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Gardner-Webb Rises to Rachel's Challenge

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Office of University Communications

November 18, 2011



University to Host “Rachel’s Challenge Day” this Spring for Regional High Schools

Before April 20, 1999, few people knew of Rachel Scott, a Colorado high-schooler with big dreams and a bigger heart. But for those who did, it’s no surprise that she has managed to change the world – they just didn’t imagine it happening like this.

Rachel was the first student murdered in the Columbine Massacre, when two embittered students killed 12 students and one teacher before turning their guns on themselves. In their wake, shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left only destruction and sorrow. But from that unthinkable tragedy, a miraculous hope was born from the life and legacy of their first victim.

In an essay written just weeks before her death called “My Ethics, My Codes of Life,” Rachel wrote, “I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go.”

“It was more than just a theory to Rachel,” said her father, Darrell Scott. She had already been practicing that kindness and compassion for several years in her school, reaching out to others.”

After her death, Rachel’s parents found more of Rachel’s journal entries and scribbled notes, each expressing her desire for her life to matter, for the “chain reaction” to begin with her. “These hands belong to Rachel Joy Scott,” she wrote as a 13-year-old after tracing her hands

on the back of an old dresser, “and will someday touch millions of people’s hearts.”

No one could have imagined that death would be the catalyst for launching Rachel’s chain reaction. But Rachel’s courage at Columbine High School has inspired millions of children around the world to follow her example of empathy, compassion and kindness. Determined to continue Rachel’s life work and inspired by her journal writings, Rachel’s parents founded Rachel’s Challenge, an outreach that uses Rachel’s message of hope and redemption to combat violence and bullying in middle and high schools.

To date, more than 1,000 schools around the world have taken up the Challenge, many of them hosting Rachel’s family for special assemblies and starting “Friends of Rachel’s” clubs to promote compassion and inclusiveness on their campuses.

When Gardner-Webb University took on the President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge earlier this year, it chose for its educational initiative to partner with Rachel’s Challenge. Now, Gardner-Webb trains students to offer support for middle and high schools in the region. This Spring, the University will also host a “Rachel’s Challenge Day” for regional high schools, giving students in our community an opportunity to join the chain reaction.

Schools interested in attending the “Rachel’s Challenge Day” at GWU should call 704-406-2239.

“The whole principle behind Rachel’s Challenge,” said Dr. Tracy Jessup, vice president for Christian life and service and senior minister to Gardner-Webb, “deals with acts of kindness, and reaching out to people who might have been isolated or looked down upon. One of our value statements involves respecting the dignity and worth of every human being, so this was just a natural fit to partner with Rachel’s Challenge and to help spread this beautiful message of hope in our local middle and high schools.”

For more information about Rachel’s Challenge, visit rachelschallenge.org.