Rita Garvin ’05 is working with a troublesome batch of film. It is late afternoon on a dreary Wednesday in April. Garvin, a sophomore, and her classmates are hard at work in room 114, the black-and-white darkroom at the Hartford Art School.

The oldies drifting softly from the beat-up boom box perched in the corner seem out of place in the company of the young students. The smell of developing chemicals, distinct in the hall outside, is unavoidable here. Two low-wattage, industrial-looking lamps mounted overhead throw what little light they can straight up to the ceiling, casting an eerie, yellow glow. Gradually the equipment, the sink, and chemical baths come into focus. Once you get used to it, it’s kind of cozy.

In a corner, Garvin contemplates her negatives. During the shoot, she made a small mistake: one setting on her 35mm camera was off, and now she needs to see if she can salvage the film. She hopes she can “push” the film, massage it into usable prints, by playing with the timing on the enlarger.

She steps out into the bright hallway to examine a test print. She’s looking for a deep, rich tone that will give the photograph contrast and depth. Her verdict is quick: no good, she’ll have to re-shoot.

Garvin doesn’t mind, though. She’s patient—willing to try and fail if, in the long run, it makes her a better photographer. That’s what school is all about. It’s what brings students like Garvin to places like the Hartford Art School. But beyond her desire to learn and willingness to struggle with her craft, she is fortunate in one other sense: someone who had never met her, who had never laid eyes on her photographs, established a scholarship at the University of Hartford. That scholarship has helped make her studies at the Art School possible.

Jane Keller Herzig knows what it’s like to be a young artist struggling to learn her craft. She’s a graduate of the Hartford Art School herself, having earned a master’s in art education in 1981. Today, she considers herself a goldsmith first but works in a range of media. Two major projects have been filling her time recently. She’s writing and illustrating a children’s book, and her cow was selected for the West Hartford CowParade. Cities and towns worldwide have hosted these events, in which local artists paint fiberglass cows that are then placed around the town for viewing and later auctioned to benefit a charity.

Herzig has always been involved with the University. It’s something of a family tradition. For many years, her parents, Richard and Marion Keller, served as advocates for people with disabilities in the Greater Hartford region. Richard Keller eventually became the University of Hartford’s ombudsman for the handicapped. Long before it was accepted as standard practice, he worked to ensure that architects and builders took people’s special needs into account. The University of Hartford campus never had to be retrofitted for accessibility.

Thanks, at least in part to Keller, it was built that way from the very beginning.

When Herzig and her husband, Ed, along with her brothers Peter and James and their wives, wanted to honor the Kellers, it didn’t take them long to decide how. They thought of students at the University and established the Marion and Richard Keller Financial Assistance Fund for students with disabilities. Garvin, who is deaf, is the current beneficiary of the fund.

Garvin and Herzig had the opportunity to meet in April at a luncheon sponsored by the University that brings together donors and scholarship recipients. Several students spoke appreciatively of what their scholarships have meant to them. Ninth-grader Abe Cantwell entertained the crowd with a couple of pieces on his violin. Cantwell, the beneficiary of a special scholarship, studies at the Hartt Community Division. In between presentations, Garvin and Herzig talked—two artists at different stages of their careers, comparing notes. They discussed what art they each liked, and Garvin shared her plans for the future: she thinks she wants to open her own studio.

It was appropriate that she talk about her future. Speaking at the luncheon, President Walter Harrison asked the students to remember the moment. In 20 years, he suggested, they might be back for another luncheon, this time as donors themselves. Harrison urged the students to stay involved, whether at the University of Hartford or elsewhere. Scholarships, he noted, are an investment in the future.
On this occasion, Jane Herzig had the chance to meet the future in the person of Rita Garvin. One wonders if, when she was a student, Herzig had ever imagined such a moment. The University of Hartford holds a special place in her life. Now, through the Marion and Richard Keller Financial Assistance Fund, she and her family have become a special part of the University, helping to support the dreams of students and the future.