

Boxing champ Amelia Moore returns to where dreams began: Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School

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Students wait their turn to talk with boxing champion Amelia Moore between assemblies at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School Tuesday. Moore graduated from OHCHS in 2008 and has gone on to international success in the ring. *Nicole Carter / Advertiser Democrat*

PARIS — Amelia Moore is an internationally accomplished athlete. The boxer just returned home from Ecuador, where she won a bronze medal. She is the current U.S. women's boxing champion in her weight class and was an alternate at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

Moore has beaten the competition (she has the most knock outs on record in her class). She has beaten COVID (last year she feared her lungs were too damaged to continue in the sport). She has beaten the odds (as a teen growing up in Norway, Maine, she emancipated herself from a dysfunctional home).

And she has a memory of a kind soul who helped her when she needed it most. Moore does not know his name, but as a child she saw him every week and he was a constant in her troubled life, at the deli counter in the Oxford Hannaford.

On Tuesday, Moore returned to where it all began for her, at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School, to address middle and high school students on how the Oxford Hills community made it possible for her to fight her way to the top of the world.

"A child adrift is one of the most lonely, isolating places you can be," Moore said, following the second of three assemblies of the day. "You don't have that tether. So the opportunity to be a part of something, to have structure that grounds you again. That's what (community) brought for me.

"I'd walk into the grocery store and there was a gentleman who worked at the deli for years. From the time before I could even remember elementary school and all the way through high school, I would walk in and I would have these moments of real, true kindness. 'You did great at your track meet! I saw you in the paper!' he would say. Those are the moments where you don't fall through the cracks. The most important thing for a child is to feel loved, and to be seen by someone else."

That person, who had no relationship or personal investment in Moore or her future, showed her moments where, in her loneliness, she felt seen. For a young Moore, trips to Hannaford were a big deal.

Moore also credits other adults with making it possible to “keep moving forward” since her childhood, a phrase that has become her motto. Her violin teacher at Guy E. Rowe Elementary, Mr. Tift, was one. And her high school guidance counselor, Mr. Bickford.

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Paul Bickford, now the director at Oxford Hills Tech School, introduced Moore to her audience.

“Amelia had a goal to attend the U.S. Naval Academy,” Bickford told the students. “She didn’t have great grades, she wasn’t taking all the challenging courses. But she had to find a way to get to her goal. She used all the resources available to her here. She was emancipated in high school. She did this on her own.”

Moore then took the stage to talk about the importance of setting goals and grabbing opportunities that propelled her from a troubled childhood to become a world class athlete. At 16 she saw that her resources would not allow her to go on to college so she set her sights on the military.

Bickford suggested she considered the military academy instead of enlisting. After doing some research, Moore decided she liked the sharpness of sailor’s dress whites. Watching the movie Annapolis, starring James Franco, sealed the deal for her – she set her sights on the Naval Academy.

“I had to take the SATs five times to get in,” Moore said. “That’s insane. My first was because we all had to take it. I was not prepared for a four-hour exam. I took them again. And again. It’s the theme of my life. Every time I hear ‘no’, I try it again until they say ‘yes’.”

Once in at the academy Moore began her physical training classes: swimming, wrestling and boxing. Since seeing the James Franco movie, she had was drawn to boxing only to find out when she got to the school that there was no training available for women’s competitive boxing.

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“It was the reason I was there,” she said. “I wanted to serve my country, and attend the school, but that [boxing] was what I wanted to do. I didn’t take ‘no’ for the answer.”



OHCHS alum Amelia Moore shows off her most recent hardware after winning bronze at the Continental Boxing Championship in Ecuador last month. Moore will soon be off to Istanbul, Turkey to compete in the International Women's Boxing Championships next May. *Nicole Carter / Advertiser Democrat*

First-year naval academy students, plebes, were not allowed to leave the campus or have a vehicle. But Moore would sneak off campus and run to her car, which she kept about a mile away, and drive away to work with a coach willing to train females.

Health issues ended Moore's military career early. Boxing became her new goal. She credits the resources she found at OHCHS and the community with giving her the ability to do it.

"In the position I was in," she said to the crowd of students, "Sitting where you are sitting. We come from this small, rural town in western Maine. I don't think I could have done it if I'd been in that position in a big city. I would have fallen through the cracks. One of the most tragic things is when a young life, with all their potential, falls through the cracks.

"Whatever that creativity, whatever that spark that you have inside you ... we come from the backwoods of Maine, but there is a community here that has the ability to lift up those that want to be lifted. I had the opportunity from those who gave me kindness, like the lady in the lunchroom who gave me milk for my tea while I was running around, working two jobs and falling asleep in class.

"Every opportunity you're given in life, it's up to you to kick the door and walk through it. Nobody can make you do it. It's got to be you on your two feet. That's the power of it, but it's in those little moments of guidance. If you're seeking to find the answers? They're out there. You just have to be willing to be present and accept those moments as they come."

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