The Curtis Fund needs your help to continue its mission assisting those who need financial resources. Whether you are a former grantee, a family member of a recipient, or a friend of the Fund, you can make a difference for a student just like Leilani Pearl. Please consider making a donation to the Emma Curtis Fund today in whatever amount feels right to you. Every contribution—large or small—matters and you will be helping a student when help is needed most. Thank you so much!

All contributions are tax deductible to the limit of the law. Please donate online at www.thecurtisfund.org/support/donate-now or send your check in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you!

Michelle Obama—a Story of a First-Generation College Student

Peter Slevin, a national political correspondent for The Washington Post, has written a new book Michelle Obama: A Life. In it, he writes about the challenges faced by a young Michelle Robinson in overcoming her family’s past—a past that included roots in slavery and segregation, her grandparent’s move from the South to Chicago, her grandmother’s job cleaning the homes of wealthy white people, and her father working the overnight shift tending boilers for the water plant making $858 a month, just over $10,000 a year. For her parents, one thing was certain—somehow Michelle and her brother were going to get a college education. Along with her parent’s determination, Michelle Robinson also had the love and support of her extended family and other opportunities, such as piano lessons and enrollment in a magnet school. As we know, Michelle Robinson Obama has done quite well in life.

In many ways, Michelle Obama’s story mirrors the stories of our Curtis Fund grantees. She was born in a working class family, lived in a small apartment, and neither of her parents went to college. She was a first-generation college student. If you look at our Curtis Fund recipients, you’ll discover the similarities. However, many of our grantees face additional challenges that Michelle Obama did not. Many come from single-parent households, have lived in poverty, some have lived in foster care, and some have been homeless, even living in the back seat of a car. Most of our grantees have persevered under the most difficult circumstances to reach their goal of getting a post-secondary education.

Michelle Obama’s grandparents and parents told her that her destiny was not determined the day she was born. Despite racism and low income, they knew she could achieve more. Through The Curtis Fund, our grantees receive much needed financial assistance. Through our partnership with VSAC (Vermont Student Assistance Corporation), our Curtis Fund recipients receive support and guidance. Together, we tell our students, “You can do it if you are determined and we’ll help you every step of the way.”

“For her parents, one thing was certain—somehow Michelle and her brother were going to get an education.”
— PETER SLEVIN

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
See how on page 4!
Leilani Pearl is grateful for the support

Leilani Pearl is grateful for the support she received in making her dream for “a rewarding career and financial stability” come true. It does “take a village” and Leilani received encouragement from teachers, college professors, and her mom, guidance from VSAC, and financial assistance from The Curtis Fund to attend college and graduate school creating opportunities for a successful future.

Leilani’s mother was a single parent who did not attend college, but like Michelle Obama’s mother, told her that she would do whatever she could to put her daughter through college. Leilani said, “My mother knew an education would open pathways for me that she never had access to.”

And opening pathways is exactly what happened for Leilani. “The Curtis Fund opened my eyes to a whole new world academically. I met like-minded folks who loved to read literature and inspiring professors who helped me think critically. Because of the Fund, I was able to attend UVM and in my junior year, I studied abroad at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England. Not only was this a transformative life event for me, I also met my current husband there!”

Leilani goes on to say, “I had several teachers in high school, college and graduate school who saw something in me and pushed me to pursue my interests in writing and teaching. These are the teachers who gave me books to read outside of the classroom and encouraged me to never stop asking questions and learning.” With the encouragement from her college professors, Leilani enrolled in the Master of Arts in English Literature Program at Boston College and received her MA in 2000.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without The Curtis Fund. It allowed me to see worlds beyond my small hometown and spawned a life-long love of learning and enrichment.”

— LEILANI PEARL

in the Master of Arts in English Literature Program at Boston College and received her MA in 2000.

We All Need a Little Help from our Friends.

This winter I had a very challenging project to complete for the Fund. For 39 years I worked in organizations that had vast resources, human and otherwise, which could be enlisted to work on a difficult task. But, The Curtis Fund has very limited resources, including no staff, for example. If anything needs to get done, I have to rely on the good graces of volunteers and outside help.

Fortunately the job got done. While working on the project, I often thought about the 450+ Curtis Fund grantees who were in school somewhere in the United States, tirelessly working alone to stay there, but who had toiled even harder to get there in the first place.

Most of our award recipients did not have college on their radar back in middle school, but thanks to a teacher, a counselor, or a guiding hand from somewhere, they began a journey that culminated with acceptance into a post secondary educational institution. The amount of time and effort, both on the student’s part and mentors who believed in their charges’ abilities, were enormous.

Low-income, first-generation students face tremendous barriers to academic and social integration at the collegiate level, often working one to two jobs combined with family responsibilities at home. Their resources are limited. One unexpected event—a faulty transmission, a sick child, job layoff—can endanger their college career, possibly indefinitely.

Our scholars do not have the social capital that most middle-income students can call upon to see them through these crises. When I needed help with my project, I called on one of our vendors for assistance. Many of us have a huge social safety net, but our award recipients get through each day often without one. The $4,000 award we provide them each year, thanks to the generosity of Emma Eliza Curtis, gives them a chance at a better life, one they feel worth fighting for.

Joseph Boutin, Chair Curtis Fund Board of Trustees

ARE YOU A CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENT OF A CURTIS FUND GRANT? SHARE YOUR STORY!

GO TO www.thecurtisfund.org/support/share-your-story

Donations to The Curtis Fund make a difference for a lifetime

With your donation to The Curtis Fund, you can make a positive impact on the lives of Vermont students, just as Emma Eliza Curtis did. Every gift—large or small—is tax deductible and helps Vermonters achieve their dreams for education and a better life. All contributions to The Curtis Fund are tax deductible to the limit of the law.

Donate by going online to www.thecurtisfund.org/support/donate-now, or by sending your check to: The Curtis Fund, Merchants Trust Company, P.O. Box 8490, Burlington, VT 05402-8490