

A portrait of a young woman with voluminous, curly brown hair, smiling gently at the camera. She is wearing a light blue denim jacket over a blue and white vertically striped dress. She has large hoop earrings and a necklace with a circular pendant. She is sitting on a dark, patterned carpet in front of a large, abstract yellow and orange artwork. The entire image is framed by a decorative border with a repeating pattern of teal, orange, and white shapes.

Student in Focus:
Jondayah Martin



“EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”

- Nelson Mandela

Jondayah Martin was used to doing well at school.

Growing up on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait as the daughter of a teacher, she earned high marks all through primary school - especially for English.

It's one of the reasons why she received a Yalari Scholarship to attend one of Queensland's best boarding schools - following in her mother's footsteps to St Margaret's Anglican Girls School in Brisbane.

“It was a huge change,” says Jondy, “from running around barefoot on TI in a singlet and basketball shorts to a mainstream city school where I had to wear brown polished shoes and a panama hat every day.

“But the memory that really stands out is the day I got my first mark back from my English teacher: It was a ‘C’.

“I was shocked. I'd gone from being one of the smartest kids in my class to someone who was struggling academically.”

Jondy's mother, Michelle Martin, runs the Montessori program at Tagai Primary School on Thursday Island. She was the first woman in her family to go to university and was determined to set Jondy on that same educational pathway. You can almost hear Michelle speaking through her daughter as Jondy relates how she refused to let that disappointing English mark define her.

“I wasn't going to let that ‘C’ be the measure of how much potential I have or what I can achieve,” says Jondy.

“Having a mother who works in education - who always talked to me about having a ‘growth mindset’ - made me realise that this is one of those situations where you really have to push yourself.

“And so I reached out, asked for help and got involved in all the opportunities that St Margaret's offered.

“I signed up for debating; I played hockey and basketball; I ended up on the School Council; and went on a student exchange to live in Japan for a few months.

“By the time I reached Year 10, I'd pushed my grades up to a comfortable A / B average and was confident in my ability to articulate what I wanted to say and do what I wanted to do.”

The other challenge for Jondy was to stay connected to her culture.

“Culture is part of everything in the Torres Strait,” she says. “It's embedded into the school curriculum and part of everyday life. Even at church, we sing Islander songs in language.

“It also extends to respecting our Elders and being surrounded by family so it's a very comfortable way to grow up.

“As a teenager in Brisbane, it was easy to get caught up with the latest trends and what was happening at school. When I'd go home, my friends would see the change in me. They'd say, ‘You're not Torres Strait Islander anymore’.

“It was really hard - and I realised that if I wanted to hold onto that cultural connection, I'd have to fight for it. It has been a process of learning to walk between two worlds.”

Jondy's transition to university life has been a lot easier. She commenced at Bond at the start of the year after receiving one of Blue Sky Alternative Investments' Indigenous Scholarships to study Communication.

“I've only been on campus one semester but I've already got a really cool group of friends here,” she says.

“There's a strong feeling of family - that we're all empowering each other and that one person's accomplishment is an achievement for all.

“Most importantly, we all have that crucial drive and ambition; we're all here because we know that the only way to get what we want is through education.

“I'm so grateful for the opportunities that St Margaret's and the Yalari Scholarship gave me and now the generosity of Blue Sky Alternative Investments.”

As for a highlight of her first few months as a Bondie? That's easy...

“I came first in class in two subjects and received a Dean's Award for Academic Excellence!

“I didn't even know if I could go to university but here I am, loving every minute of it, studying something that I'm passionate about... and topping my classes.

“I never expected that would happen, and it was a really big deal for that little girl who was so upset when she got a ‘C’ on her English paper.”

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Alumni and Development Office

Bond University
Gold Coast Queensland 4229
Australia

Toll free: 1800 074 074
Phone: 07 5595 1430
Email: lharry@bond.edu.au