

Foundation Day 2017 – A student’s perspective

Written by sophomore student, Hannah Lempert



Camille Robinson, WSF President, with Distinguished Alumni Dan Jones '56, Rick Collins '56, Sylvia Lin '89, and Todd Jones '75

April 23, an expected Monday that would drag on for centuries, turned into an exciting experience for Wyoming High School. To start the day, the whole school was guided to an assembly honoring both 2017 Distinguished Alumni Sylvia Lin and Todd Jones. The school also heard from Dan Jones '56 and Dr. Richard Collins '56 that were distinguished alumni in previous years. 2014 and 2016 respectively



Sylvia Lin '89

Sylvia Lin, graduate of '89, spoke about her career as if it were a journey she embarked on years ago and continues with her wherever she goes. Sylvia based her speech to the school on three themes: explore, find one's passion, and give back. The students learned about the detours and speed bumps of life and how sudden opportunities can change your life. Sylvia traveled through her career with the students explaining the thrills of traveling to 73 countries and 7 continents and the downfalls to working while traveling. She expressed how work travel is stressful and lonely and how sacrifices need to be made. On the emotional side, she noted how she has no large meaningful heirlooms such as a grandfather clock or a sofa, nor does she own a house. Sylvia's life took many twists and turns. Starting off as a double Chemistry and French major, she spent an entire summer in a lab and came to a sudden realization that this was not her passion. This marked the beginning to her exploration and finding one's passion phase of life. Sylvia went on to study Economics and French

as a double major. She ended up finding her passion and decided to give back by working with Habitat for Humanity. Sylvia is also on the Public Prep fundraising board. Overall her inspiring experiences put curiosity and hope into the students' eyes and showed them the different ways life can go.

Another example of inspiring experiences is the diverse career of Mr. B. Todd Jones. Todd, graduate of '75, has three main values in life, creativity, curiosity, and friendship. Todd mentioned that "natural curiosity has never left me" and how that innocence is pertinent to life. Todd also noted how friendship teaches how to manage and relate and helps balance priorities. Todd started off in the military. This experience taught him "leadership and mental toughness" and how to not hit that panic button. He went from a prosecutor to a U.S. attorney in Minnesota. During 2009 Todd was appointed the U.S. attorney in Minnesota under Obama. In 2011, he also helped regulate firearms in the U.S. These different positions led up to his favorite position so far in his career. Last year Todd was presented his dream job by the NFL. For his job, Todd was asked to be the new Chief Disciplinary Officer. Todd watches football, looks for legal mistakes, and reminds the players not to blow their incredible opportunities. In Todd's speech, he commented that he believes in a purposeful life, following a guideline of how actions create a domino effect. Todd explained that thoughts turn into words, words turn into actions, actions turn into habits, habits turn into character, and character determines destiny.



Todd Jones '75



After Todd ended his speech with this inspirational chain, the school was dismissed back to class, while select students joined the alumni and assorted others during breakfast in the media center. Students discussed school, personal life, and other topics with the adults. As breakfast came to an end, the school moved to second bell and freshmen and sophomores were then directed to the first panel discussion of the day.

Rick Collins '56 talks with WHS students



DA Panelists: Rick Collins '56, Todd Jones '75, Sylvia Lin '89, and Dan Jones '56

During the first panel the questions were quite relaxed and casual, allowing students to ask questions that might pertain more to a student lifestyle and create a bridge between past and current high school life. Sylvia discussed how she played violin and piano in high school. She noted that extracurriculars gave her the ability to do many extraordinary activities. This diversity in after school activities eventually led to her diverse interests later in life. But, focused on high school, Sylvia learned French and now uses it in her day-to-day life. Sylvia also intrigued the students with her fantastic description of Antarctica and how vast the landscape. The scene was described as completely smooth ice and endless uninhabited nature, that is nothing like she'd ever seen before. Todd noted that in high school, in '75, they didn't have the technology we do now. In school, he stressed how learning critical thinking skills added to his education and helped him to succeed in life. In his teens, Todd worked as a busboy and waiter at a restaurant, a caddy at a golf club, and he worked at a pool. As well as Todd's



vast job experiences, he was very into art, his safe haven from the rest of life. Todd enjoyed history classes and cross country as well. After the first panel with the underclassmen, the upperclassmen came in to do a second similar panel, as the freshmen and sophomores proceeded to their third bell classes.

Students talk with DA panelists

Fourth bell began the lunch for the alumni and assorted others. I was the only student accompanying the adults. During this time, I interviewed Sylvia and Todd. I asked them, “If you could describe your high school experience in two words what would they be?”. Sylvia answered “pizzaface and fun”, which took a humorous spin on the question. Todd responded, “memorable and forgettable”. These oxymorons definitely apply to high school then and now. I also asked both distinguished alumni, “What advice do you have for high schoolers?”. Sylvia and Todd answered, “A for effort” and “Stay focused” respectively. I also asked Todd, “How do Spanish and art affect your life?” (considering that was his focus in high school). Todd stated that he passed Spanish on to his daughter and that his siblings took up careers in art but he did not.



Todd Jones shares additional insight with a student



After a long day of discussion and learning, the students went on to their second half of the day, and the alumni left to return to their jobs. Inspiration was spread through the school, adding a new perspective for students to look through for their decisions in life. Many students found the fact that Sylvia travels the world and that Todd watches football for his job fascinating and showed the school that one can do what they love. Also, the fact that one can make a living out of what one loves when presented the right opportunities. After leaving a lasting impression on Wyoming high schoolers, the alumni left with a reminder of high school lingering in the back of their minds. Both distinguished alumni had a great impact on the students, and helped them to see what their future might turn into one day.

Sylvia Lin donates her WHS letter jacket – now on display in the Alumni/Foundation Room at the WMS