FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

JAMIE
STECKART

In the Northland, we have been favored to have an abundance of trees. Visitors from across the globe travel to drive along the North and South Shores of Lake Superior during the fall to catch the dance of changing colors. There is nothing more magical than witnessing the sun sparkling off the big lake, striking the gold and red colors of the leaves during a crisp autumn morning. In some ways, we take for granted the mere presence of trees in our area.

In countless cultures, trees represent wisdom, knowledge, life, and prosperity. Trees are written about in myths and religious texts worldwide; their presence in a community implies a healthy ecosystem; and the planting of a tree is an act of service meant to benefit a future generation. There are countless ways trees enhance a community: they clean the air, filter water runoff, reduce noise, prevent flooding and soil erosion, provide habitat, and best of all, give us shade on a hot, muggy day. Trees are amazing.

Did you know that the largest living organism in the world is a stand of quaking aspen? They exist not as a single tree, but as an interconnected whole made up of individual pieces. When there is room, they will shoot out their roots to create a new tree—a new member that is connected to the community of its elders.

We have a generous population of these aspen in the Twin Ports area. As fall settles in, their leaves turn to an iconic bright yellow and shake with the wind. If you’ve experienced it, nothing can stir the soul more than emerging from the forest on the Superior Hiking Trail to gaze upon Split Rock Lighthouse, with Lake Superior as its backdrop, surrounded by cliffs blanketed in cascading golden aspen clusters.

I like to think Marshall School is like a brilliant stand of aspen. We nurture our healthy ecosystem of learners; we are watching them grow and develop while providing them with the right conditions to flourish. And while each tree in the stand of aspen is unique, each also carries common characteristics of the whole. At Marshall, those characteristics are found in our mission and core values. Multi-generations of Hilltoppers have grown here on campus, connected to that foundation of strong roots.

Graduates from Marshall are the shoots we send forth into lives beyond these walls. There is no end to where members of our Marshall community will sprout up. Across the globe they emerge, spreading the values of our school. For this, we are grateful. Know that our Hilltopper families, past and present, will always be connected to the larger community, just like that stand of quaking aspen.

JAMIE STECKART

2022-2023 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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[Signature]
SNAPSHOTS

NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

FIND IT ONLINE

INTERCONNECTED

THE ROOTS OF MARSHALL

BRANCHING OUT

BLOSSOMING ANEW

THE APPLE DOESN’T FALL FAR

GROW WHERE PLANTED

ALUMNI
01

Students Noah Mirsch ’30 and Alexandra Stocke ’30 greeted their grandparents and grandfriends as we celebrated the return of this most special day! Mark your calendars: our next Grandparents/Grandfriends Day returns to our usual Wednesday before Thanksgiving, November 23rd.

02

Upper school musicians Frannie Berg ’24, Sophie Haug ’24, and Daniella Majweka ’22 perform during the spring pops concert. “Music Hits Throughout the Decades” included performances from the show Hamilton, and music by Justin Timberlake and the Foo Fighters.

03

Spring was a successful season for sports! The Marshall baseball team finished with the State Consolation Championship, the golf team took second place in the state, and we had state participants take home hardware in track and trap shooting. Congratulations to our Hilltopper athletes!

04

The Class of 2030 had a successful four-performance run of the musical, “U.S. Geography.” The students created the backdrop, all their own costumes, and showed they have a good grasp of the state capitols. Pictured here, left to right, Addison Bastien ’30, James Denney ’30, and Xander Powell ’30.
05
Marshall’s Mathletes took first place in the state math tournament, winning the top prize on Pi Day, no less.

06
New graduate Tri Bon Nguyen ’22 makes his way through applauding faculty members. The Class of 2022 enjoyed a beautiful Friday afternoon ceremony featuring a commencement address from actor Daniel Durant.

07
On the first day of the 2022-23 school year, we welcomed our youngest Hilltoppers ever with the addition of our kindergarten through 4th grade Forest School!

08
Our Marshall team made it all the way to the Destination Imagination Global Finals in Kansas City, Missouri. Ben Bergeron ’22, Ethan Hargrove ’22, Zach Etterson ’22, Noah Stevens ’22, and (not pictured) Caleb Dungan ’22 built a structure that was as light as possible and would hold as much weight as possible. Their winning structure weighed just 29 grams and held 595 pounds!

09
The Class of 2026 spent four days and three nights in the wilderness at YMCA’s Camp Menogyn. This Hilltopper tradition is a great way to come together as a class and forge new relationships.

10
Seniors Riley Hutchinson ’23, Zach Marshak ’23, and Odin Kadlec ’23 prepare for the ziplines of the North Shore Adventure Park in Silver Bay. The senior class spent their first day together participating in team-building and adventure programming as part of the Fryberger Outdoor Experience. Some of our seniors faced their fears, while others were thrilled by the challenges.
NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

The Marshall School Board of Trustees welcomes **Julie Pierce** into her new role as Board President. Julie works as the Vice President of Strategy and Planning for Minnesota Power, focusing on long-term strategy and development for Minnesota Power’s customer needs. Her responsibilities include fuel strategy and procurement, project development, consideration of new technology, customer power supply marketing, customer forecasting, and resource planning. Julie lives in Duluth with her husband Peter Schommer and two daughters, Abby and Emma.

Julie has been with Minnesota Power for thirteen years, and past job titles have included Director of Power Supply and Resource Planning Manager. Prior to moving to Duluth, Julie was with Midwest ISO for eight years working in the reliability and market operations area in St. Paul. Julie graduated from North Dakota State University with a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering.

Julie is committed to volunteerism and serves on other local boards including the Duluth 1200 Fund, and is a committee member at the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, Regional Loan Fund. Additionally, she has served as Vice Chair for Generations Health Care Initiatives, a Duluth-based foundation that works to advance health equity and improve community health through education, collaboration, and support.

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FIND IT ONLINE

**THE HILLTOPPER MAGAZINE**

Interested in reading or sharing a digital copy of The Hilltopper? We’ve added a library of past and present issues of The Hilltopper to the Marshall School website. You can take the newest issue with you on your device, peruse past articles, search for specific topics, and help us cut down on paper and print tree waste in the process. Browse online at: [www.marshallschool.org/hilltopper](http://www.marshallschool.org/hilltopper)

**ANNUAL REPORT**

Thank you to the businesses, community partners, families, and individuals who generously support our school! The Marshall School Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 is now available online at: [www.marshallschool.org/annualreport](http://www.marshallschool.org/annualreport)
INTERCONNECTED

Like an underground river of roots between trees, we live an interconnected existence, woven amongst not only the environment surrounding us, but the people, friends, and communities we come into contact with throughout our lives. We are but a small part of the ecosystem around us, dependent on the resources of the land, the wisdom of the forest, and the hum of humanity; we are responsible for finding our part, nurturing others along the way, and contributing to the good of the collective whole.

In this issue of The Hilltopper, we explore how all of the pieces of one macro-organism come together, the natural order of life inside and outside of our Marshall halls, mirroring the make-up of a tree that is part of, and dependent on, all of the resources it takes to survive and thrive.

From seeing the Marshall community through the leaves in a stand of aspen, to exploring the root system of our shared beliefs—come along as we navigate the veins, rings, and layers of our beloved school.

The firm foundation of our mission and core values supports a trunk of formative principles that add on to the values developed at home, as one family branches out in many different directions from that central post. And as a tree loses its leaves in the fall, only to regenerate new healthy growth the following year, we’re pleased to show off a stunning crop of building renovations that blossomed over the summer. Then, like a fruit tree sending off a new crop of seedlings through the hillside, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree in one Marshall family, where we’re pleased to introduce a new generation in environmental education.

Finally, we’ll look at the courage and strength it requires to grow where you have been planted, whether on the side of a cliff, in battering winds, or through relocation altogether, one Hilltopper shares her journey from her war-torn country to the shelter of our Marshall grove.
How is an independent school different? What makes Marshall unique? Why should I send my child there?

These are questions our Admissions Office hears daily. The answer to all of these inquiries can be found when looking at the roots of a Marshall education.

When education has a foundation deeper than a standardized test, a root system as you will, comprised of core values supporting a centric mission and a climate that allows for growth, learning will thrive. Students and educators will learn to bend with the wind, stand firm against storms, and continue to seek new ways to grow and develop.

As an independent school, Marshall is able to focus on a mission-centric curriculum. Our school’s mission sets the foundation for learning; it is our guiding compass for making decisions within the school community. And as an ever-innovating educational institution, it is essential to strategically reflect on, and consciously review, our mission statement to ensure it continues to guide us forward.

“Our former mission statement had been around since 2008, and at that time, it defined who we aspired to be as a community. The focus was on ‘educating students to become global citizens’ at a time when we were building our international program and ensuring elements of global education throughout our curriculum. While the former statement is still true to who we are, Marshall was ready for a new mission to define who we would aspire to be in the next decade or longer considering the environment we live in today,” shared Heather Fishel, Marshall’s Upper School Principal, who served on the mission statement committee.

Over the course of the past year, faculty, staff, and trustees worked together to craft the new mission statement. Three variations were presented to the wider Marshall community for feedback. Through many discussions, deliberations, and careful consideration for future learning, Marshall had its new guiding light:

*Inspiring lifelong learners to embrace challenge and create positive change.*

If you look closely at this single sentence, you see it can be broken down into three succinct parts, the first of which is *Inspiring Lifelong Learners.* At Marshall, we strive to educate students to be curious, inquisitive, and full of wonder. We don’t teach to a test, but use agency and student choice to inspire discovery and a thirst for knowledge. This takes many different shapes in the classroom, but collectively teachers find engaging ways for students to connect with each lesson.

*Embrace Challenge* is the second component of our new mission statement. We understand that challenges can ignite growth in all
of us if we choose to face them. Whether it is an academic challenge inside the classroom, or trying to get a new personal record in a sport, it is important that we embrace challenges. We are striving to provide our students with the tools they need to overcome obstacles and challenges with positive perseverance.

Last, but certainly not least, is the call to Create Positive Change. It was important that we keep this in the present tense instead of looking only toward the future. As a Hilltopper Community, there is much we can do in the here and now to effect positive change. Our Hilltoppers don’t need to wait until after graduation to start creating positive rumbles in the world. Our actions today have an impact on those around us. Instilling confidence in students to make positive choices and understand the ripple effects of their actions is central to our mission at Marshall.

The mission statement, while a stand-alone phrase, was carefully crafted to embrace our core values:

Respect, Compassion, Integrity, Intellectual Curiosity, Self-Discipline, and Strong Academic Habits.

Together, Marshall’s mission statement and core values make up the Hilltopper root system and foundation for education.

So what now? Marshall’s mission and core values are more than words we add to a webpage. They are lived daily inside classrooms, on the court, and embedded in board meetings. They are prominent in all aspects of what we do on the hilltop. “The mission statement will be read at the beginning of each meeting and be visible for all board members to center the board and ensure all strategic decisions are in alignment with the mission statement,” shared Marshall trustee Laura Mullen ’97.

“Keeping the mission, core values, and statement of community in front of students reminds us all of who we are and aspire to be, why we are here, and how we treat one another. These three things together provide direction for us to understand what it means to be good people and make a difference in our world,” shared Heather.

How will teachers make this happen?

Our Marshall educators live out the mission statement in their classrooms daily. They encourage inquisitive thinking, student agency, and supported risk-taking. They embrace challenges with students to collaborate and find solutions together. They encourage classes to ask difficult questions and have the perseverance to keep going when one solution doesn’t work.

Mr. KJ (Scott Kylander-Johnson ’90) shared that in his classroom, he uses analogies to help his students connect with the mission statement. When students are facing an academic challenge, or are having a difficult time working collaboratively, they pause as a class and review the mission statement together. “I share with the students that this is similar to playing a sport or learning a new instrument. We need to practice. It is okay to make mistakes, know the mission statement is our target, but sometimes we may miss our target.” Together, Mr. KJ works with his class on ways they can make better choices, or do things differently to ensure they are embracing challenges and creating positive change.

Middle School math teacher, Sarah Perry-Spears ’92, also integrated these principles into her classroom. “In math land, we’re working with students to try to increase their intellectual curiosity. It’s not about doing the math, it’s about thinking about the math—asking ‘Why?’, exploring how many ways we can solve a problem, being able to communicate our approach, respectfully listening to someone else’s approach, and formulating questions. These skills are not only helpful in truly understanding mathematical concepts, but they also help students become creative, effective, and respectful problem-solvers—something our world will benefit from.”

In our Upper School classes, teachers are finding new ways to create that spark in learning. In Biology class, students hike to Brewery Creek to collect water samples to analyze in the lab as they collaborate and answer questions about living organisms. This type of project-based and hands-on learning helps students connect with materials and information on a deeper level.

We know that growth doesn’t happen in comfort zones, and by using our core values to create a safe environment, we can encourage students to engage in healthy risk-taking while being supported and learning new skills. This can be seen flowing throughout the Marshall experience, from the Forest School all the way to the Upper School.

The mission statement, statement of community, and core values are the roots of what it means to be a Hilltopper. These three elements provide the foundation for learning at Marshall and provide a framework for the tools our Hilltoppers will take with them as they start their next chapters. But these elements are nothing without the Hilltopper community; it requires the relationships we build and the support we give one another to make our roots strong.

Jamie Steckart, Marshall’s Head of School, added, “Relationships are the glue that holds our mission statement together. Human beings are social creatures that rely on positive relationships. From teachers to custodial staff, we all pull together to create an extraordinary learning environment for our students.” With our mission-centric focus, we know that our Hilltoppers are going to be lifelong learners who embrace challenges and strive to create positive change in our world!
What does it look like to grow from the same set of roots, same trunk, nourished by the same principles and values—to then branch out into the community to spread that goodness everywhere you go? Ask the Johnson family, a set of four inspiring siblings who were raised in the Marshall family and have gone on to create thriving lives and positive change in the world around them.

Oftentimes, our deepest core values begin in the home, modeled to us by the family members that share our space. In this household, DeeDee and Philip intentionally, and unintentionally, fed into the types of people their children would become by consistently demonstrating and encouraging a strong sense of principles. While the four siblings each grew into their own set of family values in adulthood, there were two principles that were resolutely foundational in their lives: hard work and kindness.

“Growing up, our parents were both extremely hard working and instilled the value of putting 100% into everything you do. No matter the personal or professional endeavor, they always demonstrated putting in the extra effort to go above and beyond,” explained Ashley Langenbrunner ’02. A strong work ethic, attention to detail, giving more than expecting to receive, and striving for the best one could possibly contribute were exemplified in their parents’ words and actions, but the additional caveat was to do so with joy and compassion, coming from a place of being willing and able to help others. “We were taught to keep a smile on our faces each and every day. Many of my teachers commented on my constant smile throughout my schooling days both in and out of Marshall,” shares Alex Johnson ’11. His older sister Andee Robb ’99 adds, “You never know what someone has gone through in their past, and the future is not always guaranteed.” That idea of considering others, especially with kindness, is echoed over and over like rings inside of a tree in the words the siblings warmly expressed.

Around the foundation of core family values, children build an additional set of driving principles through their experiences and interactions in school, a place where they spend a large portion of their developing lives. The siblings all came up through Marshall’s educational structure, graduating individually from the school over the course of twelve years, and were each able to see that the emphasis on being part of a community, supporting each other, and nurturing relationships were a memorable foothold in their development.

From graduation, each sibling took their strong foundation and branched out to pursue contributive and purposeful lives.

Andee is a Senior Vice President and leads the Program Management practice for Retail Corporate Services at Jones Lang LaSalle. She serves as a strategic advisor to domestic and international retailers who are growing through mergers, acquisitions, or downsizing due to economic or operational constraints. Some of her current and past clients include Regis Corporation, T-Mobile, Ulta, Under Armour, Fred Meyer, and Google.

Andee also passionately serves as a Safe Beauty Advocate for Beautycounter cosmetics, where she educates consumers on ingredient safety and environmental toxins in the beauty, personal care, and home environment industries. After witnessing the difference in ingredient regulations between the United States versus Canada and the United Kingdom, she began to advocate for the value of human health and safety. Earlier this year, she represented the State of Minnesota in Washington, D.C. for BeautyCounter’s national lobbying day, meeting with members of Congress and their staff to educate them on key pieces of safety legislation currently up for review.

“Marshall is where I learned how to be an advocate for underrepresented communities and to become a steward of the earth. Volunteer Outreach was my favorite class because it gave me an opportunity to have a social mission in my community, and I learned to reach into populations that are different from my own to create positive change.”

“Be kinder than necessary every day.” - DeeDee Johnson
ASHLEY (JOHNSON) LANGENBRUNNER ’02

She continues, “Because of Julie Ball and Terry Falsani, creative writing and public speaking came naturally, which led me to study journalism at the University of Minnesota. It wasn’t until ALS struck our family and took the life of our mother, DeeDee Johnson in 2010, that I began to use my voice publicly with a mission to help others.” Andee volunteered with the ALS Association, organized the Twin Cities Walk to Defeat ALS, and launched an online support group for young adults living with family members suffering from ALS.

“The desire to leave my community a better place than how I found it was ingrained in me at a very young age.” With her own daughters now at the age she was when she began at Marshall, she is inspired to model some of the core values she learned at the school and at home, including the value of servant leadership and the gift of freedom to make mistakes. “I’ve heard me quote Maya Angelou hundreds of times, ‘Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.’ With just a little help, I believe we all can do better.”

Ashley currently serves as the Chief of Staff to IBM’s Enterprise Performance Management Senior Leader overseeing IBM’s strategic transformation of integrated data across its global operations. After graduating from Marshall, she attended the College of Saint Benedict for a BA in both Economics and French, and later completed an MBA through Augsburg College.

A sense of family, closeness, personal connection, servant leadership, relationship-building, and authentic kindness pervades Ashley’s experience of a childhood at Marshall, as well as the current gifts and talents she brings to her personal life and professional career. Her words are intricately woven with appreciation for her own family, and an emphasis on mutual support and encouragement. “Our family has always had a ‘tree of life’ hanging in our childhood home, something I did not appreciate until being an adult and parent myself; this concept of the tree is applicable to families and communities like Marshall, starting at the base foundation, and understanding how each part is vital to the tree’s growth.” She remembers a sense of closeness with small classes that shaped her desire to go to a smaller liberal arts college, and a foundation of exciting extras that contributed to her growth, including: a variety of required classes that created a well-rounded education, foundational add-ons like “Web Walks,” and multi-day overnight trips into the Minnesota wilderness. She was challenged to think “outside of the box,” finding alternative and creative approaches to solving problems in class, which pushed her to always value creativity in her career.

Now, her appreciation for academics trickles into her own children, planting seeds for a joy and appreciation of learning at an early age. She is inspired to show her three daughters everything that women can achieve—and balance—with hard work and determination, prioritizing growth and development through challenge in both personal and professional pursuits. Her personal growth these days still comes from that central tree of community, from surrounding herself with people who allow her to utilize her strengths while also requiring her to work on areas needing refinement. “My husband, family, friends, employer, and community challenge me daily to be the best person I can be so that I can raise my daughters to be strong, kind, hard-working, and successful youth and adults. No matter what, everyone needs a good home base of supportive family and friends who challenge them to keep growing and developing throughout life.”
AUSTIN JOHNSON ’08

Austin is serving as a Women’s Reproductive Health Fellow at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill after completing his OB/GYN residency. He plans to complete an additional fellowship in Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility with the goal of specializing in fertility preservation and family planning for oncology and LGBTQI patients.

His AP Biology course at Marshall helped set him on this path: “I will never forget how excited my class was to learn from Ms. Hermes, even when it came to learning complex biology. We saw someone who truly had a passion for the material she was teaching. I believe this is what made me so excited to pursue an education in the biological sciences and ultimately a career in medicine.” He utilizes the values of dedication and strong work ethic to get through challenging days and difficult patient situations, while the sense of community and support that he gained from both Marshall and his family is something he strives to create for both his patients and work colleagues.

Finally, he brings in the foundational trunk of kindness and compassion. “I’ve had the opportunity to hear the needs of patients and to witness the struggles they face. In a time when women’s health has never been more of a priority as we battle racially-biased maternal mortality rates, limitations on reproductive freedoms, and barriers to comprehensive health care for all individuals, the needs of my patients and their families inspire me to be a better physician and individual in this world. I believe this was a core theme of my education and experience at Marshall—to think of oneself as part of a community, of a bigger world, and to use your education, talents, and passions to make the community you are part of a better and more just place.”

ALEX JOHNSON ’11

Alex is a Lead Designer with Target Corporation’s New Store Team in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He designs for a variety of locations across the United States, ranging from dense urban cores to dispersed suburban markets. Before Target, and immediately after graduating from the University of Minnesota’s College of Design in 2015, he moved to New York City to be a part of H&M’s Store Planning Team where he spent nearly three years designing stores in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia. In his current position, he is focused on working with new locations to bring goods and services into places where they may not be present already, partnering with the specific communities to ensure that Target is helping, supporting, engaging, informing, and providing for that population’s unique needs.

He also owns a company, which he started while a student at Marshall, called The Development Tracker. This is a non-biased news and media resource that focuses on real estate development within the communities of Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul, connecting the people of the community with developers, real estate companies, city officials, and more to help ensure that the design and development of projects will satisfy the needs of those who live there.

His pride in both outlets stems from the foundational values of kindness, support, and community that were touted both at home and school. “My involvement early on through Marshall community service projects single-handedly inspired me to try and support the community in whatever way I can, in valuing contribution and becoming a global citizen. I value the days I spent volunteering, whether at CHUM, Animal Allies, or Solvay Hospice House, the latter of which is the most important volunteering experience I have ever completed in my life as my mother spent her final days there during my senior year at Marshall. This firm foundation taught me to see that there are individuals who are less fortunate than I and there are ways to help and contribute to a better life for all.”

WANT to CONNECT?

The Johnson siblings are happy to speak with students and young professionals who are seeking advice on life after Marshall:

ANDEE
andrea.robb@am.jll.com
ASHLEY
ashjohn@us.ibm.com
AUSTIN
austin.johnson@unchealth.unc.edu
ALEX
alex@thedevelopmenttracker.com
Our school’s Health Center was updated throughout with funding provided through a Covid-based grant from Emergency Assistance for Nonpublic Schools (EANS).

This summer, renovations budded, blossomed, and bloomed around Marshall’s campus, both inside and out.

**BLOOMING Anew**

Outdoor signage was added and updated to create a welcoming and easier-to-navigate street presence for our school, while indoor signage was changed to reflect our new mission statement and core values.

New flooring was installed in the middle school halls and common area in anticipation of Forest School elementary-age students distributing wet and muddy footprints.

The heavily used library was renovated with new flooring, furniture, and circulation desk, while a quiet reading room was created for our youngest learners out of an unused and outdated computer lab. This was made possible thanks to generous support from North Shore Bank, the Lewis Family, and all of this year’s annual Fund-a-Need donors!
THE APPLE DOESN’T FALL FAR

BY TONY LOCKHART

Few milestones are more significant than starting a new dream job, unless of course you are retiring from that same job after a long and impactful career.

This June, both scenarios played out in the Johnson family as Marshall middle school teacher Dave “DJ” Johnson retired after twenty-five years teaching science and social studies in our middle school. That same month, his daughter Sarah Chapple ’09 was hired to be one of the founding teachers in the new Marshall Forest School.

In a tender “passing of the torch” conversation, Sarah and DJ interviewed each other to describe their interconnected and converging journeys with a beloved Marshall School, showing that the family apple of education and outdoor appreciation truly doesn’t fall far from the tree.
DJ: Sarah, tell us a little bit about your Marshall journey.

Sarah: I am a Marshall graduate; I came to Marshall starting in sixth grade. I remember being so excited when I got to go to Marshall because we didn’t have to walk in lines, and all of the independence we had. We were trusted by the adults around us and given a lot of autonomy, which I felt like I hadn’t had before. Things that I loved about Marshall were the nordic ski and cross country running teams, the really great friendships that I made, and all the amazing teachers I had. It was special to have the ski trail right on campus, and I remember during some study halls I would go and put my skis on and go ski during study hall!

Sarah: Dad, how did you start your Marshall journey?

DJ: I first came here to watch a Topper Tunnel when I was coaching at another school—the Topper Tunnel was for a nordic skier from Marshall who was going to go to state, and also for students who had competed in math league and were going to their state competition. I thought it was really cool that they were celebrating the math kids along with the athletic kids. Then, I walked around the hallways on a little tour and saw that all the lockers were open, and I thought, “Oh, why are the lockers open?” My guide explained that it was because people trusted each other and it was a way of showing that trust. I thought, “Wow, I want to teach here, and I want my kids to go to school here.” When I was hired, Mr. KJ [Scott Kylander-Johnson ’90] was part of the hiring committee. We worked closely together for twenty-five years, doing all sorts of fun stuff.

DJ: Sarah, what brought you to Marshall as a teacher? What are some of the high points on your journey as an educator?

Sarah: I started going to Saint Scholastica for a year and discovered that I wanted to work with younger students, and that I really liked being outside; I thought it’d be cool to be able to work at a school that had an outdoor focus. I transferred to Wyoming, and after graduation
was offered a job at a school in Colorado with a huge outdoor focus. We took kids outside every day, and on Fridays we spent all day outside going on adventures like hiking, biking, and skiing. I love Colorado but knew that I would want to be back in Duluth one day and that I would love to teach at Marshall. I hoped that Marshall would open a third grade—then I heard about the Forest School and knew it was my dream. Our goal is to be outside all day teaching our curriculum. We have such a close-knit teaching team, something that I was really looking for professionally, and it is special that I get to teach in, and about, the place where I grew up.

DJ: That reminds me, you also were a big part of building the ski trail. I used a lot of volunteer labor—you and your brother Cody had to do a lot of afternoons hauling trash and wood chips and stuff like that. Now, you’re getting to use the things that you built as a middle-schooler and high-schooler!

Sarah: Yes! And, my senior project was making all of the trail signs, and I wrote a history slide show about different parts of the trail.

DJ: How do you see me as being an influence in your career path? Did you become a teacher because of me, or were there other reasons?

Sarah: Just because of you!

DJ: (laughing) Yes, yes, that’s the right answer!

Sarah: No, it’s the truth. I definitely have thought you’re one of my role models. I always thought it was so cool how your students looked up to you; there were so many kids that were like, “Oh, Mr. DJ is the best!” You were able to influence so many kids, and that was a catalyst for why I wanted to become a teacher. However, I wanted to do something different, more of a general elementary educator. But yes, I think it’s a family business.

Sarah: What are your thoughts regarding me teaching at Marshall, and what do you believe my strengths will be?

DJ: That’s such a good question. I’ve always thought that Marshall should have an elementary school and actually envisioned that there would be the “Larry Weber Elementary School of Outdoor Learning.” It would be a building on the hillside just below the tennis court with solar power and lots of natural light; kids would come in there and learn all about the natural world. I never envisioned a forest school because I didn’t know such a thing existed until this year. When our school leaders started getting serious about wanting to do a forest school, I thought, “Oh, this is a perfect fit for you!” and you had all the skills they were looking for.

DJ: Would you sum up the Forest School in twenty seconds? Tell me why it is unique and special.

Sarah: The Forest School is especially unique for kindergarten through fourth grade. We are spending as much time as possible outside with our kids, and each teacher has a small crew of fifteen students. We’re outside in any weather, and although we’re not just playing, play is fundamental to our philosophy and sets the groundwork for the day. We play first, and then from that we’re able to move into our academics of math, reading, social studies, and science—but we’re doing all that outside. My blue tarp is one of my favorite tools; it is in the cart of teaching materials that we pull around all day, and with it I have a mobile carpet to spread out to become our “container” that we sit on to read or write a journal entry. It is my little classroom that can be moved from place to place.

Sarah: What are your reflections on your time here at Marshall, starting with that Topper Tunnel to ending with your retirement party?

DJ: I have absolutely loved working at Marshall School. I’ve loved the people foremost—I have worked with Mr. KJ closely, and all the other teachers on my teams. I’m very proud of the things that we’ve done here, especially building the ski trail. We started that in 2003 and now it’s a 2.5K trail. I think the trail was one
of the things that needed to be in place before the Forest School: the trail exposed parts of campus where they could find cool places like the upstream bridge and Snake Hollow, and I love hearing the children in the woods, hearing the kids playing and happy and active, and seeing the grass all trampled down where they’ve been. I feel good about the work we did with water testing and keeping a close eye on Brewery Creek, and I am really proud of how I taught science and projects that engaged kids. I also feel good about my career here because if this were a movie, and we were at the end credits, it would say, “No children were harmed during the filming of this movie.” I was able to treat every child with respect and care and give them my best.

Sarah: Do you want to talk about how you like retirement?

Dj: Retirement is great, too! I loved retiring and this first retirement year is awesome—people are really nice to you, you don’t have to go to as many meetings, and you don’t have as many worries about the next year. It’s great, I would retire every year if I could! I enjoy the freedom to do what I like every day, to volunteer with organizations I care about, and being able to go for a bike ride in the middle of the day.

The vision of a forest school at Marshall arose from a growing desire in our local community for nature-based learning to continue into the elementary years. Marshall has a strong history of providing middle school and upper school educational opportunities that focus on cultivating students’ gifts and a passion for lifelong learning, and now the Forest School extends this to all grades.

The Forest School utilizes students’ curiosity and playfulness to develop student agency, critical thinking, and a growth mindset that puts students on the path to continued academic success. It harnesses nature as a backdrop to build foundational academic skills with an average of 50% of time spent outside. Students learn on 40+ acres of extensive trails, fields, and creeks, as well as in innovative classrooms designed for our youngest learners.
“My favorite animal is dinosaurs,” giggled the beautiful fifteen-year-old in front of me with pink manicured nails and a shyly genuine smile, “and I loooove pizza!”

Anna “Anya” Gorishnja ’24 is a Marshall international student from Kharkiv, Ukraine. When we spoke, she had been in the United States for just ten days—new to an American education at our school, exploring our city and country for the very first time. I was introduced to Anya when I set out looking for someone in our Hilltopper community who could tell me a story that would paint a picture through words resembling one of those trees that sprouts on the side of a cliff. Those growths that photographers are especially drawn to, in an impossible crevice, thriving in an unexpected place, and all the more beautiful and strong because of it.

While 11th grade Anya is every bit what you would expect from a normal teenager, she has bloomed forth from an extraordinary history of life experience, and she was gracious enough to share this diverse perspective with me. I began our meeting by asking her to tell me her story, and she jumped right in…

“I woke up that morning and my mom said, ‘We need to go.’ When I asked why, she only replied, ‘Because, we just need to; take your clothes and go.’
I asked what happened and she couldn't say. She couldn't explain that the war had started because I was too young to understand. I just took my dog and said, 'I'm ready!'—'Quick, quick, quiet, we have to go,' she told me.”

In the summer of 2014, Anya's idyllic five-year-old life was abruptly altered with the beginning of war in Luhansk, Ukraine—her home and place of birth. After the hurried exit that morning, she and her mother left her father, their house, belongings, and life behind to travel five hours to the city of Kharkiv where her father's parents were waiting. She was just a small child, much too young to understand war and unable to understand why she couldn't just go back to her home when she begged over and over. Her well-intentioned mother couldn't begin to try to explain the complexities and atrocities of violent conflict to her. Anya began second grade in Kharkiv. Her father eventually joined them a year later; they moved into their own home, and her parents went to work.

It wasn't until Anya was around eight or nine years old, when she received her first cell phone and had internet access, that she was able to fully explore the topic that her parents had quietly alluded to. She voraciously read everything she could about her country and was finally able to answer the question that had perplexed her young mind for years:

“What is the war?”

At the end of February 2022, the world watched Ukraine in helpless horror as Russia began an unthinkable assault, relentlessly bombing the city center of Kharkiv.

“This is my city. It was so bad. I live two minutes from there,” she shared as she pulled up a YouTube video titled Close the Sky Over Ukraine. As I watched sickening images of war and death flash on the screen, she continued, “This day, this is the worst day of my life. This one.” She pointed at the screen. “We just stayed at home and can hear the sounds of this—we can't do anything. We need to just sit, just wait. What will happen? I was seeing all of this with my eyes, in the streets, in my city. It was all bad, every day, hearing the sounds from the streets... it was planes, Russia bombing Ukraine, and I was really scared about this.”

She continued, “We stayed in Kharkiv during this time—the first month of war was the worst month of my life, worrying every day.” She deflects back to the screen before us and points out a room full of young toddlers. “These are the children without parents because their parents died in the war. I think I will never forget. This is war.”

Because of those constant bombings, Anya is still afraid of airplane sounds in the sky. Her comments played on repeat in my head later that day as Marshall School had an emergency evacuation practice drill. With sirens going off, everyone in the school exited the building to the rumble of fighter jets from the local 148th Air Force Unit practicing aerial maneuvers overhead. I have always loved seeing these aircrafts in Duluth, but in that moment it struck me cold to think of what they actually represent and how somewhere on campus, Anya was standing under this same sky.

“This conflict has been going on my whole life,” she explained when I asked how she coped. “I'm used to it, this is normal for me now. This is normal.”

Anya is aware that most people in the United States cannot understand what is happening in Ukraine, cannot fathom the concept of a war that continues even now as her family lives beside the wreckage. “Yesterday, in World History, we had a test, and one of the questions was, ‘Why are today's teenagers in America so sad?’ I can say why Ukrainian teenagers are sad, but this question I do not know.”

I see Anya laughing with her new friends walking through the school halls, but behind the young smile is a worried fear for her parents, grandparents, sister, brother, cousins, and friends in Ukraine. Only one of her childhood friends remains in her country; the rest have scattered throughout Europe in recent months—to London, Italy, France, Poland—anywhere they could safely go. “Only me and Rienat in the U.S.,” she says referring to her grade school friend from home who is also attending Marshall this year for the first time. “I started talking to Rienat, and he said he was at Marshall,” explains Anya when I ask how she ended up here, “Okay, I will come to you. I will go to Marshall, too.”

American embassies in Ukraine have been closed due to the conflict with Russia, so Anya's family searched the breadth of Europe for available visa appointments with an American Consulate. The first available was in Latvia, a country in Northern Europe by the Baltic Sea, where she then traveled with her mom. Once the visa was approved, she remained in Latvia until she could travel to the United States. Eventually, she was on a plane alone headed to Amsterdam, then on to Minneapolis where Rienat and his older brother met her at the airport. These kids share similar stories when it comes to parents who moved mountains to get their children to the United States, knowing an education here was a priceless ticket to security.

“Goodbye, goodbye, good luck!” waved her mom as she watched her daughter leave to the other side of the world. What did that moment feel like? What emotions might one have in that flicker of time? “When I was sitting in the plane, I felt safe.”
Any’s mother now wakes up at 5:00 a.m. every day in Kharkiv to connect with her daughter on the phone. Her parents will stay in their country—her father cannot leave due to a policy that requires men 60 years old and younger to fight. “If you are a man and the war is in your country, you need to go to the war.” I asked if her parents kept some form of protection at home, “No, no protection. My parents just live a normal life, just live with war, just going to work every day.”

Just live with war.

I rolled this around in my head. Anya knows she’s had a challenging start to life, gravely abnormal by American standards. “The worst childhood ever. In my childhood is two wars in my country, and Covid—I’m just alone in the U.S. now. The worst, but also the best. Because of the war, I am here now; this was my dream all my life to study here.”

Her face begins to glow again, the aura of anger softens, and the delicate child reemerges. She explains that there is a big difference in attitude between people in Ukraine and those she has met here. “People are so kind, so cute, I love the people here. I love everything in the United States, because it’s the United States!” She continues on to name all of the blessings she has appreciated: the big beautiful school, an astounding level of high-quality education, wonderful teachers, her host family, the shockingly large size of food and beverages and clothing, clean drinkable tap water, the city of Duluth in all of its green beauty, the cinema, and countless people to speak English with. The list of gratitudes spills from her like a stream of genuine wonder.

Some of the statements she makes still stutter my breath, like how she doesn’t tell anyone her dreams. Isn’t it an extraordinary luxury to have future hopes and goals? To confidently believe you could expect to make them come true, and that you would have any resource needed to work toward them? Her English is excellent; she taught it to herself in the past year. Learning a language for your future is much different than studying a language for fun.

As for Anya’s long-term future, it is indeed uncertain. She will study at Marshall this year and next, and then will have one year to gain traction at a college in the United States before she will need to return to Europe in hopes of being able to renew her visa. She has no idea when she will see her family again, but for now, it’s a blessing to have Rienat and another Ukrainian student, Daria, here at Marshall—two friends with whom she can speak in her native tongue for a taste of home.

We end our conversation back on a lighthearted and beautiful topic: her passionate love for figure skating. Back home, she spent all of her free time out on the ice—now she spends her free time looking at the rinks in Duluth, waiting patiently for her skates to arrive with her winter clothing in a care package from home. Her smile is deep, authentic, and unencumbered by the devastation she has witnessed... she is still a teenager, by age and in heart.

I realize that Anya is not actually like a sapling developing in an impossible place… but rather, she is a stunning hardwood that will continue to grow tall and reach for great heights wherever she is planted.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

REUNION

JULY 14 & 15, 2023
MARSHALL CAMPUS

We’re already looking forward to our next All-Class Mixer and Golden Topper Luncheon! Join us as we celebrate all of our alumni, especially our Milestone Classes...

1993 2003 2013

Interested in helping organize additional reunion events for your class? Email us at alumni@marshallschool.org

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL CELEBRATION

We had a blast honoring our new Class of ’72 Golden Toppers and all of our alumni during Reunion weekend! It was fun seeing pals, reminiscing about the past, and walking the halls of Marshall again with friends. Cheers to memories old and new!

NEW! HILLTOPPER SNAPSHOTs

We love seeing Hilltoppers stay connected and get together throughout the year! Have you gathered with fellow alumni recently? Did you adventure to a game for one of our athletic teams? We would love for you to share your photos with us for the next issue of The Hilltopper magazine. Email your photos (including alumni names) to alumni@marshallschool.org

UPCOMING MARSHALL SCHOOL EVENTS

GRANDPARENTs and GRANDFRIENDs DAY
November 23, 2022 - For students in grades 5-12

ANNUAL DINNER AUCTION GALA
March 18, 2023
NEWS & NOTES

70’S

Neil Hulmer ’72 writes, “I have been retired for over three years, am president of our local little league, and live in Ashland, Wisconsin. I built a lake home up at Fish Lake, north of the Duluth Airport, and have four sons ages 39, 36, 31, and 28.”

Michael Coughlin ’77 writes, “We are proud to announce our daughter Patricia and her husband Christopher are having a baby in September. It’s our first. Can’t wait.”

Kevin Michelizzi ’79 writes, “I went to visit Russia and arrived the same day Covid lockdowns were introduced and the airport was closed. I loved it so much I decided not to leave! Been living here with my wife and dog, building a new house within a short walk to the Black Sea beach, and working for Sony Interactive Entertainment. Everything you’ve heard about Russians is not true. Instead, we should remember to love one another as we love ourselves. The world would be a better place.”

00’S

Rachel (Carroll) Herzl-Betz ’08 writes, “I recently became an Assistant English Professor and the Writing Center Director at Nevada State College. A collaborative article about linguistic diversity was recently published in Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture, and a solo article on accessibility is forthcoming from Composition Forum.”

10’S

Corey Stephan ’11 writes, “This May, I graduated with a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the Department of Theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I have accepted a full-time appointment as Assistant Professor of Theology and Fellow of the Core in the Division of Liberal Studies at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, which I will begin this fall. My wife, two children, and I are excited to move from Wisconsin to Texas to start our new adventure.”

90’S

Katie Mosack ’90 writes, “Our family of five recently relocated to Portland, Oregon from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and are enjoying the beauty of the Pacific Northwest.”

IN MEMORIAM

Madeline Roufs ’39
William Rudie ’45
Mary Jane Lewis ’46
Alyce (Wille) Flaherty ’47
LaVerny McKeever ’47
Lucille Rich ’48
Jean Robinson ’48
Patricia (Caldwell) Breiland ’49
Jerry Gleeson ’49
Kenneth Johnson ’49
Raymond Katzmarek ’50
Elwood Youngberg ’50
Geraldine (Renier) Ogren ’51
Tom Grandaunson ’54
Cornelius Loiselle Jr. ’55
Donald McDonald ’55
William Nisius ’56
Sharon Shykes ’56
Judith (Dungan) Crase ’57
Michael LaPanta ’58
Kenneth Graves ’59
Karl Norman ’61
Joseph Wisocki III ’61
Thomas Ramsey ’62
Frank Jeanetta ’65
Paul Muhvic ’65
Karleen Luoma ’67
Romyane Thomason ’67
Julie Jappe ’69
Terrie Wright ’70
Mary Miller Murray ’75
Caroline Wefelmeyer Martin ’78
Lorraine L’Abbe ’80
Michael McDonnell ’80
Susan (Gollinger) Elstad ’83
Mary Sarvela Amrhein ’88
Gary Lyons
Former Board Member
Elisabeth Tyler Congdon Mason
Former Board Member and Generous Supporter of Marshall

WE’D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

With more than 5,000 alumni scattered around the world, it’s hard to keep track of the incredible things everyone is up to. We’re always looking for stories and updates of alumni to celebrate, and we need your help! You can call or email the Alumni Office with ideas for Hilltopper profiles, or visit our website at marshallsschool.org/alumni to submit an update.
GIVING MATTERS

ANNA (SMITH) WEIS ’94

As both a parent of Marshall students and an alum, Anna Weis ’94 knows the impact that Marshall has on its students and the community. “My Marshall education was a wonderful blend of knowledge, critical thinking skills, and good study habits. I also had a positive experience with a sport, in my case nordic skiing, and was encouraged to pursue community service and to try clubs that interested me. When I look back as an adult, I see that I came through the middle and high school years as a happy person with a good sense of self-esteem. Certainly, school was only one piece of that puzzle, but I would absolutely say that my years at Marshall launched me smoothly into adulthood.”

Anna appreciates how small class sizes and flexible curriculum make it possible for teachers to know their students and meet their individual needs. “In the years [my children] have been at Marshall, the school work and other activities have always been exactly what they needed at each age and stage. I feel a sense of cohesion and of things building on each other in a way that guides the students.”

By making Marshall a philanthropic priority for her family, Anna knows she is not only contributing to educational excellence at Marshall, but also raising the bar for education across the region. “I have to give my husband credit in terms of our support of Marshall. Coming from a small town in Minnesota, he did get the good public education one expects from our state, but he can also see clearly how lucky Duluth is to have an independent private school option. I feel that Marshall’s existence pushes all the schools in our whole area to be better. In giving to Marshall, it is satisfying to be helping provide opportunities to a great bunch of current students and also to be providing that push and sense of possibility to the whole region.”

The Annual Fund for Marshall School is a critical financial resource that supports a range of discretionary and programmatic needs including unique hands-on learning experiences, field trips, and accessible scholarship funding. Gifts to the Annual Fund directly impact Marshall’s ability to offer a vibrant educational experience to our young learners.

To make a gift today, please use the enclosed envelope, or visit marshallschool.org/giving.
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