

Personal Statement

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My earliest memories involve a campus. I grew up less than a mile from Wesleyan University, where my father and, later, my mother worked. When my Mom or Dad weren't home and somebody would ask where they were, I would automatically answer "up campus," pointing to the familiar collection of buildings and fields forming work and play and extended home—a place that was "up" from where we lived in more of a mystical than a topographical manner.

As a kid, I was a regular in the locker room of the old Cage, on my way to fields, courts, pools and rinks. I body-rolled down the terraced hill between the library and the baseball field. I had birthday parties in lecture halls and watched fireworks on the roof of Judd Hall, the home of the Psychology Department, where my Dad had his office. My first jobs were working functions in the faculty club and the President's House, then laboring (filthily) with the maintenance crew cleaning student housing. Later I moved shelves and stacks of books from one campus library to another—pointlessly, it seemed— during a renovation now several decades old.

Beyond these practical amusements and employments, I sensed something powerful in the way life was lived up campus (I never referred to it as "college" or "university" or even "Wesleyan"). I was aware that whole collections of students and faculty had gravitated to this otherwise sleepy place in the Connecticut River Valley to occupy themselves with big ideas and big hopes connected to a big world. As a young person, I had a very direct and concrete notion of "something bigger out there" because I could sense it less than a mile away. It was invigorating.

When I went away to boarding school after a nearly complete public school education, the thing that transformed my life was not a single class or teacher or sport or friend. It was the total experience of finding my place on a campus that suited my needs and goals. The mission was the place—simply living in it fully. Seemingly, my development as a person was the principle exercise and locus of a whole institution. What a powerful and empowering setting for a young person. What a responsibility to carry into the world. The whole boarding environment educated me, as if every dorm room, class room, playing field, hill, stairwell and hallway of the place was dedicated to my growth. While the school had a soaring motto, "not to be served, but to serve," my desire to dedicate my life to the education of others sprang mostly from the roots and rocks of the place and my happy footsteps among them.

Great education replicates a vanishing sense of place, an experience of community that is about common purpose and an excellence defined by authentic experience. The effects of such great education on an individual are transformative and lasting. A true campus is a field of ideas and a field of experience, a place of action and repose, an environment in which learning happens everywhere, all the time, in everyone. There, life acquires the habit of mission, and campus expands to a personal landscape without limits.

I have dedicated my professional life to these ideals, but more significantly, I have located my life so as to experience and appreciate them in place, with my family. I take satisfaction in knowing that the way in which I work reflects the way in which I live. Such integrity in life is a goal worth promoting in others as much as in oneself, up campus and beyond.