

Where Are They Now? Katy Stevens *continued from front page*

invested in. When I moved in with the Millers they sat me down and told me, 'You can't just go through the motions anymore. If you're going to stay with us you have to care about your education, go to all your classes, do your homework, get straight As and apply for college.' That was the first time anyone had told me I could go to college. And I was just blown away by that idea. So that's what I did."

As a student at VHS Stevens was successful academically. She ran cross country and was a star track athlete who finished sixth in the state in the 400 meters. For her senior project she worked with Miss Oregon as her mentor who she met at a side job she had doing modeling for a dress shop in Scappoose.

She also took an active role in the fundraising campaign to build a new campus. "I was asked by the organizers to share my story with a few groups of potential donors," explains Stevens. "I told them what it was like living without a school, without books, without lockers, without the things we needed to get a real education, and personally for me, what it like to not have a house or a home for my family to live in. It was really scary to get up and talk, but it just came very naturally for me."

Betsy Miller calls Stevens "a delightful human being, terribly funny and extremely hard working." Miller remembers Stevens working at the Sentry Market for three years while attending school and participating in extracurricular activities. "She has always had such amazing capabilities," says Miller.

Stevens graduated from VHS in 2010 having spent almost her entire high school in modular classrooms. "It's such a beautiful facility," says Stevens about the new Vernonia campus. "It looks like schools we would visit during track meets and cross country meets where I would look around and think, 'Why don't we have this?' Attending school in the mods was such a frustrating scholastic experience. There was such a disconnect with the teachers and no common areas for the students."

Despite the educational obstacles Stevens applied to the University of Portland where she received an academic scholarship for 75% of her tuition along with several grants. In her last two years she earned the Brian Doyle Humor Scholarship and directed comedy projects to enrich campus life while earning all her tuition.

"All of that wouldn't have happened without the help, during my senior year at VHS, of Betsy Miller who sat down with me and went over scholarships and grants and figuring out how to pay for my college," says Stevens. "I graduated with no debt, which is pretty much unheard of these days."

When asked if she felt ready to go to college, Stevens had this to say about her time at VHS, "I felt relatively prepared, I really did. We had Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors classes available before the flood. I was taking AP History and then it turned out the school district couldn't afford the testing for us to get the college credit for the course work we did. The same thing happened with biology and literature, we could do the course work but not get the college credit because they were working on raising money for the new campus. But I still went to college

with the same education as most of my peers and did rather well and feel like I got an advanced education at Vernonia High School."

Stevens graduated from the University of Portland in 2014 with a degree in Psychology and Neuroscience. She was the President of the Neuroscience Club for two years where she coordinated events and guest speakers and researchers. "It was the most popular academic club on campus," says Stevens. She also participated in other activist events including a fair trade group, and worked for a women's crisis group. During her senior year she worked at Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) doing neuroscience and dietary research with primates.

After working with primates for several years, Stevens realized she was missing the human component. "I really wanted to help people... immediately," says Stevens. "Research is wonderful and necessary but I felt like I was working on things that wouldn't be available for 10 years and it wasn't very fulfilling."

Stevens quit her "high status" research job at OHSU and started working at a homeless shelter for women in Portland. "I loved it! It was the best job I've ever had!" says Stevens. "It was chaotic and crazy and terrifying and unsafe. And so wonderful! Once I started working there I realized this is the population I wanted to work with. It was a population I had a lot in common with and I understood a lot of their sentiments and their frustrations. And I really did a good job relating to them."

One of the challenges Stevens faced while working with homeless populations was a lack of resources. "The nonprofit world is such a hard place to work because, much like the Vernonia School when I was there, there is only so much you can do with limited resources. You have to find ways to make things work, and it's really hard to work in that kind of environment. There was never enough assistance for the people, there was never enough shelter space and most of the resources have stipulations about who can access them"

Stevens says she got really frustrated with her nonprofit work and decided she wanted to do something different, but couldn't find anything that fit her ideas. At the time she says she was also doing some self-examination and considering how she had been able to attend college, thanks in a large part to the support she received from the Miller family. "I just couldn't conceive of a way to thank them for what they did for me and articulate how important that was for me," says Stevens.

Stevens finally decided on an answer to her career dilemma, as well as a way to say thank you to the Miller family. "I decided I would start my own nonprofit and name it after the Millers," says Stevens.

After months of research, writing business plans, and applying for nonprofit status, The Miller Scholarship Foundation (TMSF) was launched this past June. "It's primarily a scholarship organization for people who are currently or previously were houseless,

continued on page 8

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