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Passing the Donor-Funded Scholarship Torch

by Clem Boyd

When Peter Voland '13 and Brittany Smith '14 received the Autio Family Scholarship in 2013, an inspiring legacy of giving was beginning to unfold.

Clyde and Jean Autio established the Autio Family Scholarship in 2002 to help qualified junior students with significant financial need pursue careers in the fields of engineering, nursing, or education. They were eligible to receive the scholarship during their senior year as long as they maintained a GPA between 2.5 and 4.0, stayed with their major, and continued to show the personal qualities that had distinguished them for the award.

Peter earned the Autio Family Scholarship for both the 2011–12 and 2012–2013 academic years while working toward his undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. He is now an engineer for Ball Aerospace in Beavercreek, Ohio. His now-wife, Brittany, earned the scholarship for two years also, in 2012–2013 and 2013–2014, on her way to a bachelor's degree in nursing. She works for Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton.

While the extra money was critical, it was the Autios themselves who made the gift exceptional. "It was cool to see the people behind the scholarship," Peter explained. "I had received a couple of scholarships before, but this was completely different. The Autios invested in our lives, and we got to know them well."

Once each semester, the Autios took their scholarship winners to dinner and spent the evening with them. Clyde and Jean sent emails encouraging their scholarship recipients. "At Christmas, they would take us out for Chinese food, then we'd follow them back to their house," Peter said. "We would sit around the dining room table, eating dessert and sharing stories."

Part of that personal touch came from a home-state connection. "Jean was from Baraboo, Wisconsin, near the Wisconsin Dells, so she asked if we were Packers fans," Peter said. "My family used to camp at Devil's Lake, an extremely beautiful area near Baraboo, and we had been there many times over the years. Brit and I had also been to the Dells area on trips with our youth group."

When the Volands imagined founding their own scholarship, the Autios' example inspired them. "They got to know us and our stories. They invested in students," Peter said.

"The way they pursued building relationships with the students made us want to do the same thing," said Brittany.

The Voland Family Scholarship encourages students from the couple's home church, Calvary Bible Church in Neenah, Wisconsin, to attend Cedarville. In addition, students majoring in nursing or mechanical engineering may be considered for the financial award.



Jean and Clyde Autio were on hand for the nurse pinning ceremony of Brittany (Smith) Voland '14. Peter Voland '13 is at far right.

Not only does the Volands' scholarship signify a passing of the blessing, but also a passing of the torch. When Jean died April 2 of this year, Clyde requested that friends and family make a donation to the new Voland Family Scholarship in lieu of flowers for Jean's funeral.

"It was extremely humbling," noted Brittany. "We were both just completely surprised and touched. It was such a selfless thing for him to do at that time."

The Autio Family Scholarship was a difference-maker for both Peter and Brittany. "We both did pretty well in high school and earned general scholarships from Cedarville, but we also received about \$3,000 from private donors," Brittany said. "That made a really big difference. We both worked on campus, which helped, but we would have had to do a lot more to make up the difference that the donor-funded scholarships helped with.

"I can't imagine what it would have been like if we hadn't received those scholarships."

The Volands awarded their first annually funded scholarship for \$2,000 for one student at this year's Legacy Banquet on September 30, part of homecoming weekend festivities. They are also building an endowment that will allow them to award more scholarships in the future.

"We feel like Cedarville is doing a really good job of making this experience more personal," Brittany added. "It's not just about filling out an online form and watching your checking account get smaller. It's been a really neat experience that's helped us feel more connected to Cedarville."

"We had opportunities to grow in our faith at Cedarville that we had never experienced before," Peter said. "Cedarville was the culmination of this huge experience in our lives, and we want to make it available to other students."

"At Cedarville, I learned what it means to be in Christian community and how to work through hard times together," Brittany added. "The friendships we made, the opportunities to grow in our faith, the discipleship. You have an opportunity to grow in faith with the people around you. You don't get this at every Christian university, let alone at a public university. We received more value from Cedarville than can be measured."

To give to the Voland Family Scholarship, or other donor-funded scholarships, visit cedarville.edu/makeagift.

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Clem Boyd is Managing Editor of Cedarville Magazine.



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