Indy Spirit

What's your independent school story?
Share it with us at *ismag@nais.org*.



Mary Keever

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PHOTO BY YASMIN LEONARD

FEW REMEMBER THEIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL teachers, but I do. At Hammond School (SC), Mrs. Davis barked enthusiastically while Ms. Monroe threw chalky erasers to invite attentiveness, and yet these independent school educators instilled the joy of learning and confidence in me as a writer. I started to think I wanted to pursue a career in teaching, but I took the scenic route to the classroom. As assistant director at Camp Illahee, I learned all I'd need to know (for any profession but especially for education). I developed my ability to connect and engage with campers and communicate calmly and clearly with parents.

Then, 26 years ago, while seeking opportunities to establish roots in North Carolina, I reconnected with my seventh grade history teacher, Pat Kahny, who was the athletic director at Westchester Country Day School. When I stepped onto the Westchester campus for an interview, I felt a sense of confidence and wonder—a feeling that continues today. I felt the magic I'd experienced so many times as a student—still thinking, learning, growing, and doing in partnership with my students and colleagues.

Only at a school like this—where confidence is built from day one—could I grow as a middle school English teacher, adviser, and coach into a dean of faculty, head of middle school, interim head of school, and head of school. Independent schools provide the scaffolding to grow from within. We're cultivating responsible citizens and leaders by embracing all backgrounds and nurturing personal excellence—and we do this with our faculty, too, no barks or erasers thrown but making memorable moments of love and care.