

Life advice from a Harvard mom

Written by Warren Binford Guest opinion

Mar. 27

statesmanjournal.com

Dear Daughters:

You have heard a lot from the self-appointed "Princeton Mom" this past year who exhorts you and other young women to devote 75 percent of your energy in college to finding a husband. She warns that if you don't snag an Ivy League husband before you graduate, you risk marrying a guy from a "state school" who is not "worthy" of you, or worse, finding yourself old, infertile and alone one day.

The "Princeton Mom" assures you that she is sharing this advice with you because you are the daughters she never had. Fortunately, you and your girlfriends already have mothers, and we hope you will never forget what we have tried to teach you since the day you were brought into our arms and our lives.

You, our daughters, are among the most exquisite creatures on the planet. Not only are you stunning to see, you are powerful enough to create and nurture life. You are highly intelligent beings who have many gifts to share with the world. As complex beings, your lives will be rich, varied and complicated.

You have the potential to be wives, mothers, partners, doctors, teachers, pilots, lawyers, executives, programmers, professors and more. Regardless of which roles you choose in life, the overwhelming majority of you will be called upon to navigate and fulfill your multiple roles on a daily basis. Others will depend on you, and so you must be prepared. Education is the key.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we now understand that women's education is the key to health, wealth and stability, not just for women, but for their families and communities. Educated women are far less likely to be poor. They earn more money, have lower divorce and infant mortality rates and live longer, healthier and happier lives.

Women's educational success transfers across generations as their children are more likely to be healthy, intelligent and economically secure. Women's success also ripples across society because they tend to use their economic gains to invest in the education and economic advancement of others.

It is this knowledge that motivates us to prioritize your education and to teach you to do the same. We send you to the best schools we can, help you with your studies and save for your college tuition, not so that one day you will have four years to spend 75 percent of your time frantically trying to find a husband "worthy" of you, but so that you will become worthy of yourselves, the families and societies you will create and the exquisiteness inherent in your complex womanhood.

As you leave home for college, we hope that we have taught you to be open to love and exploration and commitment, and to know when and where and with whom to share these experiences. We have tried to teach you that people are more than titles and pedigrees. The person driving your cab or serving you dinner in the cafeteria may be far smarter than you and is every bit as human, but lacked the opportunities you have been blessed with, so be humble and kind and grateful to all.

Finally, we have tried to teach you to always remember that there are many times, opportunities and ways to create a family. No one timeline or path works for all. There is no shortage of people worthy of your love

and commitment in this world, so be open and true and pure, and love will come.

What there is, unfortunately, is a shortage of educational opportunities for women. So please don't squander yours. Read Plato. Learn to code. Speak a new language. Immerse yourself in equations. Study abroad. Test theories. Write poetry. Play an instrument. Conduct experiments. Join a sports team. Discover the sky.

One day, your husband, your children and your community will be grateful for what you learned and who you became, and the world will continue to advance.

Love, Your Real Mom

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