



Afterschool Matters had the opportunity to talk with Kennise Farrington, a September 2009 senior at John Bowne High School¹ in Queens, New York, who spends part of her out-of-school time rowing in Meadow Lake, Queens.

Afterschool Matters (ASM): Tell me about yourself and how you became involved in Row New York.

Kennise: I'll be turning 17 in August. I'm going to be a senior next year, and I just recently tried out for the team in September 2008. I live at home with my grandmother. The coaches come to schools around New York City to recruit. I had a free period on the day the coaches were at my school, and a friend told me about it, so I just went along with her. I told her there was no way I was going on a rowing team. I had no idea what it was about, but I decided to accompany her. I was used to conventional sports like basketball, soccer, etc., and I never really thought about rowing. Who rows? You put an oar in the water and you just simply row. After doing it myself I realize how tiring it is and how much you have to put into it.

ASM: What is your day like when you have rowing practice?

Kennise: Well, during the school year, I get out of school at 2:04 p.m. and practice starts around 4:30 p.m. I'll go to the library with my friend or grab something to eat and then head over to the boat house because it's relatively close to my school. And

ROW NEW YORK is a non-profit organization that provides New York City girls, grades 7–12, with intensive rowing experience as well as academic support. Row New York fields a competitive high school team, a learn-to-row afterschool program, a middle school program, and summer camps. The girls practice on Meadow Lake at Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Flushing, New York.

The mission of Row New York is to motivate, encourage, and empower girls from all across the city to excel in all aspects of life through physical and mental support and training. Row New York was founded in 2002 with one boat and eight girls. It has since expanded to provide over 300 girls a year with a unique opportunity to pursue success and commitment through teamwork. Row New York partners with the YMCA of Greater NY, the NYC Departments of Education and Parks & Recreation, the Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation, and the Office of the Queens Borough President.²



then once we get to practice we're in high gear. It's pretty fun....We get right out on the boats and the coaches tell us what we need to work on. Sometimes we get home a little late on race days or when preparing for a race.

ASM: How are you able to manage such a full schedule of school work, home responsibilities, and late afternoon practices?

Kennise: I quickly adjusted to doing my homework efficiently when I got home. On Mondays there's no practice, and we have an academics day. We go to the Row New York office after school where there are tutors and we can get any type of assistance needed for school subjects. That's one of the greatest things about the program, that it focuses on the student-athlete.

ASM: What's it like being in the shell?

Kennise: Being in the shell you realize how much of a strenuous sport rowing is. It's really intense. You use muscles you never realized you had. It's arm and leg strokes and a real opening of the body. It takes a lot of focus because one thing could ruin the whole rhythm of the boat, and cause you to lose a race. So it's physical strength and mental strength. When we first started practice, the assistant coach had us learn

names before we ever got in the boat. It showed us it wasn't always about winning; it was also about getting to know each other.

ASM: What kind of relationships do you have with the other rowers and coaches?

Kennise: I have met some of the greatest people. The bond of sisterhood I have is something that could never be replaced. The staff are incredible. I think I have a great bond with them because they see how much I want it, and they put it a great amount of time in trying to make me a better rower.

ASM: How does your family react to you being a rower?

Kennise: They find it pretty interesting because they don't know any rowers other than me. It's intriguing to them because they have never had a family member who rowed before. I'd love to row in college.

ASM: What's been one of your best experiences in rowing so far?

Kennise: I'd have to say it was on Mercer Lake in Princeton, NJ. It was my very first race on the water, so I was pretty nervous. I didn't want to have too high hopes. But my boat had been working really hard. The coaches told us that they didn't usually take a team to that race because it's difficult, and they didn't want our hopes to drown out in the beginning of our racing careers. We went thinking we'd just make the best of it, and we won gold. I'll never forget that day.

ASM: There are many ways that older youth can choose to spend their out-of-school time. What makes the choice of Row New York special for you? What keeps you involved?

Kennise: I have to say one of the things I like about rowing is that it's a clear example that hard work does bear prizes. At first I didn't know what to expect, but after hard training, long practices in the boat—whether we're in cold or hot weather—in the end we accomplished something. That's what makes me really happy, just knowing that I am not wasting my time. It makes me want to strive harder to be better. School comes first, but rowing has changed my whole outlook on things.

¹ John Bowne was the grandfather of Robert Bowne, for whom the Robert Bowne Foundation was named.

² This information provided by Row New York, www.rownewyork.org.