



Rachel Brickman (left) says her rotation with breast cancer surgeon and Geisel professor Dr. Kari Rosenkranz (right) helped her decide to pursue a career in surgery.

SYVERTSEN FELLOW IS OPTIMISTIC AND UNDAUNTED

FROM THE TIME SHE HAD A DOCTOR'S PLAYSET AS A CHILD, Rachel Brickman ('17), knew what she wanted to do with her life. "I've always wanted to be a doctor," she says. That dream will come true when she graduates in June 2017.

Chosen as the 2016-17 Rolf C. Syvertsen Fellow, Brickman has been recognized for her scholarly excellence, commitment to her community, and love of learning and medicine. But her background didn't make achieving her lifelong ambition of becoming a doctor a sure thing. The only child of a single mother, she grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, without a lot of money. Thanks to her mother, Sheri Brickman, and her own hard work, Rachel persevered.

"Mom didn't go to college, but she's a rock star," Brickman says. "She encouraged me to dream big. We're still very close and I talk to her every day."

When Brickman was in junior high, her mother decided to move their small family so Rachel could attend one of the best high schools in the state, South Forsyth High School in Cumming, Georgia. "At the time, I was not pleased to have to leave my

friends," Brickman admits.

The move paid off. Brickman earned top grades. Meanwhile her mom did her own research and discovered QuestBridge, a non-profit organization that connects high-achieving students with scholarships and educational opportunities at leading colleges and universities. Through QuestBridge, Brickman received a full scholarship to Amherst College.

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Amherst was a defining experience for Brickman, who majored in classics. "I got the best education ever," she says. When she arrived in Hanover, "I was still obsessed with Amherst," she says with a laugh. "But every year I've been here I've known that the Geisel community is the right one for me. Our relationships here are just as strong."

Brickman and fellow Geisel medical

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student Ben Atkinson ('17) became engaged in the fall of 2015. Since Ben was a year behind her, she took time off after her third year to do research and match her schedule to his. The couple will marry this spring in Vermont, with their classmate Wesley Armstrong officiating.

Brickman enjoyed her year of research, working with Dr. Gina Adrales in bariatric surgery and Dr. Stefan Holubar in colorectal surgery at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, and her name will appear on two published papers.

Coming back to class for her final year of medical school has been great too. "Having everyone back together is super fun, especially since we're about to scatter across the country for residency," says Brickman.

In July, Brickman will begin her residency in general surgery at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. "You work crazy long hours in surgery and are on your feet for that time. I was so tired during my surgery rotation," she says. "But I always wanted to talk about my day afterward. That's what convinced me." That and working alongside Dr. Kari Rosenkranz, a breast cancer surgeon at Dartmouth-Hitchcock and an associate professor of surgery at Geisel.

Brickman and Atkinson (who will also be training at Brigham), are now preparing for the big changes coming to their lives. But just like the Syvertsen Fellows who have preceded her, Brickman remains undaunted.

"I'd rather do what I love," she adds, "even if it is hard, than settle for something less demanding because it promises a more manageable schedule."

NANCY FONTAINE