



MODUS VIVENDI

A Way of Life

COMMENCEMENT 2021

FACULTY PROFILE:
KEVIN BURNS

THE RAPID AND
REWARDING ADOPTION
OF TECHNOLOGY IN
LOWER SCHOOL

UNPACKING STRATEGIC
PLAN 2024: NO
ORDINARY PEOPLE

THE BEAR
CREEK
SCHOOL
MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2021



MODUS VIVENDI

Summer 2021

Modus Vivendi is translated as a way of life or a manner of living. The Bear Creek School seeks to develop individuals for whom the classical ideals of excellence in all things, love of learning, spiritual commitment, and self-discipline have become a way of life.

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Articles, photographs, and ideas are welcome and may be sent to modusvivendi@tbcs.org. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, and style.

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The mission of The Bear Creek School is to provide a high-quality, Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that will enable each student to become the individual God intends.

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BLOG

For an in-depth view into the happenings at Bear Creek, read our blog at tbcs.org/blog. To receive alerts when new articles are posted, subscribe to the blog by clicking the "bell" icon at the top of the page.

THE BEAR FACTS

Each Friday during the school year, *The Bear Facts*, Bear Creek's weekly newsletter, is emailed to current parents, faculty, and staff. *The Bear Facts* contains news and announcements from each of the school's divisions and from the athletics department. Previous posts are archived and searchable on the school website at tbcs.org/bearfacts.

MyBC

Students, parents, faculty, and staff can find a complete list of role-specific resources on our website. See MyBC at the top of any page on tbcs.org and log in.

ON THE COVER

Maya Bennett prepares for the Class of 2021 Commencement celebration, held outdoors at The Bear Creek School on Owens Field. Read more about Bear Creek's Commencement exercises on pages 6 – 19.

PHOTO BY SINI FERNANDEZ



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MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMASTER

By Patrick Carruth

THE DAY IS MARCH 6, 2020. The Class of 2020 has just returned from Senior Blast, and faculty are meeting for in-service to begin training for virtual learning, just in case. Over the weekend, the senior admin team texts back and forth, and on Sunday night we switch the entire school to virtual learning. And so began our fellowship together through the COVID-19 pandemic.

As toilet paper disappeared from store shelves and The Bear Creek School pivoted to remote learning, I made **two critical decisions**: I bought a freezer and made a spreadsheet. Now perhaps you were thinking there were more important decisions to be made to navigate the pandemic, and, of course, you would be right about that. But, in that moment of uncertainty and doubt, I attempted to exert autonomous control. The freezer was quickly filled with food, and the spreadsheet (still a thing of glory) was populated with COVID data displayed on linear and logarithmic charts, in hopes of **understanding, predicting, and controlling** the future. More than 400 days later, the spreadsheet has grown and is still being used to make decisions, but the freezer is emptier, and time has allowed for reflection. Perhaps you had a similar experience at the beginning of the pandemic. Perhaps your reactions were

different. But, at the end of the day, I find myself thinking the pandemic experience presents a simple and profound question that I think is also relevant, as you, the Class of 2021, commence the next step of your grand adventure.

The question: **WHAT WILL YOU DO?**



As people of the post-modern age, we are daily tempted to believe we are sovereign agents in the world, who create and interpret reality without reference to anything outside ourselves. We are drawn to believe in “my truth” rather than the “Truth” and are fooled into thinking we control the world in which we live. Until, of course, a **pandemic hits**

and reality presents itself, unvarnished, in the form of something we **recognize we cannot command**. Then our autonomy and abstractions clash with hard reality. That is why I bought a freezer and built a spreadsheet.

But the pandemic stripped away my illusion of autonomy, leaving me unable to “save” myself or “work the problem” to my desired outcome. And in that I was reminded of the Truth; I can’t save **me**. Science can’t save me. Political affiliation can’t save me. Technology can’t save me. Smarts can’t

save me. Wealth can't save me. Knowledge can't save me. Power can't save me. I mean, seriously, think about the absurdity. To exert authority over a potentially deadly virus, I bought a freezer and built a spreadsheet—helpful, but not effective.

By assuming my truth is Truth, we construct autonomous narratives that are merely wishful relative thinking, opinion upon opinion upon opinion battle for social media dominance, believing that **likes equal truth**. My truth leaves us to navigate reality alone, leading ultimately to something like T.S. Eliot's *Hollow Men*:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;
Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men...
For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

My truth always proves insufficient when we are presented with fear, uncertainty, doubt, pain, and suffering, because it is relative, rather than transcendent. It makes us, finite dependent beings, the reference point for making sense of everything, and we turn out not to be up to the task. The pandemic reminded me of that. May it remind all of us of that.

Throughout your life, graduates, you will be presented with this same question, “what to do?” What to do when you are afraid, what to do with your freedom, what to do with your indecision, what to do with your love, what to do with your community, what to do with your power, what to do with death, and what to do with this wonderful life. In the end, to make sense of life, the answer must come from outside yourself—the answer must be the Truth. We pray the outcome of your time here at The Bear Creek School is that Truth has been imprinted on your hearts and minds and hands, so, when the time comes, you will be up to the task.

The Truth matters. Even Thursday night as Emma read her speech about your class reunion in 2031, I could not help but think the aspirations she artfully and lovingly described for each of you necessitate Truth.

The Truth matters. Without it, there is **no beauty**. Imagine painting a picture without the Truth of the nature of light. Imagine playing music without the Truth of sound wavelengths and notes. Imagine throwing a curveball without the Truth of gravitational pull.

The Truth matters. Without it there is **no goodness**. Imagine a surgeon operating on patients without the Truth of where the human heart resides. Imagine trying to forge a more just society without a True definition of justice.

The Truth matters. Without it, the world does **not make sense**. Imagine engineering a bridge without the Truth of physics: load, force, and shear. Imagine creating a computer program without the Truth of binary code.

I think you see my point. Without Truth, nothing is possible. The idea of “my truth” can live in abstraction, but, when faced with reality, “my truth” turns out to be insufficient. Then, “what will you do?”

The Truth matters. It is **incarnate**. The Scriptures teach that Christ himself is “the way, the Truth and the life” (John 14:6), and “if you abide in [His] word, you are truly [His] disciples, and you will know the



PHOTO BY JANEEN SORENSEN

Truth, and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:31 – 32) from bondage to sin and death. It is **paradoxical**. The Scriptures also instruct, “whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it” (Luke 17:33). To live one must die (Romans 6:1 – 6). To be free, one must submit. Or, as C.S. Lewis puts it in *The Great Divorce*, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’” That’s how it works. When we encounter Truth, we become, in the words of the prophet in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, “undone.” Our illusions of sovereignty and autonomy evaporate. “What will you do?”

The Truth matters. It is liberating. The Latin word *liber* means free, and the “liber-al” arts were the classical world’s attempt to produce free people by exposure to the arts and sciences—to liberate people through education. However, the liberal arts alone are similarly not enough. They, too, require Truth, because only Truth, in the person and work of Christ, can actually set you free. That’s what the Gospel is all about, and that’s what Christian liberal arts aim to teach you. That is why it appears in our mission statement. Free to see yourselves as you really are

(noble yet fallen), to perceive the world as it really is (a beautiful mess), to pursue a world as it ought to be. “What will you do?”

As we close our fellowship today, I recall another fellowship in which a young Hobbit says to an old wizard, “I wish it need not have happened in my time.” At times during this pandemic, I’ve said that. Maybe you have, too. But the wise wizard replies, “So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

You are ready. And it is time. So, Class of 2021, having traveled there and back again, together, through a once-in-a-lifetime experience, I challenge you to do this:

Believe the Truth and be set free.
Free to: embrace your vocation
Free to: love the Lord and love your neighbor
Free to: become the individual God intends
Free to: live lives of wisdom, compassion,
and courage

What will you do?
Congratulations, Class of 2021!

Congratulations to the Class of 2021

Amy Susan Anderson**‡
Bellevue College

Keiko Danielle Austria‡
University of California, Irvine

Maya Hayley Bennett‡
American University

Ryan Matthew Bracewell*
Chapman University

Katelyn Marie Britney‡
Grand Canyon University

Jennifer Detwiler Buckley***
University of California, Los Angeles

Eleanor Elizabeth Carruth***‡
Baylor University

Haley Corrine Chapman***‡
University of Washington, Seattle

Jack Walker Chapman‡
Baylor University

Mariana Combariza Gomez***
University of San Diego

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University of Washington, Seattle

Issabella Lauren Dedomenico**
University of Washington, Seattle

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CalPoly State University, SLO

Benjamin Penteado
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Emma Grace Firminger***‡
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Timothy John Gephart
Washington State University

Lauren Kelly Glass***
University of Portland

Ana María Gómez*‡
Connecticut College

Holden Scott Greenwood
Washington State University

Morten Hansen
The King's College

Tala Hassan
The University of Arizona

Isabelle Newson Hayton***
Baylor University

Elise Marie Hedlund***‡
George Washington University

Emilia Maria Ifrim***
Santa Clara University

Parker Jefferson Jani*
Pepperdine University

Madison Alexis Jones***‡
Santa Clara University

Rahul Varma D Kanumuri
Santa Clara University

Connor Wiles Keith***‡
Wake Forest University

Evan Charles Landau***
Purdue University

Khanh Do Dong Le*
Parsons School of Design

Casey Jongyoon Lee**
University of California, San Diego

Florence Soojung Lee***
Washington University in St. Louis

Andi Delphine Li****
University of Toronto

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Boston University

Zoe Elizabeth Xing Osborn***‡
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WanTing Xing***
Johns Hopkins University

Kevin Yan**
University of California, San Diego

David Matthew Zhang**
Purdue University

***SUMMA CUM LAUDE (3.9 - 4.0 GPA) ** MAGNA CUM LAUDE (3.75 - 3.89 GPA) *CUM LAUDE (3.5 - 3.749 GPA)

‡LEGACY HONORS (BEAR CREEK STUDENT FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12)

Reflections from the Class of 2021

PHOTOS BY JANEEN SORENSEN



Eleanor Carruth

Final Entry

*I haven't left the campus in...I've lost count. Days? Years?
I'm not sure how much longer I am going to last. So, in case
I don't make it...this is my final entry.*

If you don't get the joke, allow me to explain it. I hear they are funnier that way. I do quite literally live on campus. It is fair to say that my entire life has been lived at The Bear Creek School. Well, aside from four rebellious years in the South, but that is beside the point. From actually studying and doing hard work during the week, to hijacking the sound system to play 80s music and riding around the empty hallways on the graphic design room chairs (sorry, Dad), it has been a journey.

Bear Creek has given me my friends, my education, my worldview, and a whole new caliber of sarcasm, hand-crafted by Mr. Norris. But mostly, my time at this school has given me three very important lessons.

Lesson #1: Even if you accidentally throw them out of a golf cart (sorry, Zoe) or throw a four-square ball directly into their face (sorry, Maddie), the friends you gain at Bear Creek are friends for life. *They will stick with you through the good and the bad.*

Lesson #2: It is okay to ask questions and to disagree with your teachers. I don't think I ever had so many teachers say that it was alright to come to a different conclusion. Well, save math maybe. Then we've got a problem. But otherwise, this challenge to think critically has cemented my worldview foundation and gives me confidence that it will remain resilient under fire.

Lesson #3: No matter how groundbreaking your essay sounds at 3:00 a.m., sometimes it is just not good. Bear Creek has taught me the value of hard work and managing my time. And while I may have failed in...one of those areas...I am extremely grateful for the values Bear Creek has pushed me to pursue since day one.

Final Entry

I found my way out. It looks like I am going to survive this round, but what lies outside of the place where I have lived and survived for fourteen years is unknown. One thing is for sure, this place has trained me well. I expect I'll manage just fine.

*So long,
Eleanor Carruth*



James Wadhvani

It is rare for me, when faced with a structureless writing task, to impose any sort of pre-determined structure on myself. I usually reckon it would just hold me back. And structureless writing is just more fun anyway.

But faced with the thirteen years I have spent at this school and the many amazing teachers I have had through those years, I realized some sort of coherent structure was needed. **Four** years of elementary. **Four** years of early middle school and middle school. **Four** long years of high school (you can probably see the pattern). Here are the **four** things I learned during my years at The Bear Creek School.

One: Curiosity—the curiosity to learn

Curiosity is, without a doubt, the single most generic and lame thing to put in a speech like this. However, Dr. Sorensen, Mr. Wood, Mr. Norris, and Mr. Mack are anything but generic or lame. These teachers

sparked a new kind of curiosity in me. Dr. Sorensen and Mr. Wood never ceased to surprise me with their own curiosity and small quirks that made their classes enjoyable. It is what made me come back with renewed enthusiasm each day. There is always room for fun in formality. Mr. Norris taught me more about English than I knew existed and showed me a sort of formulaic curiosity I had never seen before. Things work as they are ordered, especially with letters on a page, but there is so much room to explore between the lines. I never had a class with Mr. Mack, but I am so glad I could work with him as a House Leader. He taught me to be curious about myself, and he always loved to hear about us and our thoughts.

My trip to Rome as a sophomore fostered this curiosity further. Seeing the physical results of history and art made me love them more than ever.

Two: Open-Mindedness—being able to think from multiple perspectives

People tend to be closed-minded. I see it everywhere and was guilty of it as a naive freshman entering high school. The journey from closed-minded judger to accepting thinker is one of my most valuable developments. I was shocked as a freshman, and am still amazed, to see the pure level of open-mindedness Mr. Davison, Mr. Schuldt, and Mr. Summers offered us. Mr. Schuldt's lessons on various religions, Mr. Davison's lessons on philosophies, and Mr. Summers' lessons on worldviews opened me to so many valuable perspectives. I feel as though I am properly equipped for a future full of diversity. An open mind is the first step to success. Capstone only furthered this, by letting me explore various religious perspectives through which to view the world. I am truly grateful.

Three: Passion—the passion for what you do; the labor of love

Mr. Culbertson, Ms. Bell, Mrs. Dunn, and Mrs. Plourde all hold so much passion for what they do. And yet passion is now what I look for in my role models. All of these teachers took their subjects to

the next level. And you could tell they loved what they taught. And that made me love to learn.

Four: Ambition—To strive

There is no single teacher to whom I can ascribe this value; it has to be them all. I developed ambition as a direct result of my time in school. My teachers, my classes, and my friends changed me from a freshman without a clue, to someone whose most important goal is simply to always have a goal.

Thank you everybody who has helped me grow throughout the years. Thank you to everyone who has helped me develop these four values.



Alissa Wang

I never thought I would attend a Christian school. Growing up with a non-religious background, receiving a Christian education was at first frightening to me. I barely had any knowledge of the

Bible and did not understand God at all. What would I learn here?

In ninth grade, I joined the basketball team. I did not know the rules, yet Bear Creek's small community enabled me to play on a varsity team. At my first practice, I just stood on the court holding the ball. I never cared about winning before. I was surprised that I shed happy tears with my teammates when we fought hard in a game together. The sport also taught me something important: to be tough and fight hard for what I want. Despite the difficulties, the basketball team was the first group of people who made me feel included. They were family, and they inspired me to become so much better. With them, I felt the happiness of winning as a team.

In tenth grade, I became the Treasurer of Key Club. That was when I felt like I was in control of power and wealth. When I went in front of the entire club for approval as Treasurer, my hands were sweaty. If you asked me in the past what my least favorite thing in the world was, I would say speaking in front of the class. Well, here I am today. I was so surprised to be confirmed as the Treasurer. I was no longer a freshman following others. I was being followed! As Treasurer, I learned how to communicate with different people about my needs and how to be a leader. I stepped out of my comfort zone and took a position I never thought I would. Bear Creek gave me this opportunity to try anything.

In junior year, the heavy workload somehow fulfilled me. There were also some emotional breakdowns. I remember one night before an AP Chemistry test kneeling on the ground looking over my notes and realizing that I barely understood any of them. I did what most students would do at that moment—cried. This was the first and only test I ever cried about during my four years at Bear Creek. I cried for a good twenty minutes and then sat back down to study. The pressure was real, but the joy of achievement after understanding all the concepts was also rewarding.

It was also in junior year that I took the classes that

probably shaped my career path and met the teachers who inspired me most. Mr. Culbertson's Calculus BC class made me truly fall in love with math. It was the first time that I realized math can be so clear and fun, like solving different pieces of puzzles. Mr. Culbertson's work ethic also inspires me. Even at the start of quarantine, the class would receive Mr. Culbertson's lesson plan for the day at four in the morning. I still wonder, does Mr. Culbertson even sleep? Ms. Bell is one of the funniest teachers I ever had. Her chemistry jokes never failed to make me laugh. I also loved going into Ms. Bell's office hours because not only could I do much-needed test corrections, but I could also simply chat with her. One conversation was probably life changing. At that time, I was about to start my college application. I asked Ms. Bell for advice. She listed all the jobs possible from a major in STEM. Ms. Bell sounded so passionate about her college studies. I never thought I would go into STEM, but after our talk, I planned a path for myself in that field. I finally found something I was passionate about.

Last but not least, I cannot stress enough the importance that the experience of a Christian education had on me. As I said in the beginning, I grew up with a non-religious background. I barely heard the word "God" before coming to Bear Creek. Now, however, after four years of Chapel, I can sing along with many worship songs. Going back to China in the summer, I could chat with a friend, who surprisingly was a Christian, about Christianity and my view of it. I also started attending church regularly. I feel much more confident now because I have accepted the idea that God will love me no matter who I am.

We often say that we are in a Bear Creek bubble. I am thankful that my parents chose to put me in this bubble. Here, I learned and grew. I did not have to compete with anyone; instead, during my four years here, I got to compete with myself and to learn more about who I am and who I want to become.



Connor Keith

I began my Bear Creek experience trotting into class with my miniature shark backpack strung over my shoulders. That was 13 years ago. Since then, I have made new friends, played in a varsity basketball game, learned calculus, and been accepted into college. There is no better way it could have happened.

I worked harder than imagined because of the support from the amazing Bear Creek community. I still remember my first day of first grade when I asked the teacher, Ms. Larson, to write the schedule on the board. She then did so for the rest of the year because I was a needy first grader. But she did it without a second thought. Countless times growing up, a Bear Creek teacher, staff member, or just a member of the community supported me without thinking twice. I didn't always think much of it, but reflecting back, I wouldn't be the same today without

the support. No other school puts as much time and care into their students as Bear Creek does.

The culture is set up for student success. The teachers' passion makes it seem as if they are teaching the topic for the first time. My peers are supportive and hard working. The curriculum is crafted in a way that is engaging and effective. If someone doesn't understand a concept, a teacher advises them to stop by during office hours, or another student stops what he is doing to explain how he understands it. Bear Creek provides access to all the tools one could need. The path was already laid out for me, I just had to follow it.

My favorite experiences all involve my amazing friends and the thoughtful faculty. Take, for example, the Outdoor Education and Mount St. Helens field trips. Neither would have been possible without the careful preparation of teachers and parents, and neither would have been as much fun without the entertainment of my friends. I still remember Jack sleepwalking in the middle of the night.

Although I have been at the school since kindergarten, that which has impacted me the most happened in high school. Being on the basketball team shaped my character and created stories which I will tell my kids. Few people get to go to a state tournament with a sports team. Another influential experience was the visual arts trip in San Diego. Every time a picture from that trip pops up, I smile. Not only did I learn to expand my creativity on the trip, but I deepened my relationships and saw another part of our country. These experiences highlight just a few of many, as my high school experience has been full of uniqueness and has helped me to grow in the best way possible.

In the future, I am prepared to engage in communities and bring part of the Bear Creek community to them. By bringing the core values from Bear Creek, I will contribute positively to others. In college, I will be prepared for hard classes, compassionate towards other students, and full of courage to take risks. I am prepared for success. And

not only am I prepared for success, but I have made important memories along the way. Thank you, Bear Creek. Thank you for embracing me and my shark backpack.



Lily Parker

At six o'clock in the morning, twenty of us walked into the empty Sistine Chapel. We stood quietly, hands in our pockets, looking up. Any moment we blinked was a moment lost to beauty. **Beauty**, I thought. **Truth** and **Goodness**. Three words I had heard since I was small, so many times they were almost a running joke, three things that finally came together that morning in Rome under the *Creation of Adam*. I left with new eyes, uncovering truth, beauty, and goodness in the most obvious and unexpected places. Though I did not connect the dots until that day, it is because of my thirteen years at Bear Creek that they became **rooted in my life**.

Valley Campus was where I first learned to appreciate beauty. It was a wild place, where untamed peacocks roamed, and you had to put on your rain jacket just to go the bathroom. I walked onto campus the first day of kindergarten, pink backpack in hand, thinking I knew everything. But despite my mastery of Bob Books, I learned quickly that that was not the case at all. The world was not just about me anymore, and my teachers gently taught me to look outside myself and glory in God's creation. My teachers' passion was contagious, and I caught their love for learning, carrying it with me through the years. I witnessed beauty in the world around me—the bridge over the creek, the orchard, and the bark chips that looked like letters. I saw beauty in my classmates, in their President reports, jump rope abilities, and perfect replication of *Little Women* characters at recess.

As sixth grade approached, I was not excited to leave my perfect little Valley Campus. To my surprise, it was Redmond Campus kids who taught me **goodness**, through ga-ga ball and four-square games, group projects, and homework help. We really were not so different—all of us struggled with complicated class schedules, understanding medieval poetry, and increasingly noticeable B.O. We overcame hurdles together, whether it was the dance unit in P.E. or our first Socratic seminar. By the time we finished Middle School, we stood on equal ground. There were no Redmond kids or Valley kids, just Bear Creek kids.

I walked into Upper School armed with goodness and beauty, but utterly terrified. I had to be one hundred percent focused, no time for fun and games with my GPA, college, and the rest of my life on the line. Again, my preconceptions proved wrong. Upper School was about striving for academic success, but more importantly about revealing the truth of God through every possible avenue. In class, I was taught how to find **truth**. Teachers exposed us to different ideas, then pushed us to discover truth for ourselves. From listening to four different versions of a jazz song, to discussing Kierkegaard, to dissecting a

shark, teachers gave us tools to piece together our worldview. These pieces floated into every other aspect of life at Bear Creek, as God revealed Himself through uplifting chapels and human Hungry Hungry Hippos games, ecstatic student sections, and spicy Uno games. Truth was philosophical debates at lunch, “challenging the process” during ASB meetings, praying before volleyball practice. As we close our high school years, beauty, goodness, and truth are no longer just words, but **expressions of God's love that extend to every aspect of life.**

Two years have passed since I stood in the Sistine Chapel at six in the morning. In that time, the world has been completely flipped on its head, several times over. But Bear Creek has stood steady, teaching **truth** through online learning, **goodness** in social distancing, **beauty** in an unwavering trust in the Lord's plan for our community. It has not been easy, and it is not over yet. But as we step forward today, I challenge you, my fellow graduates, to always keep God's **goodness, beauty, and truth** in sight. It will carry you farther than you will ever walk alone.



PHOTO BY SINI FERNANDEZ

FACULTY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY ROB SORENSEN, PH.D.

Good afternoon, Class of 2021. Congratulations on your graduation. And thank you for extending to me the great privilege of speaking to you today.

I suppose you're wondering why my beard is green. It is not, as you may have suspected, some sort of

algae bloom. There is a story. A few years ago, several members of the Class of 2021, led by Christina, asked me if I would dye my beard for their graduation. Perhaps not thinking clearly at the time, I agreed. Fast forward to this spring. When I agreed to speak at graduation, these students reminded me of my earlier promise. And, as a man of my word, I have

gone green. Think of it as an act of celebration for this fine group of students.

I have many fond memories of the Class of 2021. I remember during your sophomore year, the time that I lost a bet to Kevin and Sherwin and had to buy them Chick-fil-A. Then, there are Casey's elaborate dinosaur drawings that kept appearing on the whiteboard in my classroom. Or Kate's small drawing of a guardian spirit of the doorknob (his name is Doorknobei) that is still adhered to the doorknob of my classroom. I also remember the times when Evan wanted to skip out of House group so that he could watch a livestream of a space launch. Or Delphine suggesting that since we were neighbors, I should be available to babysit her cat. Or the time when Alysse organized the entire art history class to serenade me with kazoos at the start of class. Or the way in which the entire debate team has decided it is their duty in life to prevent me from microwaving my tea.

I could go on and describe how each of you holds a special place in my memories. But I have been told, politely but firmly, that I need to adhere to a strict time limit.

So, it is customary for the graduation speaker to dispense some advice or words of wisdom to the graduating class. So here goes: **Remember that above all else, you are a human person.** Maybe that sounds a bit trite. But it's not quite so simple as it seems. In fact, many of the structures and systems of modern life push back against your human personhood. The Catholic novelist Walker Percy wrote that:

[We] live in a deranged age – more deranged than usual, because in spite of great scientific and technological advances, [we have] not the faintest idea of who [we are] or what [we are] doing.¹

I think Percy's right about our society. Nevertheless, I have hope.

Because what we have been trying to do here at The

Bear Creek School for all these years is to address just this problem. To orient you towards those essential human enquiries of who you are and what your purpose is. I didn't teach you all art history just so you could impress people in art museums. Nor did Mr. Culbertson teach you math or Mrs. Dunn teach you science just so you could do practical things. We believe that learning is an essentially humane pursuit that helps us all to become more truly who we are meant to be. You may have read the school's mission statement, the end of which describes our ultimate goal: to enable each student to become the **person** God intends.

This year, it has been particularly hard to see ourselves as people. We haven't always been able to **be** with one another, and it has sometimes been tempting to see ourselves and our peers as little icons on a screen rather than fully fleshed human beings.

I want to argue that you should push back against this temptation; that your personhood matters in a couple of important ways.

Your personhood grants you a particular human dignity. Our culture nudges us all to seek our value not in our personhood, but in our achievements, our grades, our accomplishments. Resist this temptation. While I fully expect all of you to accomplish great things, if you look for value in those things, you will never be satisfied. There will always be someone whose accomplishments outstrip your own. Instead, find your value in the fact that **you are a human person—a child of God. As such, you matter.**

Look around you here. Look at these people in the audience, your parents and family and friends. You matter to them because you are you, a unique human being made in the image of God. Look at the faculty in the back row. You matter to them because they care about you, a human person. And I assure you that you matter to me, not because you did great in my class or impressed me with your academic skills, but because you are a person. I mean, you all matter

¹ Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 76

enough to me that I would dye my beard green on this dignified occasion to demonstrate it.

Another aspect of your personhood is the fact that you are finite and limited. Our limitedness has been particularly evident this year, both in COVID's demonstration of how fragile human life can be in the face of a tiny virus, but also in the fact that we have all been subject to forces and systems that are beyond our control and that we would probably not have chosen for ourselves. Recognizing our limitedness goes against our desires and everything that our society tries to push us towards, but it is the way God created us. Resist the temptation to believe that you are beyond limits. Instead, remember that **you are a person**, and you are part of the human community and part of **our** community.

The good news that goes along with our limitedness is that we belong with other people. You are not alone. The philosopher Zena Hitz believes that the ultimate purpose of education is to bring communities together. She writes:

Augustine says that our ability to love one another depends on our capacity to learn from one another. That suggests that we learn in order to love. If this were so, learning would not be for its own sake, but for the sake of cultivating our capacity to love. It might be the only means of cultivation or one among many – but either way, it would be secondary to the value of the bonds we form with one another.²

Bear Creek has been a community of learning and I also hope a community of love. So, remember that you will always belong here. Mrs. Blankenbeckler is fond of saying, "Once a Creeker, always a Creeker." And I want to assure you that, even though I won't be your teacher after today, I will still be here for you. As will the rest of the faculty. Believe it or not, we actually are delighted when alumni come back to visit us. You are a part of this community.

As you move on in life's journey, I think you'll come to see that Bear Creek is a really distinctive



PHOTO BY NATION PHOTOGRAPHY

place. One that I hope you'll be proud to have been associated with. So special, in fact, that I have colored my beard in Grizzly green. And you will always be a part of this community.

I'd like to conclude with a story. I love stories, don't you? I actually had a couple of suggestions for stories that the Class of 2021 might like to hear. Swastik suggested—and I'm not making this up—that I should conclude my speech with a story about feral platypuses. I'm not actually going to do this.

What I am going to do is regale you with one more story from art history, which was requested by several of you. This story is about the French painter Edouard Manet. We studied his *Dejeuner sur L'Herbe* in class; he was a key influence on the Impressionist movement.

Manet was, like many geniuses, a little bit nuts. One day, in 1870, one of Manet's friends, the art critic Edmond Duranty, published a critical (and, at least in Manet's mind, an insulting) review of one of Manet's paintings. Manet addressed this by storming into the café where Duranty was dining, slapping him

² Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 111.



in the face and demanding satisfaction in a duel, a swordfight.

A date was set for the duel. The day before he was to cross swords with his friend, Manet began to worry that he did not have an appropriate pair of shoes in which to do battle. All the shoes he had were uncomfortable or impractical. So, he went out on the morning of the duel and bought a new pair of boots.

The duel itself was fairly anticlimactic. Neither man had any skill or experience in sword fighting, so they banged one another around for a few minutes until both of their swords were bent or broken. Duranty was slightly scratched across the chest, and so Manet declared himself the winner of the duel and that his honor had been restored.

Manet then shook the hand of his opponent and gave him the pair of brand-new boots that he had purchased that morning (but apparently had not actually worn for the duel).

Now I certainly do not endorse dueling, but there is something charming and humane about this

encounter. In both the embodied physicality of the duel itself and in Manet's magnanimity in victory, they demonstrated that they were people. Sure, Manet was kind of bonkers, but then again, you're listening to a guy with a green beard.

We live in a world in which you will have conflict with others. I hope that like Manet, you can find a way to conclude whatever conflicts you might find with a handshake and a demonstration of magnanimity.

So, celebrate together (appropriately socially distanced, of course). Support one another. But don't forget that you are persons. That you matter to all of us here. And that you will always belong at Bear Creek.

Rob Sorensen, Ph.D., has been on the faculty at Bear Creek since 2001, teaching in the history department and coaching speech and debate. He is a scholar of the Protestant Reformation and his book, *Martin Luther and the German Reformation*, was published by Anthem Press in 2016. Rob has three children attending Bear Creek, classes of 2023, 2026, and 2029.




FACULTY PROFILE:

KEVIN BURNS

BY KATIE GOMULKIEWICZ '13

PHOTO BY JANEEN SORENSEN



**“ I GET TO DO THE
SACRED WORK
OF BEING IN THE
LIVES OF KIDS.”**

PROM NIGHT 2021 was always set to be unique, a celebration for Bear Creek students at the end of a long pandemic year. The night unfolded with the typical festivities: pictures, dinners, and of course dancing. At one point in the evening, the students formed a dance circle to show off their moves in the center. During a lull in the student dancing, Mr. Burns appeared in the center of the dance circle and wowed the crowd with the “Worm.” The students began cheering and clapping but few understood how significant that moment truly was. To understand, it is imperative to go back in time to Golden, CO, and into the lives of a large, Italian family.

Middle School teacher Kevin Burns grew up in a house that backed up to the local elementary school playground. Because his parents traveled for work, Kevin lived with his grandmother, ate pasta, and prayed every night. His childhood was punctuated with trips around the world thanks to his mother’s job at United Airlines. “My family taught me the importance of a tight, supportive community,” Kevin told me, “which, in a way, helps me to appreciate Bear Creek even more.” In Middle School, Kevin discovered his passion for music and was at one time the top saxophone player in Colorado. He attended Colorado Christian University on a percussion scholarship. In college, three things occurred which changed Kevin’s life forever.

The first was Kevin’s spiritual growth. “At seventeen,” he stated, “I was a baby Christian, but in college, I became immersed in a community of faith and truly

fell in love with the Bible.” During this time, Kevin also met his amazing wife, Amy (more on that later). The third significant change in Kevin’s life occurred abruptly one night during his sophomore year.

Kevin was getting dinner with his then-girlfriend Amy when he suddenly felt dizzy and fatigued. He collapsed and could not walk for forty-five minutes. As Kevin’s condition progressed, he could no longer walk, and despite visiting every doctor imaginable, he slowly lost his ability to see and speak for days on end. A year and a half later, Kevin finally found answers at the Mayo Clinic and was diagnosed with

Functional Neurological Disorder.

A week before falling ill in October 2013, Kevin had earned his real estate license and was on track to major in business. “I thought my life was set, and then suddenly I couldn’t walk for six years. Real estate was out of the question.” During that time Kevin’s faith grew. “I had to sit and listen,” he said, “and learn how to navigate suffering as a Christian.”

In September 2015, he married Amy. Over the next few months, Kevin began reimagining

his future. “I started asking the question: what am I going to do with my life? I felt called to teach the Bible.” He began courses at Denver Seminary and became ordained in the Anglican Church. Throughout this time, Kevin’s Functional Neurological Disorder symptoms progressed (relapses are expected with the condition). When Kevin took a trip to Scotland in 2017 with Amy, he experienced no symptoms whatsoever. He also had

no symptoms during a trip to Portland the following year. It appeared, the doctor told Kevin, that his condition improved in cool, cloudy, and consistently rainy weather.

Kevin had lived his entire life in Colorado, in the same small square of country, but “when home feels like a prison though,” he confessed, “it’s not safe anymore.” In 2018, Amy and Kevin came to Washington on a discernment trip and again, all of his symptoms disappeared. “It truly felt like new creation,” Kevin explained. With that, Amy and



Kevin with his wife Amy

Kevin took a leap of faith and moved to Washington. Soon Amy began teaching in Kent, but despite applying to over seventy jobs, Kevin didn’t hear anything back. Then one day Amy noticed a Christian Studies teaching position open at a small, Christian school called Bear Creek. “Do I apply?” Kevin asked Amy. “I realized I just wanted to be with people, ask the hard questions, and point them to Jesus,” Kevin said, “and after meeting with Jenn [McDonough,

Middle School Division Head] and teaching a guest lesson I realized, this is what I'm made to do."

Middle School in particular suited Kevin's personality—the silliness, the earnestness, the depth of questions. "I have the greatest job in the world," Kevin believes. "I get to do the sacred work of being in the lives of kids." Kevin shared so many moments of joy experienced over the last few years while teaching at Bear Creek. "One student started calling my classroom The Holy Place since they get to come and meet God," he told me. Another time Kevin took the students outside to symbolically spread the Gospel as they read from the Book of Acts while

together. Last year Amy also began a new job: teaching Upper School English at Bear Creek. Now together they have settled into this new community. After "living in chaos for so long," Kevin said, "this place truly feels like home."

So now perhaps, the picture becomes clearer: Kevin and Amy chaperoning Bear Creek's prom together surrounded by students singing, dancing, and celebrating. In the middle of the dance circle, Mr. Burns dazzles the crowd with the Worm. It is a beautiful moment. "Bear Creek has taught me so much," Kevin explained. "I've learned how to run, how to dance again." It is not just Kevin, though.



PHOTOS BY CINDY MCCAHERN



Kevin performs the Worm as students cheer at Bear Creek's prom.

physically moving through the world. Yet another time, Kevin and his students sat on the playground and discussed how God works missionally through people. He recalls one student finding his passion for preaching in class, discussing the emotions of the Psalms with a classroom of girls, and facilitating seminar discussions with the students.

In Washington, Kevin and Amy have learned to appreciate the "simple stuff," as he calls it: gardening, reading, hiking, sipping coffee, and spending time

Walk down the hallway in the Middle School any day and you will hear laughter coming from Mr. Burns' classroom—the perfect blend (he'd tell you) of silliness and seriousness and most importantly, learning together about God. Especially during a pandemic, this message is so important and who better than Kevin Burns to teach (and show) God's love even in the midst of turmoil, always pointing the students towards hope, community, and togetherness.

THE RAPID AND REWARDING ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY IN LOWER SCHOOL

An interview with Dr. Suzannah Calvery, Strategic Innovation Lead

A PARTICULAR HALLMARK of the COVID-19 pandemic centers around the rapid integration of technology into so many aspects of our lives. From book clubs to family birthdays, from business meetings to school instruction, connection through technology became not just a novelty, but a critical feature of nearly every interaction.

The Bear Creek School is no exception. As part of our last Strategic Plan, the Middle School and Upper School teachers have been gradually integrating a variety of technology over several years to individualize student instruction and assessment. However, for our faculty in other divisions, new technology adoption happened very quickly out of necessity.

Despite the rapid need to integrate technological tools into our teaching approach, the effort was not without intentionality and careful attention to ensuring that the technology fit into our Christian liberal arts model and enhanced, not detracted from, our nurturing environment.

One of the key people involved in this transition was Dr. Suzannah Calvery, our Strategic Innovation Lead. Dr. Calvery, who has an extensive background in curriculum design, education research, and professional learning, trained and coached our faculty and helped them troubleshoot issues throughout the year. We recently asked her to reflect on the experience of integrating technology into the Lower School classrooms.

MV: On a broad level, how does the technology we use at Bear Creek enhance our teaching?

SC: Bear Creek has taken a very intentional approach to integrating technology, carefully considering the

future-ready skills of students, curricular objectives, and even motor skills development. The technology we have traditionally used at our school (projectors, teacher devices) has focused primarily on teacher-oriented delivery of content. In our Dare to Dream Strategic Plan 2020 and the new Strategic Plan 2024, that focus shifted to student experience and needs. Consistent with our mission, specifically, to enable each student to become the individual God intends, the current strategy brings individualization of learning and assessment to the forefront along with preparing students with the innovation and critical thinking skills they need in our globalized world. Devices used by students increase computational thinking skills, collaboration opportunities, and creativity in the digital world. Student access to devices also enables higher support for skills like reading and writing through high-quality artificially intelligent programs that adapt or support student needs. Teacher-directed experiences such as virtual field trips, guest speakers, and author visits allow our students to experience more of God's creation and the awe of creativity that we cannot always access in person.

MV: How does technology use and training fit into the liberal arts model?

SC: This is one of my favorite questions to answer because it needs to be asked and answered regularly to ensure we are still on the right track! Technology integration and use should never be "just because"; it is only a support tool. When it is implemented without plans, purpose, and support, it can be messy and even detrimental to the students and teachers. Effective technology implementation in a classical school supports classical pedagogy, it is not an end in itself. For example, in the grammar stage, OneNote has



PHOTO BY VICTORIA BUTLER

Students in grade 1 during a virtual field trip to Deception Pass State Park.

built-in Learning Tools that can assist students learning to read. Adaptive online tools can also help students move along at their own pace towards mastery. In the logic stage, students can further develop their understanding and research skills with tools such as Researcher in OneNote or Word and our online library guides. Finally, the rhetoric stage is supported through processes such as design thinking, presentation tools such as PowerPoint Presenter Coach, and other tools which support students in applying and integrating their knowledge.

This also holds true in our curriculum. For example, we teach computer programming in order to help students develop grammar-level computational thinking and problem solving. We know that not every child is headed for a career in coding, but computational thinking skills are valuable for all future endeavors and using programming is just one way we teach these skills. Students also develop these skills through the writing process, in science class, and even in P.E. when learning new games. Similarly, in Middle School electives, students learn to think through how things work using mechanical technology for project development.

MV: What were the biggest fears and challenges of the Lower School teachers in adopting the technology, and how did they overcome those challenges?

SC: I think for all of us, the fear of losing our relational focus was the biggest concern. It is very difficult to teach in-person and remote students at the same time and feel that you are giving your whole heart to both groups at all times. Our teachers are so committed to loving and nurturing each child that they were ready and willing to adopt the technology required for creating and maintaining excellent virtual classrooms. The main hesitance lay in “wasting” time when the technology did not work as intended or expected. This is difficult in the best of times, but for teachers who were adopting all-new technology and managing blended classes, this is a heavy concern to overcome.

In order to respond to this need, I spent a lot of time with teachers in their classrooms to help when they were struggling. We call this “just-in-time” professional development. We also had ongoing professional development for teachers during in-service days, faculty meetings, and weekly Office Hours that I hosted throughout the year. By making sure teachers knew that I (and the Information Technology team) was always available to them to solve problems or try new solutions, we eased their concerns and helped them spend less energy on solving problems and more energy on teaching.

MV: Kids are already on screens much of the time outside of school. What benefits do young children

FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

Our Lower School teachers faced a steep learning curve when asked last March to quickly pivot to teaching entirely remotely, and then again in September, as they adapted to teaching in a blended learning environment, instructing both in-person and remote students simultaneously. With wisdom, compassion, and courage, they stepped up to the challenge. Here are some of their

derive from using technology in the classroom? And how do those benefits outweigh any disadvantages?

SC: When we think about screen time, it is beneficial to differentiate between screen time that is primarily consumption and that which is primarily creation. Some people also differentiate between screen time for purposes of education vs. entertainment, although this dichotomy is problematic when you consider that many studies show cognitive benefits to young people who spend a lot of time gaming. When making decisions about technology integration across our divisions, we take into account concerns about a negative impact of screen time for preschool-age children and the issues associated with children using social media without parental supervision.

Bear Creek's innovation strategy is not only about technology, but about learning how to think critically about things like technology. We value digital literacy, computational thinking, and creativity, and all these skills can be taught with a mix of analog and digital tools. When our teachers choose to integrate technology in their classrooms, it is because they have learning objectives that can best be reached by using this technology. Some of these learning objectives include preparing our children for what they will encounter as they grow older: research, typing, and communication skills, for example. Some of the technology integration is intended to allow teachers to better individualize learning, or to bring larger communities of learners together than can be done in one classroom. In short, because we integrate technology purposefully and with our Christian, classical perspective, we are intentional about the use and time

reflections on the past 15 months.

Victoria Butler, grade 1 teacher, commented, "My students saw me make mistakes. They saw me frustrated. They saw me confused. They saw me call for help. It was humbling, but also an incredibly powerful way for me to model the learning process for them. We had so many conversations about processing our emotions, admitting when we don't know something, and asking others for help."

spent on devices in the classroom.

MV: Bear Creek places an emphasis on teaching students how to learn. Technology is evolving so rapidly, how do we teach students to engage technology tools, both those in the classroom and the many they encounter beyond the walls of the school, with curiosity, wisdom, compassion, and courage?

SC: Our primary focus is on teaching all our content from a Christian worldview and according to the values of wisdom, compassion, and courage. Because we start there, our hope is that exposure to and use of technology across the curricula would be aligned as well. Of course, intention is not enough, so the Student Life teams have plans of action for teaching digital literacy in developmentally appropriate ways across the school. Many children are familiar with using technology as an entertainment tool, but most have not had much experience using it as a tool for learning. We work with students to understand appropriate use of the tools we make available to them at school. As they become older, we engage them in conversations around technology purpose, media literacy, business models for social media, and digital footprint (among other topics). As we adopt more technology in our classrooms, we will always consider how best to approach teaching the critical thinking and discernment skills that go with responsible use. And of course, parents are the best guides for our students when it comes to responsible and appropriate use of technology. The more we know as adults about the technology that is popular for our children, the better we can adjudicate their use of the tools.

MV: As the pandemic wanes, what technology do we

Jenny Shimada, kindergarten teacher, discovered that new technology opened up new possibilities. “We enjoyed ‘welcoming’ visitors in our classroom throughout the school year as a result of the new technology. For example, we had Mystery Readers visit our classroom many times this year, and we enjoyed listening to them read a story aloud to the class. We even had grandparents join us because location no longer mattered!”

Kim Higley, grade 4 teacher, reflected that, “One of the huge unanticipated silver linings from the incorporation of new technology this year was that it allowed students to see teachers as learners—not, by far, perfect at using this new tool. It let students know that when you try something new, most times you will make errors and that you will learn from them and be better for it.”

anticipate continuing to use in Lower School?

SC: We maintained our strong commitment to a nurturing, relational focus in our classrooms last year, even as our integration of technology in Lower School shifted radically. While teachers are looking forward to moving back to our traditional in-person classrooms, we will retain some of the best aspects of technology integration that occurred last year. For example, our grade 4 team has identified a strategy to use class sets of computers across the curriculum to further personalize learning and support their goals of developing future-ready skills. The grade 4 classes will now be a part of the one computer per student program that had already been implemented in grades 5 – 12.

Other Lower School classes will have more and higher quality computers available for teachers to reserve and utilize for projects as needed. Teachers are looking forward to using additional tablets to individualize station rotations and digital projects for their students across the curriculum.

Our Owl Labs cameras will likely be used for group events so that families can participate in the classroom on special occasions. Our use of Microsoft Teams will remain as our teachers and administration have found the tool to be of great benefit for communication, consistency, and predictability. Should we have to transition back to remote learning at any time, we will again implement the practices we honed this year.

MV: What is the long-term vision of the school, particularly for younger students, in terms of integrating technology with a classical education?

SC: Our Strategic Plan 2024 commits to continuing our investment in preparing students to lead with wisdom, compassion, and courage in this world. Part of that commitment is ensuring students have the skills to engage and evaluate the technology that surrounds us in our daily lives. By continuing to build critical thinking through the pedagogical trivium, we assist them along this path even without access to technology. Yet the fact remains that much of what is expected of people in our global system is built upon technology use. Thus, we recognize that an important part of our mission is to prepare students with future-ready skills that include computational thinking and innovation with technology as well as the ability to know how to think about technology and the implications of technology. Our goals include building a more robust foundation of technology support for classical pedagogy with intentional integration where appropriate. We will provide our teachers with professional development as well as building systems within our organization that utilize the powerful data collection and analysis tools available through AI and other automated systems. Yet, even as we implement our innovation and technology plan, our primary focus will always remain on helping students become the individuals God intends.

Dr. Suzannah Calvery joined Bear Creek in 2015 as a Middle School English teacher, but for the past four years has been working with the school as an innovation coach and now as the Strategic Innovation Lead. Her background is in curriculum design, education research, and professional learning. She and her husband live in Kirkland and enjoy hiking, biking, camping, and gardening with their son.

MAKING MUSIC TOGETHER ACROSS THE MILES

BY DEBBIE MARCHIONE

AT 7:00 P.M. IN SCOTLAND AND 12:00 P.M. IN WASHINGTON, the band conductors' batons go up. Forty young musicians watch expectantly. On the downbeat, students from The Bear Creek School begin playing, in unison, with their counterpoints in the Riverside Youth Band in Inverclyde, Scotland. Through technology, the students are able to play together despite being separated by thousands of miles and seven time zones.

The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions made playing a musical instrument in a group nearly impossible this year. Undaunted, Kelsey Thompson, Bear Creek's band director, drew on a long-time friendship with musician friends in Scotland to forge long-distance relationships between their students and ours. Band is not offered in school in the UK, so the students practice on Friday evenings in a private program.



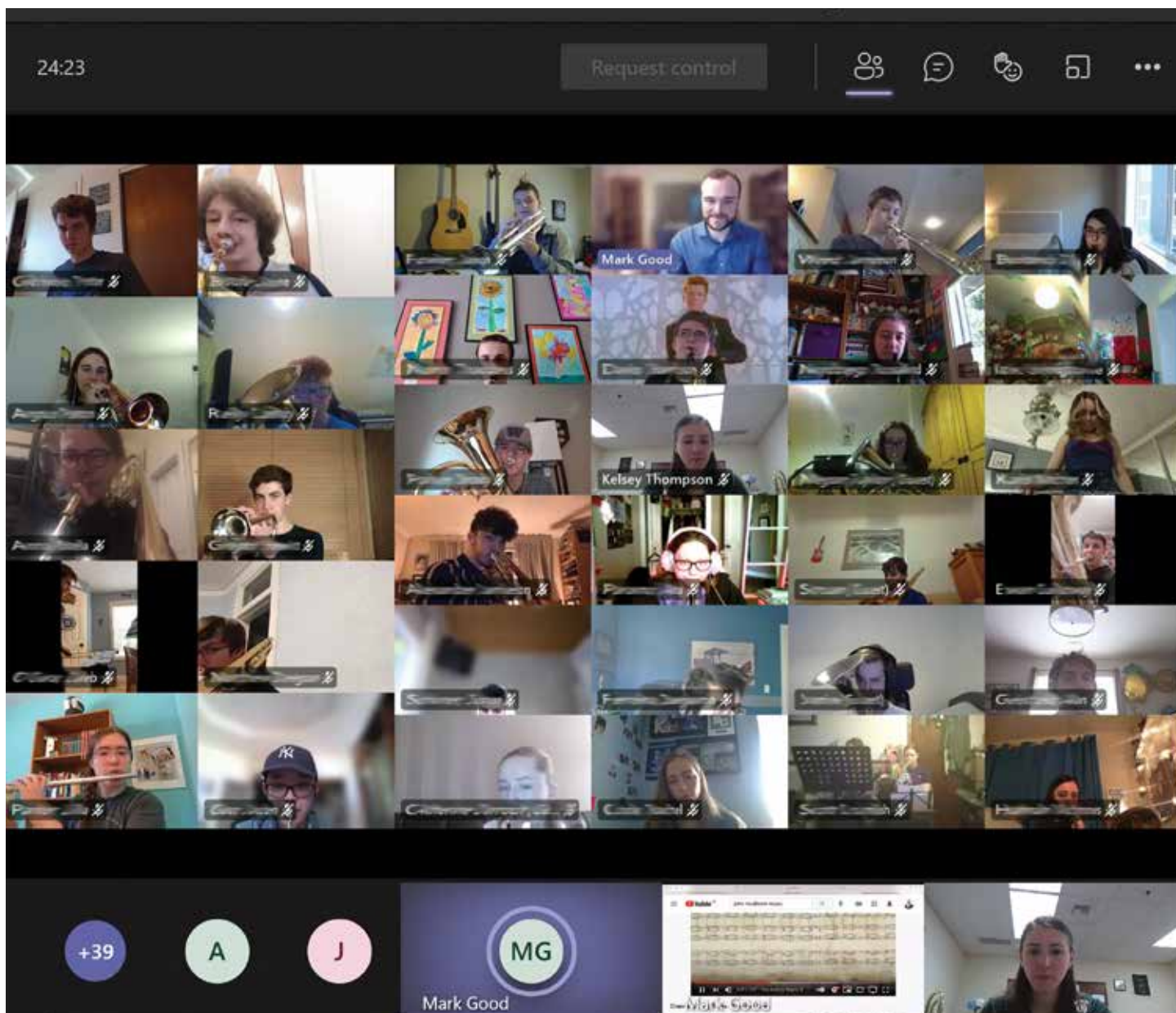
The Thompsons and Goods enjoy a Mariners game.



Mark and Laura Good traveled to Washington to play music at Brady and Kelsey Thompson's wedding.

Kelsey met Laura Good, wife of band director Mark Good, many years earlier when she studied in Scotland. Together, Mark and Laura run the Riverside Youth Band. Kelsey and the Goods have maintained a close long-distance friendship, even performing the music for one another's weddings.

The opportunity to connect the two bands, while arising out of adversity, blessed students on both



Bear Creek Upper School band performs *Valiants Arise* with the Riverside Youth Band in Scotland.

sides of the Atlantic. Their joint rehearsal and performance of *Valiants Arise* by Paul Lovatt-Cooper proved to be one of the highlights of the year for Bear Creek band students.

Thompson notes, “I’ve been thinking for a long time about how we could somehow connect the students, through some sort of travel or exchange. The ability to do it remotely through Microsoft Teams was a perfect, though unexpected, opportunity.” She hopes to continue this connection in the future, giving Bear Creek students a chance to forge relationships with other musicians that like hers, could last a lifetime.

To watch the joint performance of *Valiants Arise*, go to tbcs.org/arts/authors-artists-2021/us then select the Spring Band Concert on the Performing Arts tab. This piece begins at 9:47 on the video.

UNPACKING STRATEGIC PLAN 2024: **NO ORDINARY PEOPLE** ←

BY PATRICK CARRUTH

IDENTITY IS IMPORTANT. We spend much of our lives searching for identity—trying to create and build an identity for ourselves. Whether it is through work, social media, family, friends, intellect, sports, or the arts, each of us seeks to create an identity by our very nature, one which helps us understand who we are and validates our worth. The ironic thing about trying to compose an identity is this composition is never finished and can never satiate our desire. As noble creations, we long for dignity and respect. It is part of our nature as creatures. And the Scriptures are clear why this is so. The first two chapters in the book of Genesis establish the basis for human dignity and worth.

In the beginning, God created each human being to be a unique and individual bearer of His image (Gen 1:26, 27). He created each of us as an individual, with different gifts, perspectives, and ways of being in the world, and we honor God's creative and bountiful diversity through exercising our unique individualism, while also being united *imago Dei*. In light of this, every person is inherently worthy of dignity and respect. God is omnipotent and imbued humanity with power and command to steward the creation (Gen 1:26 – 30).

That visage is tarnished in Genesis 3 by the fall: humanity's rebellion against God and His good creation. As a result, each human being also shares a common fallen nature (Gen 3:15) before God and is graciously offered redemption and restoration by confession and faith through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19 – 21; Rom 10:9 – 10; 1 Cor 6:9 – 11).

Additionally, the Scriptures command us to love the Lord and to love our neighbor (Mark 12:28 – 31; Luke 6:31), which encourages us to be wise and aware of the unique cultures the Lord has created, to be

compassionate by engaging human diversity with dignity and respect, and to courageously center our **identity in Christ**. As fallen image bearers, the Scriptures tell us to recognize that we both love our neighbor and we sometimes treat our neighbor poorly, and that only through Christ, who makes us just before God, can we demonstrate justice, respect, and grace to our neighbor. As new creations in Christ, we can affirm and extend dignity, value, and worth to each human being in creation. The fall of humankind does not erase our inherent value, but it separates us from the source of our value and worth and moves the locus to within.

Our culture is currently having many conversations about dignity, value, worth, and identity, and we think it is important for us as a school to engage that conversation from a Christian worldview, to equip our students with a foundational eternal perspective in which they can ground both their own identity, value, and worth, and the identity, value, and worth of other people. Without an eternal external reference point as a foundation, such an undertaking is incomplete and ultimately ineffective. The Bear Creek School's definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion is grounded in the belief that everyone is made uniquely in God's image. This belief provides an entry point to meaningful conversations, interactions, and programming that are influenced by the school's commitment to honoring the individual as a unique creation of God.

As part of Strategic Plan 2024, we have created the No Ordinary People plan. This phrase is taken from a phrase in C.S. Lewis' book *The Weight of Glory* and serves as a literary anchor to where we believe true human value and dignity lie and how we can love our neighbor well. Lewis writes,

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deep about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long, we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. **It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealing with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.**

The No Ordinary People plan is intended to answer these simple questions: How are we intentionally caring for each image bearer of The Bear Creek School community and fostering a culture of No Ordinary People? And how can we continually improve? This plan seeks to:

- Develop program and student life commitment-to-care structures and analyze the need for additional staffing and/or resources.
- Develop additional focused student life curriculum and chapels which intentionally teach and model

loving one's neighbor and how to engage in conversations honoring the *imago Dei* in others.

- Create professional development training for faculty and staff to foster constructive classroom conversations and engage diverse opinions with dignity and respect.
- Create parent support and conversation venues to help our community better understand cultural differences and create and foster a supportive, welcoming community.
- Create communication plans which affirm our commitment to honoring our unity in the *imago Dei* and our school's demographic and Christian diversity and serves to rally the community around the idea of "no ordinary people."
- Ensure the mission and the classical and Christian curriculum are accessible and understandable to everyone at The Bear Creek School.

At the end of the day, the No Ordinary People plan is not new. Caring for others and treating them with dignity and respect has been a central tenet of the Christian worldview for millennia. In the book of Matthew, Christ said that on these two commandments depend all the law and prophets, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37 – 40). We have striven for 31 years, albeit imperfectly, each day to honor those commandments with our students and with each other at The Bear Creek School and will continue to develop that culture through the No Ordinary People plan.

How to Inspire Your Kids to Be Generous

BY MARIANA KELLER

AS PARENTS, WE PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE in helping children develop the virtue of generosity. In addition to continually teaching Biblical values, we can lay a firm foundation both through direct encouragement and the example of compassion, kindness, and generosity ourselves. Here are a few ideas to practice at home with your children.

SHOW GRATITUDE DAILY

Research has shown that gratitude plays a major role in both adults' and children's well-being.

A study on gratitude in children suggests that grateful young adolescents (ages 11 – 13), compared to their less grateful counterparts, are happier and more optimistic, have better social support, give more emotional support to others, and are more satisfied with their school, family, community, friends, and themselves. Another similar study found that grateful teens (ages 14 – 19) are more satisfied with their lives, use their strengths to better their community, are more engaged in their schoolwork and hobbies, have higher grades, and are less envious, depressed, and materialistic.

Some neuroscience studies observed that the neural connection between gratefulness and generosity is profound, and that cultivating gratitude may encourage us to feel more generous.

The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. They suggest that there are four parts of gratitude that you should talk to your children about to help their appreciation grow: notice, think, feel, and do.



A student in Mrs. Anderson's class donates to Bear Creek's annual Hopelink food drive.

Talk to your kids about the deeper meaning of gratitude by guiding them to make a connection between doing or receiving good things, what they think about it, how do they feel about it, and what can they do to show their appreciation. Be on the lookout for stories of everyday acts of kindness to share with your family.

To further help your child cultivate gratitude, you can create a daily family tradition like taking turns during dinner time naming one thing each person is thankful for that day. If your children are older, you can suggest creating a gratitude journal together. You can make a gratefulness jar for your family—leave pieces of paper and pen next to it so you can all add to the jar when you feel grateful for something or do a good deed. You will see how powerful it is to talk about positive things every day or experience the visual reminder of blessings as your jar fills up!

CULTIVATE EMPATHY

Bear Creek actively and intentionally works to help students develop empathy. We can cultivate empathy by helping our children imagine how others feel. Ask them how they feel when something special happens or when they receive a gift. You can name those feelings again when you do a good deed or give something to someone else.

Books can also help teach empathy. When reading a book together, ask your children what they think the character is feeling. A study shows that children are more generous—sharing more stickers with other kids in the experiment—after they heard uplifting stories about humans.

Greater Good Parenting suggests a few books for younger children about generosity like *Thank You, Omu!* by Oge Mora, *Biblioburro* by Jeanette Winter, *Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen, *The Trees of the Dancing Goats* by Patricia Polacco, and *Something Special for Me* by Vera Williams. Bear Creek's teachers and librarians will also have recommendations for books about empathy.

BE AN EXAMPLE

Our kids are always looking to us for cues on how to behave. Talking to kids about generosity, empathy, and kindness is essential, but setting an example of generosity in your own life speaks volumes and shows kids how much it matters for you.

Often our children are unaware when we make a charitable donation, and they may not notice when you run an errand for a neighbor or cook a double batch of dinner for a struggling friend. You can share and even encourage them to participate in your acts of kindness. They can add a drawing, write a card, and help you pick the charity your family wants to support.

Let them experience firsthand what it feels like to give their time to a cause by volunteering or donating as a family. Get input from your children and include them in decisions about how your family is going to give to others or be charitable.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

Introduce ideas and opportunities for your children to give time, contribute money, or donate personal items. Kids can get into the act of giving back by choosing a charity for the family to donate to together. If every member of the family picks a cause to support, however modestly, it can start

a conversation about what each person values. Supporting a charity also makes kids feel proud and might even launch a new tradition, especially if timed around a holiday or birthday.

If your children already receive an allowance, you can teach them the save-spend-give concept. You can try using three jars, separate piggy banks, or an online app. It is important to teach our kids that our money is not ours—it belongs to God, and we must steward it well.

Think big and small. Teach children to look for little ways to make a positive difference in someone's day, like pitching in to speed up a sibling's chores, or being kind to someone after he or she has made a mistake. When you notice a nice gesture—like helping a friend, giving a compliment, helping at home without being asked, engaging politely with another grown up—celebrate your child!

SPREAD JOY

Kid-friendly activities, like making cookies or decorating cards to give to others in your community, can make children feel part of something bigger. Whether you make them for neighbors, teachers, service professionals, friends, or family, sharing joy is contagious and reminds kids to appreciate the people in their lives.

Just as importantly, be generous with your children yourself. There is no better way to teach generosity. You can give them some extra attention, prepare them a special treat, or surprise them with impromptu kind words, a hug, or a kiss. These kind acts on your part can fill up your child's "feeling good reservoir" so that he or she can more graciously give to someone else.

By making acts of generosity and kindness a constant in our children's lives, you help them grow into kind, generous, happy, and healthy adults.

The Ferreira Family Looks Back



ERIC AND FLAVIANE FERREIRA have been active members of The Bear Creek School community since 2006, when their eldest son, Philip, started first grade. He graduated in 2018, and their younger son, Benjamin, just graduated in 2021 as a legacy student, starting his educational journey in kindergarten at Bear Creek.

WHY DID YOUR FAMILY CHOOSE OUR SCHOOL?

When we were choosing the right school for our children, we were looking for strong academics and a nurturing environment. When Philip was in kindergarten, his teacher informed us that she believed he would not be challenged enough at our neighborhood school. Rachael Urban, our neighbor at the time, gave us a list of schools that she recommended, and Bear Creek was one of the schools on the list. In addition to the rigorous academic environment, we found that it had much better extracurricular offerings compared to other schools. The beautiful building and kind people we met greatly impacted our decision to choose Bear Creek. Its Christian focus was certainly a plus at

the time, and this aspect became very important as both of our kids matured in their relationships and worldview.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE HERE?

While every experience at Bear Creek has been formative in our children's lives, the most memorable experience that sticks out to us was the involvement that our second son, Ben, had in the school production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. The professionalism that was displayed by the kids was absolutely beyond every expectation that we had. Their hard work and passion shone both on stage and in the orchestra pit. We were blown away by the level of quality produced by a group of high school students.

What surprised you the most about Bear Creek?

Something that pleasantly surprised us about Bear Creek was the strong community created by the parents. The way that the parent group cared for all the kids as well as each other, whether the group

was large or small, demonstrated the importance of establishing relationships with other Bear Creek parents. This community created connections that went beyond the school environment, and we made great friends throughout the experience.

WHAT HAS A BEAR CREEK EDUCATION GIVEN YOUR CHILDREN?

A Bear Creek education has given our sons the confidence to take on challenges and to defend their points of view. The worldview that our children possess, one that allows them to stand for what they believe is right, is largely due to their academic pursuits at Bear Creek. The most notable skill that all Bear Creek students possess is critical thinking, which is difficult to learn and even more so to teach. The Bear Creek education our sons received will always have an impact on the way that they treat others and interact with the world.

HOW ARE/WERE YOU INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL?

During our sons' Lower School years, Eric played the piano at Chapel on Tuesdays. He also helped musically with several plays, which provided a great opportunity to interact with the kids at school. Additionally, Flaviane volunteered as a room mom for Ben's kindergarten class with Mrs. Erickson.

For nine years, we were responsible for the Walk-a-thon lap cards, from merging the class data into the printed cards to laminating them and sending them to each class. Chaperoning on field trips was something we both greatly enjoyed, so we took every opportunity to do so. Eric attended the Outdoor Education and Mount St. Helens trips with both Ben and Philip. Later, when the boys were in Upper School, Flaviane spoke to students multiple times on the subject of mental health. And, we always had a lot of fun at auction dinners, which led us to deep friendships (in addition to the wines we won!).

WHY HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO INVEST PHILANTHROPICALLY IN THE SCHOOL?

We have chosen to help fund the extracurricular activities that brought our own children so much joy and fulfillment. Through our time at Bear Creek, we found that these activities make a huge difference in the experiences that our boys had when compared to just the class material. Every field trip and new piece of equipment made a large impact on our children, and we wanted to continue to invest in their growth and intellectual development.

WHAT DOES GENEROSITY MEAN TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

To us, generosity is synonymous with sacrifice. Generosity cannot exist without creating priorities, which often involves sacrificing one thing to invest in something more important. To us, that more important "something" was our kids' education and the school mission, prompting us to put that ahead of other priorities. Each year of donations, long car rides to and from school, and volunteering was the result of a thoughtful decision-making process about where to invest the time and money that God has entrusted to our family, even if that meant putting other things on the backburner.

A GIFT FOR THE AGES

Gifts such as bequests or trusts are meaningful ways to leave a legacy while helping to educate future generations of Bear Creek students, preparing them to engage the world with wisdom, compassion, and courage. If you have already made a provision for The Bear Creek School in your will or estate plan, please let us know so we may say thank you and recognize your generosity by welcoming you into our Fidelis Circle. Your thoughtful planning to advance the mission of The Bear Creek School will make an important impact.

For more information, contact Debbie Marchione, V.P. for Philanthropy and Community Engagement, at dmarchione@tbcs.org or by calling 425-898-1720 ext. 339.

ALUMNI NEWS AND CLASS NOTES

Class of 2011

Jonny White



Jonny White married Melissa Aeschliman in Hamilton, MT, on May 22, 2021. They were married in front of a small group of family and the wedding party on a beautiful afternoon, despite it having snowed the night before. Jonny and Melissa live in Edmonds, WA.

Class of 2012

Aaron DiGenova



Aaron married his college sweetheart Taylor Ellerbrock on May 29, 2021, at a beautiful ceremony above Lake Chelan.

Class of 2013

Katie Matthews Gomez



Wesley Jacob Gomez was born on February 26, 2021. Katie notes that “our little Grizzly is the happiest, sweetest addition to our little family.” Katie and her husband Ian feel so blessed!

Alyssa Buchanan Swartz

Alyssa graduated with her doctorate in physical therapy from Texas Women’s University in Houston, TX, and is looking forward to her career as a pediatric physical therapist. She was first introduced to PT at a young age after witnessing a family member go through extensive PT throughout her life. She fell in love with the science of how the body moves and



loves how the profession focuses on people's abilities rather than their disabilities. While in college, she spent summers working as an intern at Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center in Redmond. There she witnessed and got involved in hippotherapy (physical therapy with horses). After her second summer as an intern, she was determined to become a physical therapist. She cannot wait to see how the Lord will continue to use her to help patients move and partake in the world.

Class of 2015

Emily Huston



Beginning in fall 2020, Emily has been teaching choir and music theory at Bear Creek. Her first year teaching during a pandemic was an adventure, but she says it has been amazing to see God challenge, guide, sustain, and remain faithful through it all.

Class of 2016

Sara Hastings and John Lee



Sara and John started dating senior year of high school and continued a long-distance relationship during college. John studied mathematics at West Point while Sara studied Industrial Design at the University of Washington. They married on May 28, 2021, in Kirkland and moved to Baltimore, MD, where John is serving in the U.S. Army at Fort Meade.

SETH MCBRIDE, CLASS OF 2016

I DIDN'T DO WHAT I SET OUT TO DO.

Hotshot graduate that I was, brimming with potential, I let myself down. Young Me would be ashamed of who I have become. In the speech I gave at graduation in 2016, I declared, “We may not all know our majors, but we know who we are.” *But*, I thought to myself, *I know my major. I know exactly who I’m going to be.*

I thought of myself as the golden boy. Everyone believed in me—no one more than myself. Therefore, I was destined for success. I was going to be a screenwriter and pen the next great American TV show.

After a year of college, I visited my Bear Creek drama teacher Dr. Lynch. Telling him all I’d done and all I hoped to do, I remember being a bit taken aback by his reservations. He warned me to be careful about the lifestyle of Los Angeles—how it could drain me, how it could change me. Most of all, he reminded me that the meaning of life was not to be found in fame.

Nothing I hadn’t heard a thousand times before.

It’s tricky. Those are the virtues your parents tell you every day through childhood, and yet society teaches the opposite. It paints a totally different picture of success. We end up learning to hold those things in a strange, discordant tension. *Yes*, money and fame won’t make us happy. *But*, we are totally going to pursue those things until we get them, because... well, what else are we going to do? And I didn’t really care about *fame* so much as I did *success*. Our society has a deep-seeded obsession with hard work and wealth. Those things quite accidentally became unconsciously equivalent to success in my mind.



So, as I reassured Dr. Lynch I wouldn’t fall for those mistakes, I promptly fell.

It’s not even what you’d think. I wasn’t partying like crazy or burying myself in work. I didn’t change all that much. It was just that deeply engrained sickness I inherited from my culture that nagged at me at all times. If I wasn’t *producing* something, moving towards that bright potential future, I was wasting my time.

Luckily, blessedly, I met the love of my life at college. She was, in no way, the woman I imagined I would marry. Allison was somehow almost entirely free of that cultural lie. It was strange. Every step toward falling in love with her seemed a step away from “my true self.” I began to limit my so-called “productive” activities in favor of being there for her when she needed me. This dichotomy led to some conflict in our relationship, but we were able to work through it. In June of 2020, the year of COVID, we



were married. That was also the year I graduated without a graduation, and I lost my prestigious film internship because we were no longer able to show up in person. This last year, I felt depressed. My productivity was low, and my creative spark was non-existent. All of these things were nudging me toward a lesson I was refusing to learn. But by the grace of God, the lesson somehow pushed itself through to the surface.

The hardest thing I've ever had to say was, "Mom, I don't know if I want to be a screenwriter anymore." As I cried to her over the phone, she told me she never cared whether I became a screenwriter or not. She just wanted me to be happy. I had never felt so free.

Everything changed that day. Those truths that I knew deep down were ringing in my ear with full and perfect clarity. Success and happiness are not found in our careers. Meaning is not found in

money. Life is worth living because of those we love. Purpose is provided for us by God. He has a plan and a path for us. It was like hearing it for the first time. It was like meeting an old friend.

I'd like to give some credit—these truths were right there in my head because of my upbringing. My parents taught them to me. Bear Creek reinforced them. When we were *equipped to become the individual God intends*, that had nothing to do with career path. We were being prepared for moments like these, so that when we inevitably stray from the path and forget, we can remember the truth.

My wife Allison got her first nursing job at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, an hour away from her family. I knew that was God telling me to leave LA, to start again. I just accepted a job at the Verizon store. Not as glamorous a position as I wanted long ago, but the road is only just beginning. I don't know what God has in store, and I'm okay with that. I trust Him. I've been in Minnesota for a couple weeks now, and I've found a church with a pastor who loves board games almost as much as I do, so I'm optimistic.

Thanks to everyone who has prayed for me and rooted for me—I'm in a better place now than I've ever been, and I'm continuing to grow and mature in Christ.

CLASS NOTES CONTINUED

Class of 2016 *continued*

Jill Leszynski

In May 2021, Jill began the 28-month Master of Physician Assistant program at Rocky Mountain University.

Micah Tardy



Micah married Madelyn Grace Karnei of Magnolia, TX, on May 9, 2021, with several of his Bear Creek classmates in attendance, including Peyton Cysewski, Caleb Kesinger, Jordan Block, John Lee, and Sam Humphries.

In May 2020, both Micah and Maddie graduated magna cum laude from Texas A&M University in College Station, TX. Micah received a Bachelor of Science in Economics. The couple now lives in Dallas, TX, where Micah is a second-year law student at the Dallas SMU Dedman School of Law, and Maddie works as a CPA for Deloitte. Micah plans to specialize in either Mergers & Acquisitions or Real Estate Law. Micah also is a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army National Guard, and monthly he is stationed in San Marcos, TX.

Class of 2017

Abigail Helm

Abigail graduated in 2021 from Wheaton College with a B.A. in history and psychology and minors in Biblical and theological studies. She serves as a student ambassador in Wheaton's Center for Vocation and Career. In fall 2021, she will enter the Wheaton College Graduate School to study marriage and family therapy. See more about Abigail on Wheaton's website: www.wheaton.edu/news/recent-news/2021/march/mywheaton-abigail-helm-21-ma-23/

FAREWELL

This spring Bear Creek said a fond farewell to several Lower School faculty and staff members who are retiring from the school after many years.

Our dearly loved Mrs. Pam Erickson retired after 24 years teaching kindergarten and shepherding hundreds of five-year-olds and their families as they began their Bear Creek journeys. Mrs. Dianna Kadeg also retired this year. She taught at Bear Creek for 18 years, serving in both the classroom and library, making her mark on countless students over the years. Also retiring are classroom assistants Mrs. Vicky Tilton and Mrs. Liz Holtzman, both of whom helped shaped hundreds of Bear Creek students for over 20 years. We are so grateful to each of these wonderful women for their dedication to the mission of The Bear Creek School, and we will miss them.



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ALL IN!