

# Knotts Landing

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Another Knotts family adventure: Beth Knotts '79 and daughter Kiralee '16 take a kayak break during Move-In Day. Photo by Lisa Nugent, UNH Photographic Services

It's August 24, 2012, and the mother of four stands in front of SERC A residence hall. Beth Weston Knotts is moving her youngest daughter, Kiralee '16, into her new home.

Knotts lets her mind drift back to the day in 1975 when she arrived at UNH. "Have 37 years really gone by that fast?" she wonders. Beth Weston (she married Timothy Knotts in 1984) came to UNH to study wildlife management, but her own demeanor on that day could never have been described as wide-eyed and bushytailed as she beheld a campus that didn't look like the pictures she'd received in the mail.

No, Knotts had never actually visited campus before enrolling. And, yes, she was quite a homebody who preferred being at home, which was in West Long Branch, N.J.

“I became so homesick in Durham that, after a few weeks during my first semester, I told my parents I wanted to come home,” Knotts recalls. She also thought she’d have her parents buy her a UNH windbreaker as a memento of her trials. Upon hearing her daughter’s plan, Weston’s mother said something to the effect of “memento, shmemento” and that daughter would need to put in a bit more effort. “Mom told me, ‘No jacket unless you stay for at least one semester’,” recalls Beth. So she toughed it out, got the jacket, came back for a second semester, and made a new home in Durham.

A milestone along the journey of life comes full circle as Kiralee prepares to embark on her own journey of adventure and independence.

How will Kiralee deal with it all? Come to think of it, how will her mother?

The answer: get out the kayak.

A university can change a person, but it can also change the course of a family’s history. Once Beth survived her first-semester blues, she not only went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in wildlife management, she participated in the Semester at Sea program, earning credits while travelling the globe, learning foreign languages, and becoming a devotee of living life to its fullest.

After graduation, Knotts worked as a park ranger in the Everglades, Shenandoah, Yellowstone, Yosemite (where she and Timothy met), and Denali national parks. From Denali, the couple homesteaded on some “unoccupied land that was 90 miles from the nearest road” in Alaska.

Under the “home site” act, the property became theirs after five years of proving up on the claim. It’s still in the family and all of their children have spent time there.

When the Knotts decided to start a family, they moved back to New Jersey and Beth retooled to become a nurse, “helping people instead of animals,” as she says, for the next 29 years. She’s never lost her sense of adventure and passion for service. In 2010, she went to Haiti to help out in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake.

She hasn’t completely given up working with animals and the Knotts’ family car is used to haul dogs and gear for search and rescue back in West Long Branch.

Today, the big green Excursion carries only members of the Knotts family – and a blue kayak. Kiralee is coming off a week of living on Appledore Island in the Gulf of Maine as a participant in the UNH Marine Immersion. The weeklong program brings first-year students to the Isle of Shoals Marine Laboratory for the chance to undertake fieldwork with UNH faculty, read scientific literature, and write up their findings.

She’s a bit weary but definitely game to put in at the Durham Landing for a little spin down the Oyster River.

Kiralee says she chose to come to UNH because of the opportunity for marine research and to enroll in the immersion program. “I really liked the idea of being able to test the

waters, so to speak, as a future marine scientist” – and maybe getting some face time with a stingray.

“I took an oceanography course in high school and became interested in sting rays,” Kiralee, who took up scuba diving in the eighth grade, explains. “It was an epiphany. Of all the creatures in the sea, stingrays are what I love.”

At the Shoals lab, she studied crabs, snails, and algae, but, alas, no stingrays. She says the experience was still “fantastic and everything I hoped for,” and that she can’t wait to get back out again.

Kiralee already boasts a resumé replete with the sense of adventure her mom discovered at UNH. In the summer before her senior year in high school, Kiralee launched a program called Operation Health and Hygiene in rural South African communities. Prior to arriving at the Isles of Shoals, she worked with marine biologists in California’s Channel Island National Park, where she studied invasive species.

As Kiralee begins her new journey, she is not entirely without trepidation. “My high school class had only about 150 people,” she muses. But Kiralee seems to know what she wants and where she’ll fit in – a good start to be sure.

If you attend a sporting event this year, look for her when the Wildcat Marching Band takes the field. She’ll be in the horn section, where she plays alto saxophone. And, if the weather is cool, she’ll be wearing the windbreaker that Beth passed down to her – a gift she didn’t even have to ask for.

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