

DONOR STORIES

DENNIS HARBAUGH & JUANITA WILLIAMS “Harbaugh-Williams Education Promise Fund”

Dennis Harbaugh and Juanita Williams grew up in dramatically different parts of the U.S., but their shared interests in family, community and spirituality brought them together. Establishment of the Harbaugh-Williams Education Promise Fund reflects their commitment to social justice and equal opportunity for people from all economic, social and cultural backgrounds.



JUANITA WILLIAMS & DENNIS HARBAUGH

Dennis was born on July 8, 1958, and raised on a dairy farm in Orange Township just inside the Waterloo city limits. He was responsible for feeding and taking care of cows and pigs before and after school. As he grew older, he spent long summer days planting oats, cultivating corn, baling hay and pulling weeds while walking soybean fields. From 4-6 p.m. each day, you could find him doing his favorite chore: milking cows in the milking parlor.

Like his parents (Merlin and Melba) and several extended relatives, Dennis attended the South Waterloo Church of the Brethren, where he absorbed a theology which merged faith and service. In junior high, an interest in philosophy and politics was sparked when he read books such as “Autobiography of a Yogi” and writings by Karl Marx. In high school, he played 1st chair trumpet in the West High Jazz Band and also performed with a local soul band which played at high school dances. He became a vegetarian, helped write and distribute an underground newspaper at school, wrote a regular column for the school paper, and generally questioned authority whenever and wherever he encountered it! After high school, Dennis spent a year doing volunteer service work in Mississippi. After saving up money while working at a Waterloo print shop, he moved to California and attended San Francisco State University. He graduated in 1983 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a minor in Economics.

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Juanita, on the other hand, was born in Beverly Hills, California, on May 27, 1956. Juanita’s mother, Sharon, was raised by her father on a rural South Dakota farm after her mother died shortly after giving birth. Sharon and her boyfriend, Wes Williams, married early and left for California with only the clothes on their backs and cookies Wes had pilfered from the bakery where he worked. Juanita was born when Sharon was 17 and was named after her late grandmother. In a few years, her parents divorced, and her mother eventually remarried Ken Hildreth. Together, they raised Juanita in Huntington Beach, California.

Juanita enjoyed a typical southern California upbringing, including picnics on the beach and strong friendships with neighborhood girlfriends -- cemented by lots of sunbathing and swimming in backyard pools. The Evangelical Free church she attended had a huge impact on her early years, and she spent many hours attending Bible study classes and evangelizing around Huntington Beach. She played clarinet in the high school band and loved traveling and camping with her family.

Juanita enrolled in Orange County Community College and Westmont College in Santa Barbara. She received

her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and spent one semester on an 'urban experience' in San Francisco which led to a faith more grounded in social justice. Some years later, their faith brought Juanita and Dennis to where they first met - the basement of a San Francisco Mennonite church. Dennis thought Juanita had the coldest hands he'd ever held, but after becoming jogging partners and friends, he was touched by her warm, loving heart.

They eventually moved back to the Midwest together. Juanita received a Bachelor of Science degree from an accelerated nursing program at St. Louis University, while Dennis moved to Des Moines and toiled on Tom Harkin's first US Senate campaign. They married on August 4, 1985 at Camp Pine Lake, a Church of the Brethren camp near Eldora, Iowa. Charles Nettleton, Dennis' uncle and one of the presiding ministers at their wedding, died of a stroke at the end of the service and thus when Juanita gave birth to their son Jeshua in 1988, he was given the middle name Charles. Their second son, Jordan Justice, arrived in 1991.

Dennis and Juanita feel extremely grateful for the upbringing supplied by their parents who led by example through being kind to others, serving their communities, and instilling in them the intrinsic value of hard work. This strong upbringing, along with their personal passions and principles compelled these two individuals from very different backgrounds to serve the community by providing opportunities to others.

Dennis' passions are public policy and politics. He served as a staff person or surrogate for many US Senate, gubernatorial and presidential candidates. For seven years, he served as Director of the Iowa Senate Democratic Research Staff at the Iowa legislature. In 1991, he and Juanita moved to Waterloo, where he worked at the UNI Institute for Decision Making, and for one year, directed a federal economic development program. In 1994, at the age of 36, he suffered a heart attack and was diagnosed with a rare heart condition, which requires him to be on disability. He continues to write on public policy issues for various newspapers and journals. He is a strong believer in the power of non-violent civil disobedience, and tends to be committed to ideas more than parties or candidates. He is active in the Unitarian-Universalist Society of Black Hawk County (UUSBHC), and took the lead in establishing their Endowment Fund in 2005. He loves spending time with his sons, especially throwing the football to them in the yard.

Juanita has broad experience in the health care field. She has worked in intensive care and mental health units, as well as home health care. She has been employed for 11 years as an Education Facilitator for Covenant Health System, and previously served as Coordinator for Women's Health Programs at Mercy Hospital in Des Moines. Her passion is public health, and she served on the board of the UNI Global Health Corps and is a leader in the Bright Moves Network, which helps immigrants adjust to life in the Cedar Valley. Like Dennis, Juanita is also very active in the UUSBHC, leading youth activities and facilitating a Conscious Living group. A strong protector of the environment and amateur gardener, Juanita is a professional chef of sorts - skills honed while working as a "super-chef" on cross-country camping tours for 18-30 year olds from around the world. She is infamous among family and friends for cooking from scratch and without recipes. Juanita always puts family ahead of her career, and is known by family and friends around Iowa simply as "Juan." Juanita loves to travel, and since she speaks some Spanish, she especially enjoys traveling to Central and South America.

Since 1993, Juanita and Dennis have owned and managed several small apartment buildings rented by UNI students. Equity in these properties allowed them to establish the Harbaugh-Williams Education Promise Fund in 2005. Upon their graduation from high school, this fund will provide college scholarship support to a group of students who are currently in 2nd grade at the Cunningham School for Excellence. The Waterloo School District will join with the broader community to provide parental support and individual and group mentoring for the identified class. Friends and community members will make additional financial contributions to the fund. Establishment of this fund with the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa provides an excellent way for Dennis and Juanita, as well as the entire community, to exhibit their passion for serving others and to help those in need receive a quality education.