



The St. Andrew's Women's Network

In mid-September 2009 on a chilly afternoon, seven St. Andrew's women met outside Founders Hall, climbed into a School van, and headed for Washington, D.C. Dean of Students Ana Ramírez courageously took the wheel, while Director of Admission Louisa Zendt '78 P'03;05;09 sat shotgun. The rest—English Department Chair Elizabeth Roach P'04;07;13, Math teacher and lacrosse coach Jen McGowan, Major Gifts Officer and Coordinator of the Women's Network Bernadette Devine '99, Director of Student Activities Jolene Hyde, and me, English teacher Jean Garnett—piled into the back for the two-hour trek. We were headed to a meeting of the St. Andrew's Women's Network at the home of Sally Pingree P'01, a philanthropist who has been a friend and advisor to Tad and Elizabeth Roach for years.

It's not every day that seven women of all different ages, backgrounds and talents, come together for a road-trip. And it's fitting that the occasion for this convergence was the St. Andrew's Women's Network, which, since its launch less than a year ago, has brought together more than 100 women of all walks of life for discussion in four cities. The Network was created by Bernadette Devine and her friend and former advisor Elizabeth Roach as a way to deepen the bonds of alumnae, mothers and friends with the School and with each other, and to create opportunities for St. Andrew's women to share their ideas and experiences, learn from one another, and connect personally with the St. Andrew's community.

Meetings over the past year have taken different forms: Elizabeth Roach met with 10 women in New York last spring to discuss Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* over a meal that host Laurel Strong P'07;10 fashioned after the novel's famous dinner party scene. In January of this year, Kate Werble '98 hosted a reception at her New York City gallery, where she gave a private tour and talk on a group exhibition exploring self-portraiture. At Sally's house, more than 30 women

by Jean Garnett

(and Headmaster Tad Roach) gathered in the candle-lit backyard, and talked about how St. Andrew's prepared them for the challenges of college, work, life. They talked about what they wished they had known as high school students and shared ideas for how to teach today's young women strength and self-knowledge.

The meeting at Sally Pingree's was, like every other meeting of the Women's Network so far, an affirmation of the essential need for this association, for these unique opportunities for conversation, learning and mutual support. But even before we arrived at Sally's house, the meeting was already underway.

Soon after our departure from campus, Elizabeth Roach pulled the latest *New York Times* magazine from her bag and turned to Maureen Dowd's piece. "Women are getting unhappier," Dowd wrote. "In the early '70s, breaking out of the domestic cocoon, leaving their mothers' circumscribed lives behind, young women felt exhilarated and bold. But the more women have achieved, the more they seem aggrieved... women are getting gloomier and men are getting happier."

This seems at first like a paradox. In an article for *Time Magazine*, "What Women Want Now," Nancy Gibbs reminds us just how far women have come since those "early 70s": In 1972 only seven percent of students playing high school sports were girls; now the number is six times as high.... College campuses used to be almost 60-40 male; now the ratio has reversed, and close to half of law and medical degrees go to women, up from fewer than 10 percent in 1970.... For the first time, five women have won Nobel Prizes in the same year (for medicine, chemistry, economics and literature).

Despite a staggering expansion of opportunities for women since the early seventies, Dowd still wonders about the repercussions. A committed feminist, Dowd acknowledges that feminism has increased the burden on women, even as it has freed them from many constraints: "When women stepped into male-dominated realms, they put more demands—and stress—on themselves." And the demands that modern life makes on women are accompanied by lingering pre-feminist prescriptions. "[W]e've internalized the good mommy, happy

homemaker ideal," writes columnist Shannon Kelley. "The socialization that succeeded in keeping us in the home for centuries was potent: the hangover lingers, and we continue to measure ourselves, in some part, against that feminine ideal—even while we say we don't."

Part of aspiring to this ideal still means feeling pressure to look a certain way. Desperation to be thin contributes to low self-esteem, obsessive dieting and eating disorders in high school and beyond, and grown women are stranded in a youth-obsessed culture. Thanks to a media barrage of impossible ideals of beauty, these pressures not only set in early and hang on, they also conflict with cultural expectations about motherhood and professional success. Should we strive to fulfill ourselves or to impress others? Is it more important to be smart or beautiful? Honest or likeable? Ambitious or nurturing? For girls and women in America, this chorus of demands can be a confusing soundtrack for self-discovery.

As Ána heroically weaved through rush-hour traffic, we discussed Dowd's essay, trying to make sense of the problem she articulated, trying to weave our own experiences into this abstract narrative of "American Women." Four of us were seasoned working mothers; three were recent college graduates. Together we represented a kind of history of feminism, a reflection of its evolutions, its achievements and perhaps some of its digressions. We talked about a time when women were entering schools and workplaces that were still oriented towards men and male concerns. When Louisa Zendt came to the newly co-ed St. Andrew's in 1974, the School was still struggling to evolve out of an exclusively male culture. A few years after Louisa's graduation, Elizabeth became one of the first female teachers at the School, juggling a full schedule of teaching, coaching and mothering before there was a day care at St. Andrew's. While teachers and students today have their pick of inspiring female mentors, pioneers like Louisa and Elizabeth managed without a fountain of precedents, advice and support from and for women.

Even in the 21st century, when our culture is much more aware and accommodating of the double lives

▼ *The Boston Women's Network Launch took place on April 29, 2009. (l. to r.) Noelle Bloomfield '08, Julia van der Vink '08, Elizabeth Roach, Laura Zarchin Comstock '99, Meaghan Rathvon '02, Tad Roach, Allison Thomas-Rose '96, Sallie Graves '01, Ashley Bergland '00, Ann Woods '01, Leslie Hirsh '00, Taylor (Horner) Porter '96, Louisa Zendt '78, Vita Waters '97, Bernadette Devine '99, Kate (Harrington) Dickie '96, Rachel (Pfeiffer) Bee '97, Anne Montesano '86 and Nada Hart '84.*

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women often lead, all of us in the van were familiar with the imperative to compartmentalize ourselves, to divide our lives into a series of separate roles (“work” mode, “mother” mode, “friend” mode), and then struggle to prioritize them. Yet as Elizabeth recalled the challenge and exhilaration of balancing work and family in those early years, I was struck by how interconnected the two roles were for her. “Being a teacher made me a better mother,” she said simply, “and being a mother made me a better teacher.” I remembered these words because they inspired me; they gave me something to aspire to.

Even though we had not yet reached Sally’s house, I realized something in the van that informed my vision of the evening, and helped me to see, in a kind of flash, the mission of the Women’s Network. If many women today are feeling less happy and more stressed, the culprit is not the increase of choices and responsibilities afforded by the feminist movement, but a lack of open channels of communication. Women need to hear from women—from their elders, from their peers, from members of younger generations—in order to learn about life and to share what we have learned. It is precisely this kind of continuity that the Women’s Network is making possible for St. Andrew’s women.

The switch to co-education revolutionized St. Andrew’s, and now, over 30 years after the first female students entered Founders Hall, more than a thousand

women have made their mark on St. Andrew’s and have been molded, in turn, by the unique culture they helped to evolve. “This whole thing started,” Elizabeth said of the Network, “because I was watching girls who had graduated over time as they really came into their own, as their aspirations really began happening. I realized what an incredible resource this group of women was, both for the School community and for each other.”

“Something happens when St. Andrew’s people come together,” says Network Coordinator Bernadette Devine. “There is a sense of comfort and acceptance that is very rare.” This atmosphere of trust and openness has informed Women’s Network events, allowing women to be thoughtful and honest and making for discussions that have been not only emotionally and intellectually rich but also productive. Bernadette remembers a small meeting in Boston where the group started talking about the transition from St. Andrew’s to college: “A few of them described feeling really lost when they first got to college,” she said. “There’s a lack of quality advising in many colleges, and if you are used to having close relationships with your teachers, coaches and advisors, that can be shocking and traumatic.”

Coming from a close-knit community in which everyone feels a sense of responsibility to the whole, the more anonymous, fragmented environment of college can be alienating. But the Women’s Network is a reminder



that the St. Andrew's culture is not confined to campus; it is an internalized ethic carried by many people in many places. Listening to fellow alumnae talk about tough transitions, Kate (Harrington) Dickie '96, who was hosting the Boston meeting, had an idea: "I would love to meet St. Andrew's kids who are in college in Boston," she said. "They could have me as a touch point."

Out of this discussion between 14 women in Kate's living room, the St. Andrew's College Network was born, a new initiative to match graduating seniors with alumni at or near the college or university they attend. These mentors can help incoming St. Andreans navigate their new environment by recommending professors, courses, extracurricular activities, and community service opportunities. They can help new students identify areas of the school they want to get involved in, making their college experience richer and more connected. This year, the Network aims to match every senior with a mentor before graduation.

In the creation of the College Network, and in the intergenerational exchange that happens naturally at meetings, the Women's Network is helping to ensure that current students are prepared for the transitions to college and to "the real world" of professional and family life that lie ahead. "Our girls now are hungry and eager to connect with older girls and women," says Elizabeth. "They have a lot of questions for them. That came out last year when we took four senior girls down to a Washington, D.C., meeting. They are thinking about their futures and wondering, 'how?'"

Louise Dufresne '09, one of the seniors who attended this meeting, reflected on the experience afterwards. Her words affirm the power of the Network to create meaningful connections across generations of St. Andrew's women: "I was so impressed with women I met at the event. The St. Andrew's experience is so unique, so I immediately felt like I had substantial common ground with the remarkable women I met. What astounded me the most was the diversity of career paths the women had taken. I left the event with the strong feeling that our St. Andrew's education prepares us to be writers, politicians, producers, teachers, environmentalists and business professionals. Their insight, advice and encouragement are invaluable as I prepare to enter college next fall." ❖



▲ Elizabeth Roach, Bernadette Devine '99, Serena Lehman '97 and Kate Werble '98 at the Women's Network event at Kate's gallery in January.

April/May					2010	
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9	10	11	12	13	1	4
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Handwritten note in red: Women's Network Weekend

On April 30 and May 1, 2010, St. Andrew's is hosting a Women's Network Weekend on campus. The weekend will include a dinner with the VI Form girls and a reception at Tad and Elizabeth's house. Meredith Warner '91, a surgeon who has served in Iraq, will be the keynote speaker. Visitors will also have a chance to attend classes and participate in discussion groups with current students, faculty, and each other. We hope you can join us for this exciting event.