

DEDICATION

The Rhodes Project is dedicated to Dr. Margaret Grieco, an original thinker with the single best mind I encountered during my five years at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar (1978-1983).

She took on Oxford's old boys with tenacity and courage; when she engaged the Nuffield Common Room in debate, with vigor, a twinkle in her eye and sometimes a Scotch in her hand, I never saw her lose.

To Margaret –
who exemplifies all the qualities Cecil Rhodes required of his Scholars
(and then some), without ever being one.

Dr. Ann Olivarius

Foreword

The idea behind the Rhodes Project did not come to me in a flash. It was planted during my first snow-bound cocktail party with fellow candidates for the Rhodes Scholarship in 1977, when women were just becoming eligible for the first time and I wondered about the paths that had brought all of us to this place. The idea has since taken root and grown, fed with the experience of passing years – both my own and those of other women Rhodes Scholars. Wherever they begin, these conversations often seem to gravitate towards a particular theme: we are privileged to live now and to have been young then; the first beneficiaries (through hard slog and ambition) of the gift of “equal opportunity” and the chance to “have it all.” But what is it exactly that we have?

This question can be overlooked in the usual hurly burly. I have often taken it for granted that I am living the life for which early feminists fought. My husband and I both have demanding careers, we are both ardent supporters of equality; we have an exuberant household and three engaging children. But then, some years ago, I met up with my great friend, Deirdre Saunder (Zimbabwe 1978), who leads a life as busy as my own. She heard out my eulogy to our good times before gently, but rightly, pointing out the paradox of our lives. We “have it all” in the sense that we have a career as tough as any man’s while retaining management of the household and primary care of the children. But the traditional model would not have required anyone to take on all this. So is this really what women of our generation have achieved: a readiness to take on more than our fair share under the euphemism of “having it all?”

Deirdre had hit on a central question of our lives. The formal opportunities open to women are manifold but are we really free to take advantage of them to the same extent as men? And if so, do we? The accepted lore among Rhodes Scholars and commentators is that female Scholars have not shone as brightly in their professional paths as their male peers. But is this true? Certainly I know of Rhodes women who have achieved high positions in traditionally male settings, e.g., business, law, science. But are these exceptions to the rule? And is the “rule” anyway misleading because it fails to take into account the disparity in absolute numbers (many fewer women have passed through the Scholarship program than men) and the fact that even the oldest have probably not reached the pinnacles of their careers?

These questions, I thought, were worthy of investigation in a systematic study. If Rhodes women are in fact achieving as much as men, it would be as sensible to lay out the evidence before the oft-repeated impression of women Scholars’ under-achievement becomes self-fulfilling. If they are not, then how are they leading their lives? And is the definition of “achievement” appropriate? A comprehensive survey of the first generation of women Rhodes Scholars’ lifestyle, occupation, values and beliefs might yield surprising results. When I aired this proposal, I was struck by the level of interest expressed by family and friends, who seem to view this cohort of women, rightly or wrongly, as a marker on the progress of the women’s movement over the last 30 years.

As an economist, trained in statistical analysis, I have the formal tools with which to carry out such research. Just as important, however, is my position as a woman and a Rhodes Scholar who has come of age which gives me “insider” access to a wealth of information that lends color and substance to the bare numbers. When I canvassed Rhodes Scholars themselves on the subject, I was met by a robust enthusiasm I had not anticipated. This provided me with the final encouragement; the questions that were occupying me and my circle, were clearly of moment to a larger group. And so, in the summer of 2004, I embarked on the Rhodes Project.

Rather than the culmination of a set period of research, I hope that the Project, as presented here, marks the continuation of a significant conversation that was initiated years ago.

Dr. Ann Olivarius
CEO & Chair

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