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My name is Jamie Barton, and I am a 2004 graduate of Shorter University. I write today because I love Shorter University very much, and I am very concerned about the direction in which she is being driven.

I came to Shorter as an introverted girl with a horribly low self-esteem. You see, I didn't have many friends in high school. This probably had a lot to do with the fact that I was more interested in performing arts than cheerleading, and my best friend was gay (in a very "straight"-laced community.) I learned, as many teenagers learn, that people can be cruel. For me, I felt the cruelty of my peers in not being socially accepted. I felt that in order for me to be accepted, I'd need to fit a number of parameters – and I was comfortable with none of them.

Even while I was in high school, Shorter was a haven for me. Starting in the 10th grade, I attended every Shorter performance I could. I loved seeing shows from the theater and musical theater departments (Stardust was one of my favorites), and hearing Shorter Chorale literally changed my life. I remember hearing Kellie Jenkins (a student at Shorter at the time, and a wonderful mezzo-soprano) sing on a Chorale concert, and for the first time in my life, it clicked: I wanted to be an opera singer. I started to attend every Shorter College program for prospective students in the performing arts that one could attend (Music 1-on-1, and an unfortunately short-lived but really wonderful choral summer camp.) Even though I was only a high schooler, I made friends with Shorter students. This was especially amazing to me, considering that I had such a difficult time making friends with the people with whom I'd spent my entire life. Shorter University, even before I was a student at that wonderful college, was already sharing its magic with me.

That magic never stopped working for me. The girl who walked through the doors of the Minor Fine Arts building on her first day of school in the fall of 2000 was a changed woman when she graduated in the spring of 2004. I was no longer shy and introverted because I had been taught something of self-worth. Academically, my professors taught us to never settle for mediocrity, and to always strive for nothing less than perfection. There were times when I truly thought I could never make it as an opera singer. Look where I came from... a farm girl with no foreign language or classical training to speak of... why should I expect to even make it in this field? But, it was in those moments that my friends – friends, which I had never had many of in my life, but now I had in abundance – would hold me up and make me keep going.

I am not only grateful that my Shorter family upheld me through those formative years of my career... I am lucky that such a place existed. Because I began my training in the arts at Shorter University, my career has virtually skyrocketed. After Shorter University, I went on to pursue my Masters degree at one of the top schools for vocal performance in the nation. I went directly from grad school into one of the top in-house opera training programs in the nation. My first job after leaving the in-house opera training program was at the number one opera house in the nation, and my second job was at one of the greatest concert halls in the world. In the seven years since graduating from Shorter University, I have made debuts in major houses across the United States, Canada, and Europe, all to critical acclaim. In a market where opera houses are closing left and right, I keep getting jobs. I keep getting jobs because I am good at my job. I am

good at my job because my education in this field is unparalleled. The faculty at Shorter are a large part of why I am so successful. My friends from Shorter continue to be my pillars of support. They are my family.

This begs the question: why were the people at Shorter such a rare and wonderful bunch of people? I strongly believe it is because they were treated as such. I once asked the great opera director Peter Sellars why he showed so much love to his colleagues. You see, he is known for treating every single person with whom he works with an incredible amount of love and respect... hugs and kisses are quite the norm in his rehearsals. His response? "I've learned in my life that if you treat people like a treasure, then that is what they are."

I've always felt that Shorter University had something special, some sort of magic. After all this time, I think I've finally figured it out: I was treated like a treasure. I think I can accurately say that I wasn't the only person with this experience. I often hear alumni speak of the time they had at Shorter and the friendships they cultivated there in loving terms. People speak of Shorter as one speaks of family, and right now, people feel the need to defend the legacy of Shorter as they would defend the name of their family.

Ever since the Lifestyle Statement and other documents were released by the current Shorter University administration and Board of Trustees on October 25th, I've watched and listened as faculty, staff, students, and alumni have protested the very existence of these documents. I've raised my voice with the thousands of others who feel that this is wrong, and I've watched and waited as this new administration has ignored every dissenting voice. I've listened as they have invoked the name of Jesus to defend their actions, despite the fact that this is the furthest thing from acting with "Christ-like" love and compassion as one could get. I've watched as they have worked to systematically dismantle the institution of higher learning that I love – the place that taught me that I was acceptable as person and worthy of friendship and love because the Shorter faculty and staff treated me that way. I've watched as the new administration has treated the faculty and staff members, many of whom have given decades of their lives to Shorter University, as something less than a treasure... as garbage, to be thrown away.

Shorter University gave me so much. I love Shorter so much that I can't sit by and watch while the very magic that changed me is drained from her. I can't just sit by and watch while the current administration and Board destroy the 138-year legacy that every faculty, staff, and student body member worked to build. There isn't very much that I can do on my own, but at the very least, I can shout and I am shouting now. I have to try and make sure that prospective students and donors know what they're giving money and time to. I have to fight to make sure that, at the very least, people have access to this information. I have to do this, because I know for certain that the people in charge of Shorter are working equally hard to smooth this over and to make it look as though nothing ever happened.

I rest assured in the knowledge that I am not the only one who loves Shorter. I am not the only one who feels they must fight to keep her alive. I invite you to stand with us.

In solidarity and love,  
Jamie Barton