



CIRCLE

SPRING 2018

Graduating student Annika Olesen (pictured here with sister Liv) was this year's recipient of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges annual student award. Turn the page to learn about her liberal arts experience!

Photo: Kristen Olesen

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FINDING A WAY BACK HOME



Annika Olesen (right) with fellow Augustana alumna Emily McIlroy.

Growing up, Annika Olesen never planned to attend University. Surrounded by river, lichen, spruce trees and sand, her childhood was made up of homeschooling and as much time as possible spent outdoors on her parents' homestead near the Hoarfrost River in the Northwest Territories. A box of a dorm room, stifling classes and a ten-step trek to the cafeteria—compared to the hour and a half by bush plane journey from home to the nearest road back at the Hoarfrost—was not her idea of a worthy experience. But an introduction to Augustana through the campus' dogsledding course that took place on her parents' property changed everything.

Now, armed with a liberal arts degree, inimitable experience, a passion to follow and a prestigious award, Annika is grateful for the time spent on a path she never intended to pursue.

"My liberal arts education has combined with my own upbringing to reinforce an identity rooted in a beloved homeplace," Annika writes in an essay recounting her experience at Augustana, which won her the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges David J Prior Award. In her essay, she reflects on coming to Augustana with a lack of critical thinking skills and a desire to finish schooling quickly before returning home.

Four successful years later, Annika will graduate from Augustana this June with a Global and Development Studies (GDS) degree, an irony that is not lost on her, coming from a very small and somewhat isolated place. Both humble and insightful, Annika explains that having a degree was never very important to her—it

was the experience that mattered.

"I think my GDS degree happened because I didn't want to be trapped, I wanted to have the most options possible in terms of the classes I was taking," Annika remembers. Her rare take on a degree as more of a by-product of attending University rather than the actual goal fit well with a liberal arts and sciences campus. "I've taken so many cool courses over my degree—Norwegian, creative writing, music theory, history—I've been able to follow a lot of different passions and areas of interest. Even though I chose not to pursue all of them, I now have a lot of respect for the people who do. And I think that's the beauty of a liberal arts degree."

Aside from her classwork, Annika was a member of the cross-country running and skiing teams—because she "needed to figure out a way to get outside!". She was also a student chaplain and participated in the Augustana Choir and annual Spirit of the Land conference where she formed some of her closest friendships.

"I now have so many connections to the Camrose community, which has been a really important part of my time here," Annika says. "And not just with my peers, but with people of different age groups, my professors and community members."

Looking forward, Annika hopes to work outdoors with at-risk populations based out of the Hoarfrost and the surrounding area. She will begin this goal with a summer job at Spirit North, an organization that engages youth in Indigenous and reserve communities in cross-country running and skiing.

"I think there's a huge need in the North for 'wilderness therapy' or positive connections to place and an active lifestyle," Annika says. "That's something I'm really passionate about and I think there's a lot of ways I can make that work in the Northwest Territories."

Although Annika plans to go back to the Hoarfrost eventually, she's glad for the time she's spent at Augustana as well.

"I've come to realize that I can find a sense of home in many different places."

To read Annika's essay, visit coplac.org/awards



Photos courtesy of Kristen Olesen.

CREATING A LEGACY TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE STUDENTS

By Sydney Tancowny

For Gordon Sherwood, it is first and foremost about the students.

A graduate of a two-year course at the University of Saskatchewan, Gordon spoke to how his university experience transformed his life. “I felt that where you come from doesn’t necessarily mean what you can do or achieve, and it opened up the world for me,” Gordon says. Inspired by his own father to pursue further education, Gordon’s life goal was to offer his children a university education—an offering they all seized. All four of Gordon’s children have earned university degrees, with one receiving a masters, and two graduating from Augustana.

Gordon recently decided to honour his late wife by supporting high achieving music students through the establishment of the Dorothy Sherwood Memorial Award in Music. When Dorothy passed away, Gordon felt recognizing her through an award was something he just needed to do. A nurse by trade, Dorothy dedicated much of her time outside of work to music. “She loved to sing; it was her life. She sang from an early age and was a soloist for many events and a member of the Rimbey Community Choir,” says Gordon. “With music, there’s not an established way to make money, and it’s more of a calling. Those who are committed to music despite that, I thought, would be the ones we wanted to help.”

Although this is his first time establishing an award at Augustana, Gordon is no stranger to the campus’ Community Awards Program. Ten years after the death of his son, Robert Sherwood, Gordon had received a call from Robert’s friend and roommate looking to establish an award in Robert’s name. Since then, the Robert Sherwood Memorial Award has awarded 18 students, and Gordon has met many of them at Augustana’s annual Community Awards Banquet.

At one such banquet, Gordon recalls, a recipient of the award four years prior had approached Dorothy and him. “I don’t know if people realize how important it is to meet the students, and for them to meet you. There had to be something there in order for her to remember.”

With the Dorothy Sherwood Memorial Award in Music set to award its first student in the 2018-19 academic year, Gordon will represent both Robert’s and Dorothy’s awards at the 2019 Community Awards Banquet. When Gordon can no longer attend the banquet, he plans to pass down the experience to his grandchildren, just as he passed down his love for education to his children.

“It’s the same old story,” Gordon says. “It’s just the fact that we would like to help a young person, give them a leg up, and let them know that somebody out there cares.”

The Dorothy Sherwood Memorial Award in Music was established as an endowed award, allowing valuable financial support to be granted to Augustana students in perpetuity.



Gordon and Dorothy Sherwood with student Amanda Stone at the 2015 Community Awards Banquet.

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