

ConferenceRecording-12149594-317607

September 2012

Marilynn Abrams

Parent of Ben '92 and Neil '96
Campaign Co-Chair
Trustee Emerita

Ellen Caldwell '80

Parent of Paige '21
Campaign Vice Chair
Current Trustee

Cynthia Woolbright: So we'll go ahead and jump in. And the first question, and it's really about, you know, obviously this is about Harrisburg Academy. And I know that both of you have helped so much with both your time and your talent and your financial resources. And I'd love to hear what led you to offer the support and commitment to the school? What prompted this in the first place?

Marilynn Abrams: I think what made us decide to make an investment in the Academy was that we saw what our boys received in the way of education from the school. When I spoke at Ellen's house back in, well, I guess last fall or last winter, I mean we'd been gone from there a long time, but we saw the benefit of an Academy education. We saw that there were wonderful teachers and we could have a relationship with the teacher. And our boys – it was just an investment in our boys that we feel at this point we could never repay that school for what it's given our boys.

It gave them a basis for the rest of their lives. There's a quote from Maya Angelou that I've used in fundraising; she uses the term when you cast your bread upon the water you make an impression on someone's life in the future that you will never know. And that's exactly how we feel about the Academy. We keep going to Academy events and we keep giving money to the

Academy and we'll do anything for the Academy. And I think, and our boys feel that way as well.

Cynthia Woolbright: That's great. Wonderful. Well, we're very fortunate to have you. Ellen, you want to share some of your decisions to offer your support and commitment to the Academy?

Ellen Caldwell: Oh, absolutely. Well, I've had a really strong connection to the Academy because I attended school there from kindergarten through 12th grade. And I'm so delighted that my daughter's receiving her education there. And I just so value the educational experience at the school. The small classes. The nurturing environment. The rigor of the academics. And, you know, it's so easy to support what the Academy offers. You know, they have a very passionate and dedicated faculty. And really the most wonderful thing that stands out is a very strong student/teacher relationship. And then of course there's diversity and emphasis on character building, global awareness and all of these wonderful things.

But when I think about my involvement with the school, it is not just based on my personal history with the school and the support of its mission, but it's really also affected by the positive relationships that I have with the administration and the faculty. And I think that this plays a part in involving anybody in philanthropy or supporting a cause. Because, you know, I have a great deal of respect and admiration and a real general – I mean a very genuine fondness for the people; for the leadership of the school.

Cynthia Woolbright: I would like to hear from you both on what some of your guiding principles are that you use when you do make your philanthropic decisions.

Ellen Caldwell: Well I have to ask myself some questions. Do I support the cause and feel passionate about it? Will my gift make a difference? And how many people, sometimes but not always, how many people are reached or affected by the gift? And is the organization efficient and effective? And then sometimes a philanthropic decision, you know, solely depends on my relationship with the person who asks.

Cynthia Woolbright: Um-hum [affirmative], okay, good. Marilyn?

Marilynn Abrams: I absolutely agree with what Ellen said. I think that when you have a personal stake in an organization or you have a passion for the work that an organization does, it seems that it's much easier to make that connection and develop relationships with the people who are guiding that organization. And when I know that I'm going to be able to make a difference by my investment in that organization, then, I mean, it has a positive effect on me and it has – and I think that because I know it'll make a difference in someone else's life that it really complements what I want to achieve.

Cynthia Woolbright: So what you're trying to achieve with your philanthropy?

Marilynn Abrams: I think women look at philanthropy in a little different way than men do. I think most anything that has to do with children or bettering someone's life I think – I hate to make it {laughs} sound like this. But it's something that kind of grabs you. And that's the kind of thing that I'm always looking for. And I think that women have so many choices today in what we decide to do with our lives and where we can make a difference that I think that that's really what kind of guides me.

Cynthia Woolbright: What role, if any, do you think family tradition might play in your philanthropy?

Marilynn Abrams: Well, I think it plays a great deal.

Marilynn Abrams: But again, just because it was something that was – that the family may have supported, another generation of the family has supported doesn't mean that they'll catch me as well. It depends. It depends on, you know, what the organization does; how it achieves its goal; who's directing the organization. But, you know, I'll always give it a second look and a good, long look if it's something that I know family has supported over the years.

Cynthia Woolbright: As you think about your current philanthropy, has the tradition in your family influenced you to begin to explore those areas for yourself?

Marilynn Abrams: Yes.

Cynthia Woolbright: I'm just curious to know of this is something that's a tradition that's passed down from generation to generation.

Marilynn Abrams: Oh, I think it's crucial to have those conversations not only with the generation before you, but your children and their children.

Ellen Caldwell: Okay. Well this is huge. I think it's interesting because I don't think it's necessary for somebody who is a philanthropist that they necessarily had that family tradition. But I think it plays a huge role in philanthropy and I think, you know, most children will follow the example that's set in a household. And I think it's really, really important to pass this tradition along of giving. I think it, you know, strengthens family values. I think it teaches good citizenship. And this is a really important point. It benefits—that Marilynn just made—it benefits not only the charitable organizations but the donors themselves, because giving is so personally rewarding.

And this is really great because I was very fortunate. I grew up with a mother who was very active in her community and gave her time and financial support very generously. And she grew up learning from her parents that it was her responsibility to give back. And, but what I saw from my mother more than it was her responsibility was that it was her joy in the giving. She really got so much out of that. And so I got the message that if you're fortunate in life, it's your privilege to share it. And so I think, you know, when your children see you involved and giving it becomes second nature.

Cynthia Woolbright: When you think about, then, making your decisions, are those done with your spouses or others in your life? And then the other part to that question is does the amount of the gift affect whether you consult or not?

Ellen Caldwell: Well I personally consult with my spouse when making philanthropic decisions, but not always. And the amount of the gift certainly affects whether I consult with my spouse. And it would really affect, too, whether he consults with me. So we usually make joint decisions, particularly on larger gifts. And we actively discuss our interest in giving and we have very similar views on organizations, missions and goals. So, yes.

Ellen Caldwell: Well, we have a very clear idea of how we, you know, want to do things yearly and, you know, talk about, yes, goals and things we'd like to do.

Marilynn Abrams: Yes, we make decisions jointly on larger gifts. You know, smaller gifts or something that I'm making on my own then, you know, I'll certainly tell (Richard) that, you know, I'm doing this. But especially for larger gifts he and I will discuss it. We'll even discuss it with our boys—especially when it has to do with the Academy—to let them know what we're doing. They certainly understand why we're doing it. But I think it helps when you make a

collaborative decision for larger gifts, because then it's not only women's philanthropy; it's a family philanthropy. And I think that makes an impact as well.

Cynthia Woolbright: What is it that you expect from the organizations that you support? What kinds of expectations do you each have?

Ellen Caldwell: Just that the organization supports its mission and that it's fiscally responsible and allocates the funds properly. And that they meet their goals.

Cynthia Woolbright: If your expectations aren't being met, how might you respond to that, Ellen?

Ellen Caldwell: Well, this is interesting because I'm not familiar with this. I've never had this happen. But certainly if it did happen, you know, I would think twice about, you know, continuing to fund them. And I think, you know, they have to be held accountable and be able to execute, you know, whatever their plans may be.

Cynthia Woolbright: Um-hum [affirmative], okay, alright. Marilyn, what about you? Some of your expectations of the charitable organization which you support.

Marilynn Abrams: Well, I think, you know, their mission is important. I think the fiscal responsibility; that is a major, major thing with me. I have had a little experience with an organization that I gave money to that I felt was just headed in the wrong direction. And the money was given. It wasn't like I could take it back, but, you know, I had a conversation with them about it. And I just stepped back my volunteer work with it and I haven't given an additional gift because of that. And it has to do more with some decisions they made and the direction they were going and it just was – there was something

wrong with it in my view. It wasn't meeting its mission. It wasn't doing what was in the best interest of the members. And it just – I stepped back and it just wasn't a good fit for me anymore.

Cynthia Woolbright: Okay.

Marilynn Abrams: But, you know, I really think that not only the fiscal responsibility and meeting their mission, but having conversations with their donors so that they're able to articulate exactly what they want to do; what new things they want to try. You know, really engaging donors.

Ellen Caldwell: That's a really good point, Marilyn.

Marilynn Abrams: What I've heard, you know, and what I read you can't say thank you enough. Well, you know, that's not my thing. If I'm going to support an organization it's the right thing for me to do. You know, when I constantly get, you know, thank-you letters it's like, ugh, don't waste your postage on it. You know? I'm doing it because it's the right thing to do and fine, I appreciate one thank-you, but that's not why I'm doing it.

Cynthia Woolbright: Okay, do you find, then, though that you want to make sure that you are aware of how your support is helping the organization?

Marilynn Abrams: Well, right, and I think, you know, ongoing conversations with your donor; I think that's very important and it really makes a difference to me if they're willing to engage in a dialog and they're willing to really articulate, you know, what they want to do, why they want to do it. I mean that's what it means to me.

Ellen Caldwell: Well, and I think when we talk about women's philanthropy I think it's very important to let people know how their gift is making a difference. Because I really think that women want to know that they're making a difference. I agree with Marilyn that they really should engage donors, talk to donors more. And it's not about the thank-you, but I do think it's they can give them more information about what's happening and what their funds are doing. I think it's crucial.

Cynthia Woolbright: Okay, so would you both agree that gender does matter in making philanthropic decisions, how you see – and how women's philanthropy might be different?

Marilynn Abrams: Absolutely.

Ellen Caldwell: You know, I really had to think about this because {laughs}...

Cynthia Woolbright: Go ahead.

Ellen Caldwell: Yes, it matters so much and there's been such a shift here. Because, I think in older generations, men were making the philanthropic decisions and, woman's philanthropy really depended on her husband's wealth. And now we have women in control of so much wealth and, they're in leadership positions in the workforce and the boardroom and, they're very active in volunteerism. And the volunteerism, then leads to giving. So women support their causes; causes that move them. And they really enjoy improving their communities. And they're definitely living longer than men, so then they end up being in charge of a great amount of wealth. And they have a strong desire to make a difference. So, the trend is definitely increasing women's involvement in philanthropy.

Cynthia Woolbright: Marilyn, comments from you?

Marilynn Abrams: Yes, I know that there have been times when people have gone to my husband about making a gift to an organization and, I'll say to them later, you know, you should have called me, too, because he would have been more interested in making a gift or he would have made a larger gift with input from me because he would have understood and been happy to do it because he would have understood that it meant something to me.

Marilynn Abrams: And I mean I've had that experience with him. I mean something that he's not interested in at all and really doesn't get, I get, you know, and I would have encouraged a family gift to this organization or for this project if it was something he just didn't get. But there've been assumptions made sometimes that, you know, go to the person who you think has the wealth. And, you know, don't think it through enough that you really – or don't do enough homework that makes you understand that, you know, this better approach would be to have it come from both people who would make the decision.

Cynthia Woolbright: What do you think that, schools and colleges and other institutions need to do differently to attract more women as philanthropists?

Ellen Caldwell: By involving women and asking them to solicit gifts, to get them involved in the process; it really motivates other women to make contributions.

Cynthia Woolbright: If you could pass along a lesson that you've learned through your philanthropic support, these ventures that you've been on, what would that be?

Ellen Caldwell: I think Marilyn touched on it earlier; that philanthropy is very rewarding. And, you know, the best thing about having financial flexibility is being able to make changes and make a difference. And, you know, I love that it is really an investment.

Marilynn Abrams: I found that quote from Maya Angelou. I had it on my desk here. It's "When we cast our bread upon the waters we can presume that someone downstream, whose face we will never know, will benefit from our actions." And I think that that's one thing that I've learned. Giving back to the community and having a voice; you have a voice and you show your passion and your commitment and the responsibility you feel to give back. It's personally rewarding and it really makes a difference in the world and in the community.

Marilynn Abrams: I think it's important for our children to see us making an investment in our community and in the world because if they – I mean we have to set an example. And it's great that families make a commitment to certain things, but I think our children, whether they're boys or girls, need to see their mothers have a voice and that their voice makes a difference. And that I think the message that it sends is that, you know, everybody can make a difference. It doesn't really matter how much you have; it's this responsibility you feel to make sure that organizations and schools like this are continuing because it's in the best interest of the community and it's in the best interest of children.

END