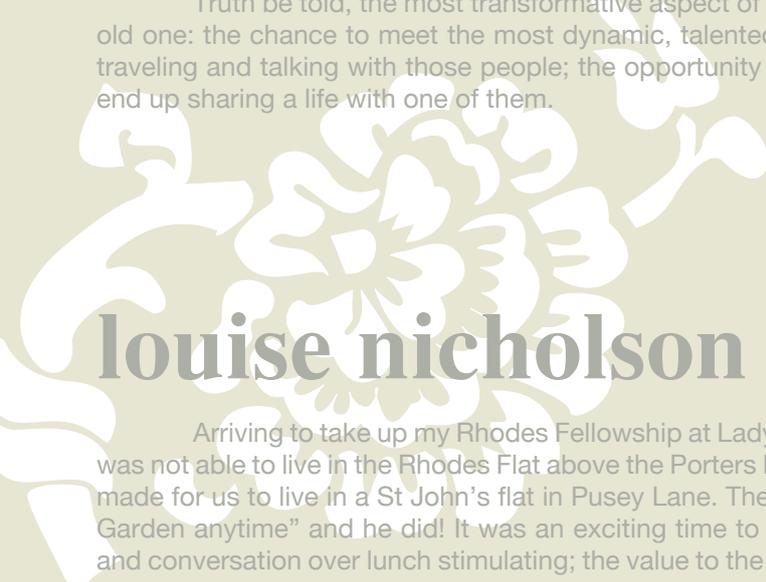
usa, 1977/76

There were surely Rhodes romances before the Scholarship went co-ed, but we have always figured that our 1982 wedding represented the first in-house nuptials. The changes of thirty years ago, therefore, made a particular difference in our lives.

Denise, a member of that inaugural co-ed class, remembers (without pleasure) the intense American press scrutiny that attended the selection of her cohort; David, who had arrived a year earlier, remembers (with pleasure) helping to plan a welcome party to which the new female Scholars (and, okay, the first-year men) were invited. Yet looking back, we are both struck that the phrase “Rhodes Scholar women” does not really capture what felt so distinctive about our time at Oxford. Breaking the Trust righted an injustice, but we are not sure that it meant a seachange in the Oxford experience. There were already female post-graduate scholars at Oxford before 1977 and the new female Scholars reflected much the same mix of talents and ambitions – political aspirants, literary theorists, lawyers-to-be, activists, and, yes, even scholar-athletes – as the men who preceded and accompanied us. Most important, being a Rhodes Scholar was less important than other bonds we shared: being Yanks in Oxford, international post-graduates, and single twenty-somethings. The co-ed Rhodes cohort enlarged, rather than created, a social world that was going strong.

For the Yanks, one central ritual of that world was the Sunday afternoon touch football game in the University Parks. The jocks, female and male, held back for the poets; the intellectuals were kept from quarterbacking because they took too much time calling plays. Many friendships and flirtations, as well as four marriages, were simmered in those games.

Truth be told, the most transformative aspect of the new co-ed Rhodes experience was much the same as the old one: the chance to meet the most dynamic, talented people anyone of us had ever known; the gifts of studying, traveling and talking with those people; the opportunity to befriend them, to be changed by them and sometimes, to end up sharing a life with one of them.



louise nicholson new zealand, 1978

Arriving to take up my Rhodes Fellowship at Lady Margaret Hall with my seven-year-old son, I discovered that I was not able to live in the Rhodes Flat above the Porters Lodge (no children in college). Fortunately, arrangements were made for us to live in a St John’s flat in Pusey Lane. The boy was, of course, “Welcome to kick the ball in the Fellows Garden anytime” and he did! It was an exciting time to be affiliated with a women’s college. The food was excellent and conversation over lunch stimulating; the value to the College of new technologies, such as “a word processor,” fed lively debate.

I was also resident when Lady Margaret Hall admitted the first men as students and fellows. While by day little changed, in the evenings groups of students congregated in the most unlikely of places to discuss and debate. I once joined a heated discussion in the laundry that lasted much longer than a “heavy cycle” wash!

During my time, there was little engagement with either Rhodes House or the Warden, but I made many friends within the SCR and enjoyed the company of a Rhodes Fellow at St Hilda’s who had a five-year-old. We once lost both our children, temporarily, in the maze at Hampton Court during a weekend outing.

Being a Rhodes Fellow at Lady Margaret Hall afforded a special and unique academic experience and I have a strong and lasting affection for Lady Margaret Hall and Oxford.

shelagh scarth canada, 1979

One sunny day, in the late fall of my first year, I was heading out for a run and passed the rather eccentric college gardener. He was kneeling, working on the plants in the border. I smiled at him and said hello, as I always did. I then began to pick up my pace, heading towards the New Buildings and out into the park. As I turned the corner of the quad, I saw that the gardener had downed tools and started to run behind me. Almost instinctively, I picked up my pace; so did he.

We proceeded out into Addison's Walk, five yards apart, with me growing more anxious as I tried to determine the best response to the gardener's behaviour. Was he following me? Was he getting his daily exercise? I was trying out for the Blue Boat at the time and was reasonably fit. I decided to run faster to lose him but he proved my match and began to pull up beside me, smiling in a non-threatening way. We ran along for a while together. Then, as inexplicably as he had begun, he slowed and dropped behind. I ran on.

I was one of the first contingent of girls at my high school, formerly an all-boys school. I was the first female Rhodes Scholar for the Prairie Provinces. I was one of the first women at Magdalen. I have experienced many reactions to the introduction of women to male institutions. This was one of the oddest.

jaynie anderson australia, 1970

The magical experience of Oxford cannot ever be forgotten, and remains central to my formation as an art historian. If the magic were to be defined, it would consist of the beauty of the place, the extraordinary richness of resources, the concentrated excellence of scholars, the rich collections of works of art, and the chance to bond with peers. It was a heady experience suddenly being surrounded by a wealth of original material at the Ashmolean and in the Bodleian Library, not to mention the Museum of Modern Art. When I studied art history in Australia, the real European world was very distant, as art history was then a European phenomenon. When I arrived in Oxford, I suddenly encountered in real life scholars whose names I had known only from books.

I was one of the first women Rhodes Fellows, a fact of which I have always been extremely proud. This was the first option given to women at a postdoctoral level to participate in a Rhodes Scholarship. As an undergraduate in Australia I had been a feminist, and something of that always lingers with you. The women's colleges, such as St Hugh's where I was a junior fellow, were not used to pure research appointments. At times there was a certain awkwardness, an unsureness about our role. Still, I remember the richness and variety of exhibitions, the accessibility of France and Italy and, above all, the time to wallow in research without any administrative duties. Oxford was paradise for art historians, a paradise whose trees I have plundered ever since.

banuta rubess canada, 1978

In 1978, Rhodes Scholars sailed to England on the *Queen Elizabeth 2*. The day before we left New York, I ran into John Lennon and Yoko Ono. They nodded at me gravely, as if we were lifelong friends who had agreed not to speak. I took this as a sign that my life was about to rise to a higher plane.

The essence of the Rhodes is leadership, which can mean hacking away at the bushes to clear new ground. I worked in isolation on my thesis about Rainis, a Latvian writer, revolutionary and national hero. Several colleagues considered this topic obscure and my research required facing off with the big bad Soviet Union. Yet I felt it gave voice to the silenced, so I chose to be brave and soldiered on.

I'd quit my undergraduate theatre studies because they seemed superficial and meaningless. Yet at Oxford I instantly became involved with a passionate and political theatre company and have spent my life in theatre – though I can still write a mean academic essay. In so many different ways, I continue to clear new ground. Back then, I woke up one morning to the news that Lennon had been shot. I was distraught. At breakfast, I spoke to an Iranian student who had never heard of Lennon. Yet he shared my sense of grief, as his sister had just been executed for distributing newspapers. That was the world the Rhodes opened for me – threatening and promising, radiant and bloody.

amrita cheema

1980

- **Country:** India
- **College:** Exeter
- **Degree:** DPhil, Modern History
- **Current Profession:** Presenter and Journalist for SBS Television, Sydney, Australia

In retrospect, it was a little foolish to ask Amrita if the Rhodes Scholarship changed her life: “Well, I gave up a planned career in the Indian administrative service for an academic degree. I married a German Rhodes Scholar from my year and moved to Germany instead of returning to India. I switched to international journalism because I did not speak the language when I first moved to Germany.”

Amrita confesses that the Rhodes aura enticed her to apply for the Scholarship. She had already been among the first women to enter the “male bastion” that was the prestigious St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, and she was its first female student to win a Rhodes Scholarship. But she found nothing remarkable about breaking new ground, an attitude she realises may have resulted from her upbringing. “My parents taught me to be strong, fearless and independent at a time when many others denied their daughters the same opportunities as their sons.”

After arriving in Oxford, Amrita discovered that her course, the MPhil in Commonwealth History, hadn’t been taught for seven years. Left largely to her own devices, she eventually switched to a DPhil in Modern History. “At the time, I felt very isolated,” she recalls. “Now I realise that it was a great learning process that encouraged you to work independently. It greatly sharpened my analytical skills and affected every aspect of my life – even the way I play squash!”

Those skills have been invaluable in Amrita’s career as a journalist, which has taken her to Germany, India (after she and her husband parted ways), back to Germany, and now to Australia. She has worked for Deutsche Welle Radio and Television, Business India Television, Star News India, and is currently a news presenter and journalist with SBS Television in Sydney.

“My parents taught me to be strong, fearless and independent at a time when many others denied their daughters the same opportunities as their sons.”

As an anchor, Amrita has interviewed the likes of Gerhard Schröder, Vaclav Havel, the Dalai Lama, and Sir Edmund Hillary. At DW-TV, she received high praise for her coverage of breaking news, including the 2004 tsunami and Beslan school siege. “Although I love the buzz of rolling news, I don’t want to be a tabloid journalist,” she says. “These are real stories of human suffering and of the triumph of the human spirit.”

In news, it’s analysis that Amrita loves most. “It’s not only what is happening in the moment that matters, but also the larger context. To cover news, you have to understand the bigger picture. I love being part of the first draft of history.” As well as her on-air work, she has worked extensively behind the scenes, as an executive producer and associate editor. She says her most creative work includes documentaries, including one on the unification of Germany and another on the Indologist Max Müller.

She believes that everyone has the responsibility to give their best, whatever their field. She may not be in India now, but it remains close to her heart. As one of only a few Indians in the Western-dominated international media, she brings a different perspective. “It’s about disseminating information and contributing to knowledge,” she explains. “And for that, there are no national boundaries.”



bonnie st. john

1986

- **Country:** USA
- **College:** Trinity
- **Degree:** DPhil, Modern History
- **Current Profession:** Author; inspirational speaker; executive coach; TV personality; mother

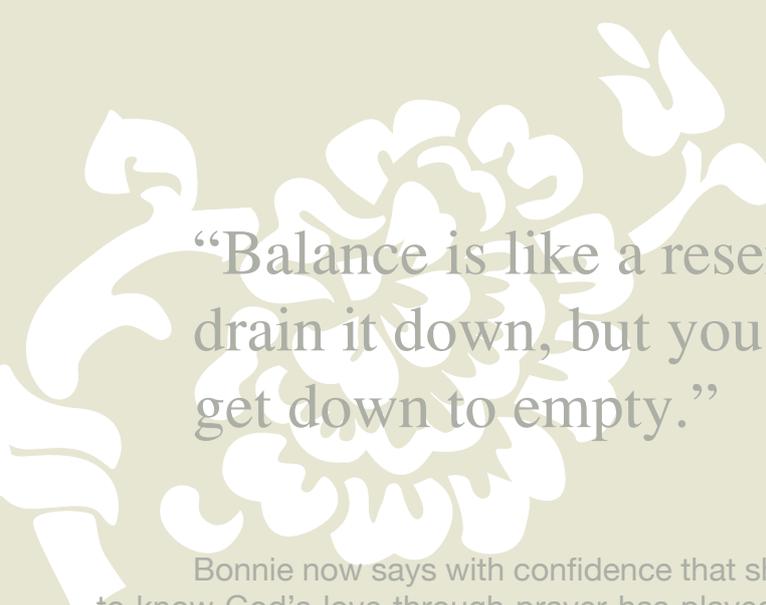
Bonnie's is no mere story of rags to riches, but a journey toward wisdom – and one in which the Rhodes Scholarship played a significant role. The Rhodes allowed Bonnie to see her potential and gave her a clearer vision of her future.

Bonnie's youth was tougher than most: her mother struggled to raise three kids with little means; she was sexually abused by her step-father; and, at the age of five, one of her legs was amputated. Bonnie didn't let any of this stand in her way, making it to Harvard where she completed her degree in three years, taking a year out in between during which she won silver and bronze medals as a skier at the 1984 Paralympics. However, while outwardly she was discovering enormous success, it was in writing her Rhodes application that Bonnie started to really unearth the long-buried emotions she had carried since childhood.

That process continued at Oxford where Bonnie started her struggle to truly embrace joy. She likens her Rhodes tenure to “suspended animation.” “It's a great place to learn more about your world(s) and identity because you can see some things better.”

Bonnie's mother sought to prepare her to succeed in a white world, and raised her with a diminished sense of black identity. Bonnie credits the black women friends she made at Oxford with helping her to establish a black identity. Not surprisingly, these women remain a valuable part of her life.

Since Oxford, Bonnie has worked to bring some of what she's learned to a wider audience. Early in the Clinton administration she served as Director for Human Capital on the White House's National Economic Council. Her books have garnered critical acclaim and she has appeared on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America* and in *People* magazine. Her diverse range of experiences makes her a highly desired keynote speaker. And yet, in spite of this immense success, it's the healing process that largely began with her Rhodes application that Bonnie values most.



“Balance is like a reservoir. You fill it up and drain it down, but you can’t let yourself get down to empty.”

Bonnie now says with confidence that she has grown and healed. She believes that coming to know God’s love through prayer has played an essential part in making her strong enough to confront her abuse as a child. And Bonnie continues to grow, particularly as a seeker of wisdom. Through her books, she has interviewed and learned from many who also strive to succeed without leaving their sanity and families behind.

When asked how she has managed the work/life balance, she laughs: “You never get it quite right. Balance is like a reservoir. You fill it up and drain it down, but you can’t let yourself get down to empty.” Bonnie says her thirteen-year-old daughter, whom she home-schooled for five years, is her first pride and joy. But in addition to raising her daughter, she says: “I’m most proud of making a difference in the lives of others. I get to meet people, talk with them and listen to their stories. I hear their problems and I have the chance to offer inspiration – I’m really proud to be able to do that.”

For Bonnie, there is great truth in Proverbs 3:13-14: “Happy is the (wo)man who finds wisdom [...] for the profit thereof is better than gold.” Living and sharing her joy, Bonnie’s is a story of gaining riches in the deepest sense.



amrita cheema india, 1980

During the 80th anniversary of the Rhodes Scholarship, a journalist came looking to interview a Rhodes Scholar who was “not white, male or American.” There were few of us who fitted this description!

I was one of two Rhodes Scholars from India in 1980. At Rhodes House, Sandra Kibble-White, Peggi Cetti and Elizabeth Hake were warm and supportive, always ready to listen and offer tea. It was my first time overseas and they patiently explained all that appeared strange and confusing – from buying duvets to the idiosyncrasies of the Oxford graduate programme.

Apart from formal dinners at Rhodes House, the Warden, Robin Fletcher, and his wife, Ginny, regularly invited bunches of Scholars to their home for Sunday lunches. I particularly loved the sign outside the Warden’s residence, which said “Rhodes Scholars do not knock. Please walk in.”

As I read more about Cecil Rhodes in my first year, I got this uncomfortable feeling that my “privileged” position was a result of a controversial imperial legacy. In 2004, I attended the Rhodes Centenary celebrations. As the Class of ’80 sat together, it became evident that all those present excelled in what they were doing and were making a difference in their respective fields. Most were engaged in meaningful work. For me, making a contribution that goes beyond personal good lies at the heart of the Rhodes Scholarship. Twenty-three years after we started together in Oxford, I understood the relevance of the Scholarship. The long shadow of the benefactor lifted.

elizabeth woods australia, 1977

The strangeness of female Rhodes Scholars in Oxford was evident long before I arrived. There was little information to guide my first critical decision – the colleges available to women were all unknown to previous Queensland Scholars returning from a small set of longstanding undergraduate colleges. My choice, Wadham, was in part motivated by my determination to be in a mixed college (after studying and working almost entirely with men as an agricultural scientist) and by the fact that it was established by Dorothy Wadham, after her husband died!

I was delighted to find Wadham centrally located, friendly, with charming Wren-designed Hall and Chapel and wonderful gardens. Less fun was the freezing room in Holywell Street, with heating provided by 10p coins in a slot. The maximum contribution at bed time left you freezing just after 4am! I was joined by two more Rhodes Scholars: Eileen Gillese (Alberta) and Dan Barker (Utah). We were a funny combination but we managed well in our less than palatial abode.

However, the biggest immediate impact was on women’s sport. After an injury sidelined the regular captain, I captained the netball team in the Blues match in my first year and again the following year. That year, three out of four captains of women’s Blues teams were Rhodes Scholars. I recall an English team member commenting that Australian women played sport like men – being highly competitive and focussed on fitness, suggesting perhaps that women’s sport was quite ladylike before our arrival!

eileen gillese canada, 1977

Sorry. I can’t do it. Despite valiant efforts, I have been unable to find words to give meaning to what was one of the most significant experiences of my life. The stories I have tried to recount trivialize the experience and what it means to me; an honest description leads to a list of superlatives that appears ridiculously unbelievable.

So sorry, no can do. The best I can offer is this: Oxford changed me and my life more profoundly than I could have imagined possible. To say it was life altering is no exaggeration. If the saddest life is the one not fully lived, it is safe to say that Oxford saved me from that fate. For that, I will be eternally grateful to the Rhodes Scholarship and my fellow Scholars.

anita mehta india, 1978

My Rhodes years frequently evoke thoughts of the roads not taken. One of two Indian Scholars in 1978, and India's second woman Rhodes Scholar, I was elected for "achievements in physics, creative writing and music." Thirty years later it is physics on which my career is centred, while the other two belong to what I call my "secret" resume. Despite my professional achievements, which include a pioneering role in granular physics, I've often longed to return to the many open roads of my Rhodes years.

My recent year as a Radcliffe fellow at Harvard allowed me a miraculous return to some of these. I've entered a new field of research which combines my two intellectual halves, the cognitive sciences, where I'm using scientific tools to analyse the perception of music and language by the brain. I've returned to music, not just as a listener, but as an occasional performer. Most importantly, I've nearly finished writing a darkly comic novel on the world of science.

This brief year of bliss in midlife has underscored the real significance of the Rhodes in my life – it was a crossroads of possibilities and passions. The truth, as I see it now, is that all of these need to be pursued: it is simply not an option to relegate one's loves in life to roads not taken.

jennifer barber usa, 1978

The other day, taking a break from a poem I'd been trying to write, I slid my copy of *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* off the shelf. Strange to think that I bought the book at Blackwell's – 1,050 pages including the front matter and index – nearly thirty years ago. The signs are all there, though: the typeface looks tiny to me now, though I had no trouble with it in 1979; my notes in the margin, in green and purple ink, are tiny, too; pages 391 through 396 have completely pulled away from the binding; the price printed on the back cover is £3.25 net.

When I bought the volume, I was in my second year of Course II in English at Wadham College. With my tutor, Alan Ward, I'd made my way through *Beowulf* and other works in Old English and getting to Chaucer was exciting. I had already figured out that I didn't have the makings of a philologist: preparing for the history of the language exam, I couldn't fathom the Great Vowel Shift or understand where the Old English declensions had gone. But I loved Chaucer, especially the combination of classical tale and courtly love in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the assembly of speechifying birds in *The Parliament of Fowls*. For a brief time in my life, all the words were Chaucer's, all the birds were Chaucer's, and "newer" meant the 14th century.



desirée cox

1987

- **Country:** The Bahamas
- **College:** Pembroke
- **Degree:** MBBCh
- **Current Profession:** Medical doctor; historian; social entrepreneur; professional musician; author; visionary artist

Desirée clearly remembers the epiphany that changed the course of her life. It was during her first weeks of clinical medicine at the John Radcliffe Hospital: “Sitting in the lobby, watching the patients limp by with drips attached to their arms, it occurred to me how primitive high-tech medicine actually was.” The truths she thought she would find in quantum chemistry and Western medicine suddenly seemed terribly incomplete.

Desirée needed a new paradigm for healing. Studying the mind, soul and spirit wasn’t widely accepted in the study of medicine, and she still remembers exasperated tutors stuttering: “But Desirée, that’s just not how it’s done!” In search of more answers, she wound up at the University of Cambridge where, having already qualified as a medical doctor, she obtained her MPhil and PhD in History of Medicine.

Her nascent thoughts did not translate into practice until 2002, while working with an inmate at London’s Belmarsh Maximum Security Prison who wanted to have “peace of mind” without taking medication. As a psychiatrist, Desirée knew how difficult this would be. A conversation with a fellow jazz singer prompted her to learn everything she could about meditation. She then taught her patient to meditate so that he wouldn’t have to resort to medication. “He was like Plato’s prisoner in the cave, his maximum security prison cell,” she recalls.

That year, Desirée founded the charity Performing Cures, which brings live music and dramatic performance to public spaces in hospitals. This work prompted the Prime Minister of The Bahamas to invite Desirée back to the country as his consultant and special advisor on Human Development and Urban Renewal. Since 2003, she has lead research projects and creative initiatives which help individuals and communities to heal through self-knowledge.

Desirée promised herself when she returned to The Bahamas that she would be open to whatever captured her there: “It was the light, the colours, the environmental beauty,” she says. “I literally woke up one day and thought: I want to paint!” Since 2007 her art has featured in several successful local and international exhibitions.

Studying the integration of mind, soul and spirit in the process of healing wasn't widely accepted in the study of medicine, and she still remembers exasperated tutors stuttering: "But Desirée, that's just not how it's done!"

Desirée believes that people can transform their experience of being alive by shifting their perceptual states. Those elements of nature that she explores through painting, fiction-writing and music now inform the human development work she does. She calls this "living from the mythic," and she is convinced that we can dream new worlds into being by living from that place.

Her work hasn't gone unnoticed: the British Medical Journal described her as a "Renaissance Woman" in 2004 and she was honoured as one of 33 pioneering women in Bahamian history as part of The Bahamas' 33rd Independence Celebrations in 2006. As the first Rhodes Scholar from The Bahamas and first woman Rhodes Scholar from the British Caribbean, her country keeps tabs on her achievements: "The Rhodes has become a symbol of scholastic excellence, creative imagination, and what women can achieve."

Desirée's journey has been anything but typical and it's impossible to predict where it will go next. But therein lies Desirée's secret: "I just follow my intuition, renew my commitment to a holistic paradigm for healing, trust my Higher Self and watch the miracles unfold."



creating their own spaces . . .

In the generations that followed, women Scholars grappled with their aspirations and anxieties, explored their identities and pushed boundaries at Oxford and beyond

elleke boehmer south africa, 1985

In 1985, the year I arrived in Oxford, women students had been welcome at most of the colleges for seven years or more, and the battles of academic access and representation were seemingly won. How wrong these first impressions – drawn from rumour or hearsay – turned out to be.

In my 1985 Rhodes cohort, as with the classes immediately before and after, women did not constitute anywhere near 50 percent of the group. They did not even make up a third of the total Scholars.

This first became evident when we gathered for the traditional group photo. Suits predominated over the colourful shoulder-pads of mid-1980s female dress. I wore a small black bowtie without shoulder-pads, to make the familiar point that women in academic circles were often called upon to perform as men, if more flamboyantly so, but I immediately regretted my choice. I should simply have come as a woman, I realised, without sartorial excuses, because to be a woman Rhodes Scholar was a statement in itself.

It was so much of a statement that I cannot recall a single raised eyebrow or sideways glance directed at my polemical garments. We women Rhodes were in many ways seen as exotic creatures *sui generis*, even within the wider Rhodes group. To have come in battle fatigues, or even more exaggerated drag, probably would have attracted equally little attention. Lush plumage was par for our course. I wonder whether this is still the case?

sarah campbell usa, 1988

A few months before I left for Oxford, I met a woman who had applied for a Rhodes in the years before women were eligible. Her interview committee noted she planned to have a family and to become a federal judge. They wanted to know how she would do both. I thought her comeback clever: “My father managed.” She was right to point out the double standard that allowed the men in her father’s generation, and, indeed, in hers, to form ambitious career plans and to assume they would have a family, too. I took up my Scholarship ten years after women became eligible, the first woman Rhodes Scholar from Mississippi. Our Rhodes class was about one-third women; we considered ourselves feminists, but felt that much of the fight was behind us. Though I joined my college women’s group, most of my student agitating at Oxford was as part of the group Rhodes Scholars Against Apartheid.

Yet the interview question from the mid-70s nagged at me: it was a question I thought was important, and one I needed to answer for myself. Now that I am in my thirteenth year of being a “mom-at-home,” a part-time writer and photographer, I know that it is a question we all (men and women) must consider. I recently heard a male Rhodes classmate of mine tell an interviewer on national radio that he was retiring from his career in the Army because it was time in his family’s life for his wife’s work to take precedence. Perhaps, we’ll solve this problem by taking turns.

ute krämer germany, 1992

My time as a Rhodes Scholar was the most captivating and stimulating period in my life, and had a decisive impact on the way I see the world today. I grew up in a country that is culturally rather uniform, where everybody tends to have similar views. I arrived in Oxford curious and eager to fit in, but I was assuming that my limited perspective on the world was the normal one. As a consequence, I encountered a lot of people who appeared to be thinking and behaving in strange ways. The rather unfortunate position of my bedroom next to the kitchen made me wonder why all the American students sharing accommodation with me cooked their dinners at 2 am.

Initially, I was most interested in getting to know the students who originated from more faraway places: Africa, Tibet, Indonesia. Yet over the three years I spent in Oxford, I also learned to understand the lives and views of people from places I had thought of as essentially similar to my own, such as the UK and the USA. Returning to Germany years later, I realised how much I had moved away from its common views and horizons, and how liberating this experience had been for me. My time as a Rhodes Scholar provoked me to think openly about and define more clearly where I stand, what I value and what I oppose. I enjoy today's global world without feeling the threat of a loss of personal identity.

rebecca boggs usa, 1995

When elected a Rhodes Scholar, I had already made one commitment: to share my life with fellow Scholar Michael Wenthe. Arriving as “two for the Rhodes,” neither of us anticipated a new commitment to Jewish learning, practice and community. It's a story best told as a series of snapshots:

1995, Second Day Rosh Hashanah: Though ambivalent, I'm at the Sailing Lunch instead of synagogue. The next week, non-Jewish Mike represents us at Trinity's welcome buffet while I fast for Yom Kippur.

1996, Day before Yom Kippur: On the bus back from Heathrow with the new Rhodies, we meet Lisa (now Rabbi Doctor) Grushcow. Jewish life together with her and other like-minded Oxonians begins to take shape. I read Torah and lead services for the first time since my bat mitzvah and, by Passover, we find ourselves keeping kosher, observing Shabbat and holding a seder in our living room for seventeen people!

1997, Our first High Holy Days as a married couple: Our coursework at the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies intensifies the learning we'd begun during Mike's conversion process, while we find our own centering with friends and with each other: Shabbat lunches in Oxford; midnight hamentashen-baking in Yarnton; studying and praying and potlucking together. We return to America proficient in Yiddish, Hebrew – and Jewish living.

2008, Spring: Ten years after leaving as students, we return to Oxford as scholars and Jewish community leaders. Thank you, (Uncle) Cecil!

jasmine waddell usa, 2000

The people I met and the experiences we shared helped to make my time “on the island” profound and meaningful. In the years above and below me, American women Scholars were in the minority. The support we offered each other as we met each week was an important part of my experience. It was also in Oxford that I discovered, for the first time, a black community that coalesced around our differences.

One of my most powerful memories is standing alongside a Zambian and African-American Scholar to read a Pat Parker poem – about being a black woman throughout history – at a cultural show sponsored by Rhodes House.

Given the openness I felt at Oxford, I was saddened as I watched the alumni community struggle with the complexity of identity-related issues after we left. In 2007, the AARS hosted an Alain Locke centenary event. Locke was the first African American to win a Rhodes Scholarship. He was also openly gay. Somehow, the community clumsily grappled with the intersection of gender, sexuality and colour this occasioned. I hope as we move forward, we'll find a way to again unite around our differences, celebrating our diversity as we had done before.

catherine anderson 1992

- **Country:** Australia
- **College:** Magdalen
- **Degree:** DPhil, Modern History
- **Current Profession:** Mother of four-year-old twins; architectural theorist and historian

Buildings are not just built of bricks and mortar; they are built on ideas. Catherine passionately believes that the quality of those ideas shapes the quality of people's lives. As an architecture student at the University of Melbourne in the late 1980s and early 1990s, she argued with incredulous design tutors about the importance of sustainable architecture and the need to design for disenfranchised groups within society. Even her final design thesis – a refuge for women escaping domestic violence – attracted scepticism. It wasn't architecture, critics said, because its function demanded anonymity. Undaunted, she still came first on the Honours list every year.

During her tenure at Oxford, Catherine continued to investigate the role of ideas in architecture, through both academic study and travel. She researched how 19th century concepts of ornament helped give birth to modern architecture and she spent time abroad in order to broaden her knowledge of what she calls the "human experiences of dwelling." Rich Oxford friendships took her to the Middle East and brought her into contact with Islamic architecture, encounters that affirmed her belief in the importance of "ensuring buildings touch the spirit." It is in part thanks to Oxford, in fact, that spirituality occupies a central place in Catherine's life. Her personal spiritual journey took an important step forward when she found the Blackfriars and that journey now continues with the Melbourne Jesuits.

As much as Oxford was an odyssey for Catherine, intellectually and spiritually, it was also a place where she cultivated her own "dwelling." It was during her time in Oxford that she married Rufus Black (Australia, 1991) after an engagement that stretched for three years because Scholars had to remain unmarried until the end of their first year. Even then, a couple could not marry until "permission" had been granted from the Warden.

Since returning to Melbourne, Catherine has taught and mentored architecture students and continued her exploration of architectural ideas. Her most rewarding project, however, has been the raising of her twin daughters, who were born in 2003: "At first I thought two babies kept me busy, but it was really nothing compared to the relentlessness of two two-year-olds or the sheer unbounded energy of two four-year-olds!"

“Looking at the world of buildings and spaces through the eyes and experiences of my children has profoundly enriched my understanding of how to make truly human dwellings.”

But her children have been far more than just a logistical challenge. “Caring for them,” she says, “has underscored the immense importance of human relationships and our intensely embodied experience of the world.” Not only has she been profoundly happy to spend the first years of their lives at home with them, she is also grateful for the gifts they have given her: “Looking at the world of building and spaces through the eyes and experiences of my children has profoundly enriched my understanding of how to make truly human dwellings.”

With Rufus – who has juggled a very busy home and professional life – now taking a weekly “Dad Day” with the girls before they start school, Catherine is returning to writing, design and finishing her DPhil. While her journey has taken unexpected twists and turns, they have all been enriching in often surprising ways. She is now contemplating how best to put her undimmed passion to work on the task of creating a sustainable and essentially human architecture for our relentlessly urbanising world.



laila khondkar bangladesh, 1998

I was born and brought up in a society characterized by poverty and inequality, where people are nonetheless extremely resilient in the face of calamity. I continue to believe that it is our collective responsibility to support the less fortunate and to work for the common good, and the Rhodes made me better prepared to make a contribution in that journey.

Attending the lectures and events at Rhodes House and elsewhere at Oxford was an enormously important experience for me. The exposure gave me the intellectual maturity and cultural understanding to deal with the complex issues of the contemporary world, and I shall always have fond memories of the time I spent with the other Rhodes Scholars, a lively, passionate, visionary group of young people. My involvement with the Rhodes Scholar Southern Africa Forum had a profound impact on me. I still remember an evening when we were reviewing proposals in order to reach a decision about funding small development projects. Though prosaic, I found the experience to be rewarding, because I realised that this was work that could make a difference.

It is difficult to feel proud of personal achievements while so much deprivation at a very basic level – access to food, water, education and shelter – still exists in the world. But I do not accept social injustices, and continue to work for international organisations that fight for the rights of marginalised groups. I feel extremely privileged that I was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. The experience increased my sense of responsibility to make change in the world.

siofra pierse

ireland (european rhodes), 1994

A bona fide Irish Rhodes Scholar is now a dodo, but I was one of the lucky few female members of the extinct European Rhodes Scholarships. For me, the Rhodes represented an education in extremes, an exposure to both rags and riches.

On the happy hand, there were endless college balls and black-tie dinners along with a life of aplomb at Rhodes House. Lady Kenny sportingly belted out Christmas carols on the piano, while erstwhile Warden-philosopher Sir Anthony conducted from atop the dizzying heights of a kitchen stool. In Wimbledon weather, I found myself on the Rhodes ladies' tennis team, playing charity tournaments in the most exclusive tennis clubs in London. One afternoon, as we raced into the changing rooms of the upmarket Chelsea Club, we were accused by a resident naked lady of disturbing her aura. The resulting laughter worked wonders for our tennis game.

On the unhappy hand, I drummed basic French verbs into a tragic group of culturally and socially impoverished children as part of an outreach programme in one of the saddest suburbs of Oxford. Having taught underprivileged students before, I was nonetheless unprepared for such flatness and despair in the dulled eyes of fifteen-year-olds. Yet on the night of the school concert, one of my weakest students, also a victim of bullying, sang an operatic aria powerful enough to break my heart.

The Rhodes was an apprenticeship in treading that median through the pervasive worlds of privilege and despair. I'm still navigating – from auras to arias and back.

kakoli ghosh india, 1994

Some of us are born inspired, and for some of us, the journey brings the inspiration. For me, the Rhodes Scholarship was the beginning of that journey. When I enrolled for a DPhil at the Department of Plant Sciences in the foggy autumn of 1994, I was seeking answers to burning questions in plant biology. Days and nights in the laboratory were spent exploring and testing hypotheses. But as one experiment led into another, larger questions began to gnaw, thanks to the wide range of discussions at Queen's MCR. I started attending as many public lectures as possible and was exposed to issues of conservation policies, public resources, private ownership and the greatest good of the largest number. These inclinations led me to the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture at the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Working on international policies here, I soon recognised that many countries lacked the expertise to address the complex regulatory issues of food and agriculture. My current duties involve enhancement of skills and knowledge for capacity development by bringing together governments and scientists at national and regional levels. It was in the midst of such a workshop in Arusha, experiencing the passion of people to share knowledge and improve livelihoods, that I realised that this is what I always wanted to do. Knowledge truly grows by giving.

mindy chen–wishart

new zealand, 1992

“You have children? That will be a problem if you get the Fellowship. What will you do with them?” After facing that question during my interview, I was stunned to win the Rhodes Visiting Fellowship (RVF). An insecure young academic and new mother, I got a big dose of Imposter Syndrome: “They’ve made a mistake. I’ll be found out! Run and hide!”

Despite these anxieties, repeated questions from openly incredulous colleagues grew tedious: “Wow, why did they give it to *you*?” My answer evolved from long apologies to a curt: “Because I was hot!”

Although the aim of the RVF was to support my research, it was much more to me. It provided grace at a crossroads in my life. When I doubted whether I had what it took to be a top legal academic, endured postnatal depression and struggled with the demands of mothering two little boys, the RVF reminded me of what I had done and what I could be. It encouraged me to hold my ground and *act* the part until I felt I *owned* the part. Penniless, I went to the head of my college with an offer to swap my generous dining rights for a computer and a research allowance. In the end, I got to research *and* eat! The Fellowship forgave a period of thin publication although the research later bore rich fruit. Mostly, it allowed me to hang onto the profession in teaching and research that I love.

I *am* hot! Sometimes.

sherry–lee abrahams

south africa, 2002

While writing my MPhil thesis, I interviewed United States Congressman Jim McDermott, who was surprised to learn that there were Rhodes Scholars beyond the United States. I smiled and took a moment to explain the broader history and reach of the Scholarships, and our conversation quickly moved forward with ease. Since that meeting, I have embraced the opportunity to serve as an ambassador for other African Rhodes Scholars.

At every opportunity, my professional superiors make a pointed note of highlighting the fact that I am a Rhodes Scholar, always without any prompting from me. It has allowed me the occasion to have many conversations about the history of the Scholarships and their ties to Southern Africa.

I am privileged to have had a woman Rhodes Scholar, Dr. Ngairé Woods, as my supervisor at Oxford and to have another, Sylvia Mathew Burwell, as a programme president in my current job. It speaks volumes that both women work in international development, which I strongly regard as an opportune area for women Rhodes Scholars to engage with. International development is a field in which to continue building relationships and programmes between the developed and developing regions of the world. It is also an area rich with opportunities to give back to those with the greatest needs for the very talents and resources we have been able to leverage and grow through our education at Oxford.

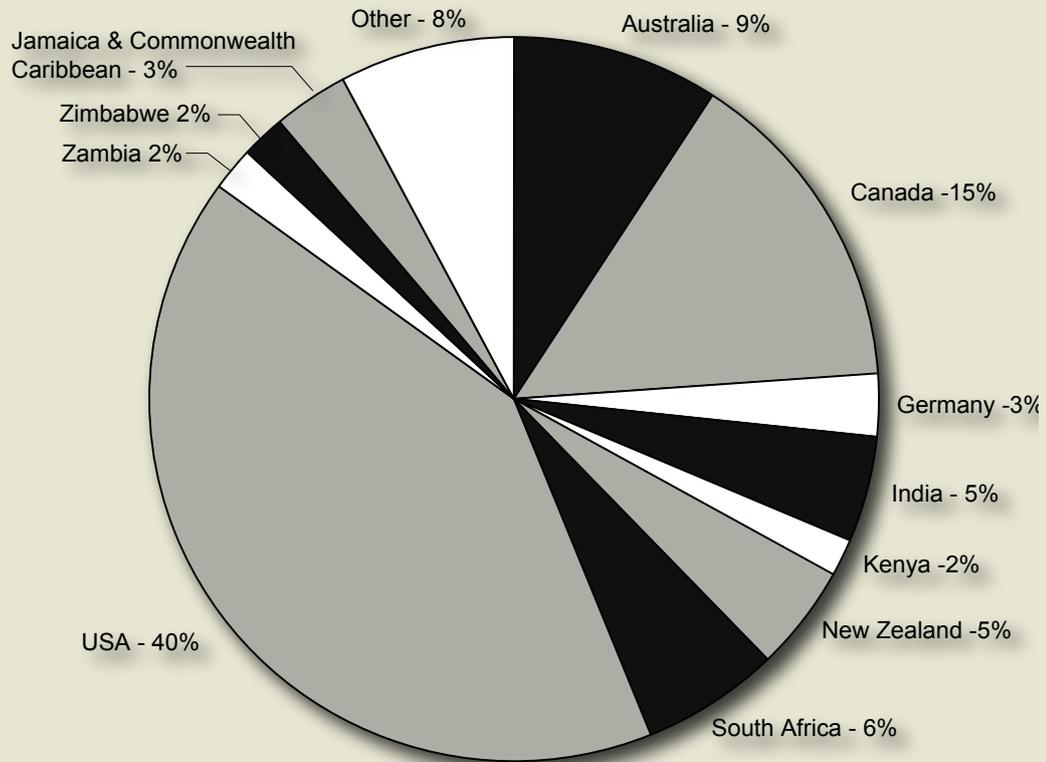
valerie brader usa, 1998

I regularly feel the prompting to consider whether I am fighting the world’s fight – at least half as often as I remember the Book of Luke verse reminding Christians that to whom much is given, much is required. Since a Rhodes Scholar is by definition one to whom much has been given, I am challenged to make sure that I am doing something to change the world around me for the better. Am I “fighting the world’s fight” when I bake bread to welcome visitors to my church or spend time finding an appropriate devotion for a meeting? Am I fighting the fight when my work day is spent setting up a small business?

I imagine the Founder might be dismayed at the lack of scope or “waste” of skills (especially in my more “female” activities). While it is helpful to have the prompting to re-evaluate my choices and commitments, the priority is clear: the admonition to love the world as God loves us trumps all else. So, when I am doing the “little” things that make a stranger feel welcome, touch a heart or help someone realise their dream, I am fighting the Lord’s fight. And when it comes to changing the world, I suspect the Lord’s fight is a very good place to start.

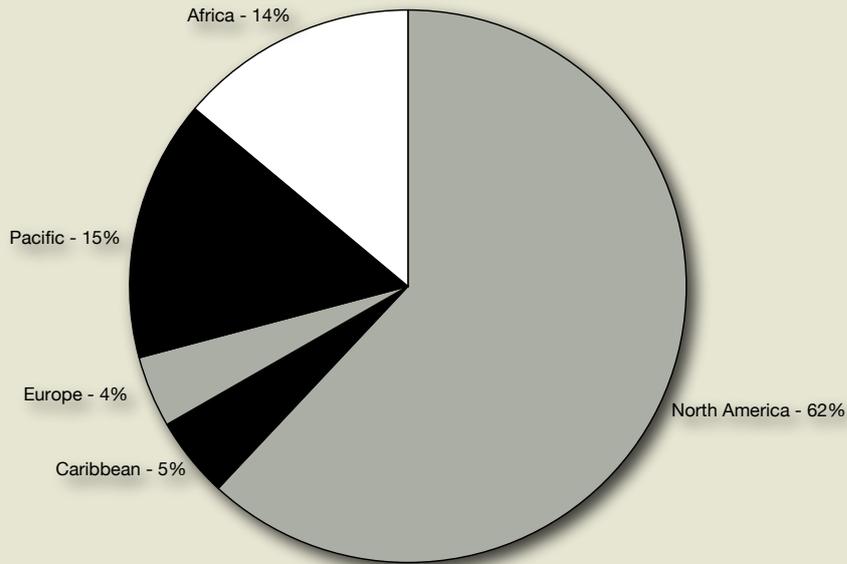
statistics

Rhodes Women by Country



Country	% of post-1977 Scholars	Number of Rhodes women
Hong Kong	61	14
Malaysia	52	11
New Zealand	46	37
Zambia	42	18
Canada	40	138
Europe	40	12
Kenya	38	15
USA	38	380
Jamaica & Commonwealth Caribbean	36	26
India	34	41
Australia	34	87
Singapore	33	7
Zimbabwe	30	17
Uganda	30	3
Bangladesh	29	2
Bermuda	29	8
Germany	28	24
Pakistan	24	8
South Africa & BLMNS	23	62
Nigeria	11	1

Rhodes Women by Region



Region	1977-1986	1987-1996	1997-2007
Africa	9	10	17
Asia	8	8	12
Caribbean	2	5	5
Europe	1	6	4
North America	64	76	77

Facts about 30 Years of Women Scholars

- There has never been a year in which there were more female Scholars than male Scholars. The only year in which elected Scholars were divided (nearly) evenly between men and women was 1999, when 45 women and 46 men were elected.

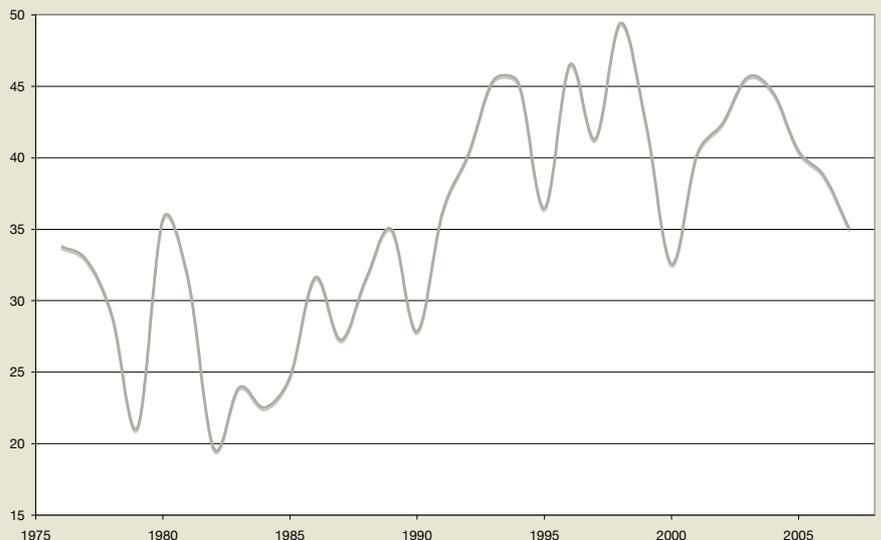
- The number of female Scholars has increased only steadily over time. Women were 34% of elected Scholars in the first decade in which they were admitted (1977-1986), 36% in the second decade, and 42% in the third decade.

- Only two constituencies have elected more than half female Scholars: Hong Kong and Malaysia. The five countries that have elected a highest percentage of women are Hong Kong, Malaysia, New Zealand, Zambia and Canada. Nine current or past Rhodes constituencies have elected fewer than a third women since 1977.

- Nearly two-thirds of Rhodes women are North American.

- There have been 105 black Rhodes women, 11% of all Rhodes women. The number of black women has also increased over time: there were only 11 in the first decade in which women were admitted to the Scholarship, 33 in the second decade and 63 in the third decade.

Women Rhodes Scholars as a percentage of total (by election year)



jessica heineman–pieper usa, 1992

Anniversary Reflections
(among Rhodes Scholars)

A gift of diamonds.
Currencies converted.
Power. Paper. Prestige.
Flesh.
Western knowledge, trinkets, baubles,
Take them home and watch them grow – cancerous.
Empire in tow. [Enter Bechtel, World Bank, CIA, Shell...]
Exploitation antiseptic: bureaucratic, scientific, academic.
Now with modern refinements and freshly white-washed.
Who or how to speak of madness among soulless corporations,
Inhuman systems, rights without responsibilities.

Human consciousness fragmented into mine/thine; us...them.
Pulverized fuel for corporatocracy,
Recombined. Consumer, investor, banker, trader, CEO, President,
Counting and severing heads for a handsome bounty.

The insignificance of a life, a spot on the oil fields
Where corporations dance to the beat of an oil drum, tapping
White Western Lives on the downbeat, while other lives
aren't measured. Local heroes stand and are effaced.
No one even bothers to mop up. Watch your step. It's slick.

Reinvent our world.
How? Yes, and now.
(Of course I don't know how).
"Then how should I begin?"
Enough of 'I' – Enough of schemers and redeemers. Nor yet
a Hamlet nor a Prufrock pinned,
Paralysed, alone,
As time runs out.

Rise up, splintered souls! Wake up
To what is. (It's not what we chase).
Authentically, lovingly, courageously be who we are. Who's that?
(We stand but leave no ego-prints in the sand).

kathryn brown australia, 1988

On becoming a Rhodes Scholar I became part of an international community, providing me with the opportunity to establish relationships with a diverse range of individuals whose interests and enthusiasms continue to broaden my own range of experience. My move from Australia to Oxford represented a significant personal change that was at once exciting and formidable. However, I discovered that the challenges involved in making the transition to a new home gave me confidence to seek out further opportunities and to be undaunted by change.

While at Oxford I completed a DPhil in French literature and then went on to study law. I practised corporate law in the City of London for thirteen years, becoming a partner in a US law firm in 2006. While pursuing my legal career, I completed a second doctorate at The University of London in the field of art history, affording me the opportunity of taking up a research post at the University of British Columbia. Throughout my diverse career, the Rhodes has continued to give me the confidence to pursue my different interests, and the courage to explore new opportunities. It is a constant inspiration to learn of the achievements and aspirations of other Scholars in a range of different fields.

naana jumah canada, 2001

The significance of the Rhodes Scholarship did not strike me until I read an article where I was noted to be the first Rhodes Scholar of African descent from Canada. The news shocked me. Toronto's Ghanaian community rallied around me as did black student groups at my university along with many other African and black students on campus. Winning the Rhodes Scholarship was no longer an individual accomplishment but was seen as an acknowledgement of the achievements of African and black Canadians more broadly.

Indeed, my success was possible because of the achievements of many African and black Canadians who came before me, but who lived at a time when this recognition was not accessible to them. While I felt tremendous pride bringing this honour to a community that I was outwardly identified with, I also felt unsettled by the lack of appreciation of the contribution of my multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic family.

The Rhodes Scholar community I was introduced to at Oxford was a microcosm of the modern world with one significant difference: a genuine openness and curiosity about each other and the circumstances that made each of us into who we are. From this safe and privileged position, we could explore and challenge our previously held convictions, whether about gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity. The perspective I gained radically changed the way I viewed myself – no longer as just a Canadian citizen but as a global citizen – and the way I viewed the world. I am forever grateful.

anna donald australia, 1989

The Rhodes Scholarship transformed my life and career. For fifteen years, as a doctor, lecturer, campaigner, editor, author, and, finally, chief executive, I helped develop evidence-based medicine (also known as evidology), a new medical specialty made possible by the digitisation of more than 14 million pieces of medical research. The findings reveal the comparative value of medical drugs, devices and other interventions with unprecedented clarity, enabling physicians and policymakers to make better clinical and economic choices.

Last year, the diagnosis of widespread breast cancer forced me to change direction. After seventeen years in Britain and North America, I returned to Sydney. Cancer has led me back to the questions that drove me to medicine in the first place: Who are we really? Why do some people heal when they shouldn't? How do our social perceptions have such large effects on our mechanical bodies? What is healing? Living in the shadow of the valley of death is a surprisingly fecund and creative space; I never expected death row to be like this. While unlikely, I know it is possible to heal. I do not have an execution date.

The Scholarship gave me the chance to live at the level I had always hoped for, which is of great comfort to my family and to me. I remain sincerely grateful to the former warden, Sir Anthony Kenny, to Lady Kenny and to the Rhodes Trust.

shazia azim

1993

- **Country:** Pakistan
- **College:** University College
- **Degree:** PPE
- **Current Profession:** Managing Director, Royal Bank of Scotland

“Balance does not mean mediocrity,” says Shazia – and she means it. She worked at Goldman Sachs in their investment banking and fixed income divisions for ten years and is now a Managing Director of structured products at RBS Global Markets. She maintains that “being a woman has never been an obstacle to rising in the banking world,” and is adamant that women can take advantage of the different ways that they view problems, carry out solutions and interact with colleagues. Shazia is a woman who lives by her own words. At both firms, her teams have won countless industry awards and she is presently one of only three female managing directors in her division at the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Her sterling career carries yet another distinction: she continues to balance her high profile job with a reasonable period of maternity leave, always managing a timely return to work without sacrificing her family. Shazia has a three-year-old daughter and an eight-week-old son. She calls her family the “centrepiece” of her life, “but not to the exclusion of my career and intellectual enhancement.”

Don’t think it’s easy. While her gender hasn’t hindered her banking ambitions, Shazia concedes that women do have it tougher when making work/life decisions. Before having children, she recognized that to be the type of mother she wished to be, she probably wouldn’t go as far in her career as her capabilities would otherwise allow. It’s a difficult compromise, but Shazia copes by focusing on “living in the here and now and enjoying the present, rather than yearning for the future.”

Enjoying the present came easily for Shazia at Oxford, a place whose carefree charm sometimes arose through pure accident. She fondly remembers sitting at the table during her Coming Up Dinner, oblivious to the fact that everyone was waiting for her to start the meal. She later explained to her distinguished tablemate Lord Sainsbury that she’d been busy working out which of the five sets of knives and forks to use. Delighted at the exposure to a new culture, Lord Sainsbury proceeded to lead an animated discussion on Brits and their extravagant use of cutlery.

“Being a woman has never been an obstacle to rising in the banking world.”

Of course, she soon confronted more significant decisions than which knife to use for butter. Shazia arrived in Oxford as Pakistan’s second female Rhodes Scholar and intended to return to her country to pursue a career in politics. Circumstances conspired otherwise. While at Oxford and, subsequently, the London School of Economics, she became much more interested in a career that fulfilled her intellectual ambitions rather than political ones. Political conditions in Pakistan also worsened during her Rhodes tenure and she wanted to work in a field that would be less impacted by her gender.

Shazia points out that, while the Scholarship is an opportunity that opens doors, it can’t tell you which door is the right one. Shazia decided to stay in England, embark on a new career path and raise a family. These choices were hard, but Shazia loves the life she leads. She also sees that, as one of few native Pakistanis in the banking business in “the city,” she’s doing a little trailblazing for her country overseas. And though she may not realise it, she’s leading the way for women in banking, where few have risen to her level. There’s no mediocrity in that.



fiona stewart australia, 1991

My mother said the Rhodes Scholarship was the worst thing that ever happened to me – seriously – because it took me away from home for over fifteen years. I planned to return to Canada after Oxford, with lofty good intentions to take what I had learned and contribute to my home country, but instead stayed to work in publishing in London for “just a year.” That year turned into more than fifteen, and included marrying a Brit and having two of my three children in London.

Being a Rhodes in Britain was a different experience: no one cared (or even knew?) about the Rhodes Scholarship. Being an Oxford graduate was much more important. So I left that part of my identity behind me. In some ways it was easier – the pressure to live up to big expectations was off.

But what I didn’t leave behind was how the Scholarship opened up a whole new world to me, how the experience shaped me and how my Rhodes friends are still some of the best I have ever made.

Looking back, I was so young when I won my Rhodes Scholarship – just twenty-one. It was an honour, a privilege and an incredible opportunity, but it was just the start of my adult life. At the moment, my other identities as mother to three small girls and English teacher are perhaps more relevant to me, but worst thing that ever happened to me? Sorry, Mum, but I don’t think so.

elizabeth young mcnally usa, 2000

Seven and a half years ago, I met some amazing women. We were Rhodes Scholars who’d just “come up,” enthralled with Oxford and the many opportunities unfolding before us. We were also, I must admit, a bit overwhelmed. So what did we do? We formed a women’s group, where we could meet and talk through our experiences.

Having just graduated from West Point, the concept of explicitly relying on other women for support was foreign to me. West Point had taught me many great coping mechanisms, but “girl-power” was not one of them. Oxford made me a convert. Through this women’s group and the friendships that resulted, I began to appreciate the critical role of strong female friends in a woman’s life – or, at least, in my life.

I left Oxford in 2002 and returned to my military life. The Army has taken me to Germany, Iraq, Hawaii, and back to Iraq, and I have remained at least an ocean apart from these amazing Rhodes women. Still, through email, the occasional phone call and the rare and treasured visit, we have managed to grow even closer.

As we each navigate life – the triumphs and the tragedies, the easy decisions and the gut-wrenching ones, the dreams we hold and the realities we face – we do so together. And our individual experiences and insights continue to strengthen us collectively, as they once did at Oxford.

miryana nestic australia, 1993

Before the Rhodes transformed my conception of what was possible, I considered that the only way someone with my skills could make any real contribution in my field was via the traditional large corporate law firm. I had acquired this definition of “success,” narrow and specific, from my undergraduate legal education. The Rhodes gave me the confidence and support to try another way, off the beaten track. I was introduced to the work of non-governmental organisations in my field, encouraged to develop extensive consultancy skills and thrown into new opportunities from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and Africa.

Over the last ten years, with the doors that initially opened through the Rhodes, I have been able to encourage the uptake of mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution across diverse areas, from court and legal reforms in post-conflict regimes to intractable multi-party international disputes in modern economies. I work with highly motivated and creative individuals and organisations around the world, unencumbered by the traditional structures of law firms and the expectations of most lawyers. In my case, “jumping off the long and winding Rhodes” has from time to time been fraught with considerable insecurity, and even danger to life and limb during certain projects. Yet it has also brought great adventure, enormous variety and blissful contentment.

charalee graydon canada, 1982

Many people have touched my life as a result of the Rhodes Scholarship. Some were familiar with the award, its background and the values it seeks out in the men and women to whom it is bestowed. Many others knew nothing of the man or the Scholarship. But both groups have impacted the journey to Oxford, and beyond.

I believe that the routes I have taken in the legal world have allowed me to fulfill my commitment to the Scholarship to give something back to society. The highlights of my achievements, in academia and in legal practice, reflect two things: first, my struggle against social injustice and second, my quest to create new legal models where I felt they were needed. I have worked in areas ranging from indigenous rights to alternative justice systems for business to preventive models such as environmental management systems.

The Scholarship was valuable at the beginning of my legal career when I held academic positions in Wales, Canada and New Zealand. However, the further I move from my Canadian roots and academic life, the less the Scholarship means to my daily life. Currently, I spend considerable time in Europe, learning different languages and immersing myself in different cultures. Few people here have heard of the Rhodes Scholarship. This is not at all negative, as now, twenty-six years after the award, I recognise that its greatest value has been all that I have learned during that twenty-six year journey.

lois quam usa, 1983

In the two decades since I left Oxford, I discovered my “world’s fight” in marrying the benefits of business and government, responding first to health care, and now to climate change.

I found that I thrived on the ability to build organisations to scale and created a \$32 billion health care business serving seniors, governments and non-profits at UnitedHealth Group. Now I scale renewable energy and clean technology through my work at Piper Jaffray, a 113-year-old Minnesota investment bank.

The Rhove gave me the breadth, time and perspective needed to prepare me for these challenges of leadership. My three sons, born less than two years apart, taught me how to make things happen through those blessed skills of prioritisation and teamwork. I have also been able to avoid the remoteness that afflicts business executives by supporting my husband, Matt Entenza, in his work on progressive public policy at the think tank Minnesota 2020, which he founded.

For me, business is about finding creative and sustainable ways to fulfill the aspirations and the needs of individuals and societies. I immerse myself in the challenges of developing the green economy and a more affordable health care delivery system by identifying and investing in the new kinds of companies we need.

merata

kawharu

1994

- **Country:** New Zealand
- **College:** Exeter
- **Degree:** DPhil, Social Anthropology
- **Current Profession:** Director of Research, James Henare Maori Research Centre, University of Auckland

Merata doesn't think on a small scale. Her aspirations for New Zealand's Maori population, to whom she has committed her life, are just the opposite: to encourage emerging Maori leaders; to contribute to Maori tribal, cultural and business development; and to increase cross-cultural understanding between Maori and non-Maori New Zealanders.

Merata's background has given her a unique perspective on how to engender dialogue between distinct communities. Her two main tribes, Ngati Whatua and Ngapuhi, are her extended family. She spent much of her childhood in their ancestral homelands. She grew up, however, in Palmerston North and Auckland, and attended mainstream schools there. "I suppose I lived in two worlds quite easily," she reflects.

Like her parents, Merata wanted to contribute to Maori community development. Because her father, Professor Sir Hugh Kawharu, was a prominent anthropologist and Maori tribal leader, she knew that a command of this discipline could provide her with the tools she needed to address the difficult issues of change and development that the Maori face in New Zealand. Her father had studied at both Cambridge and Oxford and returned with his family on sabbatical in 1978 and 1985, so she was generally familiar with the opportunities both places presented.

Her upbringing exposed her to the possibility – and benefits – of studying abroad, but it was Merata herself who decided to apply for the Rhodes. "I was just so excited to get a free flight to Wellington!", she recalls of learning she was a finalist for the Scholarship. The reality of actually winning a Rhodes took longer to sink in, but the experience proved invaluable. "My time at Oxford enabled me to see local (New Zealand) development issues from a wider, perhaps global, perspective."

Her potential to contribute to Maori research and development hasn't gone unnoticed. In 1999, she was invited to join the James Henare Maori Research Centre at the University of Auckland as a Research Fellow, and became its Research Director in 2007. Merata is using the numerous high-profile grants she has won on ground-breaking research projects, including the development of multi-media products about regional language and heritage that are aimed at Maori youth.

Her parents led Maori community development initiatives and she spent much of her childhood in her tribal homelands, despite attending a mainstream school. “I suppose I lived in two worlds quite easily,” she reflects.

In 2001, Merata was appointed to the New Zealand Historic Place Trust and the Maori Heritage Council. She admits that she joined these national bodies at rather a young age but shies away from suggestions that there is anything impressive in this. One of her books, *Whenua: Managing Our Resources*, was a finalist in the 2003 Montana Book Awards, the most prestigious national book awards in New Zealand.

According to Merata, “our children are our future,” but for her, they’re also the present. She says her two children are her greatest achievement, although striking the right balance between work and family remains tough. She says her children spend much of their time in airplanes traveling with her and her husband Paul Tapsell, also an Oxford graduate. “Maybe they really like this travel thing,” she muses. “Maybe they’ll end up studying overseas too, maybe at Oxford!”

Her parents raised her to be passionate about her Maori roots. They led by example. Now Merata and her husband are doing the same. Maybe her children will learn to love travel, but more importantly it’s likely that they – along with the other New Zealand students and children who benefit from Merata’s work – will learn to value and defend the pluralistic society to which Merata has dedicated her life.



emma bermingham lopez

bermuda, 1993

When our first son was born my head was filled with dreams and expectations, for him, for our family and for myself as a parent. My life up to this point had been charmed and I had no reason to suspect the future would be any different. I have since learned what many others already know: that life is a journey of ups and downs.

Our treasured son Max has a moderate global developmental disability. This is a condition that will not change; it is part of Max's life, and our lives, always. At times I have been completely flattened by our situation and I have grieved for the son I expected to have. Yet through this journey I have grown in ways that I could not have anticipated, and I am proud of the insights and perspective I have as a result of the experience of raising Max.

We have been blessed with a second son and more recently a daughter. I experience immense wonder and mighty gratitude witnessing our three children learn and grow in their different ways. The gift of being able to learn is not guaranteed in life, and I feel fortunate to be able to appreciate this gift as we raise our children.

We have a beautiful family of five remarkably different individuals. I am overwhelmed with pride when I see our children play, communicate and interact together. What started as a very difficult parenting journey has become a balanced ride.

drew lamonica arms usa, 1994

"Remember – you are a Rhodes Scholar." I brace myself before the daunting double doors. It is Saturday morning at Wal-Mart, and my three-year-old is booming *Row Your Boat* in the shopping cart. As I manoeuvre past awkwardly-parked carts and people, I remember that it was not so long ago when I was far, far away from this "madding crowd." Spotting the instant Nescafe on the shelf, I find myself back in Oxford, lounging in the Lincoln MCR with other DPhil Candidates and preparing for the most intimidating exercises of our lives: the DPhil defence – the summation of three to ten years of days spent in the Bodleian and evenings at the Turf, celebrating brilliance or drowning in anxieties. Now the self-checkout intimidates me.

So I stand in line with my daughter who is progressing through every vertebrate of *Old MacDonald*. In this rare moment to myself, I know what I want to write about and ultimately remember: the greatest gift I received at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar was "world enough, and time." Time to devote to my own passions, interests, insecurities and mental and physical wanderings without guilt or reservation. And world enough in my daily jog across Port Meadow, tea on High Street, browsing in Blackwell's or wandering the Yorkshire moors in search of *Wuthering Heights*. Now, "time's winged chariot" keeps drawing me down the various aisles of my life. But that makes me cherish the gift all the more, especially in Wal-Mart.

regina yau malaysia, 2001

Being a Rhodes Scholar has been, and continues to be, a bittersweet experience. What nobody tells you is that being a Rhodes Scholar can be fraught with the weight of expectation and prejudice. People either put you on a pedestal or long for *schadenfraude* and there seems to be nothing in between.

When I started my public relations career, it took more than 250 applications before I secured a position. Most employers couldn't have cared less about the Rhodes and told me that it did not count for anything because "we are looking for experience and you haven't got it."

The Rhodes did not entitle me to a glittering career, nor should I have ever expected it to. Have I failed? No – failure is all a matter of perspective. I am still proud of being a Rhodes Scholar but have stopped counting on the Rhodes to tip the scales in my favour. I now realise that the Rhodes should be viewed as a starting point. For some of us, the road will always wind more than for others – this can be the result of our sex, our ethnicity, our nationality, our culture and sometimes even our own bad choices.

Since the Rhodes, I've done what many others do in life; I've rolled up my sleeves to work my way up again. After all, not all Over-achievers are created equal, not even Rhodes Scholars. Life makes sure of that.

shehnaaz suliman south africa, 1997

I had some appreciation that winning the Rhodes Scholarship was a great privilege, one that would open up new opportunities. I did not appreciate the extent to which the friendships I made would be a mainstay of support in my life after Oxford. Through these friendships, I have been moved to hold what constitutes “success” in my personal and professional life to a truly high standard.

The Scholars that most inspire me today are those who continue to leverage their Oxford experience to make a difference to disenfranchised and disempowered communities around the world in new and innovative ways. Though I work in the corporate world, I am not exempt from this sense of responsibility. I try to think creatively about how life-saving medicines can reach those who need them most.

My organisation has been successful in forging a new business model that facilitates co-operation between traditional biopharmaceuticals and generic companies, a development that increases access to novel HIV therapeutics in the developing world. In this non-traditional business arrangement, generic companies receive technology transfers that expedite the creation of life-saving generic versions of HIV therapies which can be sold at discounted prices in exchange for a modest royalty.

The ideal that the poorest of the poor may one day have access to these medicines continues to guide my daily work. But this ideal has itself been nurtured through my experiences with so many talented Rhodes men and women whom I continue to count as my dearest friends.

fiona greenland usa, 1998

My life after Oxford began in Oxford. After all my Rhodes classmates but one had returned to the US, I married a fellow graduate student – a local man. Seven months after I completed my DPhil, our son was born. I became a lecturer at New College, but there was a persistent sense of disconnect as my Rhodes community melted away and I was left behind to push the pram to Tesco. I enjoyed living in a small neighbourhood and getting to know fellow mums. I hadn't conceived of Oxford as a place with families and deep roots, but I crossed over and became a townie and a UK citizen. I stopped telling people that I came to study at Oxford on a scholarship, and perfected the local accent. I went native, and it was nice.

I moved back to Ann Arbor after eight years in Oxford. I'm glad to be back, closer to my family and in my home town. It's taken some time to get over my hang-ups about what my Rhodes colleagues have accomplished (so much, it seems) versus what I have (so little, I fear). I see that within the Rhodes community there is a broad range of affinities and gifts. Maybe my contribution will be big and come late; maybe it'll be as simple as raising my children to be thoughtful, engaged citizens. No matter what, I'm glad that I'll always have that crimson passport in case I want to return. The Rhodes gave me the chance to join two communities, and I'm grateful for that.

janet kabiru

1995

- **Country:** Kenya
- **College:** St Hilda's
- **Degree:** BCL
- **Current Profession:** Director, Tax Services, PricewaterhouseCoopers; mother

Once a Rhodes Scholar, always a Rhodes Scholar. Somehow, everyone realizes this maxim, but in Janet's case, it might have additional meaning. The only current female Country Secretary, Janet expresses enduring enthusiasm toward the Rhodes Scholarship. She fondly remembers Oxford as the place where she was first introduced to her country's most celebrated author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and formed lasting friendships with people from diverse parts of the globe.

While Rhodes House may not have been central to her time at Oxford, she appreciates the opportunity and motivation that the Scholarship provided. "Every now and then one receives recognition for something - an achievement, a talent, even an ambition - and that recognition creates an expectation which challenges you to live up to it," she reflects. "The ideal of what a Rhodes Scholar is supposed to be has been one of those challenges."

Janet's role as Kenya's Country Secretary is but one way she channels this energetic conviction. Another way is through child development. Janet is involved in programmes that seek to promote mental, psychological, emotional and social development in children, which she believes is particularly important given that the AIDS pandemic has fractured so many families in her country.

As a successful tax lawyer, Janet has certainly made the most of her Oxford BCL. After an unexpected three-year detour to Ghana with her husband, she returned home in 2000 and made partner shortly thereafter at Kenya's top law firm, Kaplan and Stratton Advocates. She is currently a Director with PricewaterhouseCoopers, working in the Nairobi office. Janet enjoys her present workplace and has embraced the challenge of working outside the traditional legal environment, with colleagues who generally come from an accounting background.

“Every now and then one receives recognition for something – an achievement, a talent, even an ambition – and that recognition creates an expectation which challenges you to live up to it.”

Despite this professional success, Janet counts her two children, a son and a daughter, as her greatest source of pride. Alongside her husband of eleven years, they are her greatest joy in life. The challenges of being a professional woman and mother are not lost on her, but Janet’s approach is simple: “I’m realistic about what my priorities are and what I’m prepared to give up, and I’m not prepared to compromise on my values regarding family and the investment of time which raising children properly requires.” Janet also cites her relationship with God as central to her life, and celebrates the evolution of that relationship although it only formed in later years.

Keeping alive her love for Oxford, Janet is one of the few Scholars who returns annually. She admits that her active connection with Rhodes House is partly an excuse for just this. But other than the chance to relive her stipendiary days, Janet has the rare opportunity to impart to those who follow after her the vote of confidence and encouragement she received from those who came before. Janet remains, to this day, a Rhodes Scholar.



building a legacy . . .

For the women Scholars who still call Oxford home, new challenges and opportunities that reflect an increasingly cosmopolitan world mix with obstacles – and successes – familiar to their predecessors

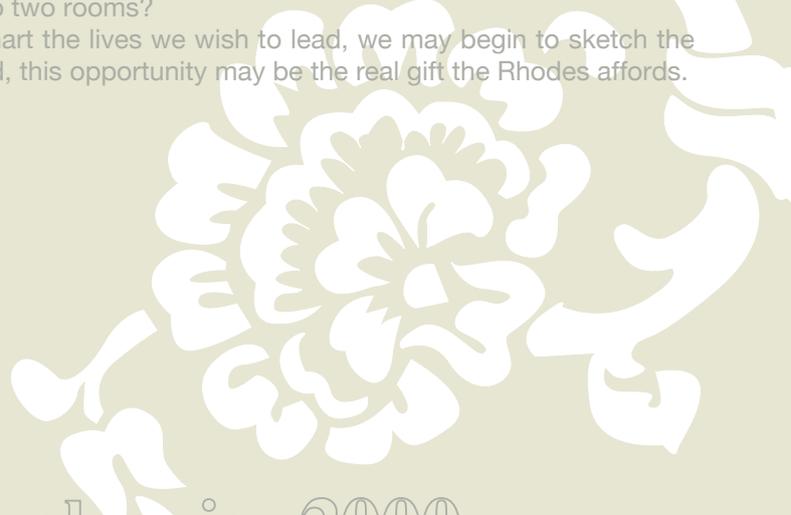
katharine wilkinson usa, 2006

As the 2006 Rhodes class enters the home stretch of our second year, questions about life after Trinity term press upon us. Should I enter the working world? Stay for a DPhil? Try something utterly unexpected? Which door should I choose? Sensing that the more options we forgo, the more we are giving up, many among us try to make choices that keep all options open – or find it hard to make any choice at all.

These “which door” questions are particularly poignant for Rhodes women, who face the ever-ominous timing clash of academia and biology, family and career. At Oxford, I struggle to relinquish options in the “professional/personal” juggling act. I attempt to clarify what “success” would mean for me personally. I endeavour to align values and goals, interests and responsibilities, and to create a coherent life mosaic out of sometimes contradictory elements.

As Rhodes women, which door should we choose? Can we learn to be satisfied with the reality that we can only take small steps to realise big, multi-faceted dreams; only pass through one door at a time? Or will we eternally search for the mirage of a door that leads simultaneously to two rooms?

My hope is that while we may not know how to chart the lives we wish to lead, we may begin to sketch the contours informed by past and present Scholars. In the end, this opportunity may be the real gift the Rhodes affords.



ananthi ramiah malaysia, 2000

The Rhodes community as a whole has strengthened my sense of personal accountability to the world around me. The fierce idealism fellow Scholars display, and their perseverance and willingness to take difficult positions, has been thoroughly inspiring.

However, it is previous women Scholars in particular who have most impacted my personal goals. I admire their seeming ability to combine successful careers with family life and social leadership roles. While I admit that I continue to find this triumvirate of success sometimes daunting – and also firmly believe that not all three components or even two of them are necessary for a person to be successful – I know that I would like them each to play a role in my own life. Though the exact formula is as yet unclear, hearing and reading about previous women Scholars has made me more hopeful of eventually getting there.

Post-Oxford, I see myself working as a social psychologist in Malaysia or elsewhere in South East Asia, with a family and a firm involvement in Malaysian civil society development efforts. Whatever the exact course my life takes, I know that my definition of success will, at some level, always be characterized by being a “Rhodie,” and that this will keep me true to a higher purpose in moments of malaise or inertia. My personal sense of social responsibility – that “to those whom much is given, much is expected” – while present in my youth, has now been indelibly imprinted in me through this remarkable Scholarship.

jessica leight usa, 2006

Women's breakfast at American Bon Voyage weekend 2006 seemed a pleasant opportunity for less pressured conversation with female alumni about what lay ahead. So, once we all sat down, I was startled and somewhat horrified to find that conversation turned almost exclusively to our futures balancing work and child-rearing – a worthy subject, but one I had been raised (by my child-rearing father) to consider equally the province of men and women. To remove us from our male peers for a chat about the struggles of parenthood seemed to send precisely the wrong message both to us and to them: that we would be the ones to face these struggles and the attendant sacrifices, while our future male partners would continue to regard these choices as entirely within the female domain.

The experience turned out to be a low point in my experience as a woman Rhodes Scholar. Happily, I found most of my peers, both men and women, eager to engage on issues of work, family and the struggle for fulfillment in both – and was touched that some male classmates even protested their exclusion from breakfast. I have a healthy respect for the value of female solidarity, but the experience reminded me that one of the most significant challenges in making progress on questions of gender equity is establishing that they are precisely that: questions of equity, not “women's issues.” Perhaps in the future, we can rename it “not-women's-issues breakfast”; I'd be happy to help host.

farnaz sabet australia, 2005

Upon receiving the Rhodes, a female journalist interviewed me about my aspirations. After I explained them, her first question was, “and are you ever planning to have children?” I replied yes, to which she cynically responded, “and how do you intend to do all that?!” I answered vaguely because I had no clue! There was no serious man in my life, and I think the Rhodes frightened off the sprinklings that were hanging around. Not to mention that I was twenty-four, almost out of med school with another six or seven years of training ahead – and now had added time at Oxford as well. Plus, all the professionals showering me with career advice were men who were always at work.

Work and family should reciprocally enhance each other, but I battle with the way society has turned this into a dichotomy. And, as fate would have it, I had to tackle the problem head-on when I fell in love with a Jordanian on my way to Oxford. We married after I finished my master's, and I was sure there was no way I could “fit in” a DPhil. However, my husband disagreed! A Baha'i and a firm believer in the equality of men and women, he advocated the need for more women to excel in their fields and to help dispel stereotypes. So now I've returned to Oxford with him, and we look forward to the adventures the future holds for both of us.

laura bremme

1998

- **Country:** Germany
- **College:** Merton
- **Degree:** DPhil, Physics
- **Current Profession:** Associate Principal, McKinsey & Company

Laura's pace can only be described as frenetic. As an Associate Principal at McKinsey & Company's Zurich office, she travels each week to Russia, Denmark and Germany. The long hours spent in planes and taxis would wear out even the most energetic among us, but Laura says that the satisfaction and pure fun of her work more than compensate for the hardship. "I work with clients I care about deeply," she explains. "I thrive on the immediate impact of the work I do. I love to coach people and to see them grow and overcome challenges."

She also values the McKinsey culture, which has continued to inspire her since she joined the firm in 2002. "I enjoy working in a meritocracy," she says. Her colleagues are a mix of people from various backgrounds and countries, and that reminds her of what she enjoyed most about Oxford and Rhodes House.

Laura's experiences of Oxford began before she won a Rhodes Scholarship. She had spent a year as a visiting undergraduate student in the physics department prior to earning a Diploma in the same subject from the University of Heidelberg, in Germany and ETH Zurich, in Switzerland. "I knew the magic of the place," she says of Oxford. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that she was drawn to the Rhodes Scholarship and returned to the city and the Physics Department for her DPhil.

For Laura, the transition from physics to consulting was straightforward. "The way of thinking is similar. It is about logical and structured thinking," she explains. She confesses that one significant difference took time to adjust to: "In physics, when you finally get the results you want, you might admire them simply because they are 'beautiful.' In consulting, you have to accept that there is no such thing as doing analysis for the sake of beauty. Analysis is for concrete and actionable recommendations to clients."

“I thrive on the immediate impact of the work I do. I love to coach people and to see them grow and overcome challenges.”

For someone like Laura who loves beauty – she fell in love with opera when she was four and is passionate about classical music – not being able to appreciate it for its own sake might seem like a sacrifice. But solving problems has an exciting rhythm of its own, and she finds she enjoys it enough to make it her life’s work. When asked about her future career aspirations, Laura says she can think of nothing she would enjoy more, for the time being, than continuing her career in consulting.

And, like many Rhodes Scholars, Laura will always look back at her time at Oxford as something beautiful. She refers to her years as a Rhodes Scholar as a golden age of her life. While few people she meets in Switzerland know of the Rhodes Scholarship, Laura says she still considers herself a Rhodes Scholar. “Although I didn’t spend a lot of time at Rhodes House, I always had the sense of being sheltered and taken care of,” she says. “It was always a part of me and I was proud to be a part of it. I wouldn’t change those three years for anything.”



jennifer gruber 1999

- **Country:** USA
- **College:** University College
- **Degree:** DPhil, Engineering Science
- **Current Profession:** Flight Dynamics Officer, Space Shuttle Mission Control, NASA

Jennifer knows a thing or two about trajectories. Thanks to film and television, most Americans have a romantic view of “Mission Control,” where the only phrase that matters is “Houston, we have a problem.” In truth, says Jennifer, Space Shuttle Mission Control is “a well-oiled machine.” Everyone has a role and hers is helping to manage a space shuttle’s transition from peaceful orbit around the earth into its rapid descent. Sometimes, however, things don’t go to plan. That’s why Jennifer, training to become the officer in charge of shuttle trajectory during launch, has to understand “abort options, in case something goes wrong.”

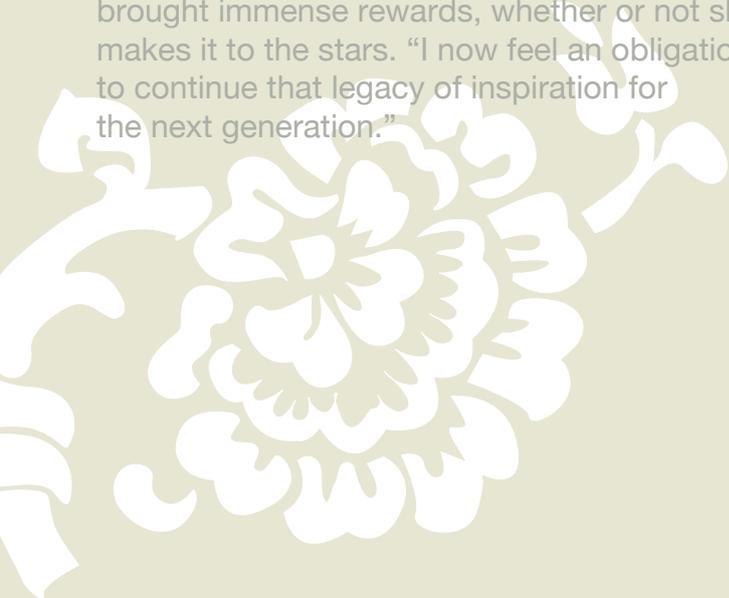
Small mistakes can mean everything to space flight, but how easy is it to alter a human trajectory? Jennifer grew up in a trailer park in Nebraska. “Statistically speaking,” she admits, “It would be unlikely for anyone of my background to get any kind of advanced degree, much less a doctorate from Oxford on a Rhodes.” Yet from an early age, the thought of floating among the stars inspired her. Her dream began to materialise when, as an undergraduate, she participated in NASA’s Cooperative Education Program. Rather than her big break, the Rhodes was almost an accident, suggested by an administrator who encouraged her to consider it. It “sounded like a good idea,” so Jennifer applied.

Even if it wasn’t part of the plan, she calls her time at Oxford “an amazing life experience.” It was a mix of pleasures, challenges and frustrations – antics with her gymnastics teammates, painfully getting used to only six hours of daylight in the winter and “magnificent springtime runs in Christ Church meadow when the daffodils were in bloom.” Although she experienced some chauvinism, she found her supervisors and co-workers to be supportive and welcoming. This support and compassion extended beyond the confines of her office, as Jennifer discovered in the week immediately following September 11, 2001. “When I would meet people, they recognised my American accent. Instead of teasing me for it, they would express their sorrow and sympathy,” she says. “Something like that can make the world seem like a very small place.”

From an early age, the thought of floating among the stars inspired her.

Jennifer considers herself lucky that being a woman doesn't matter in her line of work. In something as dangerous as space flight, there's no time for sexism, racism, or anything else that interferes with efficient cooperation. "I would be quite happy to work in human space flight mission operations for the rest of my career," says Jennifer, although don't think her feet are planted too firmly on the ground. Despite intense competition, Jennifer is applying for astronaut training.

No matter what happens, she's likely to stay busy. She and her husband, also an aerospace engineer, are planning to adopt in 2009. While Jennifer believes she has "the 'work/life' balance down pretty well," the new addition to her family may change the equation. But hers remains a trajectory to be proud of. The dream of flying in space has already brought immense rewards, whether or not she ever makes it to the stars. "I now feel an obligation to continue that legacy of inspiration for the next generation."



diana fu canada, 2006

“Why don’t you go back to your own country!” The remark sliced through the crisp afternoon air as I stood at a junction in the heart of civilised Oxford. The assailment choked me, as it often does. It silenced me not because of its shocking blatancy but rather its banality. It wasn’t the first time I’d been told to “go back home.” Nor was it the first time I’d stood still, subconsciously petrified of what the person (often male) would do to me if I protested. It wasn’t the first time I then found myself relating the incident to friends, some of whom identified and others who gazed at me with bewildered amazement. Years of academic training have taught me: “I don’t have a home because of my multiple identity. I should not go back because I have the same constitutional right to be here as you do. You mark me because of the colour of my skin. Racial tension goes beyond the binary of black and white.” These statements are true. They are politically correct and intellectually sound. But none came to me as I stood in fractured silence. Parts of the sentence hung in the air long after the assailant biked away. You may wonder what this story has to do with the gendered experience of female Rhodes Scholars. My answer is this: for a woman of colour, gender and race intersect. I am both woman and minority.

catherine frieman usa, 2005

Walking into Rhodes House for the first women’s lunch, I wasn’t sure how many people I’d know or if I’d remember their names. Since my arrival in Oxford, my relationship with the Rhodes community felt uncomfortable. My subject – archaeology – didn’t interest many “Rhodies” and I had little to contribute to discussions on global health care, non-profits and political philosophy. With a few exceptions, I rarely saw “Rhodies” away from Rhodes House, though arguably this was as much my fault as that of my classmates. Immersed in Oxford’s archaeology community, much of my time was spent organising lectures and outings. Also, my primarily English archaeology friends mercilessly teased me whenever I admitted attending Rhodes events. Both communities seemed to suggest (maybe not intentionally) that being an archaeologist wasn’t suitable for a Rhodes Scholar.

Then the women’s lunches started. I had forgotten many of the names I’d learned before, but people happily reminded me. In sharing stories of Oxford life, I made unexpected connections with my classmates through personal experiences and humour rather than political action and course work. Joining the planning committee for the 30th anniversary taught me how many amazing women and men have been (and still are) Rhodes Scholars, and opened a different door into the Rhodes community. It took two years and a roomful of women, but I’ve finally found my place among the “Rhodies.” The archaeologists still tease me when I leave the library for Rhodes House, but now I tease them back for wasting all day inside studying.

tanya haj-hassan usa, 2006

It wasn’t until the first all-women Rhodes gathering that I learned the term “gendered experience.” This isn’t to say I wasn’t aware of innate and socially-imposed gender differences and the implications they have on the way we experience daily life. Rather, growing up in the Middle East, the social acceptability of my actions often depended on my gender. I grew accustomed to taking additional precautions simply because I realised the vulnerability that comes with being a woman; the challenge of having to constantly factor “wanting to be a good mommy one day” into my career choices; and, perhaps most relevant to the Rhodes experience, of being one of the few females in settings traditionally considered more fitting for men.

It wasn’t the gendered experiences themselves that were foreign to me, but rather the perspective that they were obstacles, setbacks, and simply put, something worth complaining about. My gender factors into many decisions in my life: I try to see it not as a disability, but rather as a reminder to be grateful that I am a woman who has been given these unique opportunities. We have been blessed in many ways as women, and are in a position about which women of the past only dreamt. Instead of tainting this blessing with complaints, we should be proud of the fact that we have made it into this minority of privileged women and are contributing to its growth.

mandisa mbali south africa, 2005

My entry into student politics in my first year at university was as Gender Officer of our Student Representative Council. It was spent addressing the issue of the gendered HIV/AIDS epidemic. Seven years later, I came to Oxford where in 2006, a referendum was announced on whether to retain the equivalent position of the Oxford University Student Union's (OUSU) Vice-President Women.

The VP Women position is unique in that it must be held by a woman and is dedicated to representing women exclusively. This is vital in an institution where women are politically and academically disempowered: few JCR presidents are female and women are under-represented at All Souls and among senior dons.

Conservative JCR presidents and OUSU officers argued for the VP Women to be folded into the VP Welfare officer on cost-saving grounds. Not only would this proposal lead to a watered-down service provision for women, but it stems from a view that the promotion of women's rights is trivial and unnecessary. What woman wants to discuss an unwanted pregnancy or sexual harassment with a man? Our rationale was that if we couldn't defend women's rights and representation at Oxford, where could we?

I will never forget the sense of relief I felt when we received the results: we had won the referendum by over two-thirds. Our victory should stand as a symbol for women combating sexism everywhere. Whether at elite institutions or as manifest in the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, the victories won must be constantly defended.

amy king australia, 2007

"Good morning gentleman ... and Amy." So began my first week interning for an Australian security think-tank. Fresh out of the Rhodes selection process – where I had apparently convinced someone of my goals to work in international security and to continue lobbying for greater female participation in government decision-making – I began working for an organisation that, apart from several secretaries, employed not one woman. In the field of international security, female academics and practitioners are scarce.

Before coming to Oxford, my supervisors and colleagues encouraged me to work towards a career in international security, in part because there are so few women working in the field. This reasoning has affected me in interesting ways. At times, it has been a highly motivating factor, and learning from some of the world's top female international relations academics has made Oxford an even more exciting place to study.

Yet, on a more personal level, placing my own career goals within a gendered framework can be daunting. I've often felt the need to prove that I am not "soft" on the issues within my field. When I decided to undertake research into Asia Pacific nuclear policy, part of me felt proud to be taking on a "hard" security topic. Although these feelings betray an ugly superficiality, I can't ignore the fact that as a woman in a less-than-traditional field, I feel the need to demonstrate that I'm even more capable than my male peers.



tariro

makadzange

1999

- **Country:** Zimbabwe
- **College:** Balliol
- **Degree:** DPhil, Immunology
- **Current Profession:** Medical Doctor

In contrast to many of her classmates at Harvard Medical School, Tariro's research hit especially close to home. After her first year, she returned to her native Zimbabwe for a summer internship, where she worked with an organisation developing appropriate approaches to HIV/AIDS education for physically and sexually abused women. During that summer she also looked after an aunt, who was dying of the disease. "We were three generations of women taking care of her – my grandmother, my mother and me," she recalls.

As the summer drew on, Tariro grew increasingly frustrated with her internship: "It wasn't answering the pertinent questions for me." Tariro's aunt knew all about the disease that was claiming her life. Her problem wasn't education, it was lack of treatment.

Tariro's experiences that summer persuaded her to dedicate her life to research and clinical care for those living with HIV/AIDS in Africa. She knew of a research group in Oxford that was conducting ground-breaking research in HIV/AIDS in Kenya and knew that they would give her skills that she needed to fulfill her commitment. She saw an advertisement for the Rhodes Scholarship in the local newspaper, and the following year put her medical degree on hold to start her DPhil in Oxford.

Finding the best way to approach HIV/AIDS has been an ongoing challenge for Tariro. She knew research was important, but "at times it felt far removed from the people I wanted to help." While she eventually returned to Boston to complete her medical degree, she made time to continue hands-on work in Zimbabwe. In 2004, she completed an elective at a public hospital in Harare. She was once again struck by the heavy burden of HIV disease in Zimbabwe. Unlike in Boston, there were limited resources to assist patients. She began to work with doctors at that hospital who were starting up an HIV/AIDS clinic, and devoted considerable time to the initiative. Unsurprisingly, once back in Boston she was itching to return to Zimbabwe to continue work at the clinic. The chance arose when she won a grant to conduct a clinical trial to understand when to intervene with HIV drugs in patients with HIV and cryptococcal meningitis.

Tariro is still in Harare. She continues to work with the clinic and conduct research. She has also taken up a position with USAID working on HIV/AIDS programming. "The ability to make a difference in individual lives was fulfilling," she explains, "but I wondered if I could have more impact through policy work." Tariro confesses that, in her "heart-of-hearts," she misses patient care. Her future challenge is to find a way to maximise her impact by combining work at the patient, research and policy levels.

While Tariro's exact path remains uncharted, one thing is certain: she belongs in Zimbabwe. Although she plans to return to the US to complete her residency training, she knows that in Zimbabwe, a single person can have a massive impact.

While Tariro's exact path remains uncharted, one thing is certain: she belongs in Zimbabwe. Although she plans to return to the US to complete her residency training, she knows that in Zimbabwe, a single person can have a massive impact. Each time she confronts the haunted look of HIV/AIDS victims in one of her countrymen and women, Tariro knows Zimbabwe is where she wants to be.

She tries to live life without regrets, but is equally cautious about achievements, pausing only to celebrate completed tasks, such as running the New York marathon. She's proud of her contribution to the HIV/AIDS clinic, but it's only the beginning: "I know there is more we can do."



sindiso mnisi

2005

- **Country:** South Africa
- **College:** New College
- **Degree:** DPhil, Socio–Legal Studies
- **Current Profession:** Student, University of Oxford

For Sindiso, the law is more than a dry compendium of rules. It also lies at the centre of many other aspects of her life, professional and personal, including social justice, education and faith. “I find the law interesting and exciting on various levels,” she says. “It is evidently important on a practical level, but I am also fascinated by its principles and their underpinnings. Its power to affect people’s lives both positively and negatively is striking.” Originally from Johannesburg, she studied law, philosophy and language at the University of Cape Town. At Oxford, she’s pursuing a DPhil in Socio-Legal Studies in order to connect the law to this constellation of interests.

Beyond her academic interests, Sindiso is passionate about issues of faith, race and gender. President of both the Graduate Christian Union and the Black Association of Rhodes Scholars, she is committed to confronting questions surrounding Christian faith and race, particularly on her home continent. “My dream is to see Africa redeemed from its role as the world’s ‘charity case,’” Sindiso says. “I want to see more Africans holding their own like I know we can.” She believes that challenges for blacks result from the combination of inner turmoil and an unequal distribution of both political and socio-economic rights. The best way to address these challenges, she argues, is through a series of steps in education, political change, legal reform, economic development and bridging the gaps within and between fractured communities and nations. Because the law alone is inadequate to confront atrocities, a broader social process of healing is needed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she wants to participate in this process too.

To Sindiso, there is something special about women’s relationships. As a black, female, African and middle-class Scholar, her experience is particular. “To state the obvious, things that would not generally occur to my colleagues not bearing my identities are glaring to me; and certain perceptions I have on life’s experiences, they often don’t share.” Sharing stories with other black women and African students has been a particularly significant part of her life at Oxford. The time-worn buildings conjure up a mystical atmosphere, but what’s special for Sindiso are the conversations with fellow students, unlike any she has had elsewhere.

“I am delighted that I – a black, African woman – am where I am in life, by–and–large pulling my weight and thereby doing my little bit to change the face of ‘black,’ ‘African’ and ‘woman.’”

As she gazes into life after Oxford, Sindiso is sure she will miss her time here, but she also looks forward to moving beyond the “dreaming spires.” She hopes to combine an academic career and active involvement in public interest litigation and advocacy. She finds the prospect of having a family exciting, but in the meantime is trying to figure out what it means to divide her time between several continents in the early stages of her career.

Sindiso is sure that she has yet to wage the “world’s fight,” but no one who knows her can doubt she is well on her way. As she puts it: “Frankly, I am delighted that I – a black, African woman – am where I am in life, by-and-large pulling my weight and thereby doing my little bit to change the face of ‘black,’ ‘African’ and ‘woman.’”



janalee cherneski canada, 2004

I once discussed the idea of gender with the head of a college and his wife over dinner. The man insisted gender was not an issue in Oxford. This, while at a prior dinner he had remarked to me and my female guest: “You delicious young things aren’t coming to dessert, are you?” The semi-reflexive nature of his next comment, “I shouldn’t have said that, should I?”, didn’t help.

I’m not sure what was worse: the blanket dismissal of the idea of gendered experiences at Oxford following his earlier conduct (which, I must add, was not shockingly out of the ordinary), or his wife’s ardent declaration that gender issues do exist at Oxford “but certainly not at *our* college.” No, definitely not at *her* college where another male fellow privately commented on the ongoing problem with his college head’s behaviour, only then to ask publicly whether I thought a particular female student was a virgin.

That said, most fellows here seem aware of the problem; they speak openly about it and seek to avoid replicating it in their own behaviour. But I’m disconcerted that while they understand the problem, many of them also just laugh at these offensive situations, regarding them as the amusing, albeit slightly taboo, entertainment of an evening out at an Oxford college. And I must confess, sometimes I do too. Awareness of the issue has made the whole scenario more sinister, yet also strangely comedic. Is this progress?

angela cummine australia, 2007

“A woman must have money and a room of her own.” On a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, women Scholars have both, though we may query the amount of the first and the size of the second. But for Virginia Woolf, we have enough to pursue the greatest heights of our abilities. These words echoed around the emptiness of my Oxford room when I first arrived. The room was one longed for, yet its walls secreted a loneliness for which I was unprepared. In its stubborn quiet, the room challenged my choice to pursue this dream and leave behind a love and shared home in Australia that would not follow.

Observing the Rhodes community, this seems a dilemma more pertinent to female Scholars. Many women struggle to transfer their relationships to Oxford, yet there is no shortage of male Scholars whose wives, partners and children accompany them on this journey. The musings of women Scholars on how to reconcile professional potential and private priorities betrays an ambivalence over the uncompromising pursuit of one’s own room. We then feel guilt over feeling ambivalent, exacerbated by the Rhodes, which endows us with a sense of higher duty to our careers. The reality is that many of us do aspire to a room of our own, but one ultimately within the walls of a shared home. The challenge is how to shake the guilt over modifying one to accommodate the other. After all, even Virginia attributed her greatest happiness to her husband.

cristina bejan usa, 2004

Being a Rhodes Scholar has made me more proud and more conscious of being female. Until I came to Oxford, gender was never a roadblock for me. These past four years have defined my identity in ways I could never have imagined. As I delivered the ‘birth monologue’ in *The Vagina Monologues* in St Hilda’s College on V-Day 2005, I saw my sister’s face in the audience. After the show I collapsed into her arms weeping. That experience, the perfect union of aesthetic creation (art) and the creation of life (birth) so moved me that I discovered a newfound fascination in the female voice and presence in both of my realms of inquiry: intellectual history and theatre.

During my third year on the Rhodes, a friend and I started a women’s theatre company named Théâtre Fille de Chambre. Our motto is “Theatre by women, for everyone.” We have performed works by female playwrights including Caryl Churchill, Paula Vogel, Wendy Wasserstein and myself, in such spaces as Corpus Christi, Saïd Business School, Milner Hall and Teatrul Foarte Mic in Bucharest.

From my days in North Carolina, when I rebelled and wore ripped-jeans, to my days in Oxford, spent in libraries or engaged in political debates until 4 am, to my current days conducting fieldwork for my DPhil as a visiting researcher in Romania, it has, despite the hiccoughs, all been undeniably awesome being a woman.

leana wen usa, 2007

Growing up, I was an outsider with something to prove. I didn't know English when my family migrated to the US. I resolved to work hard and learn quickly. The words came, but I still looked different, the one yellow face in the all-white sea. I worked even harder so my "foreignness" wouldn't be an impediment. Later, I was the youngest at my University and I strove to appear mature and be taken seriously. Then I decided to enter the male-dominated specialty of trauma and emergency medicine. My mission: to prove that a woman can handle high-stress situations even better than a man.

Because I did not know a single Rhodes Scholar before I applied, my entire understanding of Rhodes was based on President Clinton's autobiography. I pictured an all-white boys' club, and imagined that I would once again be an outsider, needing to prove that I belonged.

In fact, coming to Oxford has completely changed my worldview and set me free. My Rhodes classmates and Oxford friends are so diverse that they defy labels, so there is no outside and no barriers to overcome to belong to this wonderful eclectic group. My identity is no longer about being different. I am no longer just an immigrant, or Chinese-American or a woman. I am finally free to explore who I am and what I want, to pursue life driven by curiosity, introspection, and passion to fight the world's fight.

alexandra conliffe canada, 2004

I've enjoyed high table dining rights at college for the last two years. One evening, yet again the only woman at high table, I asked another senior scholar why he thought not one fellow had done so much as say hello to me, although they talked with him extensively about his rugby injury. "Don't take it personally, Alex. It's just because you're a girl," he replied.

If some colleagues are helpful enough to point out that I'm just a girl, others seem surprised I want to embrace certain aspects of my gender. I remember one conversation with a male Rhodes Scholar during which we discussed future career paths. I explained that mine was complicated by my desire to stay at home to be a mom for a few years when I had children. "I'm surprised at you, Alex," he replied. "I thought you had more ambition than that."

I often think it's ironic that I first became aware of my gender at Oxford, having happily sailed through a male-dominated engineering programme in Canada without giving it a moment's thought. While the sources of awareness have sometimes been sources of frustration, I am thankful to my Oxford experience for drawing my attention to gender. I *am* ambitious. I have many goals, and my family-oriented ones are as important as the others. I *am* a girl. And frankly, it's great.

closing remarks looking ahead

When I became a Rhodes Trustee in 2006, the Warden suggested that I might organise a discussion forum for women Rhodes Scholars. I took an immediate interest and convened a lunch that November. As a way of beginning the conversation, I gave a short talk about my own life and career. Like most academics, I have given many talks over the years, especially since I became Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education at Oxford in 2005. What struck me on that day, however, was the sheer intensity with which my audience listened to me, and the extraordinary acuity of their questions and comments.

Over the next few days, emails poured into my inbox. Something had obviously begun. It is not easy to describe or circumscribe, however, quite what that something was. On one level, that lunch has led to a regular series of brownbag lunches, a terrific alumni speaker event, and the commemoration of 30 years of Rhodes women, which includes this publication. But there is something underpinning these events which seems to me even more important. Perhaps it could best be described as a sense of connection amongst women Rhodes Scholars, of shared experiences and questions of identity that arise from their minority position in the Rhodes community. Part of what connects these women is a desire to reflect about the future and about what comes after the Rhodes.

I finished my own talk with a call for an exchange of stories. That theme – “an exchange of stories” – has continued through the lunches. It has been rich, at times conflicted, but always passionate. The spectrum of topics and experiences has been as diverse as the women themselves: some have discussed how they became the “other” in Oxford; some have described feelings of liberation as women; still others have not found the Oxford experience gendered at all. Some women have shared how gender and race have intersected for them; many have raised the difficulties associated with the feminist label; all have confronted the issue of whether men should be invited to attend the lunches; and, finally, many have expressed anxiety over how to balance work and life commitments. This last point is connected to the great unknown for women Scholars, the issue of what comes after – what can come after – the great accolade of winning a Rhodes Scholarship.

Rhodes women continue to approach these issues with an emphasis on stories. In the fall of 2007, we invited four former Rhodes Scholars, three females and one male, to come back to speak to us about their own paths to success, what it had meant to them to be a Rhodes Scholar and how they had managed to achieve the work/life balance. The return of women Scholars from across the generations this summer will, we hope, provide a further opportunity to reflect on these and other issues. And the words collected in this book will provide Rhodes women – past, present and future – with decades of thought and reflection.

Where will the Rhodes women’s community go from here? Certainly, the number of female Scholars is increasing, if slowly. In the talk that I gave at the first lunch, I described arriving in Oxford in 1990 to find myself the first and only female member of the governing body of my college, which had 48 male members. 18 years later the women on my governing body have reached double figures, or 19 percent, which falls well short of the Rhodes figure of 42 percent. The selectors for the Rhodes Scholars are doing a better job than most of their former male colleges at Oxford.

Women at Oxford, whether Rhodes Scholars or not, will likely have to face for some time the fact that they are operating in a world which, for hundreds of years, was constructed for men only and operated for men only. In Oxford terms, change is happening relatively fast, and, in my view and in the words of Simone de Beauvoir, it is up to women ourselves to take our future into our own hands. Women Rhodes Scholars have been doing this since they first arrived in Oxford. And, given the energy and momentum I have witnessed since that first lunch in 2006, I have no doubt that they will continue to do so.

elizabeth fallaize

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