

ROSIE CROOKER '22

AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXCEL

ROSIE CROOKER '22 HAD NO PLANS TO LEAVE HER PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL.

A star lacrosse player and ski racer, she was thriving at Contoocook Valley Regional High School in Contoocook, New Hampshire, where she stood out both academically and as a leader in the community. Her parents were similarly devoted to their small town of Francetown. Her mother, Celeste, is a rescue captain at the fire department and part-time director of the recreation center, while her father, Don, is a special education teacher, a longtime member of the conservation commission, and a ski patrol leader at nearby Crotched Mountain. At one point, Rosie considered transferring to a private ski academy, but decided against it. The expense was a factor, notes Celeste, but not the only one. "We were dedicated to our public-school community."

So when Williston lacrosse coach Charlie Longeneer contacted Rosie after seeing her



play at a regional tournament, she didn't think much about it. But on their way to a summer lacrosse tournament, she and her family stopped by campus to take a look. "I was just in awe of how exciting it would be to live in such a beautiful place," Rosie recalls. Still undecided, she toured campus again during the school year, and something shifted. "I saw how kind everyone was, how much everyone loved to be at Williston, and how excited everyone was."

Her parents also began to think differently about Williston. They knew Rosie, then a junior, had already completed many of ConVal's most challenging classes. But at the same time, "it was just not in the picture for us financially," Celeste explains. "Boarding school was not our reality."

Rosie, however, was an extraordinary candidate, and Williston was able to offer her family a financial aid package that changed the equation. "We couldn't believe



the award," Celeste recalls. Rosie accepted in March 2020, just as COVID-19 forced ConVal to switch to remote learning. She arrived at Williston her junior year. "Not that anything about the pandemic was good place to be, but in terms of having a good place to be, Williston was definitely the right place," Rosie says. "Being at Williston in person felt really lucky."

Luck was on her side. Rosie had played a role, but it was Rosie's own hard work that had opened the door at Williston. A point Celeste and Don made when her old school behind "I let her know that she's a big part of that success," says Celeste. "She always worked hard. It's not an opportunity by accident."

And she has certainly been tested along the way. During her sophomore year at ConVal, Rosie contracted what appeared to be meningitis. To confirm the diagnosis, her doctors performed a lumbar puncture. The

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those things really fueled my
ambition, and he found additional support
in the Williston community. "My advisors
and teachers were always trying to get me

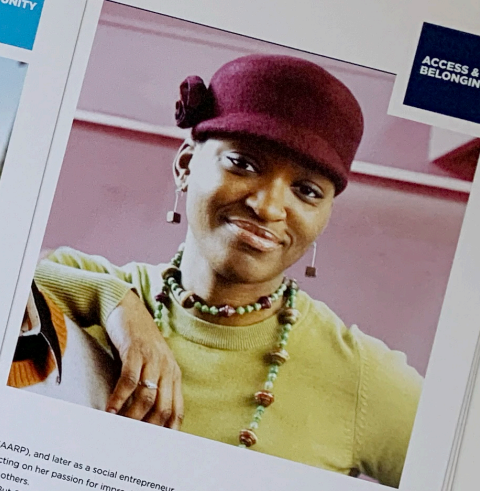


of the purity of the water. And he's taught since he was a little kid that where he goes, he has to make sure fer is not contaminated." The boys' "I realized then the difference in my mental upbringing."

dent would be just the first of stive experiences for Peisach at ere few students were from try and even fewer were g to the culture shock, his and textile business back in vided Peisach's family with me looked after by a maid, expected to make his own "keep his room clean, us jobs required of all ng hallways and waiting

on his classmates in the dining hall. And when he returned to Bogotá at the end of the school year, he had to make the 2,500-mile journey on his own, lugging his trunk and to the airport. It was all new to Peisach, as invaluable.

"I give it the maximum importance," says Peisach, whose family businesses today have grown to include rose farms in Colombia; Passion Growers, which supplies cut roses to U.S. grocery stores; and Grupo Phoenix, a multinational packaging company that manufactures Keurig cups and Yonliat tubs, among other containers. "It taught me to be organized. It taught me to be responsible and independent. I've always said that my experience at Williston



(AARP), and later as a social entrepreneur, acting on her passion for improving the lives of others.

But Gordon's promise was tragically cut short in 2015, when, after a 10-month battle with ovarian cancer, she died at the age of 33. For those she touched with her positivity, faith, and resilient character, her brief but remarkable life remains an inspiration. "Anyone who remembers Sherrie will tell you," notes her friend Pierce Freelon '02, "she was a powerful being." Adds history teacher Peter Gurn, "Sherrie saw the world as it was and sought to make it better. In her affection for learning and living, she raised our community consciousness. There are no words to adequately describe this incredible person and her impact on those around her."

To honor that legacy, the Gordon family—

her father, Derrick; mother, Beverly; sisters Kimberly Gordon and Jacqueline Elleston; and brother, Derrick—are launching The Sherrie-Ann L. Gordon '00 Equity Fund for Social and Diverse Experiences, a permanently endowed fund providing non-tuition supplemental aid to Black students with high financial need. The fund will allow low-income students of color to take part in social events and other activities that they might not have otherwise been able to afford.

"I know that Sherrie loved Williston, and that this would be something that she would love to know that we are a part of," explains Derrick. "That's one of the reasons we came together and decided to do something, to keep her name going." Beverly adds, "We said, if we can do something to help even one child, to put