

# Always In Mind

## Legacy of Ben Keating '04 lives on in humanities scholarship

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**BEN KEATING '04/PHOTO COURTESY OF THE KEATING FAMILY**

Nearly 10 years after graduating from UNH with a degree in classics, Jessica Ouellette '11 still thinks about Capt. Benjamin Keating '04. She even remembers the day more than a decade ago when she was awarded the scholarship in his name by the UNH humanities department.

“Professor [Stephen] Trzaskoma was presenting the award, and I remember he got extremely choked up when he started talking about Ben,” she says. She didn’t often see

her professors show that kind of emotion in front of students, and it made an impression on her. “I remember feeling so honored; Ben clearly had such an impact on the faculty, and his family clearly feels a strong connection to UNH.”

That connection and inspiration are exactly what Ben’s parents, Beth and Ken Keating, his sister and the rest of his family and friends were hoping for when they created the Capt. Benjamin Keating Memorial Fund in 2008.

Keating, who graduated from UNH with degrees in history and classics, was killed in a roadside accident while serving as executive officer of A Troop, 3-71 Cavalry, Task Force Spartan, 10th Mountain Division in Kamdesh, Afghanistan in 2006.

His story was in the news again earlier this year; he was portrayed in the movie “The Outpost,” which tells the story of one of the bloodiest battles in the war in Afghanistan. The movie details Keating’s November 2006 death, which happened when his truck fell from a clifftop road during a convoy run. Soon after, the outpost was renamed Combat Outpost Keating in his honor, and three years later it would become the site of the [Battle of Kamdesh](#), during which members of his team mounted a successful defense against Taliban fighters.



And while it might have been a kick to talk to actor Orlando Bloom, who played Ben in the movie, the Keatings hope the film, and the book by Jake Tapper on which it is based, serve as a reminder to Americans about the bravery and sacrifices of military men and women like their son.

At UNH, Ben was inspired by his professors, including Prof. Trzaskoma, fellow faculty member John Rouman and others, who were significant contributors to the scholarship and strong advocates for getting others to donate.

Both his parents recall stories from Ben’s professors about how he challenged them in class, and they fully admit: their son wasn’t perfect. “We’re very proud of who Ben was, but he wasn’t a saint. He marched to a drumbeat only he could hear. He drove us nuts, and we know he drove his professors nuts,” jokes Ken. “But he was very principled and very thoughtful about what he would do. Once he made a commitment, he took the consequences, whatever they might be.”

Beth agrees.

“Ben really respected his UNH professors so much, it seemed to be the right way to honor him with his scholarship. We appreciated how he found himself at UNH; he realized that there was a lot more to the world than he had known during his time there,” she says.

As the head of the UNH College Republicans, Keating was often “alone on one side of the debates taking place on current events,” says Ken, but he never used his strong opinions to disrespect someone else’s stance. He would get into heated arguments, but

they would usually end with Ben encouraging his adversary to act on the strong beliefs they had been talking about, no matter what they were.

Cousin Geoff Grant '97 '03G says Keating's interest in the humanities as an academic area of study was the result of his belief in respecting all people and varying opinions. "Ben had a mature perspective in dealing with people that made him a different kind of leader, both as a student and in his military career," he recalls.

For Jessica Ouellette, Ben Keating and this scholarship were big part of what set her on a path to professional and personal success. From her first Latin 401 class her freshman year, she fell in love with the language, and she used her time at UNH to explore the history and culture connected to it while preparing for a teaching career. She's been teaching for 10 years and is currently a Latin teacher in her hometown high school in Taunton, Massachusetts.

Ouellette notes that UNH is where she met some of the most important people in her life — including friends in the NH Notables singing group, her roommate and even her future husband. She includes many faculty members on that list, as well; much like they did for Ben, the humanities faculty became mentors to her. "The reason I'm teaching Latin is because they are so passionate about what they do," she says. "I wouldn't be in a career that I love, with students I love, in a school I love, without them."

She says the Keating family's generosity, and Ben's story, especially, are things that inspire her to this day. "Receiving this scholarship and knowing the person behind it had such a strong impact on people around him at UNH, even though I never knew Ben, I'm so grateful."

*This story originally appeared in [IMPACT](#), UNH's publication celebrating philanthropy.*

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## THE COLLEGE LETTER



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