



Yesterday: ASL in the early 1970s was an eye-opening experience

BY NINA CAMERON '72

EVEN though I attended eight different schools in four different countries, ASL had the biggest impact on my life. I'm a product of Canada, the US, Switzerland and England and all the amazingly different schools I attended in each of these places. But it was the people, particularly the wonderful ASL teachers, I met along the way who had the strongest influence on me.

ASL had some exceptional teachers. Mr. David Campbell (ASL 1967–69) taught Grade 9 social studies. On his classroom wall he posted a giant list of extra things we had to do to complete his course. I remember visiting the Guinea & Piggy Pub for extra credits; it was an early all-you-can-eat establishment where you ate like a piggy for a guinea (1 pound and 1 shilling). My parents might have complained about my traipsing around strange parts of London, but I always said, “I have to do it for a school project!” Other extracurricular activities included seeing Parts I and II of the extra-long film *War and Peace* and visiting unusual museum and art exhibitions. These activities not only got me out of the house on weekends, but also expanded my horizons. I remember seeing extremely weird and wonderful exhibitions in Soho,

at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park, and in quirky parts of the East End. One avant-garde exhibit I went to in Grade 9 involved taking my shoes off, walking through sand poured onto a concrete floor and colliding into giant mirrors suspended from the ceiling.

I still remember that Mr. Campbell hosted a Friday night “happening” in the Nash Terrace buildings in Regent’s Park, where Grades 6–9 went to school in 1969, before the “new school” was built in St. John’s Wood. Neighbors called the police after hearing a lot of loud music, and I traveled home on the bus covered in paint and laughed at all the funny things that had happened that night. In 1990, on a visit to London en route to South-East Asia, I returned to the “scene of the crime” and found our former school buildings were now the headquarters for the Rotary Club.

Mr. Campbell also devised an exercise to teach us about discrimination. For one week, all brown-eyed students were favored. Those with blue eyes were made to sit at the back of the classroom on cramped benches. They had to carry our books around and were generally treated badly. As I have brown eyes, I thought it was a great week. Then the second week was the blue-eyed students’ turn to get back at us, which they did. It was an experience that has stayed with me.

Paul Morton (ASL 1963–97) was another influential teacher in those years. You didn’t just take an algebra class, but were encouraged to attend an evening opera or two to gain extra credits. I’m not sure if our parents ever knew that if someone’s grades were hovering between a B+ and an A– Mr. Morton gave them the higher grade if they’d attended three or four opera productions, but I remember hearing parents bragging about their teenagers taking an interest in opera, all thanks to Mr. Morton.

If anyone messed up on their algebra calculations, Mr. Morton pointed out that if we had been working for NASA, we’d have sent our astronauts to the wrong planet. Or worse, they’d missed their intended destination and were now sentenced to a perpetual life in outer space. It definitely made me double-check my math after that!

Excellent classes taught by superb teachers made learning interesting. Added to this were the fabulous ASL library where I spent many hours reading and the field trips we took to Stonehenge, Canterbury Cathedral and other locations in and around London, which also contributed a lot to my education. These elements all made me the questioning and curious person I am today.

Then there were the unexpected



experiences at ASL that altered my view of the world. Most of the ASL teachers working in those years had great reputations. I didn’t have Don Jesse (ASL 1964–91) as a teacher, but I had heard about him doing creatively crazy things to encourage learning. As ASL classrooms in those days were truly open-plan, with no doors or walls, I often listened in on his classes and overheard him reading aloud some very interesting texts. One day he came to school with half his head and half his beard shaved and I believe he did it because he lost a bet against a student.

On a December afternoon, Mr. Jesse organized an “Orphan’s Christmas Party.” I helped raise the money for presents and wrapped the gifts. It was great to see the children’s wide-eyed excitement as they opened their presents and enjoyed afternoon snacks. During the festivities, one little girl tugged on my sweater and asked, “Could I take some milk home for my mum?” I was shocked. Were there children in London who worried that their mothers couldn’t provide milk for their families? I found a bag for the little girl and put a couple of full milk bottles inside. I can still hear those heavy bottles clinking together as she walked out of the room.

It’s easy for all of us to live in our own sheltered cocoon and forget that most of the world—and many in our own backyards—don’t share such comfort. That simple experience was a real eye-opener for me. How could I have been so blind to inner-city poverty? I guess, like a lot of upper-middle class teenagers, I was completely wrapped up in my own world of social activities and getting good grades. I hadn’t realized how fortunate I was living in Kensington, taking the Underground to school in St. John’s Wood, and not



1 Nina Cameron '72
2 Paul Morton
3 Don Jesse

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worrying about having enough food on the table every day.

My veil of naivety was completely lifted. There’s a tragic assumption among many of us that people who visit food banks or who are on welfare aren’t trying hard enough. Many people just aren’t lucky enough to have a good education, and misfortune can strike anyone at any time.

During my adult life I’ve spent a lot of time fundraising for different organizations in my community. Mother Teresa believed that we should help those in our own neighborhood, rather than worrying about people on the other side of the world so much. She would agree that it’s important to send aid to China or Myanmar, but not to forget those less fortunate ones living in your neck of the woods. Whether it’s donating time or money, it’s important to give something back to our communities. The rewards are so immense.

Whether it’s buying a homeless person a pair of winter boots—something I did when working in Ottawa—or donating cans to the food bank, keep the less fortunate on your mind and in your heart. A pair of gloves, shoes, a business outfit

to wear to a job interview or a package of spaghetti can make such a difference in a person’s life. When my Lioness Club (part of Lions Clubs International) was collecting food for the local food bank, one of our members said not to donate a macaroni-and-cheese dinner because some families couldn’t afford to buy the milk to make the mix. What a fascinating insight and again, we’re back to the milk!

Thank you Mr. Jesse and all the creative teachers at ASL for opening my eyes to so much, so many years ago. ■

Nina Cameron '72 attended ASL from 1969–1973 (for an Ontario grade 13). She graduated from York University in Toronto, Canada in 1977 with an Honors B.A. in English and history. For the next 20 years she and her husband of 30 years, Bob McClelland, published a restaurant and hotel newsletter, wrote columns in more than 30 trade journals and gave seminars around the world. From 1996–2006, she worked with Elections Canada as a Federal Returning Officer in Toronto and at the Ottawa headquarters. She was also an election observer with the Vienna-based OSCE. Nina continues to write and lives with her husband on the edge of a UNESCO Biosphere in Long Point, Ontario, Canada.

WHEN COMPUTERS CAME TO ASL.

Alice Iacuesssa (ASL 1979–2000) and Cathy Adams (ASL 1974–2005) asked fellow former faculty members Bill Iacuesssa (ASL 1979–2000) and John Servente (ASL 1980–2008) to cast their minds back to their early days at ASL to recall the first 20 years of computers at ASL. Compared with the wealth of technology we take for granted today, it makes for interesting reading.

'72

First computer at ASL is actually a terminal with keyboard and monitor that connects to a university mainframe via a dial-up modem. BASIC programing class is taught by **Paul Fecher (ASL 1972–95)** in the math department.

'79–'80

Math department buys two Tandy computers. They are so unusual and valuable that they are kept in a locked work area! They use tape recorders to save files. Additional programming classes are offered by a number of teachers in the math department.

Diane Heard Homer (ASL 1979–81) and Bill Iacuesssa arrive at ASL. Both are keenly interested in computers. Diane owns a Sorcerer PC, which she uses in her math classes. A proposal is made to purchase four Apple II computers for the Middle School. The high school math department buys an external 5.25"

floppy drive, which replaces one of the tape recorders, and offers faculty in-service workshops.

'80–'81

Another computer enthusiast, John Servente arrives at ASL. The MS acquires four Apple II computers, and more workshops are held for faculty. A MS computer committee is formed, along with an after-school computer club. In November, Grade 7 holds a mock US presidential election with four Apple computers set up in the Boardroom to be used as voting machines to record students' votes. A final tally is distributed giving overall results along with a breakdown by homeroom, grade and gender.

Jonathan Nash '85 and **Chris Leventis '87** are two students keen to learn how to program.

'81–'82

John Servente becomes the first K–12 computer coordinator in a half-time position. Additional computers added in MS and HS.

'82–'83

Educational commercial software becomes available. Some teachers begin using it with their classroom computers. **Ruth Heuman (ASL 1970–2009)** introduces LOGO to her math students.

'83–'84

Bill Iacuesssa takes over from John Servente as K–12 computer coordinator. He writes a software program to score the ISST cross-country championships, and **Eddie Hufford (ASL 1967–2005)** asks him to write software for recording results and scoring at ISST track and field championships—both are firsts for ISST events. Athletics Director **Chuck Dodson (ASL 1973–2001)** starts to use word processing to improve communication with coaches, parents and athletes.

The library purchases its first Macintosh computer at the request of AV Coordinator **Keith Bing (ASL 1981–2003)**, and a dial-up connection is installed to connect to the Internet.

'84–'85

John Servente returns to ASL to resume his role of K–12 coordinator.

'85–'86

First computer lab is created in Bottom Green for use by K–12 classes. An unofficial computer department is created with John Servente as HS coordinator. Bill Iacuesssa acts as K–8 coordinator and teaches MS computer classes, which are offered for the first time. A lab assistant is hired.

A parent donates money to media services to purchase the first LaserWriter at ASL. Keith Bing works with **Tosh Lee**



(ASL 1975–98) to print *The Standard* on the LaserWriter.

Ed Ladd (ASL 1983–90) and Tosh Lee become enthusiastic users of the lab for writing classes. Evening classes are offered for parents.

'86–'87

HS computer lab is created, also in Bottom Green. Large-screen monitors are purchased for use in classrooms.

'87–'88

John Servente publishes a rationale for using word-processing that includes how to compose electronically and the benefits of doing so.

'88–'89

MS lab moves to Bottom Red with Apple IIGS computers and computer classes continue. The lab is available to LS and MS teachers. The MS is the first to publish its student newspaper using desktop publishing software.

A writing lab with 18 PCs is created using a combination of donations of used equipment and the purchase of new ones.

'91–'92

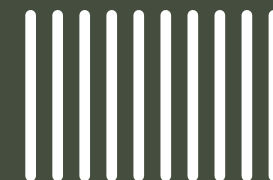
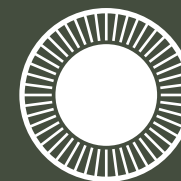
The last Apple II+ is retired after 10 years of active service.

“We had one Apple II allocated to each classroom in the sixth grade so when anybody wanted to do something, we would gather the students in one room with electrical cords running about like a snake house. At one point John Servente was running a computer lab in the classroom next to mine in Bottom Red. There was only one specially installed telephone jack, which was meant for use on the ancient dial-up connection. I used to drive him crazy by unplugging it to have access to another telephone link on the floor.”

MIKE MCKEEN (ASL 1973–97)



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“I don’t recall there being a lot of technology prior to the establishment of a computer lab, which was pretty advanced for its time. I believe the first machines they used there were Apple IIs. Prior to that, the only thing that comes to mind are the mimeograph machines in the teachers’ areas with the crank handles for making photocopies.”

JONATHAN NASH '85



“In the MS art department, I used the computer a little as a teaching tool but as we only had one, it was not very effective. When I retired in 1995, I still wrote reports by hand!”

SALLY MARLOW (ASL 1964–95)

“When I came to ASL as a sixth grader in 1979, technology was just beginning to appear at the School. In 1980, I clearly remember taking a summer programming course in the HS computer lab, which was full of TRS-80 computers. We wrote simple programs in BASIC that printed HELLO all over the screen. In 1980, as a seventh grader, the MS staged a presidential election. **Nestor Carbonell '86** was Ronald Reagan, **Heather Ferguson '86** was John Anderson, and I was Jimmy Carter. **Alice Iacuesssa (ASL 1979–2000)** organized the campaign and **Bill Iacuesssa (1979–2000)** organized the voting. The Boardroom, which back then was the first room on the left at the Loudoun Road entrance, became voting central. Apple II computers were set up and students came in and voted electronically. This was very high tech considering elections in Britain still used paper ballots and voting boxes. There was no need to have a team of people counting the ballots by hand as the computers did all of the tallying for us. Brilliant! In Grade 10, I took Journalism I with **Tosh Lee (ASL 1975–1998)**. She made us do something unheard of back then, but that was so important for our future. She made us compose our class work straight into the computer. Of all the things I learned at ASL, nothing was more important for my academic future than learning to compose work straight into the computer.”

JONATHAN SCHWARTZ '86



“When I arrived in 1972, the School had one computer monitor and keyboard with access to a mainframe computer at a university for one hour per day. Access was via telephone. If one wanted to ‘save’ a program that had been written and typed, one saved it on paper tape. At that time, there was one computer programming class, taught by **Bernie Olimunder**. Bernie left ASL in 1973 and I was recruited to teach the course. In the early 80s, there were two or three computer programming classes taught in the math department by myself and later **Phil Young (ASL 1969–99)**, **Joyce Anderson (ASL 1980–2012)** and **Dave Sutherland (ASL 1970–98)**.”

PAUL FECHER (ASL 1972–95)

“I remember the first time we were exposed to computers; it was in the 80s. **Bill Iacuesssa (ASL 1979–2000)** led a workshop for MS teachers. We all sat there with this amazing machine trying to write simple programs that would do things like count, bounce a ball back and forth, etc. We were thrilled with the results. We used little discs in the early days and had to save everything on them—and the discs did not always decide to work.”

KAREN SELLARS (ASL 1968–2004)

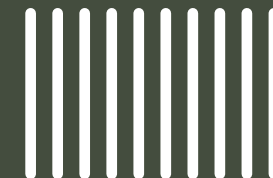
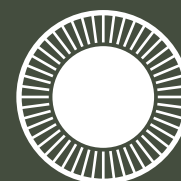
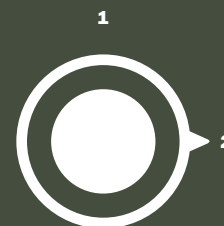
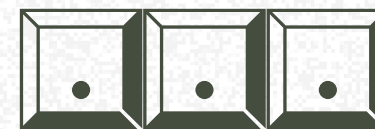
The picture of technology at ASL today is a world away from these humble beginnings. On a typical school day, between 200 and 300 gigabytes of information are downloaded from the Internet. At peak times, up to 1,000 users utilize our wireless network simultaneously. Year on year, our Internet bandwidth increases by 50 percent. The School runs 170 iMacs and 80 Dell desktop computers, primarily for administrative use. There are 82 printers around the building, 94 projectors, 40 servers and 12 terabytes of storage. Who knows what the next 20 years will bring to One Waverley Place!

“My first computer memory was in 1978 when little **Jonathan Nash '85** came into my room selling cards. I asked him if he was selling the cards for charity. He said no, he was saving up to buy his own personal computer. I said I'd buy some cards, but I'd never heard of such a crazy idea in my life! His own computer! In 1980, **Paul Fecher (ASL 1972–95)** led some sessions in the Boardroom for interested HS/MS teachers. We shared two computers among 20 teachers, and he tried to teach us BASIC. I went on a computer sabbatical in 1981–82 and studied with Hap Peele at UMass (an Iacuesssa suggestion). He sent me to New York City, where Seymour Papert was conducting a seminar introducing teachers to his new language called LOGO. I read Mindstorms and fell in love with LOGO. From 1982 to 1986, we taught LOGO in Grade 7, mainly on a project basis. I also ran a girls' computer club after school in 1985, since the girls found it difficult to get any time on the two Apple II+ computers we had in each grade. I remember two tiny fifth grade girls, **Ellen Goldberg '91** and **Becky Storck '91**, carrying huge heavy computers, disk drives, and monitors up the stairs from the fifth grade so we could have enough machines to run the club.”

RUTH HEUMAN (ASL 1970–2009)

“At the dawn of the computer era, I had been teaching long enough to believe I had encountered every conceivable excuse for late or shoddy work. Students always seemed to dwell in households populated by paper-eating dogs, paper-swallowing snakes, paper-stealing birds, or mothers who thoughtlessly threw homework in the trash. However, an alibi I had not heard previously turned up when a student explained a missing assignment with: “The computer lost my files.” I couldn’t follow his explanation for this disaster, but not wishing to betray my ignorance of the new technology, I grudgingly accepted his excuses.”

RAY REUHL (ASL 1978–93)



CLASS NOTES

1 The Class of 1972 celebrated its 50th reunion in October 2022



The Class of 1972 celebrates its 50th reunion

On 3 October 2022, 50 years after earning their high school diplomas, members of the Class of 1972 returned to their alma mater to mark their half-century ASL reunion. Organized by **Marla Petal** and **Peter Spiers**, nearly 20 classmates, along with spouses and partners, made the trip to London for a busy weekend of sightseeing and celebrating. In addition to Marla and Peter, alumni in attendance were: **Rod Bell, Kevin Browne, Susan**

(Michels) Conway, Susan (John) Ford, Betsy (Fredericks) Giannuzzi, Pat (Relf) Hanavan, Vicky (Sanderlin) Hand, Brooke (Roberts) Learmonth, Patricia Leonard, Andy Lubin, Mark Mackey, Susan (Barker) MacLeod, Greg McCullough, Peter Menzies, Sue Souls and David Wicks. The group hailed from California, Colorado, Canada, Texas and the East Coast of the US. Highlights of the reunion included lunch with current high school students who

represented the Social Justice Council, the *Standard* newspaper and the Sustainability Council; a grand campus tour and an ASL-sponsored happy hour at the nearby Clifton pub. Reflecting on the reunion, Marla shared, "This was an amazing and very moving experience for all of us. It will take some time to digest both the new memories we made and the many memories this trip has churned up during our jam-packed, wonderful in London."