

## THE BONER SCHOLARS PROGRAM

### BEREA ORIENTATION TALK

*By Wayne Meisel, 1993*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the nineteenth century philosopher, wrote that one has lead a successful life if he has made life a little better for just one other person.

With that thought in mind I'd like to tell you a story about a young boy. This kid was having a very difficult time in school. Teachers gave up on him and his peers labeled him as stupid. It seemed no matter how hard the boy tried, he could not do well in school. It seemed like the only person who wouldn't give up on him was his mother. She would work for hours each day working to fight off the frustration, disappointment and discouragement which seemed ever present.

One day a friend of the family contacted this boy's mother. This friend told her of a doctor that she had heard of and who was known for working with children that were having difficulty in school. Following her advice, the parents took the child to see this doctor. Almost instantly the doctor diagnosed the child as dyslexic. That was the turning point for this child because from then on he and his parents understood what was going on and how they could address the problem. He got proper help and within months he was on his way.

Several years later, as a high school student, this same person was going through that awful time we all go through - adolescence. Filled with self doubt and the temptation to not work hard in school, he found himself sitting next to a man at the dinner table one night who gave him some advice. This man happened to be the husband of the woman who recommended the doctor. For hours they talked, forgetting that anyone else was in the room. After talking the young man was inspired, challenged and determined to do his best. He went on to finish high school and college; and now, out in the work force, he tries to be a productive member of society.

This story is an important one for me because the young boy was Wayne Meisel and the couple that helped him were Mr. and Mrs. Bonner.

I am so passionate about and feel so much a part of you and the Bonner Scholars program because I feel as if I were the first Bonner Scholar.

If you spend any amount of time with Mr. and Mrs. Bonner, there is one word you come to learn - gratitude. The quote, "of him who has received much, much will be required," is their life's motto; it is their constant companion and the creed that has challenged both of them every day of their lives.

And this is why he decided to create the Bonner Scholars program: to express gratitude to the Lord for what He has given him and to express the gratitude he has for you, what you have done, what you are doing and what you are capable of.

The Bonners will never ask for an accolade. Instead they hope that through their example and life's work, you will learn the value and wonder of leading a life of gratitude.

And that doesn't mean that you live a life of gratitude to the Bonners for the confidence and commitment they have entrusted to you. You show gratitude best when you pass it on - through serving others, by tutoring and counseling those boys and girls that you are currently working with.

Never forget the impact you can have. Just as the Bonners have helped shape my life, so too can you help shape someone else's. I heard a story just yesterday from one of you, Lisa Perkins. When I met Lisa she was jumping up and down; if you saw her you would have thought she had just won the lottery or gotten engaged. When asked why she was so excited, she explained that the young man who she had been tutoring for two years was planning to go to college and he was hoping to go to Berea. This young man was a person who the teachers had given up on.

Nowhere else, not in a Federal program or in an initiative designed by planners from MIT, is it so clear the impact and the difference that you are making.

Nothing gives Mr. and Mrs. Bonner greater joy than being a part of your lives and of giving you the chance to shine, to grow and to blossom. It's a funny thing that happens when someone cares enough to believe in you - you might start believing in yourself.

It is no mistake that you are here. A great deal of time, energy and hard work went into selecting you. The Foundation could have built a gymnasium, a laboratory, bought books for the library or given money to endow a faculty chair. All these things have merit. But instead we chose to invest in you.

Why? Because we believe in the mission of Berea, that mission that says everyone should have a chance, and if I get a chance then I am going to work like hell to make sure that someone else gets the same chance. And who better to champion, preserve and spread that mission than you.

You are a special group. As you remember that, remember the Bonners' creed, of him who receives much, much will be required. Yes it's a great responsibility. Do not however let it be a burden. Instead it is a great opportunity, an opportunity to do the Lord's work, to make something out of your life and to make this country great.

You are the first, the first group of Bonner Scholars. Our hope is that someday we will have over 100 Bonner Scholars at Berea and perhaps as many as 1,000 every year across the country. This can and will happen. And you, you will set the standard, you will be the cornerstone, you will set the pace. I hope you will understand this and, in realizing it, will reach out as far as you can. I hope you will dare to dream, to think impossible things and work to make them happen. For if you do that, it will change not only your life but also the lives of the people you touch, the Bonner Scholars that will come after you and this wonderful land that we live in.

As you move forward, know that you are not alone. When it gets hard, scary, lonely or sad, remember this ... that the Bonners are in your corner.

On behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Bonner I'd like to say "we love you, keep it up and God bless you."