

# Oak Leaves

Winter 2022-2023

NEWSLETTER FROM OAKWOOD FRIENDS SCHOOL • CELEBRATING OVER 220 YEARS OF FRIENDS EDUCATION IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

## Our Global Community - Connecting with Students, Parents, and Alumni

As early as the 1860s Oakwood welcomed our first international students and we have been building and strengthening a global community ever since. With increased travel opening this last year, Head of School, Chad Cianfrani, and Admissions Director, Nicolas Ugarte, took the opportunity to visit Mexico, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan. In late October Nick traveled to Mexico City, and Mérida. In November Chad and Nick connected with alumni, current parents and prospective families on a twelve day trip to five cities: Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Seoul, Osaka, and Tokyo.

During the first visits to Mexico City and Mérida Nick connected with the family of **Armando Castillo '24** over a delicious brunch and enjoyed a lovely meal of pipián verde with an alumni family. In Mérida he met with prospective families and international educational consultants.



Nick with Armando's parents Geovana Castillo and Armando Diaz, and siblings Melissa and Matias Castillo

In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Chad and Nick connected with peer institutions, consultants, and prospective families. Importantly, they visited with the families of current students **Nguyen Le '23**, **Han (Rachel) Le '24**, and **Khoa (Peter) Tran '23**. These families generously shared their hearts, homes, and community with them. While visiting many stunning cultural sites, the days were filled with conversation, delicious meals, egg coffee, impressive traffic flow, and a deep appreciation of education and opportunity.



Nguyen's parents Hue Thi Thanh Nguyen and Duc Hoai Le and brother Khoi Nguyen showing Chad and Nick the sites in Hanoi

As they landed in Seoul, South Korea, the timing could not have been better, as several alumni from 2006–2010 were in town to celebrate the wedding of **Jin Young Kim '07**. **Byung Kyu Choi '09** helped to organize the gathering that included **Jinhyun Lee '08**, **Jin Young Kim '07**, **Jiyeon Hong '06**, **Yoon Sik Jung '06**, and **Brandy Jung '07**. Many of these alumni had not seen each other in quite some time so the gathering not only connected them back to Oakwood, but to each other. As these were some of the first students Chad taught at Oakwood almost 20 years ago, there were more than a few stories to share.



Seoul alumni - Front row (l-r) Brandy Jung '07, Jiyeon Hong '06, Nick Ugarte and Yoon Sik Jung '06. Back row (l-r) Chad Cianfrani, Byung Kyu Choi '09, Jin Young Kim '07 and Jin Hyun Lee '08.

In Japan, Chad and Nick met with many prospective families in the cities of Osaka and Tokyo. Then, they traveled briskly past Mount Fuji at 178 mph via bullet train to Tokyo. An alumni gathering was organized with the help of **Tamio Ishizaka Bando '98** and included



Japan alumni gathering – (l-r) Nick Ugarte, Tamio Ishizaka Bando '98, Sachi Takamori '15, Chad Cianfrani, Hideto (Ed) Yoshida '93 and Mike Peters '98

**Sachi Takamori '15**, **Mike Peters '98** and **Hideto (Ed) Yoshida '93**. Warm conversations revealed deep appreciation for a connection to Oakwood centering on faculty, community, and learning. They enjoyed seeing Oakwood's anniversary book, "*One Hundred Years in Poughkeepsie*" by fellow alumni **Matthew Voorhees '17** and **Anita Dickhuth '54**.

This trip abroad helped connect Oakwood with many new international families, deepened our connection to current families, and strengthened our ties with alumni. It was a powerful reminder that all of our students, both those 8000 miles away and those closer to campus, powerfully shape, strengthen and support our community through a diversity of experience, perspective and understanding. 🍁



Hideto (Ed) Yoshida '83 enjoying Oakwood's 100 Year Celebration book

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## Visionary Leadership

By: Chad Cianfrani, Head of School

It was with deep gratitude that I was able to visit with Oakwood's former Board President, Don Spencer, shortly before he passed in December. Having known Oakwood as both the parent of Alyssa Spencer '13, and a member of our volunteer leadership on the Board of Managers, Don was a visionary Board President. Curious, sharp, witty, and restless, he helped push the school to think creatively, expansively, and strategically in the years prior, during, and after the pandemic.

Navigating the pandemic safely and responsibly, from an educational, professional, personal, and spiritual level were top of mind and topics of conversations between me and Don on a weekly basis. Over this last decade, he was a fierce advocate for student and faculty support, while having an acute and detailed understanding of the long range impact and financial realities that each strategic decision carried. He was disciplined in his thinking, calculating in his work, demanding of me as head of school, and always put Oakwood first.

I see Don's exceptional leadership carried forward in the creativity, opportunities, and connections within our student, parent, Board, alumni, Friends, and Hudson Valley communities. In just the last few weeks our students have traveled to Sandy Springs Friends School for a Quaker Youth Leadership Conference, visited New York



Don Spencer and Vickie Riccardo in front of The Spencer Family Theater

City to participate in an annual Ethics Bowl competition, and joined over 600 students from around the country at the Model United Nations event in Boston. They have presented on food scarcity to the Mayor of Poughkeepsie and moderated nationally-attended American Philosophical Association panel discussions on Technology and Privacy. **The Spencer Family Theater**, made possible by generous philanthropy of Don and his wife Vickie Riccardo, is welcoming local theater groups who perform

and share their expertise with our students on stage and in the lighting/sound booth.

The increased connections extend to our Board of Managers, Poughkeepsie Friends Meeting, faculty and staff. During a recent weekend retreat, facilitated by Friends Council on Education, we explored areas in which our four distinct groups share common goals and explored opportunities for mutual support and growth. Recently traveling to the home of Marilyn Reagan, widow of Bob Reagan '38 and daughter-in-law of former Head of School William Reagan, current and former students discussed eight decades of shared Oakwood experience. Internationally we recently reconnected with alumni in Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan. Personal connections over meals and adventures, with current parents in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and alumni gatherings in Seoul and Tokyo with my former students from 2004 through 2015 reinforced the impact of an Oakwood education and the strength of our diverse global community.

These multitudes of connections are visible in virtually every aspect of our program. As I reflect back on the uncertainty surrounding us in the spring of 2019, the growth of our program since then, completion of major Lighting the Way projects, strong enrollment, and a campus opening further to the larger Hudson Valley community, I am thankful to our volunteer leadership on the Board of Managers and to my friend Don Spencer for being at the center of this work. 📍

## The Small Steps at Oakwood That Led to This Journey

By: Jinhyun Lee '08



Sometimes it is mesmerizing to see how a small step taken in a moment turns into a lifelong journey of a dream. Your passion creates new experiences, which then become a career.

Back in my time at Oakwood, I was exposed to minds of kindness and compassion, and the stories of many cultural

backgrounds. An embracing community of care and openness helped me to grow interested in the questions of righteousness, which then moved on to the issues of globalization, development, human rights, and peace within the United States, in my home country of South Korea, and around the world. I joined fellow students and faculty to participate in anti-sweatshop activities within and off campus, and joined conversations of likeminded youth as delegates for the Model United Nations.

A trip to maquiladoras on the US-Mexican border really opened my eyes to see the realities of the problems seen in textbooks and the untold stories behind the Lexus and the Olive Tree. The underprivileged are exposed to a chain of problems: poverty leads to educational problems; labor rights are intertwined with environmental rights; limited access to clean water deteriorates gender equality, etc.

My experiences at Oakwood naturally led me to the field of international de-

velopment and the work of the United Nations. Currently as an Operations Associate at the United Nations Development Programme Seoul Policy Centre, I am assisting the team to implement its mission to support effective development cooperation, and higher quality programming and action through development research, policy dialogue and knowledge sharing on key development issues.

Looking back, my journey into a career in international development all began from the small steps I took at Oakwood: the weekend march for immigrants' rights at the Victor C. Waryas Park; representation of Argentina at the Brown University Model UN conference; and the presentation of works of our student anti-sweatshop group, No Sweat, at the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) Albany Conference. But above all of these, the words of my beloved teacher at commencement stand out: "Be concerned with what is happening around you." 📍





## Remembering Don Spencer, Former Board President

*The Oakwood community mourns the loss of Don Spencer, former board member and president. The following was shared by Don's daughters, Jocelyn Spencer and Alyssa Spencer '13.*

On December 14th, 2022, Don Spencer died doing the same thing he did during most of the holidays of his married life: taking a nap while his family puttered, laughed, and chatted around him. He was 67 years old. He was a devoted husband of 32 years to Vickie Riccardo, a much loved younger brother of Harvey Spencer, a beloved cousin, a cherished uncle to ten nieces and nephews (including new in-laws), and an adoring father to Jocelyn and Alyssa.

As a father, Don knew how to find magic and mystery in the mundane. Whether it was inventing an elaborate conspiracy theory about the neighbors joining a bear-themed secret society called the Ursartorials, or referring to an industrial park where he'd eat McDonald's and play kickball with his daughters on the weekends as "The Double Secret Location", he was proof positive that being silly has no age limit (nor does a good nap).

As a businessman, as well as in other aspects of his life, he was an early adopter and was always curious about new approaches, perspectives, and technologies. Whether it was adopting ESG principles long before they became a fashionable hot topic in the business world, or installing a GPS in his car long before they were standard (because while he was a man of many talents, navigation was not among them), Don was never afraid to try new things.

Sometimes those new things turned into what his wife Vickie sometimes exasperatedly (but always lovingly) called his "Passing Fancies": woodworking, target shooting, World of Warcraft, paint-by-numbers, PC building, South Asian cuisine, kayaking, volunteer firefighting, medieval weaponry, watches, power boating, powerlifting, and home brewing beer are just a sample. He dove into any new hobby or intellectual pursuit with enthusiasm and curiosity, made countless friends through his many endeavors, and occasionally drove his wife nuts when his latest venture was less than tidy, or involved motorized blades.



Don lived his life with a sense of wonder, humor, and curiosity that was contagious to everyone who knew him. Although it was cruelly cut short by a rare form of cancer, he still managed to make his loved ones laugh, and find some time for a few of his less dangerous hobbies, up until the last day of his life. He leaves behind a family that will deeply mourn him, but carry in their hearts all of his best qualities, as well as some great stories to laugh about together while he takes his eternal nap. 📺

## Relections on a New Role

*By: Julie Okoniewski, Director of Development and Alumni Affairs*

I first came to Oakwood in early 2000 to see a play directed by my friend from NYU, Elaine Lifter, who was the Theater Director at the time. I remember thinking how lucky she was to live on this beautiful campus and teach at this wonderful, unique school. Little did I know that just a few years later I would join her living and working at Oakwood and would eventually serve as the Director of Development and Alumni Affairs.

My initial time at Oakwood was spent exclusively during the summer when I rented space to run a free, two week summer advocacy program I designed for local and New York City teens. Named Voices of Tomorrow Empowered (VOTE) by the participants, the program combined my work with economically disenfranchised youth on the Lower East Side and my experience working on Capitol Hill as a Legislative Director for Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez. Over the course of 16 summers, VOTE has served over 150 youth, many of whom became staff themselves and some of whom now work at Oakwood as my colleagues. More importantly, VOTE led to me working at Oakwood, living on campus with my husband Gerardo and our sons Sam and Ben, and to Sam joining the



*Julie with Bela '04, Clarissa '07 and Clara Baez '03, whom she knows from both her previous work in NYC and at Oakwood, at a recent alumni gathering at the home of Marilyn Reagan.*

community as a Middle School student.

Over the course of my 17 years at Oakwood I have worn many hats, like so many of us here do! From swim coach to dorm parent, Political Advocacy and Leadership class teacher to Community Outreach/Service Learning Coordinator, and serving as a facility advisor for various clubs and activities in between. Having worked in development and grant writing in my previous job at Grand Street Settlement in New York City, I was excited to join the Development and Alumni Affairs team in 2015 to connect my work in the classrooms and dorms to furthering the school's mission at

a different level. It's been a wonderful experience collaborating with colleagues on grant projects like the four season greenhouse, connecting with recent alumni who I used to coach, teach and spend time with as a dorm parent, and learning from my colleagues Elaine and Wendy about the broader alumni family that spans decades and is still so connected to the school.

In my new role I am excited to build on the legacy of work undertaken in the office in the past and to continue to create connections between alumni, current students, faculty and friends. In conversations with alumni at gatherings and events over the years I find that there is a connection that links everyone together, regardless of when they attended Oakwood or for how long. Alumni that are strangers to one another can gather in a room with current students and faculty and there is a shared experience that unites them. That connection is what I love about being a part of this community and being an Oakwood parent. I also have a deep sense of gratitude for the generations of alumni who dedicate their time and resources to supporting the school for current students, including my son. I look forward not only to the work ahead, but the many celebrations to come! 📺





## Sports Roundup

By: Athletic Director Saddam Alma-Bueno and Coaches Meghan Bishop, Oshane Brown, Chad Cianfrani, Katie Davis, Jim Fenner and Sara Sandstrom

The overall defining word of this season was TEAM. Every group, on every level, rose to the occasion of building a cohesive and supportive team. We are continually proud of what our students are able to accomplish when they put teamwork above all else.

Cross Country coach Chad Cianfrani congratulated the team on 2022 their Hudson Valley Athletic League (HVAL) Championship Race! All of the team ran exceptional races, improving times anywhere from 30 seconds to five minutes this year! In a strong run, the boys team took home an upset win for a first place in the HVAL race this year! It was a great season with wonderful accomplishments for every member of the team. Cross Country is a beautiful meeting of personal focus and challenge, mixed with team comradery and support. Every single member of the team improved this year. They challenged themselves, pushed themselves to achieve, and accomplished a great deal. We can't wait to see where this young team runs to next year!



Boys cross country team winning first place in the HVAL race

Thirds soccer coach Jim Fenner shared, "My grin could not be wider when considering each member of the team and their gains and contributions throughout our winning season. This was my first year coaching Thirds Soccer, and I absolutely know that I learned more from my co-



Thirds soccer team in action on the field



Girls Varsity Soccer team

coach Sue Cianfrani and my incredible team than I ever have before as a coach or player. Our team started their season as a group ranging drastically in age, size and experience, and found themselves at the end of the season as a cohesive, supportive squad who could adapt their playing styles, position assignments, and roles within the team community. Oakwood Soccer is a place where exceptional kids can develop their mental and physical capabilities, and I am honored to have taken part in that process."

Girls varsity soccer coach Meghan Bishop shared, "The girls varsity players are a quintessential example of the true definition of a team. This is because they all worked as a unit, a group that didn't shine because one or two players had this incredible skill and carried the team, but a group who shined because they carried each other and played together using every player's strengths, working to achieve a goal. The girls were always supportive of each other both on the field and off the field where their bond as teammates remained strong. They never gave up or let their guard down. They all have a reason to celebrate success in the sport this year. I can honestly say I have never coached a more inspiring group."

Boys varsity soccer coach Oshane Brown, a former Division 1 soccer athlete, joined Oakwood this year and had his first chance to work with the team. "The team's greatest success was developing chemistry in such a short space of time. At the start, some students did not have a lot of soccer experience or just signed up as an after school interest. Having personally coached others at such a high level it was very interesting and challenging for me to bring together a group with such varied skill sets. With proper coaching, the team was able to come together and make major improvements over the course of the season. It isn't just about coming out and playing, teamwork involves respect, for oneself and the team, as well as timeliness, presentation and being mentally prepared

to put one's best foot forward. I am so proud of how far they came. They listened to themselves and each other and found that working hard and working as a team was the greatest win of all. I am really looking forward to working with everyone again next season and believe we can accomplish an even stronger connection to each other and to the sport."

Coach Katie Davis led JV Volleyball this season and commented, "I want to give a huge shout out to the entire JV volleyball team for being so amazing and fun to coach for my first season at Oakwood! We walked away with one win this season, but we had a lot of really close and competitive matches. The improvement from every single person on this team was amazing. Everyone showed up, wanted to learn, and worked hard to better their volleyball game all season, and it definitely showed. That in itself is the best type of win for me! I am so proud of everyone for never giving up and always staying so positive and focused!" 🏐

Varsity volleyball coach Sara Sandstrom summed up her season with a poem which was shared at the fall term sports awards. Enjoy this excerpt from her creative piece!

Back to the gym this fall  
Masks off this year  
Despite the hot gym  
Our team had good cheer

We kept every set close  
And played really great points  
Our improvement rate  
Did not disappoint

As I say every year  
Without missing a beat  
Coaching this team  
Is a major treat

It is a privilege to coach  
Whatever the scores  
Because being around these players  
One never gets bored.





## The Arts

By: Ted Messerschmidt -  
Music Director and Arts Chair

Oakwood students continue to enrich the community with their talents in music, theater, visual arts and photography.

In music, **Brooklyn Dottin '23** rang in the new academic year by performing some of her outstanding compositions for piano at Orientation. Later in the fall term, **Willa Sio-Cody '23** opened Parents' Day with a stirring rendition of Jennifer Linn's *Evening Tide*. With selections ranging from jazz and classical to hip hop and R&B, the Winter Festival Concert was also a great success. After performances by a variety of soloists and ensembles, the concert concluded with the annual holiday sing-along. In late January, **Jenine Tobias '23** had the honor of singing the National Anthem at a Vassar College men's basketball game. Currently, students are preparing for the NYSSMA Solo and Ensemble Festival and are also practicing for off-campus performances with the Community Service through the Arts class.

In theater, the student production of *Tongues and Savage/Love* was a great example of what is possible with collaboration. Oakwood's production class transformed *Tongues* from a one-man show and widened it to accommodate a larger cast. Rather than a man, the group opted to change pronouns and allow Phoebe to become the central figure while her emotions are represented visually through the other characters. The students divided the lines among the appropriate characters, and Phoebe wrestled with her emotional selves: Fear, Rage, Confidence, Hope, and Strife.



*Tongues and Savage/Love* performers Marcus Enderle '25, Siena Solis '24, Alex Ferry '25, Oscar Schilling '24, and Jonathan De Silva '24

**Lila Saywer '26** summed up her collaborative experience. "When I came to Oakwood, I knew I wanted to be involved in the arts. And in the first week of school, I found a home in the theater department. I had always been interested in acting on stage, but the fall term play



Winter concert performers Dallas Tulloch '23, Jenine Tobias '23, Jack Iovanella '23, Jonathan De Silva '24, Jessica Feng '23 and Narqis (Florence) Hekmat '25

allowed me to try a new position, stage managing. I was a little scared; I didn't know anyone, I was the only freshman, and I had never been a stage manager before. I didn't think I could pull it off, especially with our play, an interpretation of *Tongues and Savage/Love* by Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin, being so creatively adapted. But it ended up being so much fun. Through the fall term, I was able to make so many friends I probably wouldn't have met or talked to if I didn't take a chance in the fall production. I can not wait to be a part of future productions here at Oakwood!"



Ethan Borress '24 and Tristan Jean-Baptiste '23 at work in the graphic arts studio

In visual arts, students are rotoscoping, a kind of hand-drawn animation using source video footage. The students in this class made self-portrait videos reciting (or singing! Or ASL signing!) parts of a poem, or any other text meaningful to them. They then hand drew the moving images at 12 rotoscoped drawings per second of video. With videos ranging from 10-20 seconds long, some of the Animation students drew 240 frames for this project! In ceramics, **Alex Ferry '25** combined wheel and handbuilding ceramics techniques to make this Octopus cup, shown here after its first (bisque) firing. Come see the fully glazed, finished result in our Visual Arts Showcase this Spring!!

## Middle School Theater

By: Teresa Gasparini - Theater Teacher

The middle school had a busy fall exploring different aspects of theatre on every grade level. The inquisitive sixth grade learned the timeline of theatre history from its origins in Greece all the way through modern Broadway. The wildly creative seventh graders became playwrights with their playwriting course which resulted in every student writing an original 10-minute play from conception to final draft. Our fearless eighth graders dove into the wonderful world of Shakespeare learning about his life and times, and doing a presentational style reading of *Macbeth*. For the winter term, we shifted to music with sixth grade learning the basics of Music Theory and seventh grade is diving into music appreciation and are gearing up to compose their own original rhythmic pieces, while eighth graders are globetrotters as we explore music, instruments, and cultural impact in various countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and North/South America. 🎵



Bisque fired octopus cup by Alex Ferry '25





## Middle School Winter Seminar Highlights

### A Christmas Carol Radio Show by Teresa Gasparini, Theater Teacher

A big highlight to the year so far would be our performance of the radio play: *A Christmas Carol* featuring almost half of the middle school! We had students on stage, each taking on at least three roles and singing! Students really got into backstage/production work with hands-on learning of basic set, lighting, and sound design. The end result was a magical and spirited performance presented for the Oakwood community! We are looking forward to more performances in the spring as we venture back to theatre!



*A Christmas Carol ensemble*

### Sculpture Seminar by Erin Koch, Art Teacher

To start off Sculpture Seminar, students learned how to make foundational shapes including a cube, pyramid and polyhedron. In this way, students gained experience with attaching popsicle sticks with the glue gun. Students were then given the challenge of creating a sculpture as tall as a person using geometric shapes such as cubes and pyramids. Their tower could be of any shape so long as it was structurally stable. They then conceived their sculpture in their mind's eye, and drew what they imagined from the front, back, top and bottom. Students then selected whether they would work in groups or individually and finalized what they would build together! They spent the final week of Sculpture Seminar assembling their towers.

Students collaborated in small groups and worked together to make geometric shapes that they could assemble for strength and height. There was a lot of experimentation as students discovered



*Sculpture seminar students Eve Holman '29, Paisley Ascione '27 and Santiago (Santi) Bastidas-Brecht '28 hard at work on their sculpture*

what caused towers to balance, or not, and made corrections along the way in order to find stability. Some students found they had to redesign their buildings in order to continue and successful ideas included creating wider bases, strengthening key areas, or adding counter weight. The Seminar culminated in a presentation of student artwork in the Middle School Art room, filling the room to the ceiling with impressive architecture! 🏠

## The Middle School is up to...Something Good!



*Micah Coward '29 with Middle School Director Ricci Alma-Bueno*

### Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Middle Schoolers took time to focus on Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. They tie dyed bandanas pink, carved pink pumpkins, and created a Breast Cancer Awareness community education board on the middle school patio. At the end of the month they hosted a pink party and invited the whole school to come out. Each advisory supplied pink desserts, wore pink clothing and accessories and judged the pumpkins! Pink beverages and desserts were sold with over \$200 in proceeds going to a local Breast Cancer organization. Awareness is Power!



*Sunshine Squad members Nathania Antoine '27, Meya Coward '27 and Olivia Cho '28 at their bake sale*

### Sunshine Squad

The Middle School Sunshine Squad, in charge of all things bright and joyful, is a group that formed in the fall to raise funds for good time events throughout the year. Through a series of bake sales the students are able to put an extra sparkle on some fun happenings. Their first event was a costume Halloween Dance Party. Next up they hosted a hot chocolate bar on the last day of school before winter break as a toasty end to the middle school seminar series. Their next soiree? A Valentine's Dance! Full of positive energy and good vibes this group consistently strives for fun times and making great memories for everyone! 🏠

## Ski Sundays

Our students are stirring up the powder on the slopes! Ski Sundays with Oakwood Friends is a new excursion program this year bringing together boarders, day students and their families to weather the cold for some wintery fun! Skiers and snowboarders, beginners and veterans have welcomed the opportunity to board the Oakwood bus and be transported to Belleayre Mountain in the Catskills to share new experiences and make lasting memories – Oakwood style! 🏠



*(l-r) Tilly Serras '29, Kendrick Young '28, Sadhika Raj '23, Ada Onyeani '24, and Han (Rachel) Le '24 hitting the slopes*





## Creativity in the Classroom



**Amelia Goldstein**, Science Teacher

I've been at Oakwood for almost three years now, and what brings me the most joy about Oakwood students is their curiosity, humor, and creativity! Every day, Oakwood students surprise me with their critical thinking and open-mindedness. I became a science teacher to empower students to face a world where scientific information is often skewed and used against them. I find that creativity is a necessary part of an empowering and student-led science classroom, especially life and environmental sciences. In my classes, I emphasize risk-taking, innovation, and communication skills by encouraging students to come up with novel ideas to answer questions with unknown answers, by asking students to design their own investigations, by teaching students to critically evaluate the messaging they see in the world around them, and by guiding them through the format of scientific writing and forming compelling arguments. Creative projects are for me a way to encourage students to make connections to their own experiences, to form lasting memories, and to bring a sense of humor and lightness into the classroom. Without the freedom to think creatively and take risks, how can we expect students to be innovators or problem-solvers?



In this photo, **Jimmy Lin '23** is presenting on auxins, a plant hormone that helps plants grow in response to stimuli such as sunlight. This is part of our AP Biology unit on cellular communication, in which students present a multitude of creative projects and case studies on plant hormones, human hormones, drugs,

pheromones, and drug alternatives. In this assignment, students were asked to create an advertisement depicting why their assigned plant hormone is the most marketable. Jimmy presented on auxins with enthusiasm, expertise and a fun, memorable slogan: "Reach for the Light."



**Jacob Gamage**, English Teacher

I've been teaching English at Oakwood for the past three years. Over the course of my career, I've taught across many grade levels from Middle School to Upper School and to undergraduates in college. It's wonderful to see students here at Oakwood develop as readers and writers through their humanities courses. While it's important for students to develop the skills needed to be successful academic writers, creativity and imagination are equally important to me as I attempt to create indelible experiences for students in their classroom. As a graduate of an MFA poetry program myself, I try to design an environment where students can not only take in and critically evaluate works of others, but also a place where they can produce their own stories and experiment with different writing styles and genres.

Creative writing and thinking is a safe place for students to take risks—to experiment and "try on" different voices and imagine a variety of audiences. As an example, in my English 11 class, students created a "multigenre" project, in which they choose a handful of genres to respond to *The Great Gatsby*. In addition to an expository piece, students wrote short stories, poems, eulogies, graphic novels, satires, digital art, and other imaginative pieces as a way to support their thesis. The challenge of the project was not to create a disparate collection of random pieces, but instead to take a big idea about a text and examine it on all sides through a crafted selection of writing and artistic styles. My hope is that this balance of the creative and the critical will serve them well as they learn to be active observers and producers of literary and digital media, and not simply passive consumers. I look forward to employing engaging activities surrounding literature throughout the rest of the year for the students. 📖

## Ethics Bowl

By: *Edie Strianese '25*

Ethics Bowl gives students the opportunity to practice important skills relevant to their life while also contemplating equally important moral dilemmas. The goal is to further our understanding of complex ethical issues and learn to articulate our opinions, then bring our arguments to the table with other schools to discuss the cases given to us in a civilized manner. My enjoyment of Ethics Bowl stems in part from the thought-provoking dialogue that inevitably happens both at the event itself and in the preparation for it. Another large part of it is the opportunity you get to meet new people and further your understanding of various current topics. This year, the cases ranged from very real questions regarding AI's potential for sentience to the equally serious recent banning of books in communities and politicians interfering with school curriculums. In the most recent Ethics Bowl, on January 28th at Manhattanville College, Oakwood had two teams competing, headed by **Samarra Dottin '24** and **Trevor Brooks '23**. One of the teams made it all the way to the semi finals and while they did not emerge victorious, their arguments were eloquent and well thought out. 📖



Students **Bee Breslin '26**, **Trevor Brooks '23**, **Gabriel Sampliner '26**, **Edie Strianese '25**, and **Kishi Oyagi '23** conferring during Ethics Bowl



Team mates **Edie Strianese '25**, **Sula Dunwoody '24**, **Siena Solis '24**, **Duke Gandin '24** and **Samarra Dottin '24**





## Quaker Youth Leadership Conference

By: Edie Strianese '25 and Simone Maldonado '25

This year, for the first time since COVID began, Oakwood students had the opportunity to attend the Quaker Youth Leadership Conference (QYLC), this year held at Sandy Springs Friends School in Maryland. A group of three students attended, including **Siena Solis '24**, **Edie Strianese '25**, and **Simone Maldonado '25**, chaperoned by Assistant Director of Residential Life, Krisken Coward. The theme of this year's conference was *Our Past, Our Progress: Promoting Peace Through Activism*. The three speakers that were invited were Amelia Kegan, a member of the Friends Committee on National Legislation strategic legislative advocacy committee, a spokesperson for Baltimore Peace Movement, and Dyresha Harris—a longtime activist who strives to bring everyone, no matter their race, ethnicity, or income, closer to the natural world with firsthand experiences. They all, in their own manner, spoke of their experiences regarding their given fields of activism, what it means to be an activist, and how any individual is able to make a difference in our society.

The conference also proved to be a place in which we could meet a range of people from Quaker schools across the region, listen to their stories, and gain insight into the lives and perspectives of others that we otherwise would have never been

able to gain. There were a multitude of team building exercises and icebreaker activities that we participated in to spark some communication between students belonging to different schools. We also had a brief amount of free time to explore Baltimore and search for food with fellow conference attendees. There was also a talent show where students could either participate or simply enjoy watching the skill other's had to offer, or laugh at the comedy sketches made on the fly about five minutes prior to them taking stage.

Sandy Spring's relatively close proximity to Baltimore also afforded us the opportunity to visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum which works to provide insight into the history of African American lives and culture in Maryland. At the time we visited, the museum had a temporary exhibit dedicated to Fredrick Douglas. We spent half a morning at the museum and the areas that we were able to see provided some truly educational and fascinating insight into African American history that is all too often overlooked and understated on a broader educational level.

Our third and final day consisted of facilitating and attending workshops entirely put together and organized by the students of the schools in attendance. Oakwood ran a successful workshop



(l-r) Simone Maldonado '25, Edie Strianese '25 and Siena Solis '24 at the QYLC

surrounding the *Poughkeepsie Community Fridge*, providing those who stopped by with information as to how students at our school worked to implement the fridge, the importance of fridges like this in all varieties of communities, the logistics behind running a fridge, and how they may be able to put together their own fridge. Overall, the QYLC was a fantastic experience to meet others from Quaker schools and learn from speakers and those around us about their work with activism. We look forward to going next year and hopefully hosting the conference ourselves sometime in the future. 🍌

## Poughkeepsie Community Fridge - Making an Impact



Middle school students stocking the fridge

The student-run Poughkeepsie Community Fridge is off to a great start since its installation at Adriance Memorial Library in the City of Poughkeepsie in October! According to sophomore Alex Ferry, who is one of the students who help manage the fridge and keep it stocked weekly, "Things get taken from the fridge about an hour or two after we put them in. So,

it is very successful, but we are having trouble keeping it completely full and definitely need more people in the community to donate." The fridge, which is located on the first floor, is accessible whenever the library is open and anyone can take what they need with the bags that are available on site. Reflecting on the project, senior Theo Hirmes shared, "In the beginning, a lot of people would swarm around the fridge and take a bunch right out because they are used to not having access to a bunch of food, and so they have built up a mentality of scarcity. I think people are learning now that the fridge will continue to be refilled and that they do not need to hoard things much because it is a community and people are bringing things. I think we started to build trust there and it has caused a more sustainable and substantial system." The students hope to add an additional fridge on the north side of the city in the coming months to further address food insecurity and got approval from the Mayor of Poughkeepsie for a second fridge on city owned property. Senior

Kishi Oyagi commented on what it takes to keep such an ambitious and impactful project going. "The more people we have involved working on the fridge the less work it is to keep it maintained." 🍌

### How You Can Help:

- Donate labeled and dated food either at the fridge in Oakwood's Main Office or directly to Adriance Memorial Library (93 Market St, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 M- Th 9 AM - 8:30 PM; Fri-Sat 9 AM - 5 PM; Sun 2 PM - 5 PM)
- Donate towards grocery shopping through check or Oakwood's website - notation "Poughkeepsie Community Fridge"
- Spread the word!

Thank you to Brooklyn Dottin '23 for interviewing fellow students Alex Ferry '25, Theo Hirmes '23 and Kishi Oyagi '23 for this article.





## Young Alumni Winter Reunion



Panelists Philip Stephens '21, Carissa Herrera '20, Nafisa Rashid '19 and Max Hopkins '22



Recent alumni gathering in the Main Building

We were thrilled to welcome back over twenty young alumni from the classes of 2018 to 2022 for Winter Reunion on Friday January 6th. Returning to an in-person format for the first time since COVID shifted the reunion online, we were joined by panelists **Nafisa Rashid '19** (Wellesley College - Linguistics/Environmental Studies), **Carissa Herrera '20** (Wesleyan University/English/Creative Writing and Education Studies), **Philip Stephens '21** (Marist College/Business) and **Max Hopkins '22** (Bard College/Undeclared). The four recent alumni first met with the senior class and then with the rest of the Upper School to talk about their transition to college. They answered questions about a variety of topics including deciding on their majors, balancing social life and academics, and getting involved with extracurricular activities on campus. They also shared advice on how students can maximize their experience at Oakwood to prepare for college. Thank you to all the panelists - and to everyone who returned to campus for a visit! 📸



School nurse Debbie Wilsey with (l-r) Philip Stephens '21, Christophe Mooney '20, Delaine Aranha '20 and Jayden Brockington '21



Associate Head Anna Bertucci with Nafisa Rashid '19 and Shane Calliste '18

## Reviving Regional Gatherings

We were excited to return to our regional alumni gatherings this year with a kick-off event in Chicago in October! Alumni in attendance were **JD Lee '10**, **Nick Currie '07**, **Gwendolyn Rice '57** and **Beth Sonnenschein**, widow of **Hugo Sonnenschein '57**. The group gathered at a local restaurant, The Purple Pig, and reminisced about their time at Oakwood.

In January, **Marilyn Reagan**, widow of **Bob Reagan '38** and daughter in law of former Head of School William Reagan, hosted a gathering in NYC. Alumni through the decades connected with current students at Marilyn's lovely Upper West Side home, sharing stories and memories from their time at Oakwood. Head of School Chad Cianfrani gave an update about upcoming projects and



Chicago area gathering at The Purple Pig

initiatives on campus and current students shared about their service learning work in the greater community. A wonderful time was had by all - and we look forward to more regional alumni gatherings to come in the months ahead! 📸



NYC gathering in the home of Marilyn Reagan.

## Photographer Irene Yee '05 to Present Arts Lecture

Irene Yee '05, a professional west coast based rock climbing and adventure photographer, will present this year's Arts Lecture on Thursday May 4<sup>th</sup>. She started rock climbing out of pure joy, picked up a camera soon after, and continues that journey on her Instagram where you can follow her @ladylockoff. Her focus is to uplift women, BIPOC, and the LGBTQIA2S+ communities; choosing to highlight those pushing their own personal limits and finding inspiration in those with passion over muscle. She is internationally published, is a contributor to National Geographic Adventures (on Instagram at @natgeoadventure), and works with today's largest outdoor brands and non-profits. We look forward to welcoming Irene back to campus to share about her photography career! 📸





## Celebrating Over 160 Years of Oakwood Alumni Gatherings

By: Matthew A. Voorhees '17, Academic Programs Assistant

For over 160 years graduates, former students, and friends of Oakwood have gathered to reconnect with old friends and reminisce on days gone by. The first recorded instance of an alumni gathering is referenced in a June 1872 article in the Friends' Review: *"The Tenth Oakwood reunion is to be held on the 11th of Seventh month next, to renew old acquaintance, compare life-notes, and live school-life over again for a day, in the same halls and oakwood shades."* The Oakwood Seminary Alumni Association was founded in October 1898, holding annual dinners in New York City with Lindley Leggett, class of 1889, serving as the first president. The name would change to "Oakwood Old Students Association" before ultimately becoming the "Alumni Association." Since then there have been forty-eight presidents consecutively. Through world wars, pandemics, and financial crises, former students of Oakwood have maintained an interest in the school and endeavored to

gather annually for a reunion. After the school moved to Poughkeepsie the association faced a dilemma. A majority of its old students and friends lived hours away at Oakwood's previous home in Union Springs, New York. There were of course alumni and friends in the Hudson Valley but not as many in comparison. For the first few decades reunions at Oakwood's new location in Poughkeepsie were infrequent, most reunions took place in Union Springs either at the home of an alum or on the front lawn of the former school building, with simultaneous reunions being held in New York City where a great number of younger alums were located. The first organized reunion held in Poughkeepsie was in October 1937 when over 125 former students and alumni spent the weekend at Oakwood attending student football and field hockey games, listening to a guest lecture, and attending a dance given in Lane Gymnasium. While there has not been a dance



(l-r) Don Badgley, Esther Calvino, Marion Reed, Henry Brecher, Anne Pelon, and Thomas Renouf at Alumni Weekend 1958



Alumni Tea in Craig Dorm at Alumni Weekend 1960

given during Alumni Weekend in many years, they have featured guest lectures, musical performances, creative activities, and athletic competitions.

So, I invite all former students, alumni, and friends to join us this June so that we can continue the 160+ year tradition of renewing old acquaintances, comparing life notes, and live school life over again for a weekend in the same halls as we did all those years ago. 📍

### Alumni Weekend June 16-18, 2023

#### Friday, June 16<sup>th</sup>

- 6:00pm Welcome Reception & Buffet Dinner in Dining Hall
- 8:00pm Dorm Activities (bonfire, s'mores, acoustic music)

#### Saturday, June 17<sup>th</sup>

- 9:00am Registration & Breakfast
- 10:00am Alumni Association Annual Meeting & Meeting for Worship
- 12:00pm Lunch & Class Photos
- 1:00pm Arts/Sports/Classroom Activities Bouncy Castle and Dunk Booth
- 2:00pm Reception for Class of 1973 and Oak Tree Club - Head's house Class of 2013 + Friends - 10 Year Reunion - Peter's Porch Refreshments in Collins Library
- 4:00pm Entertainment in The Spencer Family Theater - Open Mic, Student performances, Justin Brown '86 and band
- 6:00pm Festive Dinner with musical entertainment in Dining Hall
- 8:00pm Dorm Activities (bonfire, s'mores, acoustic music)

#### Sunday, June 18<sup>th</sup>

- 9:00am Hot Breakfast
- 10:30am Meeting for Worship - Nine Partners Meeting House

## Professor John Torrey Presents Caroline "Dash" Davis Gleiter '51 Lecture on Social Justice

By: Stephen Miller, Humanities Department Chair

In November, John Torrey, Ph.D delivered the annual Caroline "Dash" Davis Gleiter '51 Lecture on Social Justice. The presentation covered portions of Torrey's article titled, "Beyond the Bank: Justice, Injustice and Black Reparations," which was published in the journal *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice*. Feedback from students and colleagues was glowing and plentiful about how much they enjoyed his lecture on this topic. In addition to giving the lecture, John also talked with students in my *Ethics and Technology* and *Critical Thinking Inside and Outside of the Classroom* classes and engaged students during lunch and our tour of campus.

John is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and a contributing professor in the Africana Studies unit at SUNY Buffalo State. He holds a BA in Philosophy and Spanish from Morehouse College and an MA and Ph. D in Philosophy from the University of Memphis. His primary research interest is the interconnection between moral arguments for reparations for Black people and their political limits in America. He currently serves on the Academic Advisory Board of PLATO (Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization). As part of his work as a public philosopher, he was appointed in 2020 to Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown's Commission to Recommend Police Policy



John Torrey speaking with students after his lecture

and Advance Social Reconstruction, and was elected to the Board of Ethics for the City of Buffalo in 2022 and appointed to the 400 Years of African-American History Commission for New York State in 2022. 📍

To access the open source article, you can go to [https://www.pdcnet.org/p4/content/p4\\_2022\\_0004\\_0051\\_0067](https://www.pdcnet.org/p4/content/p4_2022_0004_0051_0067) or visit PLATO at <https://www.plato-philosophy.org/>.





## Class Notes



**1946**

**Betty Nunn Moon-Kramer** - Still living independently at a University of Florida retirement community. Go Gators!

**1950**

Congratulations to Board Member **Eric Wohlforth** who received the Walter Hickel award for public service from Commonwealth North, an Alaskan public research nonprofit entity in October.

**1951**

**John Earp** - I just turned 89, and that's how I feel. No longer vibrant and lively. Two bouts of Covid this year (not bad because I was fully vaccinated and boosted). Cognition is also beginning to slip a bit, but overall I'm doing quite well.

**1953**

**Taffy Thunick Hoffman** - I've weathered both Covid and the California rain/snow -without incident. Still active in my senior community.

**1954**

**Kay Memelsdorff Johnson** - I am alive and well in the Washington, D.C. area. I would love to see anyone who ventures down this way. I am still volunteering as a docent for the National Gallery of Art and am planning to move to a CCRC (Collington) in April. I miss Libby and Saul like crazy.

**1955**

**Judith Palmer Muggia** - Al and I are happily ensconced at Brookhaven at Lexington (MA) since 2016. Very spacious apartment, two gardens to tend, a fund of delightful new friends and countless programs - speakers, music, art and trips, etc. to enjoy as well as total health care. Three sons, their wives and ten grandchildren make time to visit often. Al has retired from giving courses through Tufts at this point and I have retired from my business *Galapagos Direct* but remain involved by supporting an education initiative in support of island children. We fear for the world we are leaving to our children and grandchildren!

**1956**

**Kay Busher Ross** - Life is good here in Florida but I do miss my family up north. We are healthy & live in a nice gated community with lots to do, not very far from the ocean. Sadly, I lost my sister last year, Pat Busher Mead 1948. I sure miss her. Happy New Year to all!

**Molly Watt** - Thrilled our play *George and Ruth: Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War* found a home and is a free download on the ALBA (Abraham Lincoln Brigade) website. Did you know ALBA has a network of 1,000 high school teachers teaching a course on the SCW? Plus

the play is being translated for a performance in Spain next fall. Plus us oldies, my husband Dan and myself, will be performing it at the World Fellowship Center again this summer. It was almost our first performance some twenty years ago and this will very likely be our last, two musicians with us. I had my first birthday away from home in 1954 when I turned 16 and my mother sent me a cake mix and candles and my roommate Pat Walker and I made the cake and shared it with our dorm by candlelight after lights out, a very special birthday. We are great grandparents for the second time. Pahtosequan (meaning he, she, they bring spring in Nipmuc) born in March. Our granddaughter is a member of the Nipmuc People. Happy another granddaughter, Alice Flanagan, Oakwood class of 2017 married her sweetheart Mario D'Agostino and lives in Sheffield, England. Hope all are well! Miraculously we are healthy so far despite working, ushering for Harvard and proctoring finals etc. We test and test again.



Alice Flanagan '17 with husband Mario D'Agostino

**1957**

**Isadora (Ginger) Botvin Alman** - I moved to the Palm Springs area with my long-time partner. I still write monthly for Psychology Today online ([www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sex-sociability](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sex-sociability)) and I welcome any old (and we are!) schoolmates to write me at [askisadora@aol.com](mailto:askisadora@aol.com)

**1958**

**Holly Clarke-McAlary** - Active with poetry - coordinate monthly poetry reading series. Also busy with social justice work at the congregational church I joined a few years ago. Grandson Tyler was married in October, and granddaughter Natalie will wed in August 2023.

**Jerry Hoerner** - My late father who was born in 1898 and a physician used to say, "the knife of time cuts all of us down". Well, approaching 83 it is working on me. I summer in Ohio and winter in Florida. My email address is [jerryhoerner@gmail.com](mailto:jerryhoerner@gmail.com). Please drop me a note if you are interested.

**1959**

**Susan Gerner Moskal** - Sadly, my husband of 58 years passed away on November 17, 2022. Ed and I had a wonderful life raising two daughters

and watching our six grandchildren develop into amazing adults. After we both retired we traveled the world and supported our local symphony orchestra. I have since moved to assisted living (we planned on doing this together) and am adjusting to a new lifestyle and making new friends.

**1961**

**Karen Drucker Omahen** - Ken and I have become snowbirds! We will spend the winter in St. Augustine, FL and the summer in Newbury, NH.

**1962**

**Joe de Groot** - I moved to Coos Bay/North Bend, Oregon in 2006. After retiring from a career in broadcasting in 2009 I found a nice quiet place to live and have been enjoying my life surrounded by some of the most beautiful nature in the



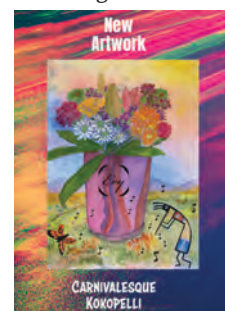
world. As I look back on my past I continually reflect back on my years at Oakwood and the help I received from the Oakwood community. I'm still in touch with Oakwood friends after 60 years and enjoy reconnecting with friends whenever and wherever possible. Best wishes to you all.

**Peter Longini** - I mostly retired this past May and I'm learning to navigate life as a man of leisure.

**1963**

**Barbara Richmond Mates** - I'm hoping this will be my last semester as a professor. I am looking forward to the first time in 50 years without a full time job.

**Evy Reitzel Okerstrom** - Hello to Everyone, I live in New Smyrna Beach, FL and have been here for the past eight years. It is a small art centered community and I am a part of it. I am a watercolor, pen and ink artist primarily. I am represented by the Hub on Canal in NSB, and I teach classes in Sketching with Watercolor, Pen & Ink. I write a



monthly blog about my art news, and have a website: [evyokerstrom.com](http://evyokerstrom.com). It would be great to hear from everyone. I am attaching my latest painting which will be part of an exhibit, "Viva Carnivale" at Art Spotlight in Ormond Beach, the month of February.



**Martha Richdale** - It has been a happy and healthy year. Several camping trips during summer and fall. Tons of beach walking/picture taking at sunrise; most importantly, am about to celebrate 9 years in remission with stage 4 metastatic melanoma! My secret is moving so quickly that it can't catch me, yoga and meditation. Best wishes to all!

**Lewis Shepard**, sitting with his wife, Ellen Berezin, at the New Orleans Art Museum Sculpture Garden. The sculpture is part of George Segal's *Four Benches and Three Sitters*, 1979.



**1964**  
**Shari Hubner** - Over all the years, Oakwood has remained near and dear to my heart, full of special memories of magical personal and educational experiences.

**Pam Tinnis Lord** - My news is my first book "Furry Tales" is being made into an Audio book, and should be out in the first part of this year, narrated by Benjamin Fife. I also have just finished my third book, "Furry Tales - No One Saw This Coming" and have submitted it for publishing. All three books are about friendship, inclusion, ecology, aging and the pandemic.

**1965**  
**Tess Coppoc DeNies** - My husband Mark and I have been married for 51 years last November. Old age is starting to creep up on us, but we're still active in the community. Our daughter and son-in-law are doing well with successful careers.

**1967**  
**Don Badgley** - As of January 1, 2023, I am retired from my insurance business. I am blessed beyond words and looking forward to many years to enjoy the fruits of my and my wife Tracy's labor.

Congratulations to Grammy Award winner **Bonnie Raitt** for her recognition as a songwriter. Her song "Just Like That..." was chosen as Song of the Year at the awards show on February 5th.

**Debra Perlstein Spina** - I graduated Oakwood in 1967 - I take it wherever I go. My two children attended Friends Academy in Locust Valley, NY. They are exceptional participants of life.

**Nancy Leopitzi-Wawrla** - Hey, F/friends! I feel pretty fortunate to have been in touch with former schoolmates from 1965 to 1971. A wonderful surprise, this past fall, was to share cocktails, dinner and a delightful evening in Red Hook, NY, with Leeba Canter Blask '67. She looks fabulous! I periodically speak with my freshman roommate, Barbara Spark '67, who continues

to advise me and provide uplifting humor. I attended Pat and Bob Saling's '67 amazing 50th wedding anniversary celebration, in NYC. I spoke with (Ward) Jake Morrel '65 and Beth Knight Morrel '66 in November, from Florida. (You know they're married, right?) Jake has flown his own planes, in Maine, since the '70's and a college friend's husband, who also flies his own plane (and in Maine), was interested in Jake's book, entitled *Hardscrabble Lodge*. I'm always thrilled to promote a friend's work! Fred Jellin '66, recently sent me a lovely note, with a photo of him and his sons! Jonathan Kaplan '68 has been encouraging me to ski with him in Colorado (...under consideration, Jon, I just bought new skis!). I'm planning a February rendezvous with Nina Kammerer '69 and, separately, with Peggy Keiser, in Poughkeepsie. Connecting with dear Oakwood f/Friends is simply "youthifying"!!! I wish you all a happy, joyous and healthy 2023!

**1970**  
**Theresa Riley Baron** - Wishing love and prosperity to all my Oakwood classmates - the world needs this more than us. Peace to all.

**Jim Raker** - Retired! Mostly playing bluegrass and still causing trouble. Two kids in Alaska and two in Brooklyn - makes travel and visiting easier. See y'all in Poughkeepsie!

**1972**  
**Eric Hoffman** - Enjoying retirement in Berkeley, CA. Sorry that I missed everyone at the 50th reunion!

**1975**  
Thanks to **Randy Detwiler** for visiting campus in February to donate a Celestron Computerized Telescope for our Math and Science Department! We enjoyed the visit and look forward to our students getting an amazing view of the night sky for years to come!

**1979**  
**Ellen Oltman Kellner** - Here is a photo of my old friend and classmate David Eskin '79 and me, when he and his family came to visit us in New Orleans recently.



**1981**  
**Neal Ostberg** - Hi Friends! This year, our community lost Dawit "David" Zeleke, Class of '81. He and I spoke after he chose to discontinue chemotherapy. We laughed and shared about the immense impact Oakwood Friends School had on our lives. We acknowledged the moral compass Quaker life instilled in us and the strong sense of community that remained with us long after graduation. I strive to teach these qualities

to my 10-year old daughter. Dawit will be missed by many. Love to all. Here is a video link showing some of Dawit's accomplishments with The Nature Conservancy in California:  
<https://tinyurl.com/DawitZeleke>

**1982**  
**Levan Johnson** - I'm grateful for my experience at Oakwood during my formative years.

**1983**  
**Anne McCord Wrublewski** - Nothing much new on our front; I still work as a travel agent for Frosch and we continue to live in Riverdale in the Bronx. We still travel to Scotland every year for the Hebridean Celtic Festival, and try to get in other trips when we can. This year will be our 20th wedding anniversary, and we're hoping to celebrate with a small party at An Beal Bocht, which is our local pub. Best wishes to all!

**Oona Younger** - Connecting with so many of you through Facebook has been such a gift. I love hearing about my classmates, teachers, staff and other classes. It's been meaningful to develop new Oakwood relationships and to rekindle older friendships. I hope to see everyone from '83 at the reunion in June! There have been big changes in my life recently. My husband, Howard, died in January from ALS - an absolutely devastating, heartbreaking illness. Last March, after 17 years of working and living in an alternative, intentional elder care community (Howard worked there for 10 years and then became a resident in the care unit when he became too disabled to work) we moved to Wisconsin to live with a friend. Howard was taken care of by me and some wonderful caregivers. Our kids flew in from NY, just in the nick of time and spent a few hours with him while he was still conscious. He died at home surrounded by his loved ones. I'll be moving back to the Hudson Valley this summer to be a part-time live-in caregiver for an elderly person. Volunteering at Oakwood, learning how to play the hammered dulcimer, making medicinal herbal products (salves, tinctures, tree blends, etc.) and spending time with friends and family are all on my agenda. Thank you to Oakwood for being so instrumental in weaving together the lives of so many people.

**1984**  
**Katie Settler** - Every time an Oak Leaves arrives, I rush to see 1984 and love seeing anything sent in. This time, I thought it only fair that I send in something. I have only added to Oak Leaves twice before. Once when I was in my 20's telling you all how I discovered photography and was going to be a photographer!! Then I spent the next 15 years not being a photographer. The second one was when my son was born, who is now 18... Life has been fun, life has been hard and all the feelings in between. Some days are still tough, but I have the most incredible foundation thanks to you all. I am so grateful to Oakwood for being the place I could finally meet the person I had been hiding. I did finally return to photography and have landed my dream job photographing concerts for a venue in Connecticut. My kids are now 16 and 18, my daughter, a mini me. This concerns me. I hope to inspire you guys to add to Oak Leaves because selfishly, I'd love to read about you next time I rush to 1984. Actually, I'd love to read about all the classes. Sending you all my best.



**1985**

**David Hochfeld** - What an incredible year it's been. I got to speak to so many of my friends this year and keep up with my Oakwood family. I even got to be a part of the biggest surprise gift ever. I have become such a fan of my fellow Oaks, that seeing their accomplishments inspires me to be better, and make a bigger impact. 9 yrs with LIFE ALERT, 1,650 lives saved, is just the beginning..... Sending huge hugs from Tampa

**1986**

**Justin Brown** - Happy New Year to everyone. Hope to see EVERYONE at Alumni Day this year (June 16-18). I will be in attendance with some friends making music in the The Spencer Family Theater. We played last year at Alumni Day and had a blast. Played some stuff to make you bop your head. Hope to see more heads bopping this year. We encourage audience participation. Come check us out and hang afterward. See you then.

**1988**

**Jennifer Elizabeth Brunton** - I have a wonderful new granddaughter, Wren Merlin Brunton, born July 29, 2022.

**1989**

Congratulations to **Keith Bunin** on his new play, "The Coast Starlight," opening at Lincoln Center Theater. Previews begin on February 16th.

**1992**

**Dorothy Glusker** - is currently a Language Development Specialist in Woodside, CA and has two daughters, 9 and 14 years old.

**1995**

**Forrest Rohde** - After living out west for the past 15 years, I've recently moved back east, to my birthplace New Hampshire. I am so happy to be back in New England, reconnecting with the friends of my childhood.

**2004**

**Claribel Baez** - My sister Clara Baez '03 is working hard on her cocktail business and I (Claribel aka Bela Baez) am currently focusing my energies on my Reiki and Tarot business. Photo credit to: Angie LM Vasquez



(l-r) Claribel (Bela) and Clara Baez

**2005**

**Edward Poretz** and wife Gigi Rosen Poretz have a baby girl, Zelda Poretz, born on February 9, 2022

**Danny Robbins** - My husband Joe and I currently live in Baltimore where in our free time we're working on renovating and restoring our house from the mid 1800's. Our most exciting news though is that on December 23rd we welcomed our first child, Ezra Isaac Allen Robbins, into the world! He was born healthy and happy at 7lbs 9oz. It was a true family effort to bring Ezra into the world - my younger sister, and fellow Oakwood alum, Sarah '07 donated eggs and our sister-in-law Melissa carried Ezra as our surrogate. We're incredibly grateful to both of them for helping us become fathers.



Danny (left) with husband Joe holding Ezra

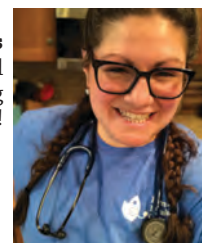
**Deana Stuart** - I'm happy to share that in May 2022, I married my college sweetheart, Seth Abrams. Irene Yee '05 was one of my bridesmaids. Seth and I live with our two cats in our South Philadelphia rowhouse that we purchased in 2019. I work as a Data Engineer and Seth is a Software Developer.

**2007**

**Lillian Shad** - My husband **Mauro Parra** and I (both class of '07) were married back in 2019 and just welcomed a baby girl this past October - Hazel Lorelei Parra. She joins her big sister Laila Jane who just turned 10!

**Sarah Robbins Weers**

- Still loving life in rural northern Michigan, working as a Family Medicine Doctor!

**2010**

**Jessica Cuneo** - In September 2022 I started a new position as a Billing/Accounts Payable Specialist at Kiernan Trebach, LLC, a law firm in Washington D.C.

Congratulations to **Daniel Wysocki** on his marriage to Daegan Keyes on August 28, 2022.

**2016**

**Benjamin Whipple** - My time in the Oakwood community were formative years for me that I look back on with more and more reverence.

**2017**

**Matthew Colalillo** - Just completed an internship at JBT in Kingston NY. I'm a Mechatronics Major (it's a combination of Mechanical Engineering, Computing and Electronics) at SUNY Delhi, graduating in May 2023. It is used to design and develop manufacturing techniques. (picture: my mom on left (Flower shirt), myself, my Aunt Amy, cousin Luke, and cousin Leo.)



**Spike Kelly-Rossini** graduated in December with a degree in Ethnomusicology from Bard.

**2019**

**Victoria Allen** - is about to graduate (May '23) from Washington College. I credit Bill Doolittle for my love of the environment. I'll receive a degree in environmental studies with minors in studio art, political science and museum, field & community education.

### Former Faculty / Friends

**Michael Sklaroff** - Enjoying retirement and living in Rhinebeck. We still have 3 dogs and 2 cats. Two of the dogs are new rescues who never lived with us on campus. I'm in touch, occasionally, with former students. It's great to see them making their way in the world. I volunteer as an ESL tutor; I currently have 2 students whom I see online. And I recently started volunteering at Northern Dutchess Hospital at their Thompson House, their short and long-term care facility, where I chat up 90+ year olds and centenarians!

**Douglas Wenny** - Enjoying retirement at Kendal at Longwood in Kennett Square, PA. 🏡



## Remembering Board Members Ralph Skeels '60 and Dawit Zeleke '81

With sadness and immense gratitude, the Oakwood community remembers two alumni members of the Oakwood Board of Managers who passed away in 2022.



**Ralph Skeels, class of 1960**, served on the Oakwood board for ten years, terming out after nine years in 2018, then graciously agreeing to re-join the board in January 2022. Ralph passed away on December 29, 2022.

Ralph and his wife Judy, whom he met in college, spent almost forty years immersed in public education in New Jersey. Ralph mostly as a Learning Disability Specialist, and Judy as a Music Educator. In retirement, Ralph brought his dedication to service back to Oakwood Friends School, along with his deep connection to Quakerism and Quaker process, rooted in his childhood. Ralph grew up in Chappaqua, New York, where he was a member of Chappaqua Friends Meeting. As an adult, he grew to appreciate even more the special environment he experienced during his high school years at Oakwood.

Long before Ralph became a member of the board, he expressed his gratitude to Oakwood through his steady philanthropy. Quietly, without fanfare, he consistently supported Oakwood financially while furthering its mission through his work. In meetings, Ralph always listened to others with an open mind, then fully embraced the decisions of the board once they were made. Ralph was always ready with kind words of acknowledgment, encouragement, and support for fellow board members, faculty and staff. His modest manner and gentle sense of humor helped lighten every situation. Ralph served as Vice-President, Trustee, and long-time member of the Development Committee. He was a steadfast advocate for Oakwood in every way, never missing an opportunity to contribute his wisdom, his resources, and his time. He was a true friend and ambassador for Oakwood.

Ralph reflected on his Oakwood experience on the occasion of his 50th reunion: "The journey through 50 years began with our graduation in the spring of 1960. It has been a great adventure – taking off for that first summer on Cape Cod with Jack Starke and Dick Merris where we each found employment, adventure, cultural activities, and a good time.

After graduation, I went to The King's College in Briarcliff Manor, NY, graduating with a BA in History. I found a position as a 5th grade teacher in southern New Jersey, and remained in that school district moving from regular education to teaching special education students for most of my career. I met my wife Judy while in college and she found a job in the same district, first in Early Childhood education, then as a Music Educator. Together, we spent a total of 75 years in the Gloucester Township Public Schools. We have a son, Dennick, who is a chief financial officer for a mortgage company in the DC/Virginia area. After we found peace in retirement, we have become enthusiasts for small ship cruising on the rivers of Europe.

Serving on the Oakwood Board of Managers has been a fulfilling experience, and I am very impressed with the students, staff and leadership of the school. Oakwood is extremely fortunate with all that is going on in today's difficult atmosphere. I truly value Quaker education."



**Dawit Zeleke, class of 1981**, completed a three-year term as a member of the Board of Managers in June. He passed away on October 10, 2022.

When Dawit returned to campus to present the 2015 Dash Davis Gleiter Lecture for Social Justice, he mesmerized students and faculty alike with his talk, "The First Time I Saw Snow: An Immigrant's Journey That Began at Oakwood." Dawit's warmth, candor, and ability to relate to our shared Oakwood experience was remarkable. Dawit was generous to Oakwood in every way. He told us: "Oakwood gave to me for four years and that gift I have

carried with me my whole life. What I received was priceless. What little I give will add up and allow another young person the chance to grow and find their way in a complicated world."

Dawit's wife, Cori Ong, shared this reflection: "Dawit was forever grateful to Oakwood Friends School for the guidance and compassion he received from friends, faculty, and staff as he navigated his new life in the United States. Dawit always said Oakwood changed his life. So many good things followed. In turn, I'm grateful for the inspiration Oakwood had in the making of this wonderful man with whom I shared my life."

Neal Ostberg '81 wrote: "Dawit and I spoke after he chose to discontinue chemotherapy. We laughed and shared about the immense impact Oakwood Friends School had on our lives. We acknowledged the moral compass Quaker life instilled in us and the strong sense of community that remained with us long after graduation. I strive to teach these qualities to my 10 year old daughter. Dawit will be missed by many."

Dawit was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and came to the United States in 1976. After graduating from Oakwood in 1981, he earned his B.A. in Cultural Anthropology from Friends World College in Huntington, New York. In his 30 year career at The Nature Conservancy, he was responsible for setting strategic vision for a conservation region that includes forests in the Sierra Nevada, river systems in Northern and Central California, and more than 100,000 acres of agricultural and rangeland properties throughout California.

The Nature Conservancy printed this beautiful tribute to Dawit in their newsletter:

"This month, a light in the world went out. We lost Dawit Zeleke, a friend to all who knew him and one of the most effective advocates for nature the Conservancy has ever known. As a farmer and a fierce conservationist, Dawit was able to turn divides between conservation and agriculture into strong bonds and shared goals.

Over the arc of his extraordinary career, Dawit led conservation partnerships across California, and he was doing this work up until the moment he left us. He was integral to the protection of the wetlands of the Cosumnes River, he helped establish new forests along the Sacramento River and he saw through the 20 year Hamilton City Project. Dawit led the effort to make TNC's Staten Island a model for sustainable, wildlife friendly agriculture and reduced emissions farming. Additionally, he curated the Sierra Valley Preserve to be a haven for both people and wildlife, down to the visitor center's "bird-proof glass."

Beyond his conservancy legacy, Dawit was a wonderful person. His infectious spirit and luminous smile made him a natural connector, but his deep belief in the people in his life made him a true friend." 🌱



## Instant Friends

*In Memory of Dawit M. Zeleke '81*  
By Hank Hayes '80

We were instant friends.

In September 1977 I attended the orientation for new students at Oakwood. We gathered in a meeting room in Lower Reagan (which has long since been converted to bedrooms). I remember being quite nervous and unsure. Full on mid-teen anxiety. A new school filled with new people. All of them strangers. Better to stay quiet, hang back and "test the waters". Stay quiet and people might think you were "cool" (the ultimate badge of honor for teenagers in the late 1970s).

The person leading the orientation was trying to coax new, reticent students into talking, but the silence was continually interrupted by one new student who kept speaking. He did not look like anyone I had ever met. He had a speech pattern the likes of which I had never heard before. Everything he said was LOUD and enthusiastic. He was unburdened by the need to appear cool.

He introduced himself as David Zeleke. I am sure his father and step-mother encouraged the anglicization of his first name, a practice far more common forty years ago than it is today. He was talking A LOT that day. If he was nervous, he didn't show it. His smile was broad, his manner warm and his curiosity was apparent. I liked him immediately.

My original roommate left the school less than two months into the school year. Dawit and I were already best of friends and we made the easy decision to be roommates, which we remained for the next three years until I graduated.

Three years living in the same room. So many experiences were new and fresh, as they are with any teenager. We were each other's confidante and each other's support. Trying to figure out how the world worked, how relationships worked (or didn't). Trying to navigate the many uncharted waters that await all young adults.

His family had fled Ethiopia in the mid-1970s when Haile Selassie was ousted as that country's long-time ruler. He then spent a year (or two) in Zaire attending The American School of Kinshasa before immigrating to the U.S. and enrolling at Oakwood.

Dawit loved Oakwood. He would attend Oakwood for four years and even spent the summers working at the school. It became a home for him. A welcoming community of which he was very much a central figure.

I cannot recall Dawit raising his voice in anger anytime during the 45 years that I knew him. He had a world-class temperament. He was assertive without being pushy, thoughtful without listing into indecisiveness. He didn't say things to people simply for the sake of making them feel good, but I never heard him say anything to anyone to make them feel bad. He was authentic.

He was also courageous. A trait that took me many years to fully appreciate. He had been forced to flee his home country and ultimately to leave his home continent. A decade after



Oakwood and living (mostly) in the eastern U.S., he packed up his belongings and moved to California to begin a new chapter in his life.

In California he would find work with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) continuing that work right up until his passing. He was passionate about his work involving land reclamation and land preservation. He was also adept at finding the rare "middle ground" between land owners, ranchers, farmers and preservationists. He was ideological, but with an understanding that ideology often requires flexibility in order to achieve the greater good.

It was at TNC that he met Cori Ong, the love of his life, who would become his wife, partner, confidante and touchstone for the remainder of his life. Together, Dawit and Cori would build a life of meaning and cultivate a diverse and wide-spread group of friends.

In December 2021, Dawit called my wife Sharon and me and told us that he had stage four stomach cancer. It was awful, scary news. Dawit was confident that he would go through chemotherapy and that his health would improve. He was shaken by this news and keenly aware of the fight ahead, but also optimistic that treatment would be followed by positive results.

Over the following two months Dawit would undergo a series of chemo treatments which sapped much of his energy and left him in extreme discomfort, without yielding the hoped for positive results. By mid-February he and Cori made the difficult decision to cease chemo and to try to "live with cancer" for whatever time remained.

Sharon and I visited in late February. His energy level had just started rebounding and he was able to go for a short walk and talk while we were there. As Spring 2022 progressed, Dawit's energy improved. By middle/late summer Dawit's energy level began to wane, as cancer began to take over. Our phone conversations were frequent, but short. In September 2022 Sharon and I traveled once more to see Dawit and Cori. On the last day of our visit I was fortunate to be able to spend a couple of hours at his bed-side. We spoke about the old days and about days more recent. When it was time to leave I told him I loved him. He replied, "I love you too.....I will see you on the other side".

In his sixty years he had an enormous impact on those who knew him. Quakers believe that God exists in all people and things. God certainly existed in Dawit Zeleke. His spirit does carry on, but I miss him deeply.

We were instant friends. We were friends for life. We will be brothers forever.



### IN MEMORY

**Jeanne Benedict Kuby '44**  
April 8, 2022

**Susan Davis Doderer '45**  
December 9, 2022

**Ellen Godfrey Marquis '46**  
January 15, 2022

**Audrey Cherin '51**  
September 20, 2022

**Barbara Booth Passmore '51**  
November 2, 2022

**Merle Hansen Bigelow '52**  
September 29, 2022

**Andrew Harkness '52**  
July 3, 2022

**Ben Dent '53**  
February 10, 2023

**Ellen Knowles Bisson '55**  
November 3, 2022

**Bard Prentiss '57**  
November 20, 2021

**Dennis Buttinger '58**  
December 30, 2022

**Vivian Hogg Zoller '58**  
October 4, 2022

**Ralph Skeels '60**  
December 29, 2022

**Julie Cook Downing '65**  
December 12, 2022

**Dawit Zeleke '81**  
October 10, 2022

**Frances Yeomans Szasz**  
October 24, 2022  
Former Faculty

## Oak Leaves Winter 2022-2023



OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT  
AND ALUMNI AFFAIRS

**JULIE OKONIEWSKI**, *Director*  
**WENDY GIANGRASSO**  
**ELAINE MILES**  
**AMY SOLIS**



**Address Service Requested**

**2023 Spring School Calendar**

April 18	Earthshare Day
April 29	Visual Arts Showcase and Spring Concert
May 4	Arts Lecture - Irene Yee '05
June 7	Middle School Moving Up
June 8	Senior Dinner
June 9	Commencement
June 16-18	Alumni Weekend

Visit us at [www.oakwoodfriends.org](http://www.oakwoodfriends.org)

## Winter Fun – Circa Early 1930s

