

Distinguished Alumni
Distinguished Alumni Award – 2023

Boyden Rohner '95

You came to the Mesa as a 9th grader in the fall of 1991, a couple weeks shy of your 14th birthday. From a young age you wanted nothing more than to go to an English boarding school and join a ring of child detectives, as you read about in Enid Blyton's books *The Famous Five* and *The Secret Seven*. Though you lobbied your parents ceaselessly for this outcome, you eventually capitulated and agreed to go to Cate, following in the footsteps of your elder half-brothers **Franklin Rohner '71** and **Clayton Rohner '75**.

Sports and leadership dominated your time at Cate. You earned six varsity letters in volleyball and track. Your volleyball team went to the CIF finals twice. In track, you set school and league records in the 4 x 400 relay. Most notably, you had the fortunate timing of being a contemporary of some of Cate's most exceptional female athletes, such as **Mia Mitchell Grandpre '95**, **Athena Jones '94**, **Tracye Lawyer Robinson '95**, **Aisha Jeter Stephenson '93**, and **Stephanie Shideler '93**. As a result, you simultaneously experienced the joy of team wins *and* the disappointment of coming in second! You became a Prefect and a Teaching Assistant and were introduced to the concept of *Servons* through Cate's volunteer programs. But the best part of your Cate experience was creating enduring friendships that have uplifted you through all of life's trials.

As a senior applying to colleges, your father encouraged you to apply to the United States Naval Academy. Having served in World War II and the Korean War, he knew firsthand how precious freedom and democracy are. He instilled in you a sense of service that ultimately inspired you to choose the Naval Academy.

Two weeks after graduating from Cate you reported to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Your time at the Naval Academy can only be characterized as fraught. An essay you wrote for *El Batidor* about being punished for not following rules was a harbinger of things to come. The creativity and individualism that you cultivated at Cate didn't readily translate to a military context. As a result, you stood a lot of restrictions. In the spring of 2000 you graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree and a major in History and were commissioned as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy.

As a newly commissioned naval officer, you reported to your first ship—a destroyer at Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia. Nine months later, 19 violent extremists hijacked four commercial airplanes and carried out coordinated attacks that ultimately killed nearly 3,000 people. The events of that day, September 11, 2001, changed the world forever, and gave your 24-year-old life focus and purpose you never could have imagined. A year later, your destroyer deployed with NATO forces to support Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. You then deployed a second time to the Northern Arabian Gulf, where your destroyer was tasked with hunting terrorists and defending the Al Basrah Oil Terminal, which was the only source of revenue for Iraq at the time.

Eventually you took orders to Washington, D.C., and were promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Commander. In Washington, you were energized by the ebb and flow of interesting individuals working to solve hard problems for the American people. When an opportunity to be the Secretary of Homeland Security's daily intelligence briefer presented itself, you jumped at it! You hoped the role would put you in a position to learn the government's most-secret secrets, such as the location of Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction, and if aliens exist.

Although you didn't learn whether aliens exist, you had a front row seat to nearly every national security emergency over the course of two Presidential Administrations. In addition to supporting the daily intelligence briefing for three Homeland Security Secretaries, you also served on the National Security Council staff. There you spent late nights and weekends in the White House managing the national security correspondence of President Obama and National Security Advisor Susan Rice. Somehow you found time to earn a Master's degree with honors in Public Administration from American University *and* fall in love and marry fellow Navy veteran and former Navy SEAL Paul Clausen—which you tout as the best decision you ever made.

It was during your time running the daily intelligence briefing that you saw the threat from overseas terrorism wane and the threat of cyber-attacks rise. So, you made a shrewd decision to apply for a developmental assignment at a cybersecurity operations center. Your lack of familiarity with the work forced you to become a good listener and collaborator. Those skills helped you ascend to the senior leadership team at America's Cyber Defense Agency: The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). At CISA you started the first team to lead the federal government's work to manage cybersecurity vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. Now you oversee the integration of cyber and physical security operations to reduce risk to the infrastructure that Americans rely on every hour of every day.

Amidst this incredible career, you always remembered Cate. Your best friends, to this day, are the same women you sat with at assemblies in Hitchcock Theatre and shared meals with in Raymond Commons. As an alumna, you attended receptions on the East Coast, West Coast, and in between—at Grumpy's in Sun Valley, Idaho. As you settled in Washington, you hosted Cate events, including the first Cate Alumnae Network gathering east of the Mississippi in 2013. You returned to the Mesa to celebrate multiple reunions with the great Class of 1995. For many years, you have given back to the School through the annual Cate Fund.

For your distinguished career in cybersecurity, service to the country as a Navy veteran, and your dedication to Cate School, we are honored to award you, Boyden Rohner, Class of 1995, with Cate's Distinguished Alumni Award for 2023.