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From 1967 to 2022: A Student's Deep Roots to the RWU Campus

Before stepping foot onto RWU's campus, freshman business major Lily Ramsay held a deep history and connection to the University, making it a true home away from home



Lily and Enzly Ramsay inside the Center for Global and Community Engagement at RWU, which once belonged to their family.

September 11, 2018 | By Courtney Dell'Agnese '19

BRISTOL, R.I – When selecting a college, students seek a fit that feels just like home. But for freshman business major Lily Ramsay, choosing Roger Williams University already meant coming home. That's because the building known on campus as the "Farmhouse" – the Center for Global and Community Engagement – was once the childhood home of Lily's father. And as she begins her first semester, Lily aspires to continue the family's business legacy built on the very land the University sits on today.

When Lily first stepped into the Farmhouse a few days before classes began, it was hard for her to imagine it as her father's home, transformed into office spaces and crammed with desks and meeting areas. But as she made her way into the living room it felt more like home. From the countless photographs she's seen of the house, she noted that the living room still has the original moldings, hardwood floors, brick fireplace and mantle, and picture-window seat. The entire upstairs, according to her father, looked exactly the same as he remembers.

"I could totally picture my grandmother sitting in front of the window with her typewriter, as my dad always told me she did," Lily said. "I never got to meet my grandparents on my dad's side so it meant a lot to be able to see the house and get a glimpse into how they all lived."



The Ramsay siblings in the area where the Marine & Natural Sciences building is now located, in 1972.

What may have been glimpses into their lives for Lily, however, were cherished memories for her father, Enzly. In the late 1950s, Enzly's father came to Ferrycliffe Farm when it was still a working dairy farm owned by the Fulton family. More than a decade later, Enzly recalls his earliest memories of watching the first few buildings being constructed when Roger Williams College (at the time) purchased a large swath of the Fulton family's farm and moved the campus from Providence to Bristol.

The Ramsays continued to own a chunk of the land around the Farmhouse, raising cattle and chickens, mowing vast fields, and tending the horse stables. Fortunately for Enzly and his siblings, it wasn't just about work. In their free time they roamed the grounds, swam in the bay, and rode the horses.

"The University was just always there, although there was a lot more land than there were buildings [at the time]," recalls Enzly. "Growing up, it wasn't a working dairy farm anymore so we treated it like it was all ours. The 70 acres of land that hadn't been sold to the University," where North Campus is now located, "was my backyard."

No matter how much campus has changed since then, the memories of what it used to be will always remain with Enzly. Now with the same beautiful backyard at her disposal, it's Lily's turn to create memories.

Connections Both On and Off Campus

To begin her journey, Lily participated on Aug. 27 in Feinstein Community Connections Day – a beloved tradition where the entire freshman class devotes a day of service at non-profit agencies across Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts to immerse them within their new home and foster a passion for giving back to the community in a meaningful way. Lily pulled weeds and cleared debris to make space for new plantings at a community garden in Pawtucket, R.I. She says this experience set the tone that Roger Williams is about much more than receiving an education – that it's about "learning to be connected to the community and becoming a valuable member of society."

A Bristol native, Lily was fascinated to learn she'd be kicking off her first college experience, not only by paying it forward to the community but also exploring a direct tie-in to her family's legacy. The Farmhouse, which houses the Feinstein Center for Service Learning & Community Engagement, serves as the epicenter for the Feinstein Community Connections program.

"It's nice to know that the program comes out of here and you're doing something good for the community," Lily said. "I think it's great that that's what this building has turned into."

Because of her deep roots, it was always on her mind to come to RWU. But it was her late grandfather who solidified the decision for her. Not only was he the last manager of Ferrycliffe Farm, Enzly's father was also a volunteer firefighter with the Bristol Fire Department, which earned Lily the Bristol Memorial Grant, a four-year, full-tuition scholarship.

"The fact my father grew up here and because of my grandfather I got the scholarship, it all just made sense to come here," Lily said. "It's almost like an extension of home and feels really comforting knowing that all this history is here."

In the Family Footsteps



Enzly "Jimmy" Ramsay worked as farm manager at Ferrycliffe Farm from 1957-62.

It's not just her family history that Lily hopes to come full circle with at RWU. By pursuing a business degree, she sees herself one day taking over the family landscaping business just as her father did in 1985.

"In theory, it's like my grandfather's paying for my education because of the scholarship and it's almost like I'm repaying him by continuing his legacy with the family business," Lily said.

And while the original draw to RWU may have been her family's legacy, what also interested her was the ability to enroll in the undeclared business program. She's excited to spend her first year exploring all the facets of business at the Mario J. Gabelli School of Business before she chooses the major she's most passionate about.

As she sat in the Farmhouse living room with her college career ahead of her, Lily couldn't wait to start her journey at RWU and discover her passion in the same place her grandfather and father did. And maybe one day, 30 years from now, it will be Lily's turn to reminisce inside the Farmhouse as her own children make a home at RWU.

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