

AÚN APRENDO

BESANT HILL SCHOOL OF HAPPY VALLEY



**LOWER CAMPUS
REBUILD**

Page 6

**VISITING SCHOLAR:
DAVID WANDERA**

Page 34

**OJAI INSTITUTE
PARTNERSHIP**

Page 36

**COSTA RICA
EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING TRIP**

Page 44



DOWNLOAD

Never miss an issue.

Download at www.besanthill.org

CONTACT US

For general inquiries, write to
contact@besanthill.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Alex Smith	Dave Cosby
Portia Johnson	Doug Jessup
Brian McColgan	Betsy Stix
Shannon Rowan	Mary Spence
Claire Lowndes	Mike Biermann
Anh-Dao Tran	Kathy Zotnowski
Dan Call	Stanton Smith

©2020 Besant Hill School Of Happy Valley. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the editor, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Message from the Head of School

Recently, my stepsister and alumna of the school, Lindsay Soleimani, shared a poem by Leslie Dwight titled “What if 2020 Isn’t Canceled.” To paraphrase the poem, Dwight advises that instead of dismissing the discomfort and pain of this year, we can lean into it and use it as a catalyst to bring people together and create change. In our school’s 75th year, we are challenged to face these turbulent times with the strength and dedication our founders showed so many years ago. The unity they modeled in the school’s creation lives on in our efforts today as we prepare to serve our students and families with consistent care, compassion, and a safe environment for learning and growth.

An adage that has been important for me to remember at this time is that we are in a marathon, and not a sprint. While news headlines will shift many times before we reopen in the fall, our devotion to fostering open-minded, responsible citizens will not falter. Our founders began this marathon for us 74 years ago, and we will sustain their values in year 75 and beyond. The divisive events of World War II deeply impacted our founders, which was yet another tumultuous time for the world. They envisioned Besant Hill as a place where students from across the globe could be educated together, and our school continues to shine as a remarkable space for learners to celebrate one another’s differences and engage in open dialogues that foster a true global community. Today, we stand poised to honor the diversity of our student body through a curriculum that teaches our students to think critically while championing all people and their unique history. As we work to expand the mosaic of our school population, it is my goal to build our endowment so that we can offer this opportunity to even more students throughout the United States and the world.

On a different note, I would like to take a moment to welcome our new faculty members and administrators. Peter Asaro will join us this year as our new Director of Instructional Support (ISP). He has spent the last seven years playing a vital role in Academic Support at Landmark School in Massachusetts, where the mission is to “enable and empower students with language-based learning differences to reach their educational and social potential.” Peter will be a kind and inclusive presence for our ISP students and as a resident in the Eos dormitory. We have two internal promotions to celebrate as well: Claire Lowndes, a member of our arts faculty for the last three years, who is currently completing her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership from Pepperdine University, will take the reins as our new Director of Academics; and Anh-Dao Tran, a coach, trainer, and fitness guru, will, in addition to teaching math, serve as our new Athletic Director. Claire and Anh-Dao are enthusiastic and highly skilled within their programmatic areas, and we are excited for their leadership. Melinda Wilder, a seasoned educator who has taught around the globe, will join our Math department, and finally, Sally Chung, a working artist, Los Angeles area teacher, and outdoor enthusiast, will be our new Art Instructor. We welcome our new faculty members and congratulate our current community members on their promotions.

In closing, I offer my heartfelt gratitude to our community for their incredible work this past spring. Our students, families, faculty, and staff adapted to many changes with impressive flexibility and resilience, and I am continually grateful for the fantastic people who make our school run so smoothly. Our intentionally small size, combined with the philosophies handed down to us by our founders, paved the way for us to come together in a difficult time, just as Leslie Dwight’s poem advises. If we can accomplish this much in times of strife, I am beyond optimistic about what we will achieve moving forward. For our students, families, faculty, and staff, 2020 is surely not a year to be canceled, and 2021 promises to be a whole new adventure for us to face together. ♦



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Portia".

Portia Johnson
Head of School



LOWER CAMPUS REBUILD 6



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:
CLAIRE LOWNDES 16



OJAI INSTITUTE PARTNERSHIP:
FREDDY JENKA 36

- 1 Message From the Head of School
- 4 Mammoth Ski Trip
- 6 Lower Campus Rebuild
- 10 Campus to Table Dining
- 12 International Week
- 14 College Bound Matriculations
- 16 Faculty Spotlight:
Claire Lowndes
- 19 100 Nights
- 20 ePortfolios
- 22 Winter Athletics
- 28 Spring Visual Arts
- 30 Distinguished Speaker Series:
Regina Hirsch
- 33 UC Davis Matilija Dam Monitoring
- 34 Visiting Scholar: David Wandera
- 36 Ojai Institute Partnership:
Freddy Janka



39 Spring Variety Show

42 Neighbors that make a difference:
Jim Hall

44 Spring Break Experiential Learning Trip:
Costa Rica

48 Online Adaptation

50 Faculty Spotlight:
Peter Asaro

51 Senior Capstone Presentations

52 Virtual End of Year Traditions

53 Alumni Spotlight:
James & Radha Sloss

55 Annual Fund Update



STUDENTS TAKE A BREAK FROM CLASSES TO ENJOY THE SLOPES

MAMMOTH SKI TRIP

AUTHOR: ANH-DAO TRAN

Over the extended Presidents' Day weekend, a group of BHS students and faculty took a road trip to the Inyo National Forest and the breath-taking Mammoth Mountain, one of the premier skiing and snowboarding resorts in California. Mammoth Mountain has a summit at 11,053 feet above sea level and is known for its legendary snowfalls, providing a winter wonderland and playground for adventurers of all skill levels.

The Sierra Nevada mountain range received 380" of snow at its summit this past winter, which is less than usual; however, our students and team leaders had plenty of fun skiing the slopes and taking in the fresh mountain air. Our skiers and snowboarders ranged from beginning to experienced, and there was a place for everyone on the mountain, from ski lessons to more advanced slopes.

After each day of skiing or snowboarding, we would return to our cabin with many options for relaxation, whether it be in the community room, the sauna, or by the pool

or hot tub. When it came time for our meals, small student groups had the opportunity to plan and cook breakfast and dinner for everyone. Rotating responsibilities for cooking and cleanup promoted a sense of responsibility and togetherness among the students, fostering a community atmosphere that was enjoyable for adults and teenagers alike.

This Mammoth Mountain trip was nothing short of amazing for us all. By the end of our adventure, we had learned more about one another by exchanging a lot of laughs, smiles, and stories. Our Mammoth weekend concluded with a stop at Fossil Falls, where volcanic activity in the Coso mountain range, along with meltwater from glaciers in the Sierra Nevadas, created the spectacular lava falls. We returned to the Besant Hill campus with lifelong memories of our time spent together in the snowy mountains, and we are very much looking forward to the next opportunity to explore the wilds of California with our students! ♦



HARKRISHAN K. '20 IS ALL SMILES ON THE HILL



HEADED UP THE SKI LIFT ON A BLUEBIRD DAY



WHAT IS A SKI TRIP WITHOUT A FEW SNOWBALLS?



KIANA C. '21 AND BELLA L. '21 HAPPY TO BE IN MAMMOTH



LOWER CAMPUS REBUILD

AUTHOR: ALEX SMITH

EACH NEW RESIDENTIAL FACULTY HOME FEATURES AN OPEN FLOOR PLAN, TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE SPECTACULAR VIEW



It was over two and a half years ago when the Thomas Fire forever changed all of our lives. I will never forget arriving at our campus to a sight reminiscent of history book depictions of devastation caused by the bombs that ended World War II. Our “lower” campus was completely gone, destroyed; as if this area was ground zero, with collateral damage spreading throughout the remaining parts of campus and all the way up to the Logan-Wood house. The homes of our community members had burned to the ground with their worldly possessions inside. There was nothing but utter sadness felt in what seemed like feeble attempts to console those who had lost their treasured belongings. The Creek House, which held the school’s irreplaceable memorabilia, was gone; the maintenance facility was gone; the ceramics studio was gone; and the barn that had once been a proud symbol of our presence in upper Ojai was just a pile of ash. Only the knowledge that all of our students, faculty, and staff had been safely moved away from the destruction made the situation bearable. I continue to be comforted by the reactions of our community members. The anticipated and unexpected heroes who emerged among us, as well as the outpouring of support, made our road to recovery tolerable.

So began a two year battle with our insurance company to receive a fair and equitable settlement. In spite of a thorough insurance review just the year prior to the Thomas Fire, the post-disaster insurance process was fraught with resistance, clearly with one intention in mind: minimize the payout to the insured. Suddenly, the “Elite Educators” endorsement--which provided additional coverage so eagerly sold by broker and carrier--seemed all but forgotten by those who were anxious to accept our premium payments. Knowing this was a fight we literally could not afford to walk away from, we persisted, and we finally arrived at a somewhat fair settlement with the insurance company on May 1, 2020. While maximizing our insurance benefit, we were still left with a significant shortfall between the funds available and the funds required to rebuild. With the onset of



THE NEW MAINTENANCE FACILITY WILL HAVE PLENTY OF SPACE TO STORE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES WITH FOUR LARGE GARAGE BAYS

the Global Pandemic and the uncertainties regarding revenue for the coming school year, it became fiscally irresponsible to create debt service obligations with the unknown impact of the pandemic. So, we changed our funding strategy in the final months of construction. I would like to thank everyone who immediately stepped up to donate to our fire fund, and I would particularly like to express gratitude towards a generous and committed alumna and the Happy Valley Foundation Trustees who stepped up to bridge the significant gap between insurance funds and the true rebuild costs.

While the struggle with the insurance company ensued, we simultaneously began to reimagine the area of our campus along Lion Creek. The build site location would need to be moved farther away from the creek. We knew that in 2018, the county would not permit rebuilding within the FEMA-designated 100 year floodplain, and relocation seemed like a sensible change to make. We needed to maximize the insurance funds coming in while knowing we would greatly exceed the funds available for items like “code upgrades,” plus we

would have to contend with the cost of construction doubling overnight. By using “butler” type buildings, (large, prefabricated metal structures), we were able to design a state-of-the-art maintenance facility that is 2,850 square feet, including an office, break room, bathroom, storage, and four garage bays, each designated for specific maintenance activities. Additionally, we have outdoor covered areas for parking maintenance vehicles and storage areas for gravel and mulch. The facility is designed to meet or exceed OSHA standards to keep our maintenance staff safe and comfortable while fulfilling various job duties. This facility will serve the needs of campus maintenance and Happy Valley Foundation’s land management requirements well into our future. Not far from the maintenance facility, we built a beautiful, 1,650 square foot ceramics studio and artist workshop, which includes a bathroom and a separate, secure kiln room. The new ceramics studio will provide our budding artists with ample space to practice their craft. The building has an open concept with large glass doors on both sides, allowing for a free-form space that flows out into the natural

beauty of Happy Valley. I hope you will see from the photos that these new structures are amazing replacements for what stood before, providing our staff and students with the facilities they deserve.

As a boarding school, it is essential to have our faculty and staff living on campus. By the end of July 2020, after over two years, we will have the majority of our faculty home again. The county of Ventura has allowed us to build four new faculty homes, and while we also looked at prefab structures as a building alternative, we settled on a conventional build for the new faculty housing. The homes are situated in a half circle, taking maximum advantage of the unparalleled, incredible view of the Topatopa mountains. We have completed three 1,252 square foot homes with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, and a three bedroom, two bathroom home which is 1,547 square feet. A private road provides access to the residents, while there is a primary road for deliveries, maintenance vehicles, and other traffic coming to and from our



CONSTRUCTION TEAMS WORKED HARD OVER THE SPRING TO COMPLETE THE SIX STRUCTURES

campus. The houses were designed to create comfortable living spaces, maximize the natural beauty, and conserve our natural resources. You will see that we continued the theme of butterfly roofs, similar to the Grove faculty homes, which supports the original architectural design of the campus and offers a consistent theme for the entire property. While the campus buildings are white, these new structures are tan to blend in with the backdrop of nature. The design allows for passive energy conservation in addition to using cool roofing materials, energy-efficient appliances, and title 24, dark sky compliant exterior lighting. Knowing an essential element to retaining and attracting top-notch faculty is providing suitable housing, I believe we hit the mark. It is my hope that while we embrace our new facility we keep the memories alive that prospered in the early days of our school's time in Upper Ojai. While the buildings we knew and loved are gone, the memories, love, and intention that took root in our lower campus is still very much alive and has once again been provided with the shelter to grow and prosper well into the future. ♦



STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM THE NEW CERAMICS STUDIO WITH A DEDICATED KILN ROOM



JOHN FONTEYN PLANTS LETTUCE ON CAMPUS THAT WILL BE SERVED IN OUR DINING COMMONS



CAMPUS TO TABLE DINING

AUTHOR: STANTON SMITH

Ojai is well-known for local, farm-to-table dining at nearly every restaurant in town. As this trend has steadily increased, food critics and the world's top chefs now return to Ojai to experience the latest in farm-to-table style dining. Recently, the Ojai Valley Inn began marketing cooking classes taught by industry-renowned chefs, capitalizing on the Ojai name in the dining world. The reason for the reputation: the top-notch local ingredients. For many years, Besant Hill School has been a leading participant in farm-to-table dining and the promotion of sustainable growing, which is a true reflection of our connection to Ojai and the land we call our home.

Located on Besant Hill School's 520-acre campus, Rio Gozo Farm supplies our school's dining program, as well as 20 local restaurants including the Ojai Valley Inn, with the finest organic ingredients grown in the Ojai Valley. Rio Gozo is run by John Fonteyn, a godfather in the local sustainable agriculture scene. His experience of farming in the Ojai Valley started in the 1990s after he had finished traveling the globe, collecting influence from countries all over the world. Upon his arrival in Ojai, John gained more inspiration from local farmer and activist Steve Sprinkle, who, coincidentally, had farmed the produce grown on Besant Hill's campus several years prior to starting his own sustainable farm in town. Soon after meeting Steve, John began to establish farms throughout the Ojai Valley, and five years ago, Rio Gozo took over the farm on our campus. John is known for forward-thinking organic methods like plant-based fertilizer, biodiesel tractors, sustainable soil practices, and smart

watering, as evidenced by the new irrigation systems he installed for Besant Hill.

To John's knowledge, Besant Hill is one of the only independent schools in the United States with an active farm supporting not only the school's dining program, but also local restaurants. Students eat the best produce available and have an open invitation to learn from John. Two years ago, Upper Ojai local Katie B. '18 took advantage of this opportunity and completed an outstanding Senior Capstone project with John, in which she examined all aspects of Rio Gozo's operations. Many other students have visited the farm during science classes to discover where and how their food is grown.

John's presence on campus with Rio Gozo Farm offers more than just his world-class carrots, unique, and now trendy, lettuce varieties, odd types of onions, and a highly coveted variety of beets. Because of our small size, Besant Hill is able to offer full campus-to-table dining to all students and staff with a minimized carbon footprint. Our campus meals are a community-centric time when students share meals with teachers, staff, and guests.

Besant Hill's dedication to sustainability and small size delivers one-of-a-kind opportunities that only our school can provide. Our students have the first pick of ingredients and knowledge desired by top professionals in sustainable agriculture and fine dining. The restaurant industry has fallen in love with farm-to-table dining, and Besant Hill is leading this trend from our campus. ♦



ALEX N.-A. '20 PRESENTS HIS HOME COUNTRY, MEXICO, DURING THE CULTURAL CATWALK

INTERNATIONAL WEEK

AUTHOR: SHANNON ROWAN

It's hard to imagine that just a few months ago, the Humanities Department was planning and executing International Week 2020. International Week is always a lively community celebration that aims to illuminate the richness of our diverse perspectives and world views. We work carefully to curate an enriching experience that is both engaging and sensory. We not only plan fun all-school activities, but we also create student leadership opportunities and bring in professionals to share inspiring talents.

The week kicked off with an event that was

both curricular and auxiliary. Each student and faculty member reflected on what aspects of their culture have influenced their perspective and then shared those influences while walking the Cultural Catwalk. The result was a creative storm of political, social, religious, and artistic cultural influences that have impacted our community of budding Global Citizens. This kick-off activity allowed for every student and faculty member to walk the stage and share informative personal and cultural nuances that were both amusing and instructive.



STUDENTS LEARN THAI CHI WITH A STUNNING AFTERNOON BACKDROP



Our cultural renaissance was further enriched on Tuesday afternoon when Martial Artist extraordinaire Terry Kvasnik joined our school community to share the healing art of ancient China: T'ai Chi Ch'uan. The entire student body, faculty, and staff ventured out to the soccer field to partake in an all-school exercise. It was a remarkable experience to be engaged in mindful, silent movement practice with over 100 community members.

On the Wednesday of International Week, we were entertained by a stunning Performing Arts Department showcase of music, dance, poetry, pop-culture, and prayer from across the globe. The assembly revealed traditional talents of our students and faculty from Japan, China, Cameroon, Hungary, Vietnam, Mexico, Czech Republic,

and the United States. The festivities continued in the afternoon when Isha Ferraz, a local dance instructor and owner of Hamsa Dance Studio in Ojai, taught two traditional Bollywood dances to the entire student body.

One of International Week's treasures is the Thursday language classes. Our beloved Spanish Instructor, Nestor, spends weeks preparing student volunteers to teach language lessons on a topic of their choice. This year, students rallied around food and taught the names of fruits and vegetables in Arabic, Hungarian, French, Japanese, German, Czech, Mandarin, Icelandic, Spanish, Swahili, and Vietnamese. In an effort to expand our perspectives of language and communication and also tie in to this year's theme of Global Citizenship and Environmental Activism, the languages of plants and whales were also offered.

International Week culminated with an all-school assembly in which the entire freshman class presented their research projects on grassroots environmental activists. Their presentation enlightened us to important global efforts that have been made to protect the environment all over the world.

All in all, the week was a great success and a wonderful demonstration of AÚn Aprendo! ♦

COLLEGE UPDATE

AUTHOR: DOUG JESSUP

Besant Hill's graduating seniors have earned impressive returns and achieved tremendous success for this 2019-20 college admissions cycle. Collectively, they have received 109 acceptances from 86 undergraduate institutions in twenty-three different states and the District of Columbia nationwide, as well as universities in England, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Scotland, and Switzerland. They are currently slated to enroll at schools in eight different states and three foreign countries.

Every member of the Class of 2020 earned multiple college admissions offers, averaging just over six acceptances per student. Seniors sought admission to a diverse array of higher educational institutions, ranging from national liberal arts and sciences colleges to larger public land grant research universities to more pre-professionally-oriented schools focused in the visual arts, music performance, and hospitality management. Our students' successful candidacies presented such compelling credentials that they cumulatively amassed over \$1.7 million dollars in awarded merit scholarship funding over the next four years, which averages to over \$95,000 per senior, or the equivalent of nearly \$24,000 per year for each one of our graduates.

Our remote learning protocol for this academic year's final quarter has also proven advantageous to my ongoing work with the Besant Hill juniors as they have embarked upon their respective college searches in earnest. In our biweekly virtual sessions and in their free time, members of the Class of 2021 have been usefully engaged in filing electronic inquiries to colleges of emerging interest, partaking in online campus tours and information sessions, and initiating the drafting of college applications, experiential resumes, and personal statements. All of these efforts will no doubt position our current



MILO H.-M. '20 CHOSE UC BERKLEY OUT OF THIRTEEN COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

11th Graders particularly well as they continue their respective college quests and the ongoing crafting, revision, and refinement of their admissions petitions this summer and early fall.

All in all, it has been an extraordinarily productive, rewarding, and fruitful year for Besant Hill students on the college admissions front, and in particular, the Class of 2020 is to be heartily congratulated and celebrated for their exceptional efforts. Job well done! ♦



Artist: Henry R. '20

Henry R. '20 came to Besant Hill School as a incoming Senior and made good use of the Atelier and the opportunities to quickly expand his artistic skill set. Here he used black ink to reflect his love for the mountains with the impressive Half Dome skyline. He is also an outstanding photographer, check out his portrait of Digital Media Teacher, Brian Thornhill, on the back cover.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

Claire Lowndes

AUTHOR: STANTON SMITH

After an extensive review of an impressive list of candidates, Besant Hill School is excited to announce Claire Lowndes as Director of Academics. Claire's enthusiasm for our unique learning environment exceeds the requirements of this position, and her experience teaching both in the U.S. and overseas set her apart from the other applicants. Our community is one-of-a-kind, and Claire is the perfect Director of Academics because of her passion for the small school experience and the personalized learning found at Besant Hill School.



CLAIRE LOWNDES, DIRECTOR OF ACADEMICS

Claire started her career in England, where she taught at a large public school. Although her university coursework prepared her to be an interior designer, she immediately recognized the rewarding opportunity of working with students on a daily basis. In 2011, Claire relocated with her husband, Lewis, to Houston, Texas. While living in Houston, she taught at a for-profit school, The British International School of Houston (BISH). BISH is a Nord Anglia school, meaning the same curriculum was delivered to over 66,000 students globally. As the Art and Design Community Manager, Claire was the lead developer of the department curriculum delivered by 17 teachers in 29 countries. As a faculty leader, Claire humbly led by example and allowed her work to speak for itself.

Since arriving at Besant Hill School, Claire has quickly identified and built upon the strengths of our small community, where consistent mentorship develops the entire character of our students. The relationship she has built with the Carolyn Glasoe Bailey Foundation (CGBF) is a perfect example of her ability to create remarkable experiences to benefit students. Through the collaboration of CGBF and Besant Hill School, students have developed their individual artistic passions by visiting museums, participating in Senior Capstone projects, and exhibiting their work in a public gallery. During these experiences, Claire fosters growth in each of her students by introducing them to many styles of art and sharing the relevance, as well as the technique, of each piece. Many of the students on campus consider her a close confidante and trust her opinion far beyond her artistic feedback.

Claire demands a lot of herself and holds her students to a high standard, as well. At 22 years young, Claire was elected as a Town Councilor in England; technically, she is Lady Claire Lowndes. She continues to be eager to take leadership opportunities, and had she not found her passion for teaching, she would have pursued her interest in politics and government. As a lifelong learner, Claire is completing her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Pepperdine University and will graduate in June of 2021. Students relate to her while she is studying alongside them on



CLAIRE LOWNDES OFFERS HER UNDIVIDED ATTENTION TO HENRY R. '20

the Eos balcony and managing her time wisely so that her assignments are turned in on time. As a result of her example, students witness and naturally mirror Claire's tremendous drive and work ethic.

Around campus, Claire is known for a question she often asks students and colleagues: "What is your bigger picture?" Her question encourages a broader perspective in the effort from students and professional adults alike, motivating all community members to strive for the best possible job in their endeavors. Her interpretation of our motto, *Aún Aprendo*, is reflected as continuous improvement and an ongoing extension of knowledge. While mistakes will

occur in the learning process, her influence on students stresses the importance of learning from the mistake, rather than excusing it.

Overall, Claire is a lot of fun. Like her favorite color, yellow, Claire adds brightness to any room. She speaks loudly and spreads a smile with her words. If for any reason a student or professional adult is needing to lift their spirits, typically the first stop is always the Atelier, which she also keeps open for extended hours to allow students to explore their creativity on their own schedule. Claire is an asset to any group, and Besant Hill School is fortunate to have her dedication to developing the learning environment envisioned by our founders. ♦



TEREZA J. '20 CELEBRATING THE SPIRIT OF 100 NIGHTS



100 NIGHTS

AUTHOR: PORTIA JOHNSON

In late February, the first of the many Rites of Passage that the seniors undergo in their last few months of school was held at the Ranch House Restaurant. The 100 Nights Ceremony takes place approximately 100 nights before graduation and prepares students for their departure from Besant Hill School of Happy Valley while reminding them of the importance of staying in touch with the place that will forever be their community and home. Adjacent to the land in Meiner's Oaks where the Besant Hill campus was first located, the Ranch House shares an important history with the school. Portraits of many of our school's founders are featured in this beautiful and unique restaurant.

For our 100 Nights Ceremony each year, we invite a member of our school's alumni to speak to the senior class about the unique impact Besant Hill has had on their lives, and to share lessons and advice. This year, Evan Doornink, class of 2012, accepted the invi-

tation and eloquently spoke to the class of 2020. Since graduating from Besant Hill and attending Evergreen State College, Evan has been working as a freelance Audio Engineer in L.A., and he is now transitioning to graphic design, which he intends to study in graduate school. Evan was inspirational for the graduating class in sharing his deep connection with the school, its effect on him, and his continued relationships with fellow alumni.

We will forever be grateful that we were able to have this important ceremony in person, since the class of 2020 was deprived of many of their in-person rights of passage due to our disbursement in the wake of the pandemic. 100 Nights is always a special night for the seniors, but it is even more treasured this year because our memories were shared in conversations over tables, in a beautiful setting, rather than through our computer screens. ♦


Marie
[Home](#)
[✓ Freshman year 2017-18](#)
[✓ Sophomore year 2018-19](#)
[✓ Junior year 2019-20](#)
[Senior year 2020-21](#)
[Horse show pictures \(2019-21\)](#)

Junior year 2019-20

Coyote Portfolio Award: Marie H. '21
Honorable mentions:
 Emma Z. '20, Sophia G. '20, and Tina H. '20

ePORTFOLIOS

AUTHOR: PORTIA JOHNSON

As Besant Hill School enters into the fourth year of our signature ePortfolios program, the relevance of this process is more profound than ever, and students are formally being celebrated for their amazing achievements in this area.

Our ePortfolio program is unique and innovative in that it allows our students the opportunity to tangibly reflect on their classes and assignments, displaying their work in a creative and masterful way. Since traditional assessments have been difficult to administer during distance learning these past few months, schools have been turning to ePortfolios as an alternate way to assess student learning, and Besant Hill has experienced a great advantage. Because ePortfolios are already embedded in our program, students are accustomed to the process and possess the tools for creating

this work.

Another important aspect of ePortfolios has also emerged recently as a result of the pandemic and the cancellation of the spring semester SAT administrations. Many colleges have chosen to be test-optional in considering admissions decisions for the 2020-21 application cycle. As a result, having a robust and well-developed ePortfolio will be a strong asset for our students. Their portfolios will essentially act as a resume for their work in high school by outlining not only what they have learned, but how they have learned it, demonstrating who they are as a result of their growth. This provides colleges with an in-depth understanding of students as learners and individuals while they make their admissions decisions without the traditional factoring of standardized test scores.

During our online Commendations Ceremony this spring, we had the joy of celebrating student ePortfolio work by introducing four new portfolio awards. The first award is for the student who has embraced their creativity to the fullest by utilizing visual elements, making the diverse presentation of their work for the year a fun experience for the viewer. The second award is deemed the AÚn Aprendo award. It honors the student who has created connections between their learning in academic classes and their extracurricular activities. The third award is for the individual who has demonstrated depth in their reflective process by articulating their own growth, identifying skills they have developed, and setting goals for areas of growth. The final award is called the Coyote Portfolio Award. This recognition is presented to the student who combines the skills of the first three awards by presenting their work in a connected, reflective, and creative way. In addition to the award winners, Honorable Mentions were made for ePortfolios that received nominations by multiple teachers. ♦

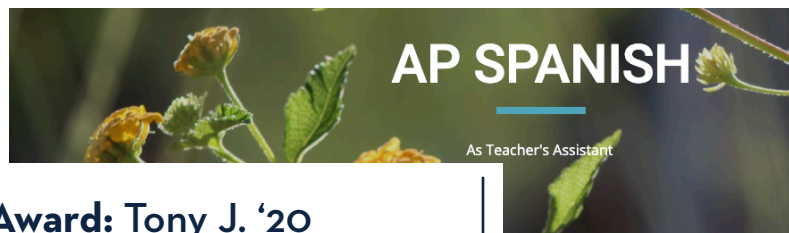


BHS Academic Portfolio

Creativity Award: Sophia G. '20

Honorable mentions:

Ava B. '21, Jana A. '20, and Karina K. '22



Reflection Award: Tony J. '20

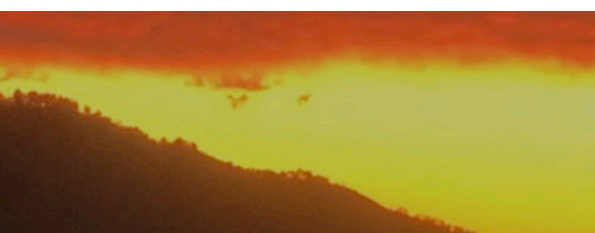
Honorable mentions:

Leila D. '22, Bella L. '21, and Tina H. '20

Before Nestor's class, I had taken "Spanish classes" from kindergarten up until 8th grade, though sadly I did not learn to speak any English. Several classes passed and I had been so stressed out in Spanish II that I went to the Dean of Academics. She had permitted me to do so under one condition: that I talk to Nestor.

EARLY STRUGGLES

I was so terrified of talking to him about it. When I finally built up the courage to one day after class, he asked me a question that was such an odd question to me, because of course I did! I even wanted to study Latin American Studies in college, it was



AÚn Aprendo Award: Milo H.-H. '20

Honorable mentions:

Jaen A. '22, Akari I. '21, and Ksusha G. '20



Art has influenced my perception of the world. The world is my canvas, and I stay ready to share its beauty. Language is intricate, as is art, but art lies in my heart as the most powerful form of communication that is brilliantly subjective to the viewers' interpretations. Art is not alive, but it can speak. Often used by influencers, art is a platform of leadership for the people of the world. Art teaches me to be patient and persistent and offers me the opportunity to inspire others through the demonstration of my creativity. My mind has opened and become more accepting, and as a result, my ability to lead has drastically matured. Creative ideas can change the world, and I now know I am someone who lends an eye and an ear to promote their power.



ALEX N.-A. '20 FOCUSED ON MAINTAINING POSSESSION WHILE SURROUNDED BY OPPONENTS



SOCCER

AUTHOR: DOUG JESSUP

Besant Hill's wily Coyote coed soccer squad enjoyed a successful 2019-20 season this past winter. Collectively, they worked hard on their technical training, physical conditioning, and team-building skills in daily practices and faced off in challenging matches against formidable opponents both in the Ojai Valley and across the Condor League. Seniors Sawyer H. '20, Sophia G. '20 and Terry K. '20 were indisputably the team's fearless leaders and most valuable players, and fellow seniors Tony J. '20, Harkrishan K. '20, Alex N.-A. '20, Henry R. '20 and Ivan W. '20 were other key contributors. Junior Tindi M. '21 and first-year student Niyati K. '23 were recognized as this year's Coaches' Award recipients for their strength of character, indomitable resolve, and incremental improvement over the course of the winter campaign. Juniors Kiana C. '21, Jordyn D. '21, Evan H. '21, Nate K. '21 and Owen O. '21 look poised to stalwartly serve as the important nucleus to lead the lineup for the coming season, and underclass returners Tara T. '23, Tarek S. '23, Shayna M. '23, and Daniel C. '23 will likewise be critical factors to the team's future success. Each member of this year's side, fledgling novices, intermediate players, and experienced veterans alike all meaningfully furthered their ability to execute on the pitch and grew as dependable team members and emerging leaders. They are to be commended for their determined effort, positive attitude, and resilient spirit! ♦

GIRLS BASKETBALL

AUTHOR: DAVE COSBY



KARINA K. '22, SIENA M. '21, AND JANA A. '20 MANAGING THE COURT AS A TEAM

The Girls' Basketball team had one of its most successful seasons of competitive play in the history of the school! Building on the growth and development from last year's season, and with the addition of a few new strong players, the girls' team was in contention to win the league championship up to the end of the season. Head Coach Kevin Henschel had a strategy for success, and the team quickly bought into his action plan. With a stronger offense than the year before, Kevin knew that a great defense would enable the girls to be in every game if they could keep their opponents from scoring too many points. With motivational quotes from coaching legend John Wooden, such as "Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming," Coach Henschel's system was both physical and mental, and the team responded magnificently.

Starting with an intense preseason regimen of running and ball-handling skills, the Lady Coyotes quickly got ready for their first game against eventual league champions Dunn School. The team was led with a strong starting group: team captain Siena M. '21, and

players Bella L. '21, Mako K. '22, Svea A. '20, and Emma Z. '20. Although the girls lost their first game, they won most of their games for the rest of the season. Throughout the season, the continued growth and development of the team was tremendous. Implementing more and more complex plays on both offense and defense, it was truly a season that honored our school's motto of continued learning: "Aún Aprendo."

Reflecting on her experience this year, Svea A. '20 had this to share about her participation on the basketball team: "Girls' basketball is a way for every girl to have their own voice and to expand upon their own leadership skills." With the words of Coach Henschel and Coach Wooden echoing in their ears, the team members challenged themselves every day to become the best they were capable of becoming. The growth, development, and evolution of fourteen individuals into one team was an amazing journey to experience. Throughout the season, the girls experienced a myriad of emotions and challenges, but through it all, they were one strong, confident, and supportive team. ♦



BELLA L. '21 ALERT ON THE COURT



SVEA A. '20 INBOUNDING THE BALL FOR THE LADY COYOTES



COACH KEVIN HENSCHER '93 DRAWS OUT A PLAY DURING A TIMEOUT



YLLAN H. '21 AND LOUIS S. '21 STEPPED UP AS TEAM LEADERS ON AND OFF THE COURT

BOYS BASKETBALL

AUTHOR: ANH-DAO TRAN



COACH ANH-DAO DEMONSTRATING INBOUNDING OFFENSE WITH SOME UPPER-CLASSMEN TEAMATES

This season, the boys' basketball team had a mission of creating and establishing a Coyote Culture that emphasizes Respect, Pride, Courage, Accountability, and Teamwork. Coming into the season, we had a diverse group of student-athletes, skill-wise, and we knew we wanted to develop and teach skills that would translate on and off the court. The successes from the season were not in the points scored or the games won. Rather, it was the team of thirteen working as one towards the common goal of establishing the Coyote Culture. Throughout the season, many basketball skills were practiced, including proper spacing and movement with and without the ball, pivoting, utilization of jabs, and protecting the ball. The skills that translated off the court were qualities such as working hard, developing better communication skills, and trusting the process with discipline and accountability.

Working together and encouraging one another was a highlight of the season. Through the highs and the lows, the team

stayed together and continued to fight and show pride in wearing the Besant Hill School Coyote uniform. The majority of the time this season was spent on getting to know each other by doing different team-building exercises, which resulted in the team feeling more connection between players and coaches. We felt that developing trust and understanding for each other would result in unification, and that is what we achieved: unity.

As the season came to a close, the thrill and excitement of beginning next season set in almost immediately. We say goodbye to an instrumental part of the team and culture in senior Milo H.-M. '20, who led the team passionately. He brought energy and enthusiasm to every practice and game, inspiring his teammates to continue working hard and holding each other accountable. We look forward to having every player rejoin us to continue building the culture and inciting others to work hard and stay committed to the process. ♦

VISUAL ARTS UPDATE

AUTHOR: CLAIRE LOWNDES

This has been a busy, fun, and collaborative semester for our creative students. The Studio Art classes have focused on turning their ideas into reality, and the Ceramics students have embraced the challenges of the making process. This focus this semester has been for students to experiment with their creativity and unlock meaningful connections with their work, inspired by their identities, passions, and personal interests.

The Studio Art and Ceramics classes have been developing context and concepts based on the bigger picture of visual communication and building their brand with the spirit animals project and their ePortfolio work. During these uncertain and unusual times, the students have enthusiastically embraced their learning within the virtual Art classes and have adapted to the challenge to think outside the box as they explore the creative process. In addition, the students have become more creatively independent, from their decision-making about getting started with a concept to how to approach the challenge and throughout the practical making process.

The overall aim this year is for students to become more confident and passionate about their art and creativity, and, more importantly, to develop an understanding of why they create in the first place, identifying what art means to them and what value it has in their lives. Therefore, the students continue to reflect, learn, and grow their individual talent whilst beginning to understand what motivates and inspires

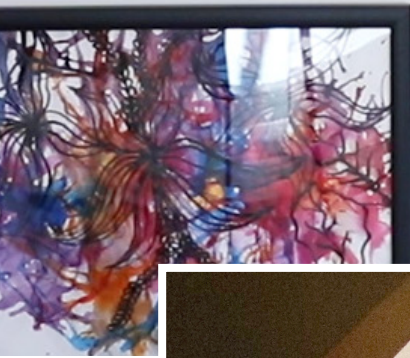


JANA A. '20 PRESENTS HER VIBRANT COLLECTION
"CULTURE EXPLOSION" AT THE OJAI INSTITUTE

them. Through a consistent balance of guided reflection and class critiques, our young artists continue to build vibrant, exciting, and unique collections of work. This allows them to voice their opinions and for their personalities to shine through the power of self-expression and visual communication.

The Getty - Feb 2020

In February our History, Art History and Studio Art classes visited The Getty Museum. The students enjoyed viewing the exhibits of Van Gogh and Rembrandt and were inspired by the architecture, sculpture gardens, and views overlooking Los Angeles. This visit was an exciting day of student collaboration and appreciation of art and architecture. ♦



MILL HARRISON GALLERY



STUDENTS ADMIRE THE CEILING OF THE GETTY MUSEUM



REGINA HIRSCH HIGHLIGHTS HER WORK AS FOUNDER OF WATERSHED PROGRESSIVE

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES:

Regina Hirsch

AUTHOR: KATHY ZOTNOWSKI

Dr. Regina Hirsch, founder of Watershed Progressive, was the featured guest at the first Distinguished Speaker Series (DSS) event of 2020. Development & Alumni Relations Officer Kevin Henschel '93 interviewed Dr. Hirsch about her passion for all things water. Dr. Hirsch shared how her early experiences as a child and teen living on a farm in Northern California eventually led to her environmental work and her specialization in the area of water. In 2009, Dr. Hirsch founded Watershed Progressive as a consulting and contracting firm which focuses on onsite water best management practices aimed at rehydrating watersheds. Watershed Progressive has helped design

and install projects restoring habitat and aiming to increase watershed hydrologic recharge functionality through water conservation and reuse throughout the Ojai Valley. Dr. Hirsch is working with Besant Hill to develop a comprehensive land management and sustainability plan that will ensure our water and water practices are maintained at the highest quality possible for years to come. She explained to the audience of students, faculty, staff, and guests how water is “sticky,” delighting everyone with her wit and intelligence. Students were prepared with questions and a flood of excitement was felt by all. ♦



Artist: Sophia G. '20

This pot is the perfect blend of Sophia's passion for painting within her Studio Art classes and her love for the 3D making elements within her Ceramics classes. This piece is inspired by the beautiful surrounding views of the Besant Hill campus.



Artist: Bella L. '21

Bella L. found inspiration to complete an old idea from spring 2019 this year. The butterflies were carefully completed and have delicate details. During Bella's time at Besant Hill, she has developed a broad range of techniques while creating a wide variety of work.

MATILIJA DAM MONITORING

AUTHOR: BRIAN MCCOLGAN

Besant Hill students and staff, in collaboration with the Ojai Valley Green Schools Coalition (GSC), are partnering with the University of California Davis' School of Education's Center for Community and Citizen Science to conduct scientific testing and environmental monitoring of the removal of Ojai's Matilija Dam.

Ten miles northwest of Besant Hill School, and just above the convergence of Matilija Creek and the Ventura River, is the Matilija Dam. The dam, which was built on Matilija Creek in 1947 primarily for the purpose of flood control and water storage, is slated to be removed by 2025. At 168 feet tall, Matilija Dam will be one of the largest dams ever removed in California.

When originally built, the dam had several design flaws. Upon inspection just five years after its construction, it was found to be bulging and cracking. In 1964, it was recommended for removal, and in 1998, Ventura County officially slated the dam for removal. Nevertheless, the Matilija Dam still stands. One major consideration that was overlooked in the design and construction of the dam, as well as most dams built during that period, was the inclusion of fish ladders that would allow the now endangered and native Southern Steelhead to migrate upstream to their ancestral spawning grounds. Sand on the Ventura County beaches originates far upstream in the local watersheds. Six million cubic feet of sediment, (enough to fill approximately 400,000 large dump trucks), that was destined for the Ventura River and ocean has filled the once-deep reservoir behind the Matilija Dam. The Matilija Reservoir is now just a few feet deep. The Matilija Dam has outlived its use and continues to have a negative impact on the environment. Removing the dam will help to restore native fish runs and facilitate sediment returning to the Ventura River and nearby beaches.



Besant Hill School is a founding member of the GSC. It is composed of seven member schools in the Ojai Valley. The GSC is a democratic, student-driven organization whose mission is to educate the community on both local and global environmental issues through event organization and planning, volunteering, partnerships, and direct action. Throughout the spring and summer, several students and faculty from the Green Schools Coalition have met both in-person and via Zoom with representatives from the University of California Davis' School of Education Center for Community and Citizen Science to craft a vision of what the collaborative project will look like. Community Science and Citizen Science engage members of the public to collaborate with professional scientists for the purpose of conducting research-based investigations, engaging in monitoring activities, collecting data, interpreting results, and producing new knowledge used for natural resource management or basic research. This includes community science, which is community-driven research or monitoring in partnership with scientists.

Besant Hill Students will have opportunities in their classes, weekend trips, and through individual projects to partner and collaborate with professional educators, scientists, and organizers from local, state, federal, and private organizations. This is a multi-year project that will provide students with relevant, hands-on scientific testing and research. This research will be used to document the environmental health of the Ventura River Watershed before, during, and after the removal of the Matilija Dam. It is an exciting, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do this type of environmental monitoring of a unique project in our own backyard. Keep an eye out for updates in the weekly News from the Hill as well as future editions of *Aún Aprendo*. ♦



DAVID BWIRE WANDERA SPENT TWO DAYS WITH OUR UNIQUELY DIVERSE COMMUNITY

VISITING SCHOLAR:

David Wandera

AUTHOR: MARY SPENCE

In February of 2020, Dr. David Bwire Wandera, an Assistant Professor at The College of New Jersey, visited our community for two days. David learned of Besant Hill during his work at the Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English (BLSE), a graduate program that runs during the summers in the mountains of Vermont. David is the Director of the Writing Center at Bread Loaf, where he helps students connect with tutors and provides support for writing projects. Additionally, he is a coordinator for the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, which is responsible for uniting teachers from around the world to share knowledge, curricula, and support. While at BLSE, David met with Besant Hill English faculty member Mary Spence, who works for the school as part of their Acting Ensemble. Mary knew of David's scholarly

pursuits in transcultural literacy practices, multimodal pedagogy in K-12 classrooms, discourse analysis, and the ethnography of communication and research methods. She approached him to discuss the unique diversity in the Besant Hill classrooms, and their conversation was so exciting that they decided David should visit Ojai to experience our community firsthand. Thanks to Shannon Rowan, Portia Johnson, and Alex Smith, a visit was organized and coordinated.

David spent a day at Besant Hill observing classes and taking notes. He met one-on-one with several students, and even got the chance to speak Swahili with Tindi M. '21 and Bibiana M. '21, as David is originally from Kenya and speaks several languages. David was especially interested in our Instructional Support Program (ISP) and our Student

Mentoring Program, and he was particularly impressed with our art classes and advisory program. In true AÚn Aprendo spirit, David held a workshop with the faculty after his observations, providing insightful ideas and personal stories as a window into international students' experiences of studying in the United States. The following day, David held workshops with our students, engaging them in thoughtful exercises to explore their own sense of diversity and inclusion.

Here are some of David's impressions of Besant Hill:

"I am writing to say thank you for the honor of your invitation to present at your school...I am very grateful for the hospitality extended to me by the entire Besant School community, and I enjoyed my stay there immensely. As I told some folks over there, towards the end of my first day at the school I would be walking about somewhere on the school campus and would hear a student or teacher refer to me by my name which made me feel welcomed in the community. Also, the school is located in an absolutely beautiful location! Through its robust curriculum, student effort, administrative support, and teacher-initiatives, Besant is doing a lot to achieve communication across difference. Put differently, there are many highlights of my visit and class observations (i.e., some really good work in the way of authentic communication across difference is currently going on at the school)...I came away with a sense that Besant embraces the diversity in the student body (and teaching staff)."

Our students gave positive feedback about working with David:

"In our visit with David, it became apparent how much of a true passion he has for educating young minds as well as how much he prioritized cultural inclusivity and diversity in academic settings." - Tony J. '20

"What I really didn't expect from David, especially after our class with him, was his enthusiasm and keenness in speaking to us at assembly and socializing. He has the great traits of social relations as well as public speaking; I was thinking that he really knew what he was doing because I once learned that if you see a public speaker talking with their palms open and more open in general, the audience would be more attracted. I really wasn't expecting his persona to be so welcoming and open-minded--I kind of thought he was a really serious professor... But overall, his public relation skills and enthusiastic persona really surprised me." - Jaan A. '22

"For personality, I can say David is funny. He appreciates a lot about different cultures. I can say also that he is kind, and he is honest." - Tindi M. '21

"One thing that stood out to me was the interpretation that many different countries have of simple fairy tales. In the instance of Little Red Riding Hood, David Wandera was surprised that the grandmother was living separately from the rest of the family, as he grew up living with his own grandparents. I'd never thought about this, and the idea that something as simple as a fairy tale could be interpreted so differently throughout cultures was surprising. I truly appreciated that he was able to come to our school. As much as our society tries, there is still so much ignorance to our social and racial biases or stereotypes." - Karina K. '22

After his visit, David sent observations and recommendations in consideration of our curriculum and practices, specific to communication across our many cultures and learning styles. We are so fortunate to have David's perspective and feedback! ♦



DAVID WANDERA PRESENTING IN THE ZALK THEATER

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: FREDDY JANKA

AUTHOR: CLAIRE LOWNDES

Frederick Janka, or Freddy, as he is known in our community, is the Executive Director of the Carolyn Glasoe Bailey Foundation (CGBF), a non-profit organization based in Ojai, California. The organization was founded in 2015 by the Glascoe Bailey family and friends, along with a group of artists, to celebrate the legacy of the esteemed art patron and dealer, Carolyn Glasoe Bailey. CGBF is committed to supporting the arts and sciences through education in the community. Freddy facilitates the mission of CGBF locally through the Ojai Institute, which fosters outreach within the community through learning and celebrating art, engaging artists in the community, educating students, an exhibition program, and an artist conversation series podcast.

Freddy has over fifteen years of experience as an administrator and curator in contemporary art museums and galleries in the United States and Mexico. He is well known in the global art community for combining his passion for connecting people and art, and he frequently travels across the country promoting CGBF. Freddy describes himself as “an enthusiastic, big picture creative who is passionate about advocating for artists.” He is on a mission to make a difference and to create a situation for Ojai residents in which the “community cannot imagine the Ojai Institute not being there.”

For the past three years, Besant Hill School and CGBF have collaborated and facilitated exciting experiences for our students. These experiences extend outside the classroom through student exhibition opportunities, a mentorship program, facilitation of Senior Capstone projects, organizing artist-led workshops, and exciting trips to galleries such as The Broad in Los Angeles.

Freddy and Claire continuously explore



DIRECTOR OF ACADEMICS, CLAIRE LOWNDES AND CAROLYN GLASOE
BAILEY FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FREDDY JENKA AT THE OJAI
INSTITUTE





THUMBS UP TO FREDDY! STUDENTS SHOWCASING THEIR WORK AT THE OJAI INSTITUTE

new ways to engage Besant Hill students with their passions, and this collaboration is going from strength to strength, giving our students access to real-world art opportunities and connections far beyond a typical high school art curriculum. Freddy's innovative and growth mindset has an inspiring impact on our students, giving them a sense of creative direction and purpose. He is an external advocate for their success and is unique in that he does not grade, mark attendance, or discipline them. The organic collaboration of two non-profits supporting young aspiring artists is a success story not only for our students, but also for the local community.

Please visit the CGBF website at <http://carolynglasoebaileyfoundation.org/> for more information on the Ojai Institute and consider supporting Freddy, the Ojai Institute, and CGBF by becoming a member. ♦



FREDDY MENTORING JAMIE C. '19 DURING HER SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT



RISA G. '21 TAKES HER TURN IN THE SPOTLIGHT WITH THE HARMONICA

SPRING VARIETY SHOW

AUTHOR: DAN CALL

The evening of March 6th saw the second installment of our 2019-2020 Variety Show extravaganzas! The Zalk Theater was full, and the audience was treated to great performances with lots of talent and fun.

Emmett J. '21 and Charlie C. '22 served as emcees, and true to the spirit of "The Show Must Go On," they managed to keep things moving and entertaining, despite the technical difficulties with their pre-arranged material. Kudos to them for carrying on!



TAREK S. '22 AND TINDI M. '21 PERFORMING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM OF TANZANIA



MONTSE C.-M. '20, TONY J. '20, SAWYER H. '20, AND ALEX N.-A. '20



AVA B. '21 SINGING A JAZZ CLASSIC

After the Emcee introductions, the show began with Tony J. '20, Pat O. '21, Ava B. '21 and Montse C.- M. '20 performing the Curtis Mayfield hit, "Resentment."

Tindi M. '21 and Tarek S. '22 performed a continuation of their skit and song from the fall show, this time with the singing of "Tanzania, Tanzania," the National Anthem of Tanzania. Up next was a fun performance by newcomer Lucy R. '21, singing the Dodie Clark song, "A Gold Star For Me" while playing the ukulele.

Leila D. '22 took us back to Greenwich Village in the '50s with her "beat" like

performance of an original poem and her own accompaniment on the bass. Hip man, real hip! Alex N.-A. '20 followed with his own composition using a loop recording that he composed live.

After Alex came an original skit based on the Lewis Carroll classic from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, "The Jabberwocky," performed by Tristan G. '22 and faculty members Sam Yarabek and Richard Ellwood.

Emma Z. '20 and faculty member Dave Cosby played a piano and guitar arrangement of "Tico Tico," the Brazilian jazz tune that translates loosely into "Sparrow in the cornmeal".

Ava B. '21 sang a wonderful rendition of the Linda Rondstadt version of "Am I Blue." This classic jazz vocal piece was first performed by Billie Holiday.



Staff member Jim Termondt gathered a few brave folks together and formed a harmonica choir that included Penny A. '23, Risa G. '21, Tristan G. '22, Daniel C. '23 and faculty member Richard Ellwood. The song started with performers scattered about the theater's audience, and then everyone came together center stage, where they each got their turn in the spotlight. Administrator and Coach Kevin Henschel was next with a song from the 2018 *A Star is Born* movie. Kevin played guitar and sang "Maybe It's Time."

The final number of the evening was a rousing rendition of the traditional Bluegrass classic by the Soggy Bottom Boys, "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow," performed by Milo H.-M. '20, Sawyer H. '20 and faculty members Brian McColgan and Chris Cairns.

As you can tell, the evening was full and fun! Here's to showcasing our community's talents again next year! ♦



KEVIN HENSCHER '93 TAKES TO THE STAGE



TRISTAN G. '22 PERFORMING WITH SAM YARABEK



JIM HALL RIDING HIS TRACTOR WITH BESANT HILL SCHOOL IN THE BACKGROUND

NEIGHBORS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Jim Hall

AUTHOR: STANTON SMITH

Across the globe, neighborly love is one of the primary forms of compassion. It has been written about for ages and has been taught to our children through television shows like “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood.” One thing is certain: it is hard to fully appreciate having a great neighbor... until there is one next door.

Jim Hall is exactly that neighbor. While not everyone that drives onto campus knows Jim by name, many of us smile from ear to ear when we see him driving his tractor on our campus fields. For over thirty years, the school has benefited from having Jim living next door. While alumni return

to campus and appreciate the nostalgia of seeing Jim tending the beautiful campus land, not everyone knows the great role model driving the tractor.

Jim was born outside of Ojai and moved to Casitas Ranch, now Lake Casitas, at an early age. When growing up, he fell in love with animals, agriculture, and ranch life, as well as the fertile landscape of the Ojai Valley. As a young man, he was drafted to fight in Vietnam and lost some of his friends in the war. After serving his tour, Jim returned to Ojai and was hired by Edison to work on the electrical lines. At twenty nine years of age, and with young children

at home, he was electrocuted on the job and lost both his arms. Jim, as resilient and hard working as he is, taught himself to use his prosthetic arms to regain nearly all of his motor functions. He now refuses to update his prosthetics because he knows how to work with what he has and appreciates the durability of the original technology.

The accident shifted Jim's career path away from the energy industry and back to his roots in agriculture. Jim started by farming hay, which is a difficult crop to grow in Ojai. He figured out tricks to grow hay in the valley and worked on many ranches around Ojai, cultivating their land. Jim loved ranch-style living so much that working cattle naturally fell in line with his lifestyle. These days, he offers his land to friends' cattle to graze, enjoys calving season around February, and hosts an annual Steer Show.

In the mid-1980s, Jim was planning to leave Ojai, but he then struck a deal on a property in Upper Ojai, directly adjacent to our campus. At the time, the land between the school's academic buildings and his property line was mostly a walnut orchard. Eventually, the orchard was removed, and Jim soon began farming hay on the school's land in exchange for fire abatement tractor work.

In addition to his electrocution, Jim has survived a tractor accident, and, a few years



ago, he was diagnosed with a brain infection. Doctors gave him a slim chance to live, let alone return to his preferred style of living. However, a stoic attitude and strong work ethic can go a long way. For Jim, it taught him to walk again. Now, at 78 years old, Jim is back to driving his tractor and working on the land throughout Upper Ojai.

For the past three decades, Jim has been riding around our campus and caring for the land as if it were his own. Our school is tremendously fortunate to have him next door. According to his granddaughter, Brittanie Burgess, also a close friend of Besant Hill School, Jim's favorite place is his back porch, sitting next to his beagle, Bella. Next time you are looking towards the Topatopa mountains, stop for a moment to reflect on how lucky we are to have Jim watching our land from his porch next door. ♦





SPRING BREAK EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TRIP: Costa Rica

AUTHOR: ANH-DAO TRAN



STUDENTS REFLECT ON THE CULTURE, LANDSCAPE, AND RICH BIODIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA



BESANT HILL LIVING THE 'PURA VIDA' LIFE

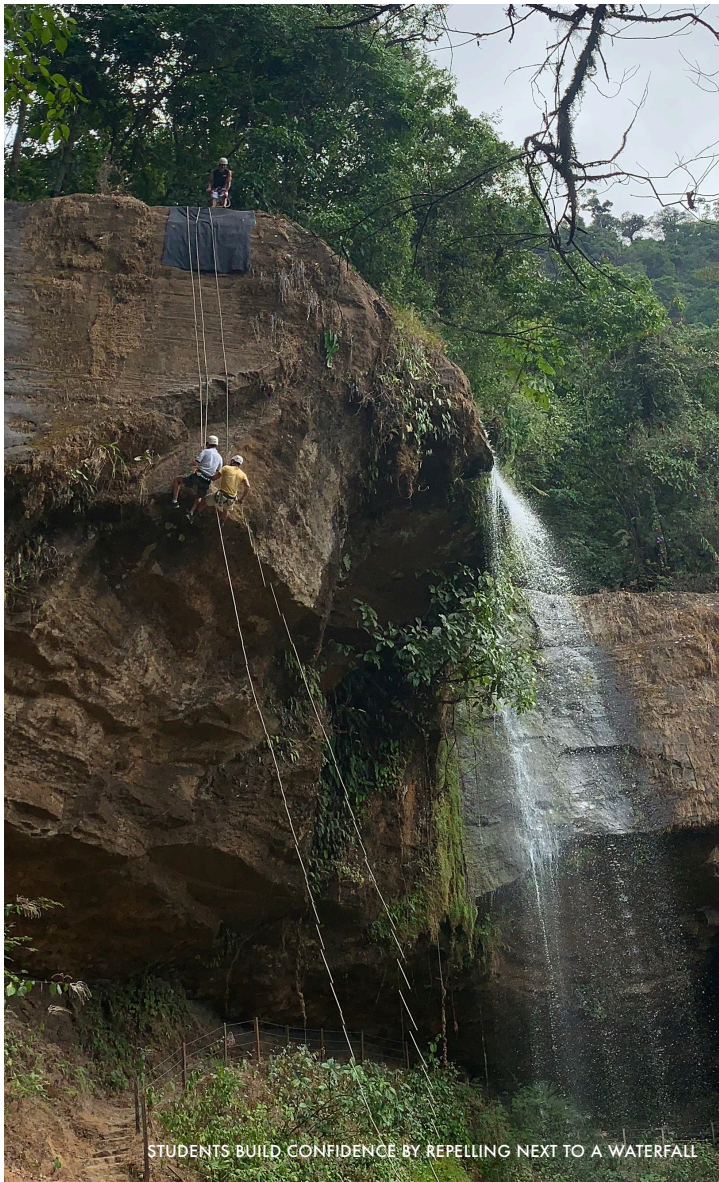
This year's Experiential Education trip to Costa Rica was an unforgettable experience led by two amazing tour guides from Rustic Pathways. The trip included ten influential days of laughing, learning, and seeing life through a different lens. Being fully immersed in Costa Rica's culture was an incredible learning journey and one that everyone should experience. Costa Rica has nearly half a million species, representing four percent of the planet's biodiversity. We saw macaws, toucans, packs of wild monkeys, sloths sleeping on the tree limbs, the Brazilian wandering spider, and an eyelash viper snake, just to name a few.

The Costa Rica trip was an expedition of courage which included zip-lining over the rain forest in Jaco, white water rafting the Pacuare River, surfing at Dominical beach, hiking to see a beautiful sunset above the waterfalls and amongst nightcrawlers, sleeping in the Diamante cave, and rappelling waterfalls. We also explored Costa Rica's famous Whale's Tail, which has one of the most special and unique characteristics of all the national parks in Costa Rica: a beach shaped like a whale's tail, formed by the

union of two separate beaches!

During this excursion, we also dedicated time to serve the community by helping with repairs in the Nacional Parque Marino Ballena, (Marino Ballena National Park), in Uvita. This was a life-changing experience, and we were honored to give back to the community in a way where it will be helpful for years to come. After community service, we would go back to the hotel and have lunch, followed by some down time either to swim in the pool or relax. After hours of working hard and working together, it was a nice break to rest in or by the pool.

By the end of this remarkable trip, we had learned about each other, sharing, community, and the natural wonders of Costa Rica. We enjoyed lovely tropical beaches, grand adventures, the beauty of nature, and the vast diversity of wildlife. As problem solvers, organizers, leaders, and unifiers, we gained invaluable understandings and friendships from this Experiential Education journey. We have grown in our knowledge about Costa Rica, and as we move forward, we will continue to learn about different cultures. Pura Vida! ♦



STUDENTS BUILD CONFIDENCE BY REPELLING NEXT TO A WATERFALL



STUDENTS GATHER AROUND A CAMPFIRE



JONAH H. '23 SURFING THE WARM WAVES OF COSTA RICA



TAREK S. '22 ZIP LINING THROUGH THE RAINFOREST CANOPY

ONLINE ADAPTATION

AUTHOR: PORTIA JOHNSON

This Spring, Besant Hill, as with schools around the globe, was faced with a new frontier in education, the conversion to online learning. As a community that is used to face-to-face connections and daily interactions in the classroom and dorms, this was truly a task that was new for us, but we found strength in our community bonds and excellent use of educational technology. We can proudly say that our conversion was smooth and successful.

Our small size was another key contributor to our success. Our relationships were forged in the months before Spring Break. Teachers had an in-depth understanding of all the students in their classes and were able to gauge their level of connection and understanding. Also, in simple logistics of handling an online classroom environment, our small class size allowed all participants and their teachers to see each other and connect virtually. Every student had a place in the virtual classrooms and made contributions as they would have in the brick and mortar version. As a result, we were able to maintain our academic requirements with integrity. The learning slide that many schools experienced was not our reality. Each student was met where they were and supported through any social-emotional or technological hurdles they may have encountered.

Our Learning Management System, Schoology, is actively used by our teachers on a daily basis and has been our primary form of communication with students and parents for assignments and grades for the last five years. This put us at an advantage in comparison to other schools that may have had an operational LMS but were not actively using it or did not have one in place, as such schools were forced to begin training their teachers from the ground up. Additionally, we were an early adopter of google apps for education, and their software for calendaring, collaboration, and communication is fully



CHAMBER SINGERS PREPARED A VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE PRESENTED DURING ASSEMBLY

embedded in our day-to-day practices. Therefore, the online conversion was an adaptive use of the software we were already using versus an invention, and things have been smooth as a result. Much credit and thanks goes to our Director of Technology and alum, Richard Ellwood. He keeps his pulse on best practices in educational technology which has allowed us to integrate these programs into our school ahead of the curve. During our online transition, Richard was available to any



community member who had a question or needed assistance, and he always delivers this help with patience and support. Richard, our whole community thanks you for your support and generosity in sharing your infinite wisdom.

I would like to thank our incredible teachers. They pivoted on a dime and used their creativity to connect with their students and go above and beyond in attending to student needs. Each one of them entered the challenge of adapting their subject matter to

the online environment, which looks uniquely different in a math class or art class or a world language course. They surveyed students, took feedback, and adapted. For a group of individuals who signed up to teach at a boarding school where daily connections with students are our bread and butter, they welcomed this challenge with the *Aún Aprendo* mentality that they emulate for our students on a daily basis. Please join me in thanking them for their resilience and can-do spirit! ♦



PETE ASARO, DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

Pete Asaro

AUTHOR: STANTON SMITH

This fall, we welcome Pete Asaro as the Director of the Instructional Support Program. Immediately upon meeting Pete, it is easy to recognize that he is approachable and kind. His attitude toward teaching is consistent with the ethos of the school in that he feels trust is the foundation of the student-teacher relationship. For this reason, he believes that the role of a teacher is a 24-hour job. Pete says that kids deserve our time, and there is nothing more important than helping a struggling student.

“Not much is more important than helping a struggling student.”

Pete is a Massachusetts native who spent the past school year living in his hometown of Gloucester. He has been teaching at a nearby high school, Landmark School, in Beverly, Massachusetts. During his time at Landmark, he focused on how to best approach students needing additional instructional support. His caring and gentle personality lends itself to instilling confidence in students. By promoting

the importance of the student-teacher relationship, Pete encourages students toward self reflection and advocacy by learning about their strengths and challenges. In learning this, they will feel comfortable knowing how to ask for help.

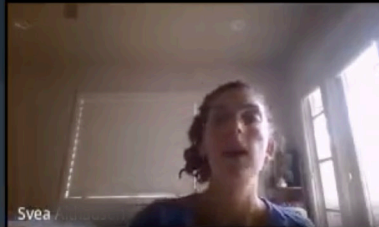
A big part of having a successful, consistent mentorship program is that the mentors are interesting and fun, and Pete certainly fits this description. He has a wide variety of interests and is really looking forward to living in Ojai. While in college, he competed as a student-athlete in Cross Country and Track at the University of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. His primary interest right now is cycling, and during the summer, he rides up to 300 miles per week. When he is not in the saddle of his bike, he enjoys anything outside. He is looking forward to spending time at the beach and camping around California. Pete is also a newlywed, married in June of 2020, and he and his wife, Avery, will live on campus. Avery will be completing her Ph.D. in Special Education and Math at the University of Santa Barbara. Welcome to our community, Pete and Avery! ♦

SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECTS

AUTHOR: MIKE BIERMANN

Why did I choose to
research Culturally
Competent Maternal
Care?

SVEA A. '20 PRESENTS HER CAPSTONE PROJECT ON CULTURALLY COMPETENT MATERNAL CARE FROM RENO, NV



When the Senior Capstone projects began in September, the anticipation and excitement amongst the students was high. They began formulating their ideas by watching past Capstone presentations and through conversations with their advisors and parents. As information about COVID-19 became more and more serious, we soon realized that the Capstone projects would have to be transformed, but the heart of in-depth study of each senior's individual passion would remain. The new plan would have the Seniors deeply research a chosen area of interest, followed by a virtual presentation of their work and a well-crafted research

paper. The program transitioned smoothly from a physical to a virtual Capstone project. Some of the students retained their original area of interest, while others changed to a new area of study. The process culminated in wonderful, moving, and exuberant virtual presentations by the Seniors in front of their teachers and peers. The amount of work the Seniors accomplished was impressive, and they displayed an inspiring amount of resiliency. They turned what could have been a disappointment into a learning experience for themselves and the community, and they made everyone so proud. A big thank you to the incredible class of 2020! ♦

VIRTUAL END OF YEAR TRADITIONS

AUTHOR: STANTON SMITH

Throughout the 74-year history of Besant Hill School, we have never experienced an end of year like this year. Despite this, we made it our focus to celebrate the achievements of our graduating class as closely to 'normal' as possible. Though in an adapted form, Besant Hill reflected its spirit of resiliency through live streaming our traditional rites of passage. These live streamed events were deeply heartfelt for our small learning community, and a reminder of how fortunate we are to belong to such a unique college-prep school.

Beginning with the Spring Commendations ceremony, students of all grade levels were recognized for their superior efforts in individual classes. As is our tradition, students receiving five or more commendations were awarded a brand new book specifically chosen for them by the English Department. During this year's Spring Commendations ceremony, four new awards were introduced to identify exemplary ePortfolios. As lessons transitioned to distance learning, the faculty's previous emphasis on ePortfolios over the past four years allowed students to apply their comprehensive knowledge within the virtual classrooms, and the new awards were an opportunity to acknowledge our students' work in this area.

The Commendations ceremony concluded with the prestigious Coyote Award. This year's Coyote Award recipient was Ojai-based day student Milo H.- M. '20, who, as a student government Co-President, committed himself wholeheartedly to his BHS classmates, teachers, and staff. Bravo, Milo!

During the annual Passing of the Torch Ceremony, graduating Seniors pass the spark of the school to an upcoming Senior, via candles, on top of Senior Hill. This year, the

event allowed for the Class of 2020 to share a video message with the soon-to-be Seniors, Class of 2021. Each of the students' videos were thoughtful and reflective of the close relationships found on campus. Ending the Passing of the Torch ceremony, Ojai local Ava B. '21 sang an impressive cover of "You've Got a Friend" by James Taylor, with Music Chair Dave Cosby accompanying on guitar. The 2020 Passing of the Torch ceremony was then dedicated to Kevin Henschel, BHS alumnus, coach, and faculty member, for his long-lasting commitment to the school.

The 2020 Besant Hill School Commencement ceremony was held at 10:00 am on the Saturday after Commendations and the Passing of the Torch. Portia Johnson, Head of School, began the Commencement with an address showcasing the spectacular accomplishments of the Senior Class. After her opening address, Portia awarded the Faculty Recognition teaching award to Kelly Henschel, Director of Instructional Support and Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning, for her dedication to her students. Next, students received a virtual Commencement Speech from award-winning actor and BHS parent Ewan McGregor, full of insight and philosophical advice. As in previous years, each graduate presented a short speech which celebrated their appreciation of their school and loved ones. With audiences in eight different countries and twelve U.S. states, the comments shared during our Commencement ceremony were beloved by families and friends across the world.

Each of the events are available online, and links can be found at www.besanthill.org. ♦



JAMES SLOSS '48 AND RADHA SLOSS '49 REMINISCE ON THEIR TIMES AS STUDENTS

ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT: James & Radha Sloss

AUTHOR: KATHY ZOTNOWSKI

“A life of significance is about serving those who need your gifts, your leadership, your purpose.”

-Kevin Hall

“Significant” is an understatement when it comes to acknowledging the contributions of alumni Radha ‘49 and James ‘48 Sloss. Radha is the daughter of Happy Valley School (now Besant Hill School) founder Rosalind Rajagopal. According to Radha, in her book, *The Story of Happy Valley*, (published 1998, revised 2006):

In 1945, the war just over, there was a ninth grade class at the Ojai Valley School, wondering where they would go the following year. Wallace Burr, the headmaster of Ojai Valley School, took Rosalind aside and suggested that in view of all the murmurings

about a “someday” Happy Valley School, this would be a good time to get started. The murmurings soon developed into very solid discussions and by spring of 1946 definite plans had been formulated to open a new co-educational boarding high school, with grades ten through twelve, in the fall” (71).

Radha and “Jimmy” were two of those first Happy Valley School students in the fall of 1946.

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

-Walter G. Bennis

Fourteen years later, in 1960, Jimmy became a Trustee of the Happy Valley Foundation (HVF) Board and served until 1966. As Radha later noted,

In 1989, James Sloss, now a professor of mathematics at UC Santa Barbara, returned to the board after an absence of twenty-

three years; and when Austin [Bee] retired as chairman in 1993, James was elected to that office" (The Story of Happy Valley 106).

Forty years after starting as a student, Radha joined Jimmy on the HVF Board as a Trustee in 1986. Together, for over thirty years, the two held leadership roles as the heads of various committees including the Land Use Committee, as well as executive committee positions including Secretary, Treasurer, President, and Chairman of the Board, and gave innumerable hours of service. Their time, wisdom, and financial resources led to the realization of many HVF goals and objectives. Under their leadership, new activities of the Happy Valley Foundation came to include The Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts, which "celebrates the life and work of Beatrice Wood while presenting exhibitions of contemporary art, workshops and events" (links at www.radharsloss.com) and the Happy Valley Cultural Center, which is "dedicated to the support and encouragement of international and intercultural understanding. The Cultural Center provides a venue for all the arts as well as for dialogues on social and scientific issues that will be of interest to the community at large and that will introduce the students of the Besant Hill School to diversity in both traditional and

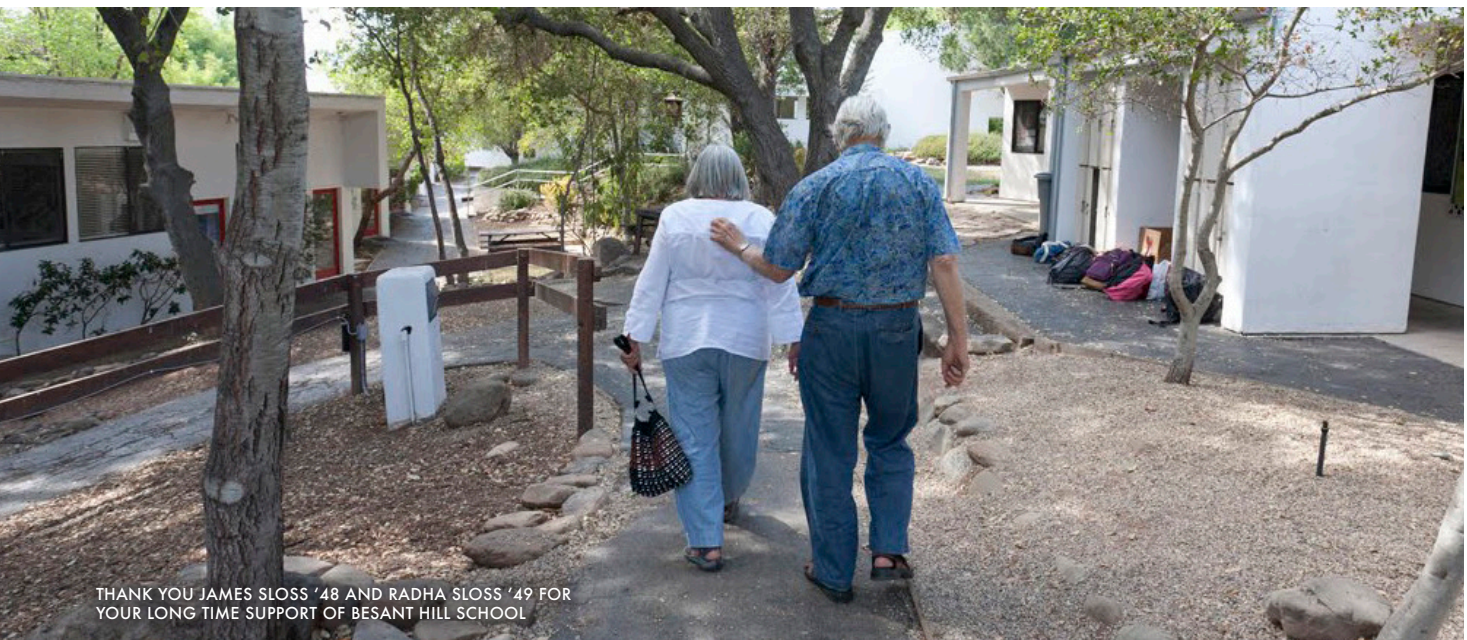
non-traditional spheres of human endeavor" (links at www.radharsloss.com).

Radha and Jimmy took on the awesome

"All good men and women must take responsibility to create legacies that will take the next generation to a level we could only imagine."

-Jim Rohn

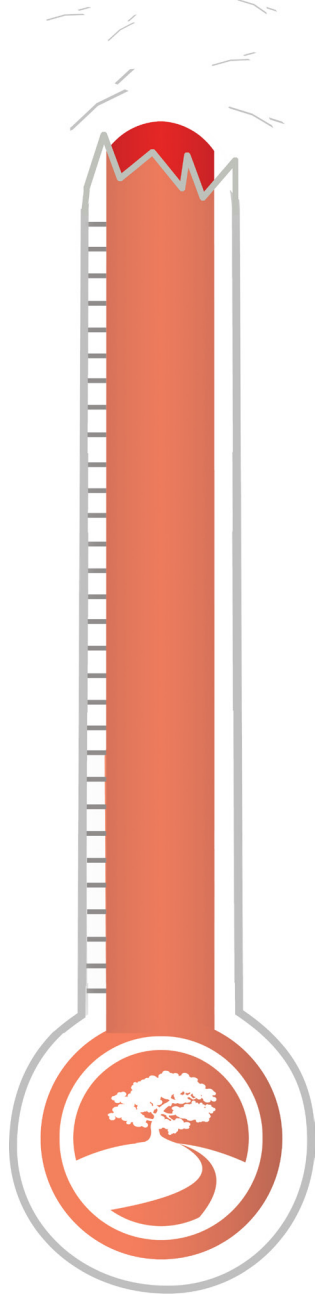
responsibility of creating their Happy Valley legacies almost 75 years ago. Their commitment to lead the Happy Valley Foundation Board while creating careers as author and educator, respectively, and raising their beautiful family--daughter Tinka Sloss, LMFT, son Robert Sloss, and their grandson--is unparalleled. It is with grateful hearts that we give our deepest thanks for Radha and Jimmy's extraordinary, life-long, "Aún Aprendo" spirits, and we congratulate them on their retirement from the Happy Valley Foundation Board. Their impact will be felt not only by subsequent generations, but forever. ♦



THANK YOU JAMES SLOSS '48 AND RADHA SLOSS '49 FOR YOUR LONG TIME SUPPORT OF BESANT HILL SCHOOL

ANNUAL FUND UPDATE

AUTHOR: KATHY ZOTNOWSKI



Though we have been confronted by crisis upon crisis--the Thomas Fire, and now a pandemic--our community has risen to the challenge once again! Despite the financial uncertainty brought on by the current global health situation, we were able to not only meet, but exceed our 2019-20 Annual Fund goal! Clearly, our community understood the dangers and sought the opportunities to help our school survive. A huge amount of gratitude goes to our alumni, led by the tremendous generosity of John S. Brown '67. In addition, we are thankful for the Happy Valley Foundation Board of Trustees and our own faculty and staff. The Trustee, faculty, and staff contributions to the annual fund truly demonstrate their "above and beyond" commitment to our community. We also gratefully acknowledge the many gifts from our current and alumni families. Not only do they share their children with us, they share their time, wisdom, and financial resources as well. We so appreciate the support! As we look to the future, we know from experience that our community will embrace the opportunities that these uncertain times pose and come out even stronger on the other side.

With appreciation,
Your Annual Fund Team

"The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger--but recognize the opportunity."

-John F. Kennedy



Artist: Henry R. '20

Henry photographed Digital Media Teacher, Brian Thornhill, as part of an assignment utilizing photo editing software. Brian, like Henry, is talented with his camera and also a paintbrush. This year both Henry and Brian created an impressive portfolio of work. In fact, many of the photos in this issue are taken by Brian, including the front cover.