

[Family Connections]

Mother-daughter campus lunches do come true

Freshman parent lauds daughter's JMU choice

BY BARBARA J. KING ('15P)

I attended JMU's 2011 Family Weekend, my first such event as a parent. Amid the Shenandoah Valley's flaming October trees and the tailgating crowds awaiting a home football game, my husband and I found our daughter, Sarah Hogg ('15), to be thriving. Her classes in the JMU Honors Program, the thrill of auditioning into two elite choirs and the fun of up-till-all-hours college life had combined to make Sarah feel intellectually engaged and at home.

During the weekend, the three of us ate doughnuts at the honors breakfast, wandered the campus, and weighed pros and cons of future courses. A highlight was the Saturday night Pops Concert, where Sarah sang with the JMU Chorale, a terrific mixed choir of professors and students. Only six months ago, that happy on-campus scenario seemed out of our reach. During that tense season of college-admissions decisions, one event stands out: Sarah's laptop screen announcing her rejection from the College of William and Mary.

W&M had been one of her top-choice colleges. It's also the place where I have served on the faculty for 23 years.

When Sarah was small, she would talk about someday enrolling in her Mom's biological anthropology courses. On her school holidays she would join me in my classroom.

Whether she was dispensing handouts or erasing blackboards, no role was too small. Her finest moment came as guest instructor of a brief sign-language lesson given to seniors in my advanced primate-communication seminar.

It required no specialist in child psychology to predict that this developmental phase would be finite. When the teenage years struck and Sarah vowed to fling herself out of state for college, we took it in stride.

What my husband and I did not expect was that as a high-school student, Sarah would reconsider and then seriously pursue admittance to my college. Soon I caught myself daydreaming about the occasional mother-daughter campus lunch.

All of us took that rejection letter hard. Yet what I've come to realize, a half-year later, is that only one of us took it hard for any length of time. That would be me.

I had known my college's policy, of course: Faculty kids get no special consideration in applying. With Sarah's class rank in the top 10 percent, her tough honors courses, her sustained community service and her recognized excellence in choral programs, she was competitive on her own, I figured.

And let me not shy away from what was, for me, a salient point. She wrote far better than a hefty percentage of the freshmen in my writing-intensive seminar that spring.



Sarah ('15) and Barbara King ('15P) look forward to many mother-daughter lunches on campus during Sarah's Madison Experience.

'Sarah's daily path takes her from Shenandoah, the honors hall, to the Quad for classes and library study, and on to choral practice. Having now walked this campus path with her, I can envision it leading to a rewarding four years at JMU.'

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For a while, I walked into that seminar room with a bitter taste lodged in my throat.

Though disappointed, Sarah moved more swiftly toward recovery than I. Other days brought happier college news. When she was admitted to the selective JMU Honors Program, she accepted immediately and joyfully. I celebrated with the family, but somehow, I still felt bruised.

Six months later, I've recovered. Most importantly, in the wake of Family Weekend, I'm able to see that Sarah is where she needs to be. Her daily path takes her from Shenandoah, the honors hall, to the Quad for classes and library study, and on to choral practice. Having now walked this cam-

pus path with her, I can envision it leading to a rewarding four years at JMU.

My husband and I have attended two concerts at the gorgeous Forbes Center to hear Sarah sing. And I won't soon forget an elated phone call from her in late October: She'd just learned of her acceptance into the honors' summer 2012 Study Abroad program in Florence.

From the start, Sarah believed JMU was the right place for her. Now, I feel the same. I anticipate more good things for Sarah at JMU — and mother-daughter lunches in Harrisonburg.

*** Learn more about Family Weekend and see photos at www.jmu.edu/parents**

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