



Alumni Spotlight

Aaron Dunn '02, '12M

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A Lesson in History

As a young person, Aaron Dunn '02 '12M found a role model in the Civil War general Joshua Chamberlain. Starting at the age of ten, Aaron researched members of his family who had fought on both sides of the struggle, but always felt the strongest affinity for Chamberlain, with whom he shares a birthday. As an adolescent growing up in south central Pennsylvania, Dunn participated in reenactments as a member of the 20th Maine Infantry regiment, Chamberlain's most famous unit. The more he learned, the more of the general he saw in himself—likes, dislikes, difficulties, and goals—and it was the inspiration he drew from Chamberlain that kept him focused, especially when he struggled in high school. Chamberlain continues to inspire Dunn even now, and even across centuries the two men's lives are intertwined.

Dunn chose a career in education, which was also Chamberlain's first calling. He works as an assistant instructor at Harford Community College in Bel Air, Md. Both his bachelor's and master's degrees were earned at Millersville. He chose to study at MU for a variety of reasons. Members of his family had already attended, and he said they gave the school "very high reviews." He needed reasonable tuition and a commutable campus. Most importantly, he knew that the teaching program at Millersville was "first rate." He chose to study education with a focus on social studies. When asked why, he explained that "If you don't do what you love, then that continued sense of initiative, zealousness to grow and learn, and that fervent spark to excel in one's work begins to dry up. If you're going to spend eight hours a day, five days a week at your job, do what you enthusiastically love."

In his studies, Dunn was most inspired by Dr. Onek Adyanga of the MU History Department. Dr. Adyanga was less concerned with the particulars of any individual assignment, and more concerned with what deeper lessons his students had gained. "In other words, how can you pass this gained knowledge onto future generations? What can we understand about different perspectives from people different from ourselves? We gain a deeper respect for other cultures when we can see the world through their eyes," he explained. "Personally, that is how I teach, and how, in my opinion, education ought to be passed on." Dunn thanks Dr. Ronald Frankum, another Millersville history professor, for helping him to become a better writer of historical scholarship.

In addition to his work as an educator, Dunn is a collector of Civil War history. The highlight of his efforts thus far is the acquisition of a pair of leather boots once owned and worn in battle by Chamberlain. Only two pairs of such boots are known to exist. With the help of another MU alum, Jolene Keefer '10, he obtained

the artifacts from a private collector in Maine, hoping to both preserve them and make them available for the public to view. After considering several options, Dunn chose to loan them indefinitely to Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. The park commemorates the location of the final battle of the Civil War, fought on April 9, 1865. Chamberlain was chosen by Ulysses S. Grant to accept the surrender of Confederate infantrymen that day.



Aaron Dunn '02, '12M and Jolene Keefer '10 are shown with Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlains boots.

Dunn has turned his attention over the years to more recent historical artifacts, too, specifically by purchasing and restoring a 1969 Dodge Charger. When he found it, it was in awful shape. “Friends, and even family, flat out told me ‘It’ll never see the road again.’” Seven years later, it has not only seen the road, but amassed nearly 20 awards as a show car. Dunn managed this restoration work at the same time as he earned his graduate degree at Millersville. He’s considering returning to MU to earn his doctorate degree, too.

Dunn describes the course his life has taken, from nearly dropping out of high school to the many successes he’s achieved, as “nothing less than a miracle,” in which “God provided me the tenacity and determination to succeed.” When asked what advice he can provide for current students, Dunn responded that “regardless of whatever life’s tasks lay ahead—whether they are working in academics or rebuilding an entire car from the ground up—strength of mind and fortitude are the keys to success.” His life and career in education echo well Joshua Chamberlain’s famous words: “The power of noble deeds is to be preserved and passed on to the future.”