

Q & A about the Scholarship Program

By John Durand

Q. Why are scholarships going to non-family? I thought this was a scholarship program for Durand relatives? Durand relatives contribute the money, don't they?

A. Well, Durand relatives have been very generous with their contributions, but most of the scholarship money has actually come from friends and co-workers of JohnnyRiders, and from business sponsors of JohnnyRides.

Q. But why didn't I know that scholarships were going to go to non-family? I feel as if I was taken advantage of.

A. That's a good question, but the answer requires a little history, because the scholarship program has evolved.

The DHF board had often discussed being able to provide a little money to support research into Durand family history, etc. After my son John died in 2002 I brought up the idea at the summer board meeting of using money that friends and relatives had sent (about \$900 as I remember) to set up a scholarship program. After word got out to my Peace Corps friends about the proposed scholarship fund I received about \$600 more, so we had about \$1,500 in an as-yet undefined scholarship program.

In that fall's newsletter I wrote: "...so far the scholarship fund does not have an official name or guidelines for disbursement. Those details still need to be developed. We invite members to suggest ideas...What the scholarship fund would support also needs to be worked out." I also invited donations to the scholarship fund.

Q. So what happened?

A. Nothing. So far as I remember I heard nothing from anybody about ideas for the fund, and received no donations, but there may have been one or two.

Based on the discussion at the summer DHF board meeting, my son Peter and my sisters Ellen and Alice and I worked on a mission statement, administrative guidelines, and eligibility criteria for the scholarship program. The board approved these proposals at its October 2002 meeting. In the Winter 2002 newsletter we printed the Scholarship Program Guidelines. Contributions to the fund were invited. We announced that \$500 would be made available for distribution in 2003.

Q. And then what happened?

A. Nothing. No one applied for anything. And no one contributed.

Q. So what did you do?

A. Well, I probably made a mistake. I figured the scholarship program was going nowhere fast. For one thing, it seemed too piddly to matter. So I came up with the idea of riding my bike to raise money to build the fund. Being 68 years old, I was hoping to get sympathy enough to raise maybe five or six hundred dollars and light a little fire under the idea of a scholarship program. I announced my plan in the Winter 2003 newsletter. I invited people to join me, but I said I'd ride by myself if I had to.

Q. And then what happened?

A. Well, the first thing I knew I was in over my head. People were interested in joining the ride, but they wanted to know, How will it work? Where do we stay? Do you have pledge sheets? How do people make out their checks? Where will we eat? Are donations tax deductible? Who can get scholarships? What about insurance? Will we get tee shirts? What if

my bike breaks down? etc. I had never even been in a fund-raising bike ride, let alone organized one. And thus was born JohnnyRide. Of course, that name came later.

Q. And then what happened?

A. Interest in that first JohnnyRide and the money we raised exceeded all my expectations. After paying ride expenses the scholarship fund held over \$8,000. And folks were interested in another JohnnyRide! That was when I expanded my thinking. In the Spring 2005 newsletter I wrote, "I don't think it's unrealistic to have a goal of building our scholarship fund to \$50,000 by 2010." The idea was that with that much money we could award scholarships based on investment income from the fund. In the back of my mind I was thinking, by that time I'll be 74 years old and probably reaching the end of my biking days. If we don't get a decent amount of money put away by then the scholarship fund will probably just stagnate.

Q. And then what? With all that new money did you give out any scholarships?

A. We made one \$300 award. Kevin Durand was going to Norway to do graduate study and said he would use the scholarship money for travel to Renebu to research the Stafne connection to the Durands. That he did, and he solved a problem concerning the identification of a family trunk that had puzzled many of us for years. He also wrote a couple very nice articles for the newsletter about his time in Norway.

Q. That's all? Didn't anyone else get an award?

A. No, and the next summer when we were lined up to have our picture taken for the second JohnnyRide someone asked how many scholarships we had given out. I really felt the group's disapproval when I had to announce, "Just one," and then lamely added, "But no one else applied!" I learned later that some who supported the first JohnnyRide didn't support the second because we hadn't given out any scholarships. It was then that we revisited the scholarship guidelines.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Well, in our early discussions about the scholarship program we (and I mean the DHF board) saw the scholarship program pretty much as a way to fund research into family history or perhaps for someone to learn French or to take a course or two to finish a degree. We also said in the first guidelines that "Applicants are encouraged to be members of the Durand Heritage Foundation." The idea all along was that anyone could apply, but I think most people thought that if only Durand relatives knew about the program only Durand relatives would apply.

Q. So what did you change?

A. Well, first of all, I need to say that we had gotten a lot of feedback about the scholarship program from JohnnyRide contributors who were not relatives. They let us know that they were not interested in supporting a program that helped just the Durand family. They said they could just as well give the money to their own relatives. They would only support a scholarship program that was open to anyone. As we got most of our donations from those people I thought their point was well taken. I also figured that once the fund reached \$50,000 and we were no longer asking the public for funds we could change the scholarship criteria to be more restricted if we wanted to.

So in consultation with my family I rewrote the guidelines and made clear in the promotional material for JohnnyRide that anyone could apply for a scholarship if they were enrolling in an accredited academic program. In other words, we got beyond the idea that awards would go just to someone studying French or taking a course. We were beginning to

see the scholarship program as a way to help any young person in his or her academic pursuit so long as the program was accredited. However, we continued to say that financial assistance was available for research and writing about Durand family history.

We also rewrote the eligibility guidelines so they were less ambiguous. The revised eligibility rule now read "Awards are made without regard to race, creed, color, gender or family relationship."

Q. Weren't those big changes?

A. Yes, but we were getting nowhere with the old model. I'm aware now that some don't like those changes.

Q. So then what?

A. Well, I was also concerned that if we didn't start awarding scholarships we would lose contributors. Plus we would jeopardize our tax exempt status, because we can't just accumulate money for a good cause and not do anything with it. So, to make the program more visible and help satisfy those who wanted us to award scholarships (and not just to family) we posted the guidelines on the Foundation website along with application materials. I'm pretty sure that's how we came to receive applications last year from young people who were not relatives...through the website.

We received five applications in all, and awarded a \$300 scholarship to each of them. All five seemed to be really great young people. Only two were Durand relatives.

Q. What's with all this "I" stuff? It sounds like you're running the scholarship program all by yourself.

A. Well, I practically am, and I don't like it.

Q. So what's the status of the scholarship program now?

A. Well, for one thing we had a big drop-off in both riders and contributions for JohnnyRide 2006. In 2005 we raised another \$6,000 but in 2006 we had only six riders and we'll be lucky we'll clear \$2,500. On this year's JohnnyRide my son Peter gave me a mock award to hang around my neck. He said it was for putting in 20 hours of effort for every rider.

Anyway, if we give out another \$1,500 in scholarships next spring that doesn't leave much to add to the scholarship fund. Nonetheless, I've posted the scholarship application materials for 2007-2008 on the DHF website, so we'll see what happens. I hope we don't have to disappoint a lot of good applicants by getting applications we can't fund, but I suppose that's bound to happen.

Q. So where do you think the scholarship fund is going? Anywhere?

A. Well, I'm not comfortable with the administration of the scholarship fund. In the beginning it was a brand new idea that involved just a few hundred dollars and the board thought our family should handle it. But we now have over \$15,000 in the scholarship fund and I would like to see a more representative structure for the administration of the program. As I said earlier, I don't like that I seem to be running the whole program. (I should note that our family doesn't handle the money. Mike Durand does that as DHF treasurer.)

Also, we look to be in something of a rough patch. I'm aware that we (and I mean the extended Durand family) lack a common understanding of what the scholarship program is all about. That situation has hurt support for the program among Durand relatives.

But when I think of how different people seem to look at the scholarship program I'm reminded of one of my favorite little stories about a traveler in the Middle Ages who comes upon a big building site. It was probably in France. Curious, he asks a man who is laying

bricks, “What’s going on here?” The guy answers, “Well, duh! can’t you see? I’m laying bricks.” The traveler thinks to himself, Well, duh! I can see that! So he asks a second man who is laying bricks what’s going on. Without turning around the guy shrugs and answers, “What does it look like? I’m laying up a wall.” And the traveler thinks, Well, I can see that! So he asks a third man, “Can you tell me what’s going on here?” The guy turns around with his trowel in one hand and a brick in the other and a big, proud smile on his face and says, “I’m building a cathedral!”

I like to see myself as one of those guys who is building a cathedral. It may take years and years and I may never actually see it, but I can see it now in my mind’s eye, and so I cheerfully labor at laying my bricks.