

Oak Leaves

Winter 2024-2025

NEWSLETTER FROM OAKWOOD FRIENDS SCHOOL • CELEBRATING OVER 225 YEARS OF FRIENDS EDUCATION IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

With Gratitude to Henry Brecher '51 – A Legacy of Exploration, Connection, and Generosity



Henry in 1960 at Byrd Station, Antarctica

Henry Heinz Brecher '51 passed away on July 27, 2024, just shy of his 92nd birthday, leaving behind an extraordinary legacy of exploration, scientific achievement, and devotion to Oakwood Friends School. His 78-year connection to Oakwood began in 1946 when, as a 12-year-old without family from war-torn Europe, he arrived at the school via a refugee camp in Oswego, NY. Oakwood became his family and his home, helping shape the course of his life and values. For decades, he remained deeply engaged—serving on the Board of Managers and Alumni Council, giving generously of his time, wisdom, and heart.

A Life of Discovery

After graduating from Oakwood, Henry attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and was commissioned into the United States Air Force. Assigned to the Air Technical Intelligence Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, he seized the opportunity to pursue flight training, sparking a passion for aviation that would endure for the rest of his life.

In 1959, four years after college, Henry embarked on a groundbreaking career as a climatologist, accepting a research position at Byrd Station, Antarctica. It was there that he met Richard Goldthwait, a renowned glacial geologist and founding director of what would become the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center at Ohio State University. Under Goldthwait's mentorship, Henry found his life's work in glaciology and climate science.

For over half a century, Henry explored the world's most remote and extreme environments, from Antarctica to the Andes, advancing our understanding of climate change through photogrammetry, geodetic science, and field research. He earned a master's degree in geodetic science from Ohio State in 1966, studied photogrammetry in the Netherlands in 1969, and later pursued a doctorate in geodetic science.

Despite retiring from Ohio State in 1988 after 25 years of service, Henry remained a dedicated researcher and mentor, continuing field expeditions well into his late 70s—including a 2011 research trip to the Quelccaya Ice Cap in Peru at the age of 78. His work contributed to countless scientific papers, dissertations, and global climate presentations, earning him recognition in children's books and even a mountain named in his honor: Mount Brecher, Antarctica.

A Transformative Gift to Oakwood

Henry's legacy at Oakwood extends far beyond his time as a student and board member. In an extraordinary act of generosity, he left his entire estate—a transformative \$1.3 million bequest—to support Oakwood's future. This gift strengthens the school's endowment, establishes a named fund for faculty professional development and research, and provides critical seed funding for a new capital campaign focused on revitalizing Oakwood's campus and sustainability efforts.

To honor Henry's unwavering commitment to education, teaching, the environment, and Oakwood's mission, we are proud to announce the creation of **The Henry Brecher '51 Sustainability Trail**—a living tribute that will amplify Oakwood's sustainability initiatives while providing hands-on learning opportunities for students.

This initiative will support:

- Improved ADA accessibility across classrooms and residential spaces
- Outdoor classroom spaces in the Greenhouse, Apiary, Solar Array, and Wetlands
- EV charging stations and school electric vehicles for a greener campus
- Geothermal HVAC solutions for campus buildings, including the Collins Library
- Elimination of fossil fuel heating sources for campus facilities
- Smart thermostats and energy-efficient lighting to reduce carbon footprint

From the moment he arrived on campus as a 12-year-old refugee in 1946 to his final days as a scientist, mentor, and philanthropist, Henry Brecher never stopped learning, exploring, and giving back. His legacy will continue to inspire generations of Oakwood students—urging them to question, discover, and take action to protect our planet.

We are deeply humbled by Henry's lifelong dedication to Oakwood and honored to carry forward his vision for a more sustainable future. 🌱

Oakwood Connections

By: Chad Cianfrani, Head of School

During a recent visit to Durham, NC, I was struck by the deep connections between past and present. I had the pleasure of meeting with Joanne Stoller '49 who shared a Fall 1944 eighth-grade report from Head of School William Reagan—typed, signed, and brimming with detail. As I read her report, I couldn't help but think of my own eighth-grade son, now learning in some of the same classrooms, walking the same halls, and engaging with a mission that has guided Oakwood for generations. Though separated by 80 years, they share this campus—its Main Building, Dining Hall, Theater, Dorms, Fields, and, most importantly, its spirit.

Oakwood Report Cards: Fall 1944 & Fall 2024

Joanne ('49): *Active, intellectually curious, adding zest to classes... She talks too much in class.*

Andy ('29): *Shines with creativity, humor, and insight in classes ... He needs to work on self-control in voice.*

This edition of Oak Leaves highlights the voices of our **students, faculty, and community**. Each day, I am both inspired and challenged by the people who make Oakwood what it is. My travels this fall and winter to visit alumni in **Durham, Pittsburgh, Ohio, and Texas** reinforced why we do this work. Every conversation, shared memory, and reconnection affirms our mission and fuels our next steps forward.

In Durham, we gathered at the Durham Friends Meeting, a space that provided a powerful setting to reconnect with classmates spanning seven decades. Joanne Stoller '49, Diane Manning '58, John '64 & Linda Hunter, Sheldon Wilson '65, Anne Akwari '69, Helen Claxton '70, Caroline Alter '88, and Fatima Sarassoro '11 (joined by her spouse, Eddie and daughter, Genevieve) came together to celebrate our shared Oakwood experience. John and Linda generously hosted Julie and me, sharing meals and tour-

ing Durham, including a visit to Carolina Friends School, where their grandchildren attend and their daughter-in-law teaches.

In Pittsburgh, we gathered at the home and stunning Japanese gardens of Sara Jane Benson Victor '54 and her daughter Beth Rabkin. Board members Annette Engler '87 and Parfait Bizimana '16 joined us, along with fellow alumni Peter Longini '62 and Steve Root '65 and his daughter Dana. Our conversations centered on education, the profound impact of the Oakwood community and faculty, and the experiences of our current students. The stories shared underscored how deeply Oakwood shapes lives—both in the past and today.



In Texas, Dick Powell '68 and I reconnected during a rare snow event! Over some classic Texas BBQ, we discussed Oakwood's programming, mission, endowment growth, financial sustainability, and strategic planning—along with a little soccer talk for good measure.

In Ohio, I had the opportunity to reconnect and travel with former Development Director Elaine Miles as we honored the legacy of Henry Brecher '51 at the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center at Ohio State. An evening spent with two of Henry's oldest and dearest friends, Anne and David, stretched late into the night as we exchanged stories—both serious and absurd—about Henry's enduring impact as a scientist, mentor, and Oakwood alumnus. His legacy continues to inspire our community.

This is the heart of Oakwood—a community that inspires, challenges, and gives me hope. Seeing the positive trajectory of our alumni and current students (even those who are a bit 'spirited' in middle school) reminds me that our mission is strong and our path is clear.

Thank you for being part of this journey. I look forward to seeing many of you in the months ahead! 🍁

The Acorn Society: Supporting Oakwood's Future

Have you thought about providing for Oakwood Friends School in the future? One way that members of our community help secure our future is by including Oakwood in their estate plans. Over our long history, Acorn Society members have made important gifts that continue to provide critical resources, building endowment and enhancing programs and campus facilities. Each gift has strengthened Oakwood and benefits our students every day.

Thembi Dube '85, the newest member of the Acorn Society, shared her reasons for supporting Oakwood's mission into the future with a legacy gift.

My life has been blessed to have been a student at Oakwood Friends School and as I've gotten older, I've seen how the blessings have shaped my life.

During my student years, Oakwood was not just a school to me, but it was also my home. As a seven-day boarder, I lived at school more days of the year than with my family. At Oakwood I was seen as a whole person, valued for my academic achievements, my athletic performance, my varied interests and...just being me. I found acceptance for the intersectionality I possessed as a Black, South African-American, young woman who wanted to successfully overcome ideologies of what



Thembi, left, with former faculty member Michael Steinberg and Lilly Marr '85 at Oakwood's 100 Year Celebration in September 2021

being Black and female in America meant and could achieve.

A few decades removed from graduation in 1985, I can look back and see how Oakwood shaped me to be bold, seek equity, break barriers, be kind, be understanding and most of all care about people, our planet and ourselves.

As I reflect back, I deeply appreciate the values that were instilled in me as a student that have carried me through



Acorn Society (continued)

a journey marked by the vicissitudes of life's joys, disappointments, celebrations and challenges. Yet through it all, I remained connected to the Quaker S.P.I.C.E.S.: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Stewardship.

So now what? Well because Oakwood has played an integral part of my life and I remain blessed to serve the school as a current Board Member, I want to say Thank You by making a bequest to Oakwood in my will. I want to leave the school with a gift that will help it carry on its mission to offer students a quality education, imbued with values that will carry them through their life's journey.

So, if you haven't thought about leaving Oakwood a gift through a will or a trust, I hope you will be inspired to consider it. It can impact lives beyond our own.

Please contact Director of Development & Alumni Affairs Julie Okoniewski at jokoniewski@oakwoodfriends.org or (845) 462-4200 x 445 to learn more about planned giving.

The Acorn Society was initiated with a gift from the estate of Louis S. Bock, honoring his wife, Caroline Reagan Bock '29, and her parents, former Headmaster William J. Reagan and his wife Florence. Reagan was Head of School from 1916 to 1948. We are grateful to the following people for including Oakwood in their estate plans:

ACORN SOCIETY

Jane Rahl Apson '63, Don W. Badgley '67, Robert M. Collins '48, Barbara L.E. Cristy, Thembi Dube '85, Joel S. Erlitz '68, Ginny Hayes, Christine T. Herrick '67, Taffy Thunick Hoffman '53, William Homans '51, John B. Hunter '64, Janice Ayer Jackson '64, Rita Muckenhoupt James '52, Jonathan D. Kaplan '68, Patience Eves Killen '67, Elaine Kimpel '59, Myra Koutzen '70, Rosalind Buck Lewis-Smith '61, Suzanne McClain Litner '54, Katrina Mabon '52, Peter D. Mickelsen '54, Richard M. Powell '68, Marilyn Reagan, Peter Reich '61, Philip J. Richmond '67, Peter Van Kleeck '52, Stephanie Ross van Reigersberg '58, Sara Jane Benson Victor '54, Lewis J. Weinstein '57, Gail E. Wild '69 and M. Margit Winckler '62. 📧

A Family Legacy Continues: The Dr. John Yergan Scholarship Fund



(l-r) Charles, Fred, sister Mary (Bunny) Yergan Hughes, and Max

The Yergan family has deep roots at Oakwood, dating back to September 1933 when Frederick Yergan III, Oakwood's first Black student, enrolled as an eighth grader in September 1933. His brothers followed, with Max enrolling in a special seventh grade section the next year, and Charles joining Oakwood for ninth grade in September 1936. After graduating from Oakwood, all three brothers went onto prestigious colleges and notable careers.

Fred attended Oberlin College while Max studied at Shaw University and Columbia University, where his brother Charles also was a student. Both Fred and Max had careers in the U.S. Armed forces, both enlisting during WWII. Max earned his M.D. and became a Captain of the U.S. Army hospital in Mitchell Field, followed by years as a civilian trauma surgeon. Charles also earned his M.D. and became a certified specialist in internal medicine.

A loyal donor who stayed connected to the school for decades, Fred was interviewed by senior Sunita Graham in 2008 and shared, "My time at Oakwood was one of the best periods of my life." His dedication to the school was made even more apparent in the spring of 2016 when Oakwood became the beneficiary of his estate after his passing. In discussion with his nephew and trustee of his estate, Dr. John Yergan, Oakwood established The Frederick M. Yergan Scholarship Fund with a transformational gift of \$75,000 to continue Fred's legacy of supporting students with financial need. Now, over 90 years

after his father Max entered Oakwood and almost a decade after his uncle established his endowed fund, John is continuing his family's legacy of philanthropy at Oakwood through the establishment of The Dr. John Yergan Scholarship Fund.

John first visited Oakwood when he was 13 when his father brought him to campus from their home in Long Island. While he didn't attend Oakwood himself, he has felt a connection to the school through his father and uncles. Reflecting on that connection he shared,



"My father and uncles, all three deceased, had fond memories and good things to say about Oakwood. Uncle Fred maintained a particularly strong connection over the years, and I developed a general sense from him of why he did that. Through discussions with the Development Office and Head of School, I believe that the school has strong, compassionate

leadership. Last year I had several opportunities to meet other staff and alumni. These individuals shared a belief in the school centered around common values, resulting at least in part from their Oakwood experiences. For much of my life I have had a particular interest in access to education and to health care for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. I believe financially disadvantaged Black students, the focus of this scholarship fund, will benefit greatly for the rest of their lives from the nurturing and challenging environment Oakwood will offer to them."

We are grateful to John and the Yergan family for their exceptional support of the school that will ensure access to students with financial need for generations to come. To learn more about how you can support Oakwood through establishing or contributing to an endowed fund, contact Director of Development & Alumni Affairs Julie Okoniewski at jokoniewski@oakwoodfriends.org or (845) 462-4200 x445. 📧

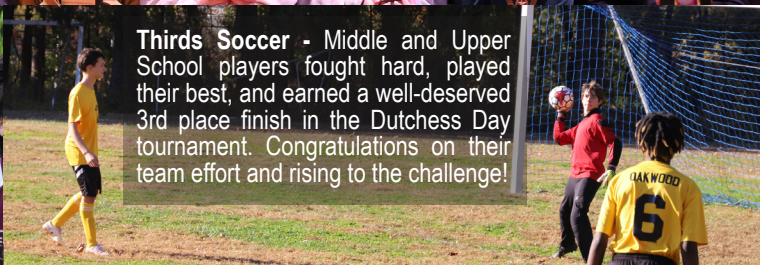


Sports

Congratulations to all of the recipients of the Fall Sports Awards! ►



Cross Country - Oakwood ran strong this year, with a large team of Middle School and High School runners. Captains, Oscar Schilling ('25), and Ava Hendrix ('26), kept us focused with several strong finishes. 8th grader, Andy Cianfrani ('29) crossed the finish line 1st for Oakwood in the HVAL Championships, coming in 9th in the league. Watch out for this team next season!



Thirds Soccer - Middle and Upper School players fought hard, played their best, and earned a well-deserved 3rd place finish in the Dutchess Day tournament. Congratulations on their team effort and rising to the challenge!



Middle School Basketball - The team enjoyed an influx of new players this year, with each player putting in hard work and contributing to the team's winning season!

Girls Varsity Soccer

This small but mighty team gave their all for their best season yet in terms of stamina, resilience, successful plays, and unwavering support for one another! They're looking forward to returning players passing down their knowledge and leadership to the incoming rookies next season.



Boys Varsity Soccer

The season was challenging but rewarding as the team improved their skills through work. They faced tough competition but teamwork and determination led to some great victories. Overall, it was a season of growth, learning, and unforgettable moments on the field!



Boys Varsity Basketball

This young group of dedicated sharpshooters bring their unique game style to practice every day! With many key players playing Varsity for the first time, they are beginning to get a feel for the competition and higher level of play. Undeterred, they are looking forward to the playoffs this year and prevailing on the court next season!



Girl Varsity Basketball - It's a transitory year for this team with a good base forming into something special. Each practice and game, the players worked hard to improve!

Boys JV Basketball - It's been an exciting season playing new teams with constant improvement on the court with each practice and game! They are looking forward to playing hard for the last games of their regular season.



Girls Varsity Volleyball - The team made remarkable progress in their teamwork both on and off the court throughout the season. Despite a mix of wins and losses, their hard work culminated in a thrilling five-set match, with the outcome determined by just a few points!

Girls JV Volleyball - The season began with many inexperienced and young players who coalesced into a force to be reckoned with! They built a strong foundation for next year with very strong, meaningful friendships that endure.





Arts

The Oakwood Arts Department is thriving! **Evie Tourtelot '26** began the year performing piano preludes at the all-school Orientation Assembly and one of her exquisite watercolors is featured on the invitation for the 20th Annual Dinner and Auction. **Darius Kalantari '30** opened Parents' Day with a performance of the Prelude from Bach's Cello Sonata No. 1. Together with Music Director Ted Messerschmidt and **Mira Gould '31**, a member of the Empire State Youth Orchestra, Darius also performed alongside members of the Albany Symphony Orchestra at the the Symphony Side-by-Side Concert held at the MVP Arena in Albany. (photo below)



In October, Ted traveled to Virginia for performances and recordings of his original compositions by the College of William Wind Ensemble, the Clover Hill High School Band, and the Diehn Chorale of Old Dominion University. In December, the Winter Concert featured performances of a wide range of music by both middle and upper school students, including an original song by **Jessica Feng '25**, pictured right. The concert concluded with the annual holiday sing along led by Oakwood faculty and student vocalists.



Theater night was also a great success, with students from Melissa Matthews' Intro to Drama class and a few guests performing scenes and monologues (photos top right). Late in the fall, students also began working on this year's musical production of *See Rock City and Other Destinations* under the direction of Melissa and Ted. In addition, **Marcus Enderle '25** and Melissa will be performing off campus as Morten and Petra Stockman in Troupe Enigma's production of *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen and adapted by Arthur Miller.

Dan Goldman began his second year as the Photography teacher and has revitalized both darkroom and digital photography in the newly renovated photography studio. Students have been working on outstanding photography projects, some of which will be featured in the Arts Showcase in May. Dan's Middle School students have also been working diligently this trimester



making beautiful paintings of the southwest on boxes to be used in an upcoming clothing drive to benefit Navajo and Hopi families. Meanwhile, Dan's photography was recently featured at Equity Gallery in New York City and also in a forthcoming documentary on Native American rights, which he discussed with the school at a recent Community Meeting. (photo left)

Lizzie Phelps' students have been working on fantastic projects in painting, printmaking, drawing, digital arts, and ceramics to contribute to the Fine Arts display at the upcoming 20th Annual Dinner and Auction, as well as the spring Visual Arts Showcase, and *Oakword*, the annual Visual Arts and Literary Magazine, which will come out in late May. 📷



Middle School Highlights

Hands on Civics!

During the first week of November, students put their civics lessons from the lead-up to the national elections into practice at the ballot box. Advisory groups campaigned for their choice for a fun destination for their winter trip, complete with print and video ads, vote whipping and backroom negotiation!

Students then voted using real paper ballots in a mock ballot station (incomplete bubbles were not counted!) and made their selection (a fun trip to the mall this Valentine's Day!). It was an excellent chance for students to process and understand all of the electoral information making this past fall in a way that was positive, fun and enriching.



Service Learning - Giving Back to our Community



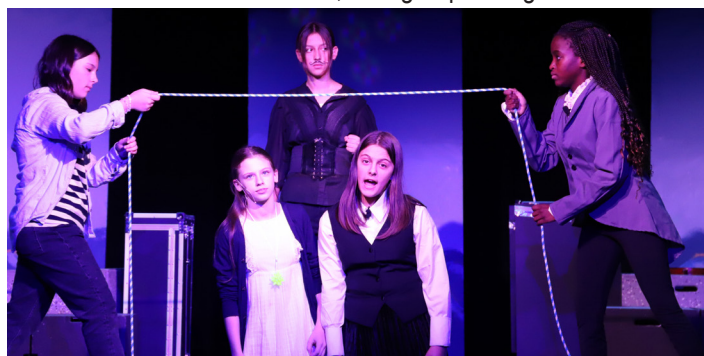
The Middle School experience continues to be centered in service learning, with each month focusing on either cultural exploration and celebration or service projects, and sometimes a combination of both. Recently, students raised several hundred dollars for local community service providers and prepared handmade food and entertainment resources for animal shelters and food distribution centers.

Students also regularly make sandwiches for a local street outreach organization, Hope On A Mission, that supports unhoused individuals in the City of Poughkeepsie. Spring projects on the horizon include a Women's History Month judged cover design project focusing on women in comic books, as well as a full day of service both on campus and in the community on Earth Day.

Engaging Winter Seminars and A Dynamic Performance

MS Winter Seminars were variegated as never before with all core teachers participating and providing at least two seminar selections for students to choose from. Ranging from dramatic eyeliners to graphic designers, from podcasters to mystery masters from Latin to satin, from Calligraphy to Cal Ripken (seriously, the baseball history seminar was a *hit*), students engaged with new subjects and truly challenged themselves to deliver high quality work in a three-week span culminating in a community showcase.

One seminar was unlike the others - a months-long project involving over three quarters of the MS student body working to deliver an absolutely astonishing stage performance of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, an origin story of the young man who would be Pan. Helmed by Teresa Gasparini, the show delivered confident, hilarious, experimental and completely enchanting theater to packed audiences. The production was completely student coordinated and created, from costumes to sets to special effects including a 15-foot monster mouth and a luminescent, stage-spanning mermaid. 🌟



Congratulations to Middle School Music & Drama Teacher Teresa Gasparini, co-founder and Executive Director of the The New Deal Creative Arts Center, on winning the Arts Organization Award at the 38th Annual Dutchess County Executive's Arts Awards! New

Deal was recognized for its incredible work in elevating the Dutchess County art scene by creating an inclusive space where artists and audiences from all backgrounds can explore and celebrate the arts. Teresa, pictured above with her daughter Grace, also serves as the Director of Residential Life and Community Outreach Coordinator, and brings over 30 years of theatrical experience to Oakwood specializing in performance, directing and Shakespeare. She has also been recognized locally with a 40 Under 40 Mover and Shaker Award presented by the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce. Reflecting on New Deal's Arts Organization Award, Teresa shared, "At New Deal, we dedicate our lives to the arts because we believe they are essential to a truly meaningful life. The arts allow us to find joy, to express our deepest emotions, and to understand the world around us in a profound way. In every project we undertake, we see the power of creativity—how it can heal, connect, and inspire change. It is more than just art; it is a way of living with purpose and passion." 🌟



Day of Affirmation of Quaker Values

Honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Oakwood hosted a Day of Affirmation of Quaker Values on January 21st celebrating the values that guide our community: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (S.P.I.C.E.S.). Students chose two sessions out of 22 faculty and student-designed workshops exploring a wide range of topics including cooking and mutual aid, advocacy and expressive arts, privilege and allyship, banned books, civil rights history, migration and immigration, environmental ethics, conflict resolution, and nonviolent resistance. Through deep discussions, movies, games, creativity and collaboration, students engaged with topics that challenge us to build a more just and compassionate world and shared together in the Meeting Room about their experiences. 🍽️



Upper School Action and Inquiry

"and this I knew experimentally" — George Fox, 1647

From the beginning, Quakers have known that true understanding comes through experience and this call to add action to inquiry has been--and still is--at the heart of Friends Education. Oakwood Upper School teachers routinely provide opportunities for students to deepen their learning through imaginative exercises and projects that emphasize learning through doing.

This winter in the trimester long Environmental Hazards course, seniors analyzed hypothetical disaster scenarios using the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction "Stop Disasters" game. They ran several simulations of chosen disasters (tsunamis, earthquakes, or wildfires) before a final run that required documentation of their preparedness planning and reflections on the success of that process based on the outcome. In another senior seminar, students adopted roles of historical figures to simulate the political landscape at the German Constitutional Convention of 1918, post World War I. In these simulations, students made critical decisions but did so from an "insider" perspective, imagining how their choices might impact real people.

"Students constantly tell us how much they enjoy the simulation aspects of extracurricular activities like Model United Nations, so we try to pull these into their classroom experiences when we can," shared

Anna Bertucci, Associate Head and Head of Upper School. "Role playing asks students to evaluate information in order to solve problems while also being creative and empathetic. And that speaks to our mission on many levels."

Direct learning activities can be found in Oakwood classrooms across different disciplines. Chemistry students determined the number of molecules in the air of the Meeting Room (by the way, that's 10,000 trillion trillion) and English 9 students wrote inverted fairy tales from the perspective of the "villain" in a classic Grimms Brothers or Hans Christian Anderson tale. Behavioral Economics students studying decision theory designed experiments and conducted them on their peers. Following the implementation of these experiments, students then wrote about the process, detailing issues they found and identifying things that could be done differently in future iterations to fix those problems.

"The point of education is to be able to turn learning into world changing activity," said Stephen Miller, Humanities Chair and instructor of the Behavioral Economics elective. "And in order to do that, one must employ moral imagination which allows us to 'rehearse' future events and possible outcomes without consequences." And as any student will tell you, learning through experience is actually quite fun. 🍽️



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Accolades for Director of College Counseling Haniya Mee



Congratulations to Director of College Counseling Haniya Mee on receiving the NY State Association of College Admission Counseling (NYSACAC) Distinguished Service Award recognizing people who have made outstanding contributions to college access and education in New York State! NYSACAC brings together school and college counselors, community based organizations that help

students with the college process, and college admissions representatives who all share the goal of helping students transition to postsecondary education and providing access to higher education for the students of New York State.

Haniya first joined NYSACAC in 2005 when she was a college admissions counselor, attending professional development programming as well as the annual conference giving her a chance to connect with peers in the field. She later coordinated the statewide annual conference at the University of Rochester where she worked. She has since transitioned into the Co-Chair roles with College Fairs and Summer Institute, served on the Scholarship and Finance Committees, and now has a position on the Executive Board as a Regional Representative from the Hudson Valley. Haniya is also currently on the ballot for NYSACAC, running for President elect.

Serving in her role at Oakwood since 2020, Haniya is proud of her knowledge of different colleges and universities and really enjoys meeting with students, finding out what is important to them in a college setting, then identifying what colleges would be the best match for them based on those factors. In her time at Oakwood, she has helped students discover and enroll at 16 colleges that no Oakwood student had ever gone to before. She also has limited the number of transfers from each graduating class, a sure sign that students are ending up in the right places.

Encouraging students to use her as a resource, Haniya hopes to help them avoid inaccurate or outdated information. She strives to continue to share her wealth of knowledge in the field, informed by her attendance at annual conferences and understanding of the latest trends and research on the college process. Her goals for the College Counseling program moving forward are to secure funding to assist students in need in attending summer programs. Summer college intensives are an important opportunity for students to discover if a college is the right fit for them and also to explore possible majors, but costs are often prohibitive.

Many thanks to Haniya for her critical work with students and parents as they navigate the stressful but rewarding college process! 🍁

People of Color Conference



Front row (l-r) Dashon Davis and Nikki Winans; back row (l-r) Ricci Alma-Bueno, Allyson Smith, Julie Zhang, Haniya Mee, Anita Jones and Sofiane Hamtousse

In December, a group of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) faculty attended the National Association of Independent Schools' People of Color Conference in Denver, Colorado. The People of Color Conference is a yearly conference meant to uplift, empower, and create wellness opportunities for Black and Brown educators who work in Independent Schools. Together they attended various workshops focused on supporting our BIPOC students, and listened to wonderful esteemed keynote speakers such as Spoken Word Poet Sekou Andrews. They networked with other professionals in various private schools, bonded as a team, and had a lot of fun! When they returned from the trip, they presented their findings and key takeaways with the faculty. *Many thanks to the board members and alumni from the class of 1967 who founded the Norm Keiser Legacy Fund for supporting faculty attendance at the conference!* 🍁

Join us! Register today!
ALUMNI WEEKEND JUNE 13 - 15, 2025



1975



1965



1995



1985



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wgiagrasso@oakwoodfriends.org





Mina Serdoud '26 - Reflections on Gen Z's Perspectives on Cancel Culture

Junior Mina Serdoud recently represented Oakwood through her participation in a webinar hosted by PLATO (Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization) and co-sponsored by the American Philosophical Association Committee on Pre-College Philosophy on *Gen Z's Perspectives on Cancel Culture*. PLATO's mission is to nurture young people's curiosity, critical thinking, and desire to explore big questions, through philosophy and ethics programs for students, educators, and families. The webinar involved international and domestic representation from five high school panelists discussing the challenges and dilemmas in cancel culture, including but not limited to its proper definition, possible ethical grounds, and implications for individuals and institutions.

Mina shared her ideas during the webinar reflecting on how cancel culture can be harmful to a community and can be seen as a form of social punishment. Her ideal would be a more utilitarian approach that aims to educate individuals and raise awareness about an issue rather than ostracizing someone for their beliefs. She emphasized the need for open mindedness and respecting others in your community, using small group discussions when necessary as a beneficial tool to reducing harm. Warning about the potential danger of cancel culture becoming personal, Mina also highlighted the challenges that exist in online platforms and among political figures or social influencers who have large followings.

An active member of the Oakwood community, Mina has embraced opportunities in and out of the classroom since she joined the school as a freshman from the UK. She participates in Ethics Bowl and Model UN and also explored prison reform through her work with the Libby Moroff Leadership Program. She also delves into her areas of interest in the summer, recently taking part in a NY Times summer program in creative writing and investigative journalism led by Pulitzer prize winning journalists. Her summer also included a service learning program in Montana on The Blackfeet Reservation



Mina (left) with classmate Grace Fosket-Cosgrove en route to the Boston Model UN conference

which she describes as, "one of the most incredible experiences of my life" learning about the heartbreaking stories of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) from their mothers. Giving back locally, Mina loves volunteering with Oakwood's Community Fridge and the Beacon Prison Books Project.

Humanities Chair Stephen Miller, who also serves on the board of PLATO, shared, "Mina is on track to break records from my time at Oakwood for the most electives taken, and she's only in 11th grade. This term she ran out of electives and is doing a fascinating Independent Study on Implicit Cognition. Mina does Ethics Bowl, PLATO's Student Advisory Council and every other chance she can find to engage in philosophy."

After Oakwood Mina is interested in pursuing political science and philosophy at a small Northeast liberal arts college and would love to pursue a career related to human rights, perhaps as a journalist. 📸

Winter Reunion

We were thrilled to welcome back alumni from the classes of 2020–2024 for Winter Reunion for an afternoon filled with connection and inspiration! Many thanks to this year's panelists who shared their valuable experiences and advice with Upper School students (pictured l-r) **Ila Kumar '21** an English major at Vassar College who has also studied at Oxford University; **Charles Grenadier '24**, a Biology major with a Pre-Med concentration at Bard College; **Siena Solis '24**, a freshman at Haverford College; and **Stefanie Quintanilla '20**, who graduated with a Bachelor's of Music in Music Therapy from Temple University. Having recent alumni return inspires current students and strengthens the legacy of our community. 📸



Meet The Alumni Council



Parfait Bizimana, Alumni Council President, graduated in 2016 and is currently based in Detroit as a Treasury Analyst. Besides running financial models, he enjoys traveling and discovering various cuisines across the world. After Oakwood, Parfait pursued his graduate education in Western New York at Niagara University. He currently serves on Oakwood's Board of Managers and is passionate about creating opportunities for students from sub-Saharan Africa to have opportunities to pursue an American education.



Richard Distel, class of 2007, has been back in Poughkeepsie for almost two years working for the city in the Planning Department. His passion for stewardship and development of the greater neighborhood which is the City of Poughkeepsie comes from the values he learned at Oakwood. He draws so much excitement from getting to continue to work with the school in his position, building bonds that can make this work stronger and long lasting. He joined the Alumni Council in order to do his part to maintain relationships and build new ones, and hopes to one day send his daughter to Oakwood to see the impact the school makes through her eyes.



Thembi Dube is a proud graduate of the class of 1985, having learned and lived at Oakwood for all four years of high school. Since that time, she earned a B.A. from Emory University and the combined education prepared her for a career as a senior analyst at a Private Equity investment firm in New York. Her current hobbies include visiting historic homes and making homemade granola (thank you, Oakwood for sparking the interest!). She joined the Alumni Council because of her deep gratitude for the values Oakwood instilled in her and her desire to continue the school's tradition of

pursuing excellence and making the world a better place for all who live, work and play in it.



Annette Engler, class of 1987, resides (for now) in the bitter, blustery midwest state of Michigan. She is the queen bee in charge of a 100 plus employee veterinary hospital/boarding/grooming/daycare and physical therapy center for dogs as well as a consultant/mentor for emerging leaders in the veterinary industry. She serves as Board President for Oakwood, and also on the board of Project Samana. She enjoys traveling, camping, hiking, golfing, biking and performing veterinary volunteer work in underserved countries and communities. Annette joined the Alumni Council because she believes education is paramount in our society and feels strongly that Oakwood is one of the finest learning institutions in the world. She wants to be a catalyst in ensuring that legacy continues.



Zack Federbush graduated from Oakwood in 2008 and joined the Alumni Council in 2024. He graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design with his MA in Painting in 2017 and has been a practicing artist in the NYC area since being in a few solo and group shows. He is still running around everywhere these days like he did back in high school. He joined the Alumni Council to help people reconnect and remember their Oakwood experience fondly.



Najah Muhammad, class of 2010 and former student clerk, lives in Poughkeepsie after years in Harlem and Brooklyn. A multi-disciplinary theatre artist and educator, she splits her time between the Hudson Valley and NYC, working with exciting companies and freelancing as a performer, director, and private acting coach. Najah joined the Alumni Council after college, inspired by the late Libby Moroff's encouragement

and a desire to give back through service. After eight years as Council President, she now enjoys contributing ideas and positive energy in a supportive role.



Mauro Parra, Alumni Council Secretary, is a member of the class of 2007 who calls Wappingers Falls, NY, home. He spends his days building his financial services business and enjoying quality time with his family, whether through cooking or playing games with them. Mauro joined the Alumni Council to give back to the community that provided him with so much support during a critical time in his life—an opportunity to pay forward the kindness he once received.



Imani Schectman, class of 2008, is a graduate of Hobart and William Smith Colleges with degrees in Studio Art and Media and Society. With a strong commitment to community building, she has served on the Alumni Council for four years and is now excited to join the Board of Managers. She is the visionary behind Open Market, a lifestyle marketplace that highlights emerging Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) brands and fosters community connections that stimulate local economies. In her role as a Professor of Small Business Entrepreneurship, Imani combines her personal experiences as a founder with her theoretical knowledge to create a dynamic learning environment for aspiring entrepreneurs.



Janet E. Tenney, class of 1967, can't recall when she joined the Alumni Council but after the late Henry Brecher '51, she may be the longest serving member. She spent two years at Oakwood and now lives in the mountains of Western North Carolina but spends time in northern VA and eastern WV. NC is her current home, but her children and significant other live in DC and VA. She gardens on her WV property and in NC, also helping an NC produce



Meet The Alumni Council (continued)

farmer to make fresh produce available to those in need as well as commercial outlets. The Alumni Council has new energy which is great for the school and Janet has been excited by their interest in promoting the Norm Keiser Legacy Fund, an effort of members of the class of 1967.



Loren Talbot, class of 1991, is an advocate who deeply believes in changing systems. She works as an end-of-life doula and as director of partnerships and communications

at INELDA (the International End-of-Life Doula Assoc.); while also volunteering as a grief facilitator through Imagine Newark and hospice volunteer at Villa Marie

Claire. She resides in Glen Ridge, N.J. and is happiest spending time with her husband and son, on her bike, or floating in a lake. She chose to participate on the Alumni Council as she cares deeply about the sustainability of Oakwood and believes that, as one of the oldest schools in our nation, ensuring its ongoing success is paramount. Loren was fortunate enough to spend the last two years of high school at Oakwood and can speak to the transformative impact the school had on her life in such a short time. She hopes to help ensure the same impact for decades to come.



Christopher J. Ware, class of 1989, resides in the Greater Philadelphia area and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He's the founder of a STEM camp for children (Kids,

Coding & Cybersecurity) and recently completed a role in the aerospace industry as an Information Systems Security Officer. Christopher joined the Alumni Council to become more involved in affecting change with initiatives at Oakwood and to take advantage of the awesome opportunity to work with like minded alumni.



Sarah (Robbins) Weers, class of 2007, lives in Northern Michigan with her husband and their two dogs and is a family medicine physician working in a rural clinic with the mission to serve the underserved. She joined the Alumni Council because Oakwood had a huge impact on her life and she wants to keep those memories alive for herself and others.

Interested in joining? Contact development@oakwoodfriends.org 📧

Alumni Connections

From the suburbs of Boston and Pittsburgh to our own backyard in the Hudson Valley, we've been meeting up with alumni throughout the region! Many thanks to **Sara Jane (Benson) Victor '54** and her daughter Beth Rabkin for hosting in their beautiful Japanese garden in Tarentum, PA and to **Beth Porter '87** and her husband Pete Richmond for opening up their home in Newton, MA, once again. Thanks to the alums who came out to hear **Justin Brown '86** and his band Blue Plate Special in New Paltz! We hope to see many of you in our upcoming travels and here on campus for Alumni Weekend June 13th - 15th!



Tarentum, PA:

(l-r) Parfait Bizimana '16, Annette Engler '87, Sara Jane (Benson) Victor '54, Beth Rabkin, Chad Cianfrani, Steve Root '65, Peter Longini '62 and Steve's daughter Dana Bishop-Root



New Paltz, NY:

Front row (l-r) Cherise Brisbon '88, Justin Brown '86, Annette Engler '87 and Susan Rachel Condon '80
Back row (l-r) Ian Richards '84, Bob Hidell and Parfait Bizimana '16
(not pictured: Fran Dunwell '70 and Tona Wilson '70)



Newton, MA:

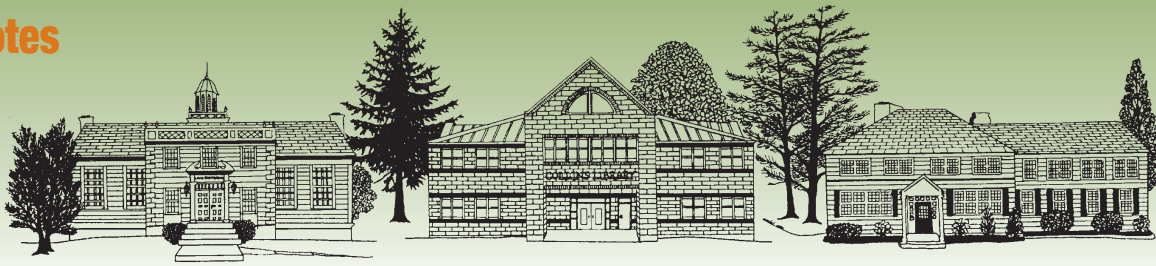
Front row (l-r) Steve Dunwell '65, Ellen Huberman '68 and Beth Porter '87
Back row (l-r) Sean Smith '76, Alyssa Spencer '13, Quynh Nguyen '20, Julie Okoniewski, Mark Engelberg '69 and Lewis Shepard '63.
(not pictured: Bob Hidell and Pete Richmond)



Kingston, NY:

(l-r) Gillian Jule '01, Jacob Leach '11, Justin Brown '86, Stephen Strocchia-Rivera '11, and Ed Hershberger '60
(not pictured: Maura Parra '07)

Class Notes



1946

Betty Nunn Kramer - Heading for age 97 and living at an adult boarding school just like the old days! Oak Hammock at the University of Florida. I am still taking classes.

1947

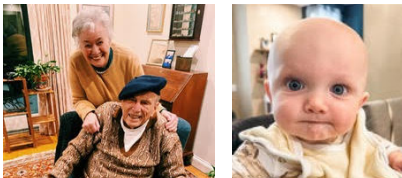
Barbara Tresler Zarchen - Still grateful for my Oakwood experience. Living at home at 95 years of age.

1953

Taffy Thunick Hoffman - I am living happily in my Senior Facilities. Although I had some health problems this past year, I am doing well now.

1955

Judie Palmer Muggia - Al and I left Winchester for Brookhaven at Lexington - wonderful CCRC - where we enjoy our patio home with gardens front and back. Cambridge Friends remains my home Meeting. Al and I both taught Learning in Retirement courses through Tufts University. We lived in New Mexico for four years while Al was chief of Medicine for the Navajo Nation and I ran Planned Parenthood clinics in Albuquerque and Tijeras Canyon. Returned in 1972 raising a family. Served on the Winchester Board of Selectmen 1986 to 1992. Very moved when the local Chamber of Commerce honored me as Winchester's "Citizen of the Year" in 1992. Al retired from forty years as an internist, handing over his practice to our oldest son, who just retired himself! Ten grandchildren live "all over the place", as they say, several in Manhattan, but visit when they can. Our youngest granddaughter, Sydney, presented us with our first great grandson in June! It happens that all three sons attended Middlebury College before attending Tufts Medical School, Harvard Business School. and B.U. Law respectively. Ten grandchildren all out of college, working or in grad school! How time flies!! We are thoroughly grateful for our continuing good health, family and treasured friends. Top left: Al turns 91-July '24. Top right: Newest addition: great grandson - Connor Nissan Bottom: Judie, Frank (youngest) - Will- (2nd) - R. Aldo (1st born) and husband Al.



1956

Martha Ullman West - Perhaps those of my classmates I'm not connected with on Facebook, or in real time and space, would like to know that I'm still on the planet, still working a bit for Oregon Arts Watch, covering dance and its links to visual arts and literature, and will be 87 in June. I went to see the Bob Dylan film the other night, and recommend it for the depiction of Pete Seeger, and his and Toshi's home not far from Oakwood. That made me remember that those wonderful people were on campus a lot, and attended our senior class picnic. Memories I cherish, along with Elliott Finch, a creation of Sarah Newcomb and Susie Deane, whose Seeger parody, "Bean stringin'" still echoes in my mind.

Molly Lynn Watt - Holly Guran, '58, curated the words written in response to art for an exhibit *Images Then Words*. She and I were among the 63 artists at a recent well received exhibition in the Menino Center in Hyde Park, Mass. The exhibit ran for two weeks, followed by an online public zoom reading by the word artists. Also, here is our link for my husband and my recently published play, *George and Ruth: Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War*. It took us 20 years to finish and get published.



1957

Peter O. Lane - I'm glad to know that Poughkeepsie Friends Meeting has a happy 'Sunday home' at Oakwood now. Reflecting on my Oakwood connections: I'm cousins with Jean Taylor Hartwig '52 and her brother Art

Taylor '50, classmates with Walter Dent '57 and I worked for/with John Nemes and Alfred Henderson in summers.

1958

Jerry Hoerner - I split my time between Ohio and Florida and turn 85 this year. My health is okay, however I have never been this age. My two sons are in their fifties and doing well as are my grandchildren. I wish all of you my best.

1963

Martha Richdale - It has been a challenging year in so many ways but ever the optimist, I look forward to 2025. I have always been grateful for my years at Oakwood. As I get older I become even more aware of the ways Oakwood prepared me for life's roller coaster ride. Thanks Oakwood!!

Jesse Rieber - We've had several rough years, particularly my wife, with health issues however we seem to have recovered, at least to the best that old people recover. I continue to see clients all week with weekends off. As I watch, with considerable horror, what is happening in this country I am thrown back to reflecting on my learnings at Oakwood. I do not believe things in the nation are going to end well, especially as anything which looks like truth and the standards of the nation disappear. Oakwood will be an oasis in the middle of the chaos, a place where truth is not extinguished.

1964

Pam Tinnes Lord - Lots going on. Three children's books, two are now audio books. Granddaughter at West Point. Still cycling and swimming. Experienced first death of a sibling.

1967

Christine Herrick - Janet Tenney came west to Bend, Oregon, where I live, to help me celebrate my 75th birthday. We met up with Barbara Bohm-Becker, who also lives here in Bend, and took this mini-reunion photo. I am on the left, Janet is in the middle and Barb is on the right.



**1968**

Peggy Landsman - My first full-length poetry collection, *Too Much World, Not Enough Chocolate* (Nightingale & Sparrow Press, 2024), has been published. A preview of the book is available on the publisher's website. Nightingale & Sparrow Press: <https://press.nightingaleandsparrow.com/too-much-world-not-enough-chocolate-by-peggy-landsman/> All links are also available on my website: peggylandsman.wordpress.com

1968

Andy Schlossberg - Happily living in Long Beach, New York. I live 10 houses from the beach. Moved a year ago to be close to family. Live 5 houses from my daughter and my granddaughter and grandson. My granddaughter is about five and my grandson is about 3. Unfortunately my son, with my daughter in law and grandson, almost 4 live in Los Angeles. Only see them three times a year. Belong to the recreation center with an indoor pool. Recently joined the local Jewish Community Center. Swimming in the indoor pool and taking classes. So glad to not be living in New York City. Life is much easier in Long Beach. Trip to Spain and Paris in March! Had rotator cuff surgery in September on my right shoulder that I use. Tough and painful recovery with PT. Invite one and all to visit. The beach is great. My dog Joey and I have room for visitors! Excellent food choices in the area. I enjoy reading and watching TV. Be well and come on out to the beach.

1970

Theresa Riley Baron - Wow! 55 years is right around the bend. How can that be possible? Hi and God bless to all my classmates.

1972

Jody Mindell - My recent visit to Oakwood this past June was beyond words. Thank you to Harriett Whitcomb, Juan Williams, Artie Washburn, as well as Chad Cianfrani for their moving words about Parker Washburn. Parker touched all of our lives. May she RIP.

1976

William Bogle, Jr - Carol and I moved to Oxford, PA after 7 years near Hilton Head, SC. We are enjoying being close to our children as they are each a little over one hour from us. Carol is fully retired but I'm still working part-time at a nearby golf course. We love visiting historic places such as Longwood Gardens, Winterthur, as well as local farms.

1980

Susanrachel Balber Condon - I am still teaching at SUNY Downstate. Hands (Hannah) is in massage school in Poughkeepsie and Malcolm is a junior at Alfred U. Hoping to see folks at Alumni Day '25 for our 45th!

1983

Amanda Junquera Downing - Our oldest started college this year and our youngest is a junior in high school. Our family has grown to include a new puppy & kitten. I'm still happy at Microsoft and welcome any alumni visiting Maine to stop by.

1995

Forrest Rohde - I'm still in NH with my wife Meghan and youngest son, Forrest. I had a busy year cross-training into a new career with the Air National Guard which required several trips to other training bases while maintaining my presence as a Boston based consultant. I'm looking forward to taking a break from coaching the snowboard team this winter and just recreational skiing. Here's a creative shot from Christmas 2024 by Forrest, the youngest photographer in the family!

**2007**

Emily Bogle - My husband Tom and I welcomed the arrival of our son, Alexander, this summer. Alex is doing great and brings joy to the entire family, including Grandad Bill Bogle, Jr ('76), Aunt Julie Kratchman ('73), Aunt Barbara Feingold ('70) and Uncle Justin Bogle ('11).

2009

Dan Schwarz - I went to grad school in the Bay Area (UCSF) and have been out here since!

Peter Zimmerman - I'm writing and directing scripts at the PIT in NYC. I'm also Breezy Hill Orchard farm manager at NYC Greenmarkets (3x/wk), writing humor freelance for Upwork, and reviewing portfolio submissions for NYU admissions in dramatic writing.

2010

Laren Elizabeth White - Quite a bit has happened since I left Oakwood. I graduated from Alfred University, moved overseas, and began my career as an international educator. Since then, I've lived in three countries and worked for a variety of independent schools around the world. Along the way, I also earned a master's degree in international education. Most recently, I'm preparing to get married in June and start my next chapter in Bangkok, Thailand, with my husband.

2023

Brooklyn Dottin - I have gotten far, far better at music production and songwriting since high school. So you can relax. I am not making any more "Stone Cold" replicas. I have been performing at open mic events on campus. Also,

I have been working at the multiple-Marconi-award-winning college radio station, 88.7 FM, WRHU. I have recently become the Associate News Director of the news department there. I have actually created the imaging (theme music/sweepers) for Queerly Informed, the queer news and current events show on that same radio station, of which I am associate producer. So I am number two in everything. Nice.

Jimmy Lin - Studying Biochemistry & Biophysics at Amherst College

Faculty & Friends

Michael Sklaroff - Both my children, Amelia and Jonah, got engaged at the beginning of the summer last year, and we had a double engagement party here in Rhinebeck in early October. Jonah lived on campus with me while he attended Dutchess Community College, 2013-2015, and Amelia was the substitute middle school English teacher while Emily Woolever was on maternity leave. [I believe this was the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year.]

Here's a photo of the two couples in Rhinebeck, October 6, 2024. Amelia and Jonah are in the center; their fiancés are on the left and right.



Ann Wyrick - My husband, Warren Wyrick, was hired to be program director, overseeing the work jobs and extra travels for the students. We came to Oakwood in 1964 and lived in the barn with our two young boys, four and one. Warren eventually became the music director, development director and dean of students. Seven wonderful years and a new baby born in 1969, was a tribute to our wonderful life at Oakwood. Warren put on many musicals and 'Amahl and the Night Visitors' - two different times. It was a wonderful time for us and I hope for the students that we came to love so. I'm lucky to be in touch with some of those students through Facebook and enjoy hearing about them. Warren died on Valentine's Day in 2020 and I miss him every day. He was a wonderful person, a great father and dedicated teacher.



Relections on My Father, Demetrius Toutounas

by Lili Toutounas '98



On October 3, 2024 my father, Demetrius Toutounas passed away peacefully, surrounded by the comfort of loved ones, his hand in mine. The outpouring of warmth from former students and colleagues has been heartening, and I have since been fondly reminiscing about my childhood at Oakwood.

I was raised by my father on the Oakwood campus, and some of my earliest memories are from there. From the ages of 5-18, I lived in "The Barn".

These were formative years. We ate our dinners in the dining hall. The bike he bought me lost its training wheels on the hill behind the Main Building. As a kid I would go to his classroom everyday after school, back then in the basement of Craig dorm, and write a note that I was home and slip it under the door of his class. Sometimes he would open the door and I would enter the class, very sheepishly, with some idea that my father was teaching a foreign language; it could have been French, Spanish, or Latin. This ritual was so integral that I barely remember when I was able to forgo it. His students were my sometimes babysitters and sometimes friends. The bond he shared with his students was obvious, even to me as a child. I thought he was just the funniest, coolest, and smartest person in the world. If you knew him, you might have fallen victim to one of his practical jokes. I remember standing next to him giggling in our living room while he would do one of his famous pranks-calling fellow faculty members and pretending to be students' parents. He had these ridiculous accents and somehow, they believed he was someone else, at least momentarily. As I got older of course this got less funny, and more embarrassing. Later as I entered my teen years and became a student at Oakwood, my dad was my tenth-grade History teacher. I was grateful this was just one year, and that I took French and not Spanish so he was not also my language teacher.

My father loved animals and tending to his yard, and long drives with all the windows down. As a little kid we traveled a lot. We went to Peru when I was 8, then to Greece to visit family when I was 10, after his father, my grandfather died. Both significant experiences. But the most memorable trips were the long car-rides we took together. He loved driving up to Lake George and Quebec City. These were very long rides, but we always took the scenic route. He hated only two things about driving - wearing a seatbelt and thruways. We listened to a lot of music in the car, and I had an early education on Bob Dylan and classical composers. During these particular summers of the mid eighties, Dirty Dancing and La Bamba were popular movies and soundtracks. He made me memorize "La Bamba" (in Spanish) at 7-years old. I didn't think it was weird at all, and I would sing it on the school bus even though I didn't understand the lyrics.

My dad always had a way of teaching me things. He could not help but double as my own personal teacher. We would be out to dinner and he would be instructing me on topics that ranged from the ancient world and civilizations, to his favorite, etymology. As a Greek and Latin master he apparently knew the root of every word. He taught me Greek; he was in fact my Greek School Teacher at the church in Poughkeepsie. He taught me the value of proper grammar, investing in literature, pursuing knowledge, singing loudly to music that moved you, and enjoying a meal at a restaurant. I resisted his teachings more as I got older, to his very visible dismay, and then less so again when I became an adult with children of my own. But what my father probably never knew is that I idolized him. I wanted to live up to his expectations, because to me, he was a giant. Not just because he was my dad, but because I knew there was no one like him in the world. After I became a mother, I got the pleasure of seeing him as a grandparent. He was just as doting, funny, and loving as he had been with me as a kid. My own children, Omar and Esme, were so lucky to have him in their lives. He could relate to them in a way most adults cannot, a visual manifestation that is burned into my mind. I've never encountered a man who can turn so quickly from frighteningly serious to a class clown in a matter of moments. It remains for me, his most endearing quality.

At one of the many Oakwood graduations I attended, I recall one where the speaker said that as we grow older we say more hellos, but also more goodbyes. That sentiment has stuck with me, particularly as I have said a few painful goodbyes the last couple of years. Now as I embark on the tedious journey of clearing out the house my father lived in that was once my grandparents, sorting mental and physical piles of what to keep and what to toss; making judgment on what is sentimental, when everything is, I find that he is everywhere. He's in the dusty books and old rugs, in photographs and maps, and in the trinkets that fill every drawer. I can almost feel him laughing his big hearty laugh as I try to clear out the tens of thousands of books that he collected over his life to other octogenarian book dealers. The irony is not lost on me.

The day he died I went to his house and saw an unfamiliar cat sitting in the yard near his chair and I sheepishly waved and said "Hi Dad."

My father impacted so many during the course of his life; colleagues, students, neighbors and friends alike. I felt privileged to call him my dad, the greatest of all time. 🍷



Please join us in honoring Demetrius with a tree dedication ceremony at Oakwood on Saturday June 14th during Alumni Weekend.





Remembering Chase Crosley

The Oakwood community was saddened by the loss of beloved teacher Elizabeth Chase Seymour Crosley, known as Chase, who passed away on December 4, 2024, in Wells, Maine. Born on October 5, 1929, in Kingsport, Tennessee, Chase graduated Magna cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Wheaton College and earned a Masters from Columbia University. A very creative woman, she then had a successful acting career, including a national tour of *The World of Suzie Wong* with William Shatner. She was also in numerous soap operas, most notably her role as Jane Fletcher in *Guiding Light*.



Reflecting on their mother, Amanda Downing '83 and Leo Junquera '86 shared, "Chase was a remarkable woman who was a fierce and loving advocate for us. She left a successful career as a stage actress and soap opera star to provide a more stable life for us as a single mother, overcoming many challenges but always finding a way to persevere. During this time, she found support from Quakerism, which aligned with her sense of community, equality, and fairness. Eventually, she moved us to Oakwood where she led the Drama department and taught English." She met her husband, Mac Simms, humanities teacher and later Head of School, at Oakwood. Chase and Mac, pictured below, were part of a core group of teachers at Oakwood that inspired and nurtured generations of students, many of whom remained close to them for the rest of their lives.

Chase had a particular love of Shakespeare. Her creativity and care would manifest itself everywhere - from the elaborate sets she created as a drama teacher, to her special basmati rice recipe, to the Halloween costumes she made for her children, to the costumes she sewed for her drama students. She loved to learn, and curiosity was a core pillar of her being. Coming from a Navy family; her grandfather was a Rear Admiral, and her father and uncle were both Captains and she was proud of them, but she was a pacifist. She had a strong internal compass and held to her principles in an unassuming manner. She was also athletic and loved to play tennis and swim, which she did gracefully and well into her 80's.

There was rarely a person Chase met who she didn't welcome into her home and her heart. She looked for the good in people, including those with whom she disagreed and could always find a place of empathy. Even as Alzheimer's stripped away her specific memories, she continued to bring joy to her community and was a favorite of her caregivers. She will be remembered fondly by the Oakwood community for her kindness, positivity, curiosity, perseverance, creativity, and beautiful smile.

Please join us in honoring Chase with a bench dedication ceremony at Oakwood on Saturday June 14th during Alumni Weekend. 📍



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Oak Leaves Winter 2024-2025



OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT
AND ALUMNI AFFAIRS

JULIE OKONIEWSKI, Director
WENDY GIANGRASSO

IN MEMORY

Maria Bohm Jacobson '42
September 3, 2024

Katherine Williams Brown '47
March 7, 2024

Virginia Self Bunker '48
May 12, 2024

Janet Deuell Merritt '48
July 14, 2024

Eleanor LeeHall Webb '49
August 3, 2022

Thomas Rockwell '51
September 27, 2024

Raymond Meagher '52
February 24, 2023

J. Lawrence Shane '52
January 29, 2025

Paul Grant '53
December 20, 2023

David Lewittes '53
June 16, 2024

Penny Colby Betts '54
September 13, 2024

Guy Philip Ellsworth, Jr. '55
July 13, 2024.

Lesley Willis Barg '56
August 31, 2024

Richard Merriss '60
April 24, 2024

Charlotte Sanford Mason '62
April 11, 2023

Lanny Clegg '63
August 8, 2021

David Sands Wolpert '63
May 17, 2024

Marion Shackford Chazan '66
January 16, 2025

Henry Canby '67
November 16, 2023

Courtney Brown Gabrielson '72
September 10, 2024

Richard Avery '75
November 29, 2013

Former Faculty
Nancy Keller-Coffey
November 29, 2024

Chase Crosley
December 4, 2024

Yvonne Poley
January 22, 2024

Neva James Riviere
May 2, 2024

Demetrius Toutounas
October 3, 2024

Bertie Wood
September 12, 2024



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2025 Spring School Calendar

April 22	Earthshare Day
May 10	Visual Arts Showcase
May 13	Spring Concert
May 16-17	Spring Production
June 4	Middle School Moving Up
June 5	Senior Dinner
June 6	Commencement
June 13-15	Alumni Weekend

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