

MARIN MONTESSORI SCHOOL

#5

SUMMER 2016



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

MARGARET MEAD

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Owen Jones • Liesbeth Koning • Anna Mitchell • Noorisinhg Saini • Saahil Saini • Sam Shapiro •
Margy Sheehy • Allison Slingluff • Sheldon Smart • Emily Stull • Martine Xenja • Generous and
Talented MMS Photographers

I was headed to the Junior High with a back seat filled with gallons of chocolate ice cream, a tub of malted milk powder, and an industrial-strength blender. During the Residential Weeks at the Junior High, I am making it a tradition to show up on one evening to throw on an apron and blend up chocolate malted milk shakes for all the students. This evening though, a call came in letting me know that the electricity was out on campus. When I arrived it was pitch dark. The flashlights were out and on, and the boys (it was boys' week) approached me to tell me their biggest worry: the dozen or so baby chicks that just hatched needed the electric-powered heat lamp to work to keep them warm and alive. While they were waiting for the power to come back on, the boys figured out a solution. They gently tucked chicks into their sweatshirts and pockets, and hovered around the other chicks to monitor their welfare. In the ensuing hour a parent who lives nearby and who had power swooped in to rescue the chicks and take them to warmth, and the faculty team discerned that for safety reasons, they needed to send the students home. It was remarkable to witness the parent community rally so quickly to the call to pick up the boys. They coordinated carpools and offered to host in their homes students who lived far away; they happily supported us in ensuring every boy got to a home safe and sound.

This evening sticks in my mind because everything about it illustrates the level of care in our community: adolescent boys protecting the vulnerable lives under their watch, the parent community quickly looking out for each other's children, and the faculty keeping their focus on safety of students as the number one priority. In my time at MMS, I've seen such levels of care in our community over and over. Indeed, it doesn't surprise me that many of MMS's veteran families tell me that they made their best and lifelong friends through the MMS parent community. Looking more deeply into this, it affirms what I love about our school, that families who choose MMS tend to hold passionately to a shared set of values that bring our community together with a unified sense of purpose: we seek to enliven the thirst for learning with which our children enter the world; we honor and support the unique richness and developmental timing of each child and adolescent; we strive to cultivate in our children and adolescents bright thinking minds, caring hearts, and a connection to the planet that will invigorate and sustain them throughout their lives.

Over fifty years ago a few parents envisioned an authentic Montessori school for their children. Now, more than a half a century later, hundreds of families make up the vibrant and inspired community that is MMS. Margaret Mead famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” I am convinced the values our MMS community enact in the world each day are exactly what is needed, now, perhaps, more than ever before.



SAM SHAPIRO
HEAD OF SCHOOL



Once Upon a Time... Long, Long Ago...

2 ...there was in the land of Marin a small group of young parents who had read in the *Wall Street Journal* about Dr. Maria Montessori and her philosophy of what she called "Education for Life." They commenced to chat about bringing about such a community and environment for their own young children. One of the fellows took a trip to Holland to inquire about signing up a group of young Dutch ladies to direct such an operation. Meanwhile, others among the founders discovered the perfect site in a little frame house with a white picket fence around it on Belle Avenue in San Rafael. And so it was that, on January 6, 1964, Marin Montessori School opened there with eighteen children.

By the following year it became necessary to open two new sites, leaving Belle Avenue behind, to accommodate the number of families who were of like mind with those founding pioneers. The school remained in these two spots for several more years, next to what is now Office Depot out on Miracle Mile. The number of the young ones and their families who enjoyed these early years is hard to remember. The first fundraiser, because we had the perfect site on Miracle Mile, we sold Christmas trees (thanks, of course, to those strong young dads who journeyed up to Sonoma County to haul back the trees!). The next year the fundraiser was the Dirty Book Sale

(not what you think!). We had a parent couple who worked for a book printer and brought us boxes and boxes of old books with their covers torn off, thus "dirty." Another year, we had our first auction in one of the families' home in Strawberry, a tradition that has carried on for these many years.

As to administration, after a couple of years the Board hired a secretary for the morning to answer the phone and do the filing so the teacher was free to be with the children, enjoy their developing personalities, and present to them the Montessori materials through which they learned. One Saturday, everybody came to school to paint the wall we shared with Goodwill Industries; many studies of animal life found their home on that wall. That was the first of what were fondly called "Work Parties," when twice a year all the parents assembled to paint walls, refinish chairs and tables, plant trees, repair fences, and the like. The sense of community was blossoming!

By the spring of 1969, we realized that the organic development of our school, as with that of our young students, had moved us to a point where we needed to be unified at one site, particularly since one of the sites was not to be ours the following year. At the Annual Picnic, one of our parents

quietly came to me to ask about this dilemma and offered to look around. It was this little conversation that moved Marin Montessori School to its next reincarnation. Jim and Nancy Kelso, whose daughter was in my class, purchased the site at 5200 Paradise Drive in Corte Madera. The reconstruction elements required to form the two classrooms were designed and built by several other parents, and the Work Party that summer brought it all together. We leased the building from the generous Kelso family and by 1985 were able to complete our purchase from them of this beautiful gift!

With the parents and the Board of Trustees respecting the complete autonomy in the pedagogical field of the trained Montessori teachers and the willingness of the Board to cooperate as much as was economically feasible in the understanding of the needs of the children, the School gained a great deal of strength in itself. Our authenticity in adhering to Montessori philosophy gave our school a respected reputation of excellence in the national Montessori community. It was a joy for all of us teachers, then and later, at MMS to have the freedom to do what our Montessori training inspired in us!

It was in this wholly cooperative manner between Board, parents, and teachers, based on the developing needs of the children, that each additional classroom, each level of Montessori education, and our daycare programs were planned and created. As the student numbers grew, the obvious need for administrative work developed. The next step, was to hire an Administrator. That Christmas I stopped in at Phyllis Pottish-Lewis's house to have a little chat. She believed that she might be willing to fill that role for two years, if she could open an Elementary class the following year. The Board of Trustees agreed and worked with the owners of the Domes, which were lying fallow, while Phyllis stared longingly at them from her office, to provide a home for the Elementary.

From this, the Elementary hatched and as our MMS history would indicate, grew, first as one class of six-to twelve- year-olds, later as two lower and upper Elementary classes. For us Primary teachers, it was such a valuable treat to have the opportunity to witness the beautiful development in our youngsters

as they journeyed up through those years, now completing the elementary cycle...and today, of course, even farther! To see the students taking on more responsibility and thus more freedom when they come across the big field to offer the Primary children the results of their research and inspire the younger ones in their own research, the "studies"... this was our privilege as teachers!

I also had the opportunity to serve on the Board for six years after retiring from the classroom. Today, I still enjoy attending the fund-raisers, the step-ups and graduations, and best of all, joining in the Ring Mountain hikes and field trips with the Primary classes.

My own life experience has been so fulfilled with the joys of working with and serving the children and such supportive and appreciative parents who have so graciously and trustingly turned over their young treasures to MMS. And my friends still comment on how alumni find me all over this land with a heartwarming, "Hi, Miss Margy!" How fortunate am I?

So many treasured memories that I will never forget... ●

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MARGY SHEEHY
FORMER MMS TEACHER
AND BOARD MEMBER



Making Lifelong Friends

On a Friday morning in 2015, I sat in a circle with my close friends at the MMS Junior High to say goodbye. By then I'd spent 13 years of my life as a student at MMS. I didn't feel like it was my last day at MMS, I guess because it was the only school and second home that I'd ever known.

I don't really remember my toddler or primary experience at MMS. But, in first grade, I became fast friends with Saahil Saini. Finding that we liked doing different parts of projects, we teamed up to do all our projects together, something we would do for many years. Now, 13 years later, Saahil is still my closest friend despite the fact that we went to different high schools and colleges. I know we will always be close friends. And, our MMS circle is bigger; we regularly spend time with several of our peers from the MMS Junior High.

Besides working with and getting to know Saahil, MMS always fostered a feeling of community. My experience at the Junior High particularly made me feel connected with all the students there. We really got to know each other. Perhaps it was because of the adventurous trips we took together to the Grand Canyon and Washington, D.C., or perhaps it was because of the time we spent together during residential weeks. Whatever made it happen, my community included the teachers too. They taught us, counseled us, played sports with us, and demonstrated every day that they cared how we were doing. They were our friends. Now, just finishing up high school, I know I'll always value my time at MMS. What an amazing school! ●

SHELDON SMART
MMS GRADUATE 2012
SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY - FALL 2016

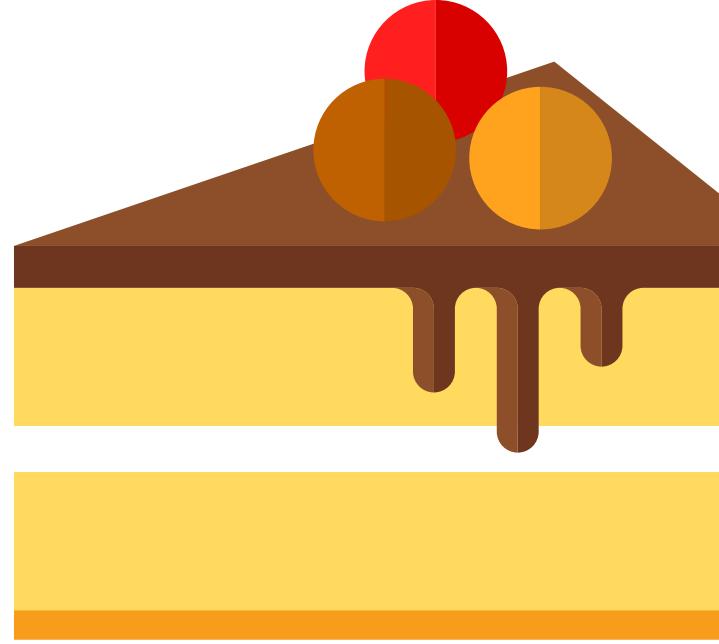
Pythagorean Theorem is a Piece of $C^2 = a^2 + (b^2)ke$

Growing up with a Montessori education, I have developed various characteristics from its teachings, all of which have shaped my personal identity. Montessori is designed in a way that doesn't force qualities upon its students, but allows them to naturally flourish. Any student who enters the Montessori community comes out of the system primed for success. I am currently a college freshman at Santa Clara University with two business launches under my belt, and I have been a part of numerous successful projects like Glassdoor and Tablehero. I owe my successes to Marin Montessori because of the identity and skills it allowed me to develop at an early age.

Creativity, independence, and teamwork are the three pillars of the Montessori education. These pillars become the foundation for every student who resides within Marin Montessori's community. I personally experienced these aspects on a daily basis, and very vividly remember how they played out in one of my projects while I was in the upper elementary. My best friend Sheldon Smart and I had just received a lesson on the Pythagorean theorem and were prompted to demonstrate our knowledge of the newly learned topic. After a very careful design process, Sheldon and I created the blueprints for a cake, which could ultimately be broken down to highlight the Pythagorean theorem.

We then organized a trip for materials and worked together to create not only a sufficiently sized cake, but also a tasty one. Our project is a prime example of the community Marin Montessori fosters and the qualities it imbues in its students. Sheldon took charge in designing the cake because he excelled in creative matters, while I organized the details and made sure our project highlighted the key ideas of the theorem. Sheldon and I both complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses, but also strengthened ourselves individually. It was always a symbiotic relationship that worked toward bettering the system as a whole because we built off of each other. In fact, our roles could easily be reversed today because of how we've rounded each other out. Each student works his way through this process of "rounding out" and as a result, finds himself in a position to succeed later on. Ultimately, students gain crucial team skills and the ability to be independent, out-of-the-box thinkers, each with a drive for creating dynamic communities that have been bettered by their presences. ●

SAAHIL SAINI
MMS GRADUATE 2011
SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY





Community in the Lower Elementary

I

Building community is an important part of the life of the lower elementary child. In the fall, the children are settling into their classrooms, learning the systems and getting to know one another as they work collaboratively on various follow-up projects to new and exciting lessons. Collaboration is integral to the elementary approach, and the children learn how to communicate, contribute their individual insights, and compromise through this work. Classroom jobs like pet and plant care, folding the laundry, and classroom cleaning allow children to develop their sense of responsibility to the community. Classroom meetings, including the more formal and much coveted “Agenda Meeting,” that the children set depending on the various activities, help grow their sense of citizenship. The children write compliment books to every student throughout the year, which draws their awareness to the unique gifts that each child brings to the community. This work builds throughout the three-year cycle as children move from learning how to work together to being leaders and role models in the community.

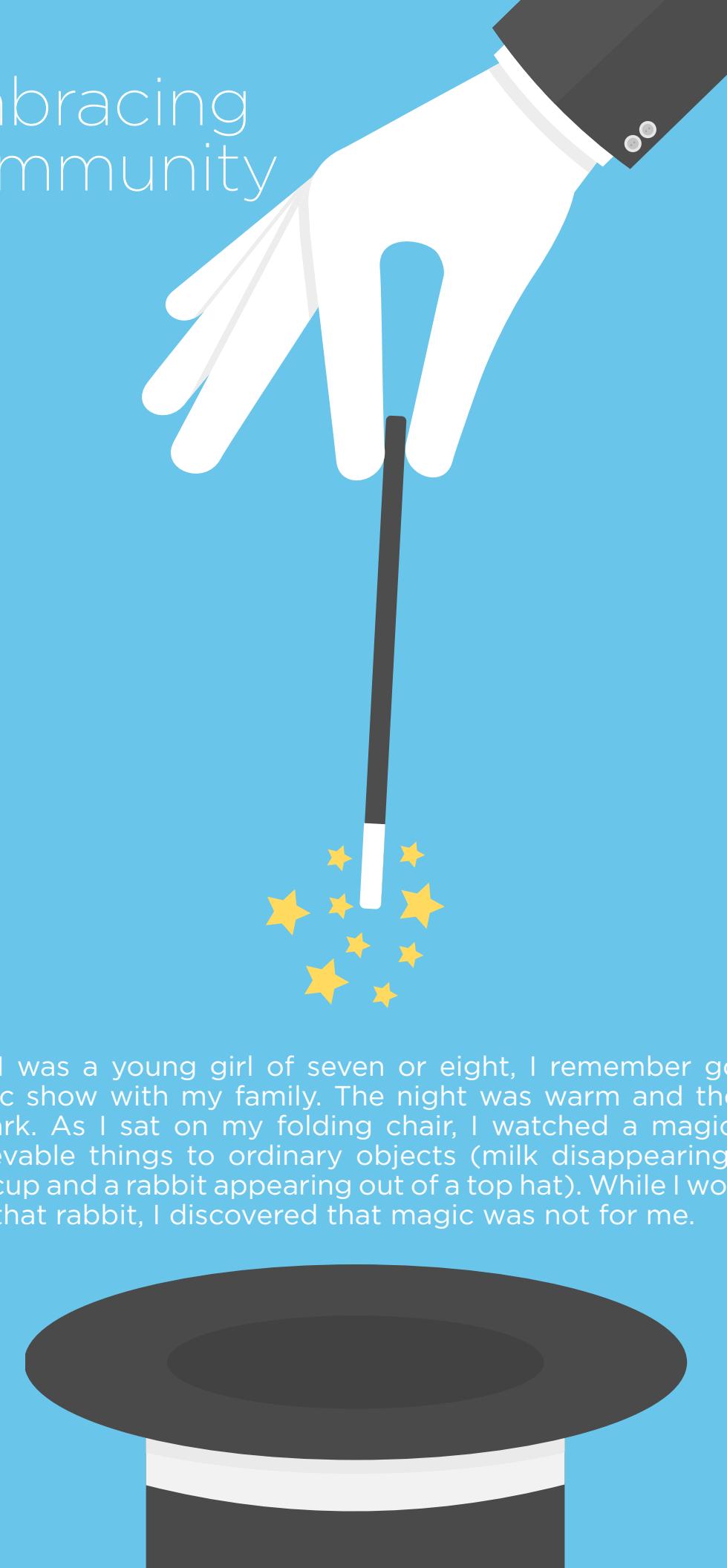
By springtime, classroom cohesion is evident, and the children are ready for a greater challenge in community building. Our yearly camp trip offers just such an adventure. This four-day, three-night

excursion provides opportunities for children in both classrooms to bond with each other. By traveling to a new and exciting place, the children make new friendships, build their confidence, and learn more about the ways they individually contribute to the greater community. The children are in mixed groups during the day as they explore the wilderness and learn about the local ecosystem from new adults, the field naturalists. They play community-building games that require them to trust each other and to communicate effectively with one another. At night, they are in mixed-age cabin groups chaperoned by MMS parents, and the oldest children have new opportunities to comfort and support the youngest students. Parents often remark on the children’s new sense of independence when they return, dirty, exhausted, happy, and full of stories about their community. ●

**ANNA MITCHELL AND ZIL JAEGER
MMS LOWER ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**



Embracing Community



When I was a young girl of seven or eight, I remember going to a magic show with my family. The night was warm and the room was dark. As I sat on my folding chair, I watched a magician do unbelievable things to ordinary objects (milk disappearing into a paper cup and a rabbit appearing out of a top hat). While I wondered about that rabbit, I discovered that magic was not for me.

Or was it? At some point during my career, I realized that each year, with a bit of Montessori magic, lots of thoughtful planning, and a common goal to support each child, anything is possible! There is much care and consideration that starts from your first visit to our school.

At the Toddler and Primary level, these magical moments start with our New Parent Welcome, followed by an orientation in May where families gather with faculty and Level Directors for an informational evening. What is discovered is as unique as each and every one of us, but what are established are the bonds of trust between your family and our school. By the end of this night, you may have given three adjectives to describe your child or had to explain the history of your child's name, and your teacher will have revealed a little bit about herself. You will also have learned how best to support your child's transition over the summer months.

Summer is the perfect time to bring families together to both strengthen old bonds and to create new ones. With direction from the teachers, your room parents are planning casual park dates where smiles abound and playful activity makes way for cherished memories.

As the last weeks of summer dwindle away, teachers begin to schedule home visits. During this special 20- to 30-minute time, teachers are welcomed into your home and have an opportunity to interact with your child in a familiar environment. The purpose of this visit is to see how your child likes to fill her days, but more important, your child sees and understands that teachers are trusted and valued professionals.

Finally, the first days of school arrive and short visits turn into longer visits, routines and boundaries are established, mutual respect is developed, friendships start to bud, and a love of self and community becomes central to the child's being. Young children are given lessons in a variety of activities. Soon, they are baking muffins, granola, and bread and have a hand in preparing all the food that they eat. Yum! In the toddler community, children now share a communal snack while the primary children can choose when to have snack with a friend. The car line is now familiar and so is the idea that that special someone always comes back.

By mid-October, a happy, harmonious community of children has been nurtured, and before you know it your family has a new network of friends, some of whom may last a lifetime.

Being a mother of three young adults, I know how quickly time flies. Magical memories are what make our families truly unique, and our school community contributes to those. By the end of each school year, parents are often in awe of where the time went and how much growth their children have experienced over the course of one school year.

Behind the doors of the toddler community, the magic is making the unbelievable, believable. As a parent you might ask yourself how or when did that happen, or you just might giggle to yourself as your young child can now speak in sentences, refer to you by your given name, wait for snack, help a friend, and work independently for two hours.

He is naturally polite, says please, thank you, sorry, hello, good-bye with a hand shake, and is confident in all kinds of situations. She is happy, but is also able to express a range of emotions, is self-directed, and has developed a deep sense of self, all the while supporting her school community.

I feel so fortunate to be part of our community and experience daily the magic of toddlers on the path to developing to their full potential. ●

LYNN GULICK
TODDLER TEACHER





What MMS Means to Me

OWEN JONES MMS UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENT

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I think that MMS is a wonderful place to go to school because of the great sense of community. Throughout my seven years here, learning at MMS has been an incredible adventure. I have made many friends and completed lots of projects with them—you have a lot of freedom here to work on what you want. And with this freedom comes an equal amount of responsibility. For example, I can choose what I work on but must keep a log throughout the day, make sure I complete what I start, and seek my teacher's feedback when I'm done. And when I do complete a large work, the sense of accomplishment is astronomical. Plus, I know that I am setting an example for younger students so that whenever they get discouraged, my accomplishments will give them hope.

I love the feeling of community here at MMS. A great example of this is the Montessori Model United Nations program, which was introduced here two years ago, and I participated in it this past year. It has been a great time for the sixth-year students to work hard and grow closer as a community. From November to March, we met after school and discussed important world issues such as ISIS, cyber security, and illegal small arms trade. Then in March, we had the privilege of traveling to the United

Nations building in New York, where we shared our ideas with other Montessori students from 19 different countries, created joint draft resolutions, and presented them to the assembly. It was an incredible experience.

Back in our classroom, the teacher-student relationship is special. In a Montessori school the teacher does not "run" the classroom—she does whatever she can to motivate and inspire the student to learn, and in the end it's the student who decides what to work on and how to best get it done. I'm very grateful for the teachers and students I've known at MMS—I will cherish my experiences here for the rest of my life.

While I often prefer working with close friends, I sometimes get more done with a classmate who is not my best friend. For example, I once had a lesson with three other classmates, two of whom I hadn't worked much with before, and quickly figured out that the best way to follow up on the lesson was for us to mold into one group and produce a single piece of work. This also made sure no one felt excluded: to create something beautiful, everyone's voice must be heard. ●

Wide Open Arms

EMILY STULL MMS UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENT

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Before I joined MMS in fourth grade, I didn't know what "community" really means. Now I do. It means a group of people who work together to create fantastic things, all have each other's backs, and help each other learn and cope with challenges in life that we can't do on our own. When I think of the word "community," I reflect back on the past three years at MMS. I moved here at age nine from Oberlin, Ohio, and I was very nervous to come to a new school and be around new people. I had no idea what to expect. The MMS community made adjusting to my new home much easier. When I first visited in 2013, I had a wonderful time that even words couldn't describe. After my visit I felt I'd found my second home. I didn't need to see other schools, for I knew that I had found the place where I wanted to create and learn.

The Belted Kingfisher Classroom accepted me with wide-open arms. The people were amazing, and they still are. My fellow students and teachers have shaped me into the person I am today. I am amazed

to see how far I have come in the past three years at MMS. I couldn't have done anything without the people at MMS supporting me at every step to thrive on this planet we call Earth. I've found that in order to achieve anything at all, you have to find the place where you can be yourself and everywhere you look there is someone there for you. You will have people supporting you, from toddlers all the way to the Junior High. I have met many talented and generous people in my life, but the best people that I have ever met are right here at MMS.

Bottom line is, the word "community" means much more than a group of people in the same area. It means being surrounded by people that love and care about you and who help you thrive in life. That is what I've found right here at MMS. ●

2/5/16

Dear Cheryl + Desiree,



KATHERINE EMERY
MMS PARENT

Valentine's Day has come early! I hope you know how much Dan, Tess, and I appreciate your grace, patience, humor and...well...it has to be said...your style.

I left on Tuesday, after my observation, with a full heart. I also left exhausted, after watching you keenly navigate your buzzing world of bees. You work hard, and I suspect that you never know what will greet you that day when the myriad personalities arrive to your room. But you greet each and every little person, and you accept — and celebrate — the person they are. I've learned that from watching you, and it's a gift you give the children and the parents.

This year, the class has more energy than I've observed in the last two years. In part, there's an increased level in noise, but it's also in activity. When I entered the room, Levi greeted me immediately. "Hello," he said, "welcome, would you like tea?" Levi, the youngest person in the class, has learned from watching his peers. Even though he is too young to make tea, he is modeling, and I am certain that he will receive a lesson and one day be able to offer and make that tea. I remind myself of the importance of mixed aged classes = peers being natural mentors. And, conversely, older children learn too from being a leader and guiding the younger children. These experiences have been invaluable to Tessa, who is an only child. I've noticed recently that she is intuitive and helpful with younger children. There's a kindness she shows now, which is new.

Grace was working on an owl study. She was also very interested in the farm game going on with her peers and occasionally popped over to check in with them and giggle. Desiree watched and quietly suggested that perhaps she choose another desk that might provide a better, quieter work area. Instead, Grace went to get a little rubber inflated pad to sit on, "to help me focus."

Annie and Meyer were busy putting a jacket on a hanger. Well, Annie was, and Meyer was instructing from her chair. The sleeve of the jacket was turned inside out, and they were confounded about how to turn it right. They flipped the jacket, twisted it, talked about it, and they finally realized they could untangle the sleeve. Meyer said, "That's it, just right, yes, that's it," from her chair as Annie neatly and slowly snapped the snaps and then handed the jacket to Meyer, who hung it up.

George and David were outside painting and singing. With every stroke they would each belt out a note, a sound, a cackle.

Aiden was sewing a bright orange heart on a paper. He worked quietly, carefully. At one point he nearly pulled the thread out of the needle eye. He noticed and stopped and experimented with a few ways he could continue that wouldn't release the thread.

Harrison was working on his clock and telling time. He carefully cut out pieces of paper and lay them together on the table. He would pause and make his glue stick into an airplane and make it soar into the sky. He would pause and turn his scissors into spectacles and gaze around the room. He was in his own world — so focused, happy, and calm.

Tessa and Sydney were on the stage. Tessa was weaving and Sydney was working on her knitting ring. They chatted quietly as they worked. Tessa got up and asked Miss Desiree to help her either get more string, or finish off the project. While she was there, George came in and asked Desiree to button his coat. Desiree reminded him to ask his friends first for help. He asked Tessa. She agreed, buttoned his jacket and gave him a tap on the shoulder, got her weaving back, and skipped back to the stage.

Gia appeared and tapped Grace on the shoulder and asked her to help her with her jacket. "Oh," said Grace, "I love to help." She buttoned up the jacket and showed Gia why it was so hard to do.

George then teetered out the door to get his boots to go into the rain to find the outside world.

This is only a very small window of what I observed from my corner of the room. I saw you two, checking with your eyes, surveying, keeping the momentum steady and calm. It was incredible to watch.

I'm grateful for all your work. I know you are tired at the end of the day — but all of those subtle and consistent and graceful check-ins, lessons, and redirections make a world of difference.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine", is written across the bottom right corner of the page.

Home is Where Montessori Is

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I remember waking up every weekday morning with a smile on my face and a thrilling sense of excitement. I was the girl who truly enjoyed going to school. But it never felt like I was going to school. Rather, it felt like I was going to my second home. That's precisely what Marin Montessori felt like—home. And it was the strong sense of community that made it so.

The magic of every school manifests itself within the classroom walls, and Marin Montessori is no different. Learning in the unique mixed-grade classes allowed me to become an independent leader capable of working harmoniously with others. The emphasis is always placed on building one another up together, and thereby growing both individually and as a whole. As a result, Marin Montessori became one close family; my friends felt like siblings, teachers like parents, and the classroom like home.

Beyond the tight-knit community fostered within its classrooms, Marin Montessori encouraged me to become a global citizen connected to the larger community around me. My MMS education emphasized the significance of learning beyond the environment I was already accustomed to. Whether it was through delving into new cultures or languages, Marin Montessori broadened the scope of my community. Every year, for example,

MMS hosted immersion trips that allowed students to engross themselves within a certain culture. I vividly remember on one such trip learning about various Native American tribes along coastal California. Not only did we partake in their traditional customs and native songs, but we also dressed accordingly in order to fully capture the essence of the tribes we were studying. This and other such immersion trips helped me realize the impact I could make within my community. In particular, by understanding the beauty behind various backgrounds, I felt poised to help others garner a similar appreciation for diversity. Indeed, I could enact a position of leadership enriching the lives of others by showcasing the fascinating histories behind every culture I studied.

Ultimately, perhaps the best way to describe Marin Montessori's inseparable community is through its unwavering sense of mutual sharing. We shared ideas. We shared memories. We shared responsibilities. But above all, we shared the brilliant minds and talents of one another. ●

NOORISINGH SAINI
MMS GRADUATE 2011
YALE UNIVERSITY



Community and Montessori

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When I first heard of the MMS Junior High program, I couldn't believe it was so small! The whole school took up two floors and four classrooms. By the end of the first month of 7th grade I knew everybody in the entire school, by name. I thought the size would be limiting, when the opposite was true. Having fewer students fostered a sense of community that eliminated most of the cliques and social divisions woven into the fabric of public school. It also allowed for once in a lifetime class trips to places like Washington, D.C., the Grand Canyon, and Kauai!

We learned a lot of important lessons as a community: how to communicate, how to be supportive, how to problem solve, and how to have fun together. One instance of collaboration and community that stands out to me from my time at Marin Montessori is our very first class trip. We spent the day at a ropes course, running through trust-building exercises that strengthened our connections to one another. Both students

and faculty participated in these exercises. The trip demonstrated the school's commitment to creating a safe, stable learning environment by building lasting relationships between students and faculty. Marin Montessori was the first place where I learned the importance of building these relationships. I still regard my Marin Montessori teachers as the best I have ever had.

Although I was initially unsure of whether or not I would fit in at MMS, I left with a lot of great friends and a strong set of social skills. Oh, and lots of responsibility! I know for a fact that I would be a lesser, very different person, had I not gone to Marin Montessori. ●

MARTINE XENJA
MMS GRADUATE 2013
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



What Community Means to Me

"I have a dream job." I find myself repeating this mantra when asked about my job. I am an adolescent guide. But what does that mean? Well, technically, it means I teach integrated math one, various science projects, writing, workshops, book groups, creative expression classes, and direct the plays; but it is so much more than that. Maria Montessori calls the school for adolescents a "school of experience in the elements of social life," and this is what we have here at the Marin Montessori Junior High. We are a vibrant community, and we are constantly working toward sustaining and invigorating that community. It's not uncommon for a student to accidentally call a teacher "mom" or "dad," and when we are returning from a field trip, students talk about coming back to campus as "coming home." This really is their home away from home. I'm so gratified to be surrounded by loving and caring adolescents who are happy to learn and who want to be here. For so many people, middle school was a time they would never want to go back to, a time they hated, a time they cringe just to think about. Our students are joyful and thriving. I attribute this to our focus on community.

Our schedule reveals our focus on building community. We start the year with an Odyssey trip, where students, old and new, build relationships through facing challenges together, from camping in the woods to completing a high ropes course. We as teachers face the challenges right along with them. I remember one high ropes element that was just a tall telephone pole. I had watched many students

climb to the top and jump off, but when I got near the top, I felt paralyzed in fear. I could hear the students calling out encouraging words. Their support helped me have the courage to get to the very top of the pole. I then called down to them to count off to three, and on three, I jumped. This was an important moment: the students saw that adults are human too, also needing support in facing fears. This past year, the Odyssey trip culminated in working together to improve the garden and schoolhouse, facilitating feelings of ownership and belonging. This work continues throughout the school year.

Our Junior High students are assigned to cleaning zones, and at the end of each day they are each responsible for cleaning the schoolhouse. This shows them, very tangibly, that their school is their community to care for. Furthermore, every Friday, we have a community meeting that includes all students and faculty. We acknowledge what went well during the week, we discuss and problem-solve issues and concerns, and we share gratitude for each other. These meetings can be tiring as well as rejuvenating. For example, it can really try my patience as I sit and listen to every student chime in on how we can solve our rodent problem in the Bay Garden, often feeling like we are talking in circles. However, I know this is the students' important work: this is their time to solve problems together. I never end the meeting with bad feelings because we end with "thank you's and compliments." It's so touching to have students acknowledge the work teachers put in each week as well as the contributions of their peers. What's even more touching, is that I don't have to wait until Friday to get this acknowledgement: students always thank me on their way out of class.

On Friday afternoons, we have community work time when students sign up to contribute to our school community or even with outside organizations in our wider community. Additionally, every Monday and Wednesday, a group of four students cook a meal for the community. It is their responsibility to meet with their teachers beforehand to get any work they will miss while cooking. Managing this helps build their executive functioning skills. Furthermore, by cooking a meal for the entire community, students are able to directly see the results of their effort to support the community, as everyone enjoys the tasty food together.

The skills required for healthy social connections are further nurtured when students stay for residential life—the ultimate community experience. Students have the opportunity to stay overnight for three weeks out of the school year—one week in the fall and two consecutive weeks in the spring. Throughout Residential, students serve on different cooking and cleaning crews, have study hall time, adult skills workshops (from "how to change a tire" to "how to live by a budget"), and recreational time. Every year in graduation speeches, residential life is mentioned as a highlight from their time here at the junior high, further highlighting Maria Montessori's insight that the adolescent program needs to be an experiment in the elements of social life. This is what they seek.

These are just a select few elements of our school schedule that build community and teach students skills for healthy and meaningful relationships. These elements of the junior high really are a thread through everything we do. They make a huge difference. Alumni keep in contact with us when they leave and always want to come back to visit. The junior high is special for them because of their own contributions to it when they were students. The Junior High is also special for me. I love this place, and I love the people in it. The students and staff exhilarate me every day. We are an intentional community with dedicated people working together to inspire each other to be the best that we can be. ●



Sum of the Parts

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I remember grammar school and junior high was just a place I had to go every day. The priests and nuns took care of things and, while they tolerated some parent involvement, they preferred to keep it to their terms. My mom volunteered at the annual spring rummage sale once or twice, but I don't think Dad even knew where my school was. We did not have room parents, classroom observation, school plays, class trips, classroom pets, or fund-raising events. But there was a church, and on Sunday we would all wave and mouth a hello from across the pews before exchanging pleasantries while we scattered and raced for our cars.

Joining MMS in 2009 redefined for me what a school could be. I began looking beyond the car line, and the more I saw, the more I appreciated the interconnection between the teachers, families, and students and how essential this union was in allowing the principles of a Montessori education to establish and take root in and beyond the classroom. Watching my sons flourish in their classes made me want something my school did not make available to my parents: the opportunity to have an active role in my children's school environment. MMS has allowed me to become involved in ways that spoke to my interests and talents and through that allowed me to find my niche in our special school community.

My first and perhaps the most rewarding experience at MMS was volunteering with Brie in the garden. We are so fortunate to have the garden space

and to have Brie tending it. From there I had the opportunity to help put on a carnival, build stage sets, assist in classroom science projects, build a bird house, organize a camping trip, and lead a science-based Bayside Afterschool Class—all the things I like to do. My role of Transportation Coordinator followed, and for the last four years MMS has actually paid me to work with our amazing group of talented and conscientious drivers. These nine individuals have one of the most important jobs in our community—driving our children—and they never fail to “go that extra mile.”

I feel fortunate to be part of MMS because it has helped me understand and define for myself what is meant by a school community. When I was growing up my dad probably never used the words “school” and “community” in the same sentence! The Montessori education that we are so fortunate to have available to us rests upon the solid foundation of teachers, administrators, staff, parents, children, and even a beloved rabbit named Joey. MMS is not only a place where we send our children to school, but it is a living organism with many parts depending on and working with each other. MMS is a true community where each and every one of us is an integral part of the whole. ●

PETE HUDSON
MMS PARENT
MMS TRANSPORTATION COORDINATOR

Before I came to the MMS community I was at Montessori de Terra Linda for two years. Prior to that I had no Montessori experience besides preschool. So when first coming to the MMS community I was a little nervous about what it would be like, only to find that the environment that had been created was very friendly and welcoming.

For example, right at the beginning of the school year, when I was new to the community and didn't know what to expect, my Jr. High class went on the Odyssey trip, where together we tackled the ropes course. At this time the only friends that I had were the ones from MdTL, the school that I had come from. Once I started to talk to people and developed trust in my classmates as I tried not to fall off the tight rope, I realized that everyone was genuinely welcoming and friendly, and still are to this day.

Also, all of my teachers are really nice and very supportive because we have built a relationship based on trust. Having never been in an environment such as this one I didn't really know what to expect. I found that in the first week, much to my surprise, I fit right in with everyone. ●

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MAX BRINEGAR
JUNIOR HIGH, 7TH YEAR

A Community for Me Too

We all love those MMS moments of watching our children—whether in the classroom, in a class play, on a class field trip, or saying their speech at graduation. Watching my youngest daughter Lauren give her speech last spring at the Junior High graduation was one of those great moments for me, but also a sad one. After being a parent at MMS for 18 years and watching my three children grow up here, I knew I'd really miss it.

When my oldest daughter Morgan started in the toddler room in 1997, I had no idea how important MMS was going to become for me as well. At first reluctant to get involved, after doing some small volunteer hours at MMS, I realized how great it was to meet other MMS families and help the school. My minimal volunteer hours expanded to spending six years on the MMS Board of Trustees. Spending time with MMS families became the core of my social life as well, something that hasn't changed even now. Additionally, I felt a deep sense of community with MMS teachers and staff.

Now that my children have all progressed to high school and beyond, I believe I'll always feel a connection to MMS. First, my nephew Colby Hobson is now attending primary at MMS, so I'm certain to be around for years to come. Second, I will always be grateful to MMS for helping to guide my three children to being considerate, responsible, hard-working people. Sending my children to MMS was by far the best decision I ever made for them and, for the community that I gained there, it was the best decision for me too. ●

KAREN SMART HILL
MMS ALUMNI PARENT



Why We Chose Marin Montessori

More than ten years prior to the birth of our son, Colby (Quail Class), we began attending events at Marin Montessori involving our nieces, Morgan and Lauren, and our nephew, Sheldon. We went to their graduation ceremonies, where they either gave speeches or sang songs. We attended a sock hop at the Strawberry Recreational Center (50's inspired dance for the lower elementary classes), several plays at the Civic Center auditorium, and even a few plays in the classrooms on campus. At the events we noticed how supportive the members of the Marin Montessori community are of each other. Even those of us who were extended family and friends always felt welcomed. Over those years, we observed Morgan, Sheldon, and Lauren, all different in their abilities, strengths, and personalities, become the most thoughtful, respectful, and independent young adults we know.

When it came time for us to make a decision on Colby's education, Michelle's sister, Karen, was very supportive. Although Karen had only positive things to say about her children's experiences at Marin Montessori, she remained very diplomatic and insisted that we make a decision that would be the right fit for our family. Looking thoroughly

at the qualities of what we desired in a school, and based on our observations of Morgan, Sheldon, and Lauren over the past fifteen years of their education, we realized that Marin Montessori was our only choice. MMS has proven to us that it creates lifelong learners and responsible citizens. Coupled with the welcoming, supportive community that we had already felt a part of for years, we had no doubts about enrolling Colby.

After the second week of school, Colby informed us that Marin Montessori is the perfect school for him. And we couldn't agree more! It has been a pleasure getting to know the amazing teachers, the supportive faculty, and the warm, welcoming families that make up the Marin Montessori community—this time as parents with a student at MMS. We look forward to being a part of this wonderful community for many years to come. ●

MICHELLE AND STEVE HOBSON
MMS PARENTS

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Community Baking



I love bread. I always have a sourdough starter bubbling in the cabinet ready to make a batch. And I think about bread making all the time because it's still kind of a mysterious process. When asked to ruminate on community, my wife, Amy knew I needed a little nudge of inspiration and suggested there was probably something relatable in making bread. And there is. Civilization was built on bread, so it makes sense that it's also the perfect analogy to community.

A fellow MMS parent and friend recently shared a quote from a Michael Pollan documentary on the transformative power of cooking, "If I give you flour and water to live, you'll perish; but if you mix the two together, let them ferment and make bread, you will live." This happens because something in the process of fermentation breaks out essential nutrients that we need to survive. That statement stayed with me. I think this is the essence of community. Separate, we are more bound by our limitations — both individually and as families— but when we seek fellowship with others, together we thrive. Engaging with community through simple gestures starts a process like fermentation, transforming ourselves and those around us for the better.

Right from the start, Marin Montessori has been the warm community in which our far-flung family hoped to flourish. Maybe as a consequence of our itinerant lifestyle over the past 16 years, we have an

acute appreciation for community. And so, a simple thumbs-up in carline; a hello with a mom or dad getting coffee; a chat at the grocery or on the trail; helping in the garden; serving on the PA; pitching in with other MMS families for Coastal Clean-up Day; assisting with a class cooking project; attending parent education activities; breaking down chairs after a school event. Mixed together and with time to grow, a greater sense of community comes bubbling up. Like fermentation, community has that same mysterious quality; transforming these small moments into something greater and nourishing. And it's this intentional quality of MMS that gives our children a feeling that their families are part of, not separate from, their school life.

We reluctantly leave MMS this year due to work obligations. We are feeling a deep and abiding appreciation for Marin Montessori and the community it fosters. It has meant a lot to our family. We hope that we have been community to you. We have high hopes of returning to MMS soon. Let me know if you'd like some sourdough starter! ●

If I give you flour and water to live, you'll perish; but if you mix the two together, let them ferment and make bread, you will live.

MICHAEL POLLAN

JEFF GOSSETT
MMS PARENT

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Moved West for MMS

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We are a first year family at MMS, and it's been a pleasure to join Marin Montessori School. We have quickly found it to be a very inviting and welcoming environment where we have encountered kindness at every turn.

We were previously part of Seton Montessori while living in the suburbs of Chicago. A former MMS teacher came to work at Seton Montessori and soon we began dreaming of a return to the San Francisco Bay Area where my husband and I met back in 2002. We often talked about moving back but never pulled the trigger. Finally we made the decision to move, and a large part was due to the feeling of Marin Montessori and our invitation to join. Coming West and moving cross country posed many challenges: changing homes, changing kids' activities, leaving our friends, doctors, dentists. Everything. It wasn't an easy thing to do.

Luckily for us, the smoothest transition in this process has been the school community. It has been seamless with the education and environment for the kids. We have enjoyed the families and relied on wonderful recommendations from them for building this next phase of our lives in California. We have found the MMS community to be a refreshing, intelligent, eclectic, and always courteous group, who each value family, children, and education. I have participated in the MMS book club hosted by Sam, we have met a handful of families with whom we host play dates, and some we meet for dinner. The kids say their favorite parts are the teachers

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and field trips to the symphony. Then there is Sam, the Head of School who welcomes us many mornings and engages the kids (Grant, Ashley, and Brooke) and Chas and me in conversation at every opportunity. We haven't even been here a year yet, but thanks to the community we feel like we've been here for years.

Just recently while on Spring Break we kayaked around a large yacht, and I suggested to the kids, "Maybe we buy that and live aboard." The kids discussed the opportunity, but Brooke soon said, "But I love Marin Montessori. We can't!" ●

ALLISON SLINGLUFF
MMS PARENT



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Community Web

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I've been at Marin Montessori for the past three years, and let me just tell you I've never felt more inspired. Each day I come in feeling a wave of joy and creativity crash over me as I begin my day.

Throughout the three years I've been at MMS I have grown to find a caring and supportive community all around. For example when I first came to MMS I found a group of friends who were welcoming and inclusive.

When you are at MMS you feel the love all around and it grows in size like a web. For instance I find myself doing service at the toddler, primary and lower elementary classes, helping them with works, projects (like houses for mermaids), and even playing with them. Also, I had the chance to help the Admissions office in the Open House for families wishing to join our community. It brought joy to me when I saw how many people wanted to be part of our community and allow their children to experience the Montessori philosophy.

In the upper elementary classes, with the guidance of our teachers, Joni and Minnie, we formed a small community first, and then expanded ourselves into the greater world. For example we worked together to meet the needs of the Syrian refugees, countries facing natural disasters, and animals in trouble.

We had parents that came in to teach us fascinating things about the brain, law and the judicial branch, acting/performing, meditation, and well-being such as Qigong.

Our own Head of the School, Sam Shapiro, took time from his busy schedule to share his knowledge of world religions with Abby, Kaitlin, and me for our big project known as a "World Religions." Then there's the office staff that always come watch our presentations and support us.

We are all connected in this web, supporting, learning and growing together, creating a strong community. ●

GRETA HERMAN
MMS UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENT



About Community

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