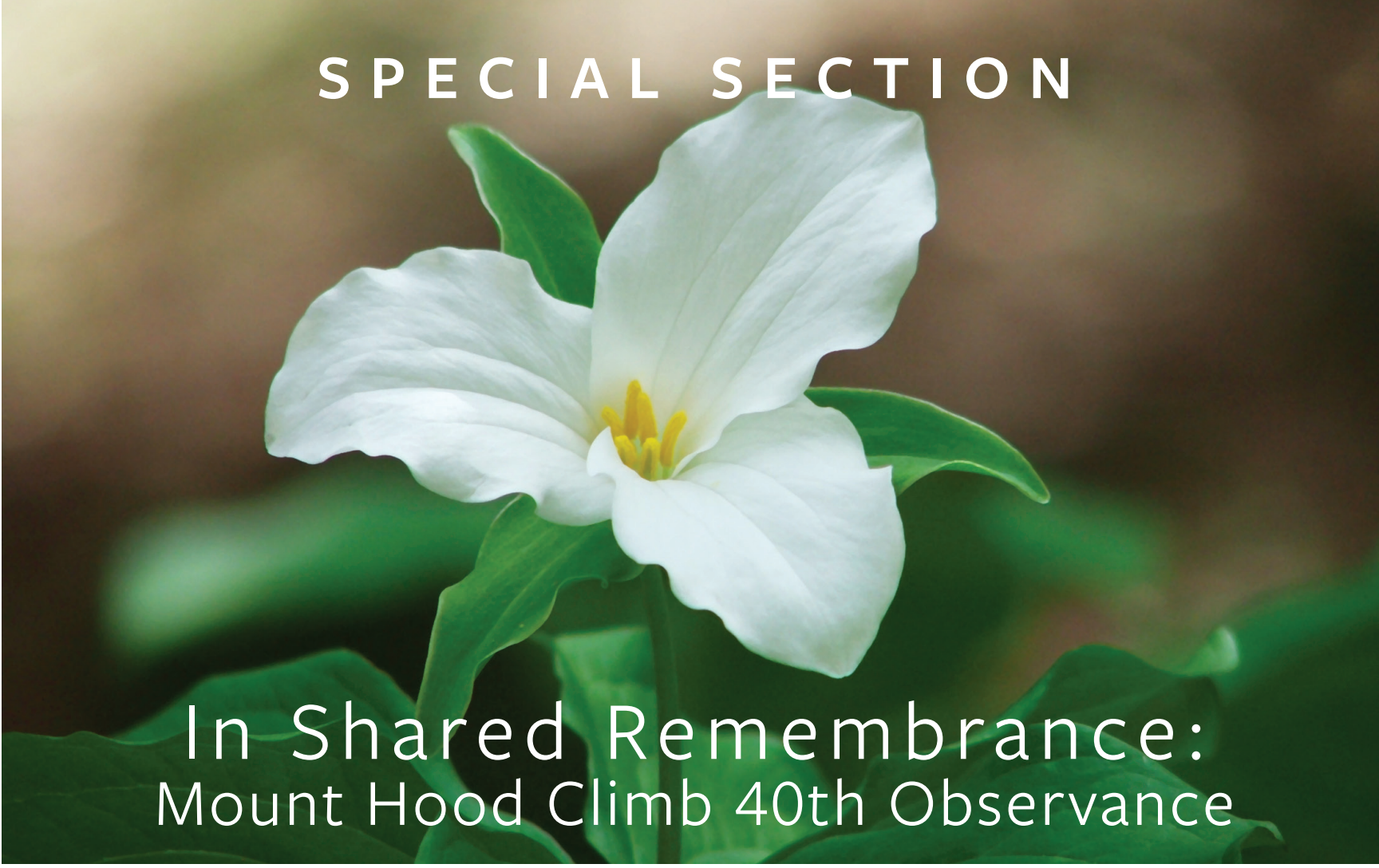
SPECIAL SECTION



In Shared Remembrance:
Mount Hood Climb 40th Observance

Forty years ago, 20 OES community members set out for a day climb of Mount Hood. Nine of those members did not return. In the years that have followed, the school has never forgotten the 20 who went up the mountain, the nine who were lost, or the families and extended community who felt the impact of the devastating events of May 1986.

This year, on the 40th anniversary of the climb, the school held two events: a requiem of remembrance at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral and the annual Mount Hood Climb Observance Day, which included a walk through the refreshed Mount Hood Memorial Garden. Earlier this year, OES engaged historian Morgen Young, who details here her research to document the climb as part of the official record of the tragedy. We also spoke with Laura Axon ’86, who has served as chair of the Mount Hood Observance Committee for the last decade.

As part of our remembrances, in the pages that follow, we feature some of those whose lives were deeply impacted by the tragedy. OES parent Scott Russell shares how his work as a Sno-Cat driver involved in the search and rescue efforts led to successfully lobbying for the use of Mountain Locator Units on Mount Hood. You will also read about the rebuilding of the Experiential Education program at OES in the aftermath of the tragedy and the threads of those efforts that remain foundational to outdoor education at the school today.

And you will hear directly from survivors of the tragedy, who have pursued careers that directly support others. They include Brinton Clark ’88, an internal medicine provider grateful for the privilege of caring for others; Molly (Schula) Shipley ’86, a longtime victim advocate for those experiencing the trauma of violent crimes; and Lorca (Fitschen) Smetana ’87, a resilience trainer with a mission of spreading joy. We also hear from the family of Alison Litzenberger ’88, who lost her life on Mount Hood; brother Brian Litzenberger ’86, a clinical psychologist with a predisposition for helping others, and late mother Caroline Litzenberger, whose life after 1986 was defined by reinvention, faith, and a call to the Episcopal priesthood.

Four decades later, with love and remembrance, these stories represent only some of the ripples of the climb.

OES Community Honors 40th Anniversary of Mount Hood Climb

by Mitch Forness, Marketing & Communications Content Manager

Forty years after the 1986 Mount Hood climb tragedy forever changed Oregon Episcopal School, the community came together this past May for a series of events to honor those who were lost while reflecting on the enduring bonds that continue to unite generations of students, families, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.

On Friday, May 8, in collaboration with the Episcopal Church in Western Oregon and the Trinity Music Series, OES held a public requiem service at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral: In Shared Remembrance: A Requiem for the 1986 Mount Hood Tragedy, featuring the Fauré Requiem. The public memorial welcomed more than 600 attendees, including survivors, family members, alumni, students, faculty, trustees, rescue personnel, and members of the broader community. Centered on Gabriel Fauré's Requiem, the service offered prayer, music, and reflection while honoring those who lost their lives and recognizing the extraordinary outpouring of support that surrounded OES in the aftermath of the tragedy.

On Wednesday, May 13, the community gathered on campus for the annual Mount Hood Climb Observance Day. The morning included the traditional Belltower ceremony, where each of the nine individuals who died was remembered by name, along with a chapel focused on the history of the climb, a community reception, the sharing of Eucharist, and a walk through the newly renovated Mount Hood Memorial Garden. Students then participated in community engagement projects on and off campus, continuing a tradition of service that has become a defining part of the observance.

"That is why we gather each year," Head of School The Rev. Michael Spencer said during the Mount Hood Climb Observance Day ceremony. "We gather because remembrance is an act of love. We gather because communities are strengthened not only by the moments of triumph they celebrate, but also by the sorrows they carry together."

Spencer also reflected on how remembrance calls the community not only to honor the past, but to shape the future.

"Our obligation, as a school and as a community, is not only to lament, but also to learn and live in a way worthy of their memory: to love more deeply, to care more faithfully, to learn more wisely," he said. "May we continue to remember them with love. May we continue to learn from their legacy. And may their memory always, truly, be a blessing."

Since 1986, Mount Hood Climb Observance Day has been held each year on the second Wednesday in May. While rooted in remembrance, it has also become an expression of the school's values, inspiring each generation of students to respond to loss with compassion, service, and a commitment to the common good. Forty years later, those values remain central to the OES community, ensuring that the legacy of the Mount Hood climb continues to be carried forward with reverence, purpose, and hope.

Q&A with Morgen Young

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

At the start of 2026, OES engaged historian Morgen Young of Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA) to research and document the 1986 Mount Hood climb as part of the official record commemorating the 40th anniversary of the tragedy. As a specialist in community history who leads HRA's public history program, Young combed the OES archives, read through media coverage of the climb, and connected with search and rescue personnel and medical staff directly involved with the tragedy. Her work acknowledges the 20 who went up the mountain in 1986 and honors their memories by affirming the records of the event. Young had no prior affiliation with OES. She spoke with OES Magazine *contributor Jana Brown.*

How did you approach this project?

I approached it with the idea of looking through everything OES had in their archive. They had a lot of materials from the time period. I do a lot of difficult history; that has been an intentional specialty of mine. I thought about the community of OES and how the impacts of the tragedy have rippled throughout the community.

What did you discover as you began to explore the OES archives?

I noticed that the school had acknowledged the nine who died in the tragedy but had not really acknowledged or had any public commemoration for the 11 who survived. That became a rallying cry of mine. We put up some new interpretive signs in the Memorial Garden. I mentioned that I thought we should list all 20 who climbed. I also noticed that there seemed to be some inconsistencies in institutional memory. For example, Father Tom Goman, who was the climb leader, was called a chaplain and he was never the school chaplain. And so there were some things that someone must have said in 1986 and those things continued to the present. There needed to be some corrections in the narrative. I based it entirely on what I could find in the archive, and then I did outreach to find individuals who had provided [medical] care to the climbers. I was able to talk to a Life Flight nurse and pilot, a trauma nurse, and two trauma surgeons who cared for people who survived and those who did not.

What are some key things you learned from your research that you want people to know?

I worked with OES on writing interpretive panels, the new ones that went in the Memorial Garden and new content that went on the website. I learned that there's real power in the words you use when describing this tragedy. For example, there was one climb leader, Father Tom Goman, so to say that other people were the climb leaders is not necessarily accurate. As an outsider, it's shocking to hear that a bunch of 15-year-olds went to try to summit a mountain. I intentionally did not form any conclusions about why this happened. I have tried to remain neutral and report on what other investigations about this have found, but I think it's important for people to understand that this was

not a one-time thing; [OES] had been doing this program for a long time, and that there were multiple factors that led to this tragedy. The school formed a committee to investigate this less than a month after the tragedy happened. The school certainly made mistakes afterwards, I think particularly in not investing as much time into the survivors from what I can see in the historical record. It's important to understand that the school is acknowledging that this is something that happened; they're not shying away from it.

Are there errors in the original narrative that you feel have been corrected?

I noticed a lot of times people said there were 19 climbers, but there were always 20 climbers. I think why that happened is that when they had to log in at Timberline Lodge, they left off the name of one person. Dee Zduniak was there as an observer because she might have been an assistant moving forward. For 40 years, in a lot of narratives I've seen, it said 19, but she was there. She was the last person to come off the mountain before the 13 who ended up staying in the snow cave. It was important to acknowledge there were always 20 people, and these are their names. Let's acknowledge who they are. Let's have the order in which they came off the mountain be correct. Let's be respectful about the reasons people decided to leave and not sensationalize it and not try to assign blame but just explain that this is the order in which things happened.

Do you think your research might help OES respond better to questions about the climb in the future?

Yes, I think so. One of the things I delivered for the project is 110 pages of research notes. Normally that's more of an internal document that I don't always share with the client, but this seemed like something for them to be able to access quickly. Everything is footnoted, everything comes from materials that the school produced themselves in the 1980s, subsequent reports or how they changed after the tragedy. The school had this collection of three volumes of newspaper clippings. That in and of itself became a huge resource for how the media was reporting on the event at the time. I went through everything and all of that wound up in the research notes—the good, the bad, and the ugly of what happened, quotes from survivors, quotes from the climb families who lost someone in the tragedy. I put it all in there for the school to access.

In what ways do you hope your work will make an impact?

To me, I think the lasting impacts of all of this is the importance of commemoration. There's a fine line between honoring a tragedy and celebrating the resiliency of people—of the climb families, of the survivors. I think the school has done a really good job of acknowledging the hard truths that this was a horrific thing that happened. There were multiple reasons that this happened, and I think they've acknowledged publicly their role in it, and that's all to be commended. It doesn't mean everyone is going to be happy with it.

What are the tangible results of all this work you've done?

There's a lot of content on the website and there's a special collection [of resources available in the Upper School]. OES has these fantastic memorial books that were put together between 1986 and 1987 by a visual arts teacher and a librarian. They received letters, telegrams, and flowers from around the world, so one of the memorial books has a sampling of that and the other is dedicated to the climbers. There's a chapter for each of the nine who died and a chapter for the 11 who survived. They usually come out once a year, so they're not super accessible, and you need to wear gloves and be in an archival setting. But I stumbled across the digital files in my research and then we worked with a design firm and a printer to make copies of those beautiful facsimiles that now anyone can look at. We then took the three volumes [of the newspaper clippings], digitized them, and made them into one volume that now researchers can access. We brought them out to the Mount Hood Climb Observance Day. People can also go online and make an appointment to access the special collection. And then there are the research notes that are meant as an internal document for the OES community.

There are also the three new signs in the Memorial Garden. The text is also available on the website. For me, the words matter, and how this gets told really matters. The signs list all 20 people for the first time. I also advocated for listing the organizations that provided support on the OES website. There were so many people who came together for the search and rescue effort. Because I do a lot of oral history and community history, OES gave me the go-ahead to go out and start connecting with people. That felt very powerful. I provided a list of every single individual name I found in my research, who they were associated with, and if they were still living or not because this is their story, too. They're part of the ripples in the pond and should be acknowledged.

If you don't ask, the answer's always 'No'

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

OES past parent Scott Russell reflects on the fight to bring locator beacons to Mount Hood.

In February 2007, three climbers and a black Lab mix named Velvet were rescued after spending a freezing night on Mount Hood. The outcome could have been different had the party not been equipped with a Mountain Locator Unit (MLU), a device made available to climbers as a direct result of the May 1986 tragedy that claimed the lives of nine Oregon Episcopal School community members.

Although the MLUs (also known as Mount Hood Locator Units) seemed a logical step after such a tragic incident, it took nearly a year of lobbying the state of Oregon post-Mount Hood climb for the units to be put into service. While many contributed to the change in state law, one of the most determined advocates navigating the unexpected hurdles to a safer climbing experience was Scott Russell, who witnessed firsthand the conditions that led to the 1986 tragedy. Although he had no affiliation with the school at the time, he later became a parent of two OES graduates.

Along with his father, Russell was on the mountain during those harrowing days 40 years ago, operating a Sno-Cat through the deep snow on the mountain as part of the search for the OES group. The Russells had been involved as volunteers with search and rescue on Mount Hood for years, assisting Portland Mountain Rescue in transporting search personnel up the steep terrain. Russell vividly recalls the severe conditions in May 1986, including winds over 100 mph, zero visibility, and the difficulty of searching with no landmarks. He describes a scary incident during the search, when his Sno-Cat fell through a snow bridge into a crevasse. He escaped by cutting snow blocks, funneling blowing snow under the machine, and driving the vehicle out. The overwhelming distress of knowing searchers were in close proximity to the trapped OES climbers, with no way to determine their exact location, motivated Russell to push for a technological solution so such a tragedy would not be repeated.

"It was absolutely frustrating to know where they were within probably a quarter of a square mile or less, but not be able to find them," Russell says. "I never wanted this to happen again."

That frustration prompted Russell to speak with the Clackamas County Sheriff about applying tracking technology, the kind used to locate whales and hibernating bears, to facilitate the rescue of lost climbers. Russell gathered all the major search and rescue stakeholders, including Air Force helicopter personnel, multiple county sheriff's offices, and the Mount Hood Ski Patrol, to develop the system together and form the nonprofit Mountain Signal Memorial Fund.

The stakeholders determined that the technology to improve climber safety—locator beacons that transmit a radio signal—on Mount Hood already existed (and had been previously proposed in the 1970s), and the Arizona-based equipment manufacturer, Telonics, Inc., was willing to participate. However, the company's attorney warned that, without product liability protection, Telonics risked accountability if the equipment failed. Undeterred, Russell consulted with Randall Kester, a Portland attorney and former Oregon Supreme Court justice, who was also an experienced climber. Kester confirmed the challenge would be significant, and that proved to be true,

although Russell and Co. soldiered on. After an initial attempt to lobby the state legislature without success, Kester advised Russell, "If you don't ask, the answer's always 'No.'"

So, Russell approached Dick Springer, then chair of the Oregon House Judiciary Committee. When Springer indicated the bill to institute the use of locator beacons might fail, Russell said he might pursue an initiative petition instead. The process "gives direct legislative power to the voters to enact new laws, change existing laws, or amend the Oregon Constitution."

"I said, 'I'm just here to see if we can resurrect this thing,'" Russell recalls, "And [Springer] says, 'Well, it doesn't look very good.' And I said, 'I guess we're going to have to do an initiative petition.' He reared back and said, 'Are you threatening me?' So, they took our three-sentence bill and turned it into about five pages of liability reforms for the state of Oregon, and we got it done. That had been the stopping point of any endeavor like this in the past."

Because the liability exemption might otherwise have allowed inferior products, the law itself included detailed specifications for how MLUs must be built and tested. The process was developed in consultation with an Oregon State Police communications lieutenant and wildlife officers who initially resisted but ultimately agreed that all identified problems were solvable.

With support from many, including Mount Hood Climb survivors Giles Thompson '88 and Brinton Clark '88 and parent Don McClave, who lost his daughter, Susan '86, to the tragedy, Oregon Senator James M. Simmons introduced Senate Bill 915 in 1987. The bill included language to "prohibit lawsuits against device manufacturers unless the maker knowingly supplied defective equipment." The pioneering MLU system was implemented in 1988, with Thompson and Clark joining U.S. Senator Bob Packwood to dedicate the units.

At a time when there were no consumer cell phones or GPS trackers, the devices filled a critical gap and were quite literally a beacon of hope for climbers in danger. Available for rent at retail locations near Mount Hood, the system used terrestrial technology to locate climbers who carried a low-power transmitter mounted on a sash so the antenna could be properly exposed.

"Climbers were expected to leave an itinerary with a responsible person," Russell explains. "If they became overdue, a search would be triggered, and the climber could activate the unit by pulling a knob that opened the circuit and began transmission."

Searchers then used a directional receiver and antenna, following a signal that grew stronger as they oriented toward and approached the transmitter, continually reducing volume until they were essentially on top of the signal source. When testing the equipment, Russell was heartened to discover the system's long range and precision. For example, he recalls dropping a transmitter 80 feet into a crevasse and discovering its signal could still be heard from up to 40 miles away by a helicopter. The units were also waterproof, durable, and equipped with long battery life; one test transmitter ran for well over a year, Russell recalls. In addition to offering a next level of precaution for climbers, the units also amplified the expectation of user preparedness, including encouragement to fill out a more comprehensive climber's registration form prior to departure up Mount Hood.

"People continued to go up there and they continued to get lost, and of course, anytime that happens, the TV stations are clued into emergency radio calls, so they know what's going on," Russell says. "One of the first questions was, 'Why the heck didn't you have one of these MLUs?' So, there was a certain amount of peer pressure involved in that people either used them or rethought their plans."

As cell phones and satellite technology emerged, the MLUs were retired in 2017. Beyond the enhanced safety precautions the beacons offered, Russell notes that the 1986 Mount Hood tragedy also prompted the formation of a multi-agency committee, the Mount Hood Search and Rescue Council, which still meets monthly to coordinate among stakeholders, improve communications, and streamline operations. "Everybody knows what everybody else is doing, and it makes rescue so much more seamless," Russell explains.

Twenty years after the MLUs were put into service, the three climbers and a dog trapped in a snowstorm on Mount Hood in February 2007 were rescued within 24 hours, thanks to the beacon that successfully guided search and rescue teams to their location. While Russell doesn't have exact numbers on how many other climbers were brought to safety as a result of the efforts of him and others, as he looks back 40 years later, he says he was simply trying to do the right thing by lobbying for safer outcomes on the mountain.

The support of the OES community also motivated him to persist through the myriad legal obstacles. "Working on the MLU system gave them something to focus on during their grief," he says, crediting that knowledge with reinforcing his commitment to the project. "How do you say no to parents who lost their kids?"

A Commitment to the Outdoors

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

In June 1988, Bill Proudman led a group of students into a wooded oasis tucked inside the Ochoco National Forest in Central Oregon.

The Mill Creek Wilderness is a modest patchwork of meadows, with a trail system that winds along a freshwater stream. Proudman had driven out there alone beforehand, picking up topographical maps from the Forest Service and thoughtfully scouting the route ahead of the anticipated journey with the students.

At 32, Proudman had joined Oregon Episcopal School only four months earlier, taking on an immense responsibility as the first director of the rebranded Experiential Education program (previously known as Basecamp) since the May 1986 tragedy that took the lives of nine OES community members on Mount Hood. What made the 1988 trip particularly significant was that accompanying Proudman were members of the OES senior class who had lost classmates and friends on the mountain. Among the Ochoco participants were Brinton Clark '88 and Giles Thompson '88, who had survived the 1986 accident.

The students made camp in a meadow and, for the next few days, sat in the quiet purity of the wilderness, talking through their grief as part of the healing process.

"These kids had been through this unspeakable experience," Proudman recalls 38 years later, "and it was their opportunity to say goodbye to each other. I just held space for them."

For Proudman, whose adventures as an outdoorsman had included an attempt to scale Denali, those days with the OES students represented "the most profound outdoor trip I've ever been on."

"We facilitated a lot of dialogue sitting in a meadow in this pristine place," Proudman recalls. "That was the purpose of the trip."

That outing, and the courage it required of those who ventured into the outdoors—and the parents who entrusted Proudman and the school with their children—remains an authentic expression of the aspirations of Experiential Education at OES.

When Proudman arrived 18 months after Mount Hood, he recognized the significance of the school's continued commitment to outdoor learning. His first initiative was to engage faculty in a yearlong process to define what Experiential Education actually meant. He assembled a task force and met monthly with faculty for the first year. The collaborative process gave stakeholders a voice in rebuilding the program.

"We redefined it as not just about running outdoor trips," Proudman recalls, "but as a way of engaging kids in their own learning that's much more tactile, with emotional and physical components."

Proudman structured the program by introducing outdoor experiences at different grade levels. He was also charged with monitoring risk management beyond outdoor trips. To that end, Proudman implemented a comprehensive incident-tracking system across on- and off-campus events and enlisted national safety experts to conduct workshops for independent schools throughout the Northwest.

Community trust returned incrementally, through a consistent demonstration of competence and care. "There was no event that said, 'Here's where it turned around,'" Proudman says. "It was a very slow process." He remembers working closely with school leadership to approach everything with sensitivity, meeting regularly with then-Head of School The Rev. Malcolm Manson one-on-one. A key challenge was moving the school forward at a pace comfortable for faculty and parents.

In September 1988, Proudman led the sophomore class on a backpacking trip into the Mount Jefferson Wilderness. The parent meeting before departure was understandably fraught, and Proudman navigated it with patience. One parent requested

that he carry a cell phone, which at the time was an unwieldy device.

"The parents wanted me to give them 100% guarantee that nothing would happen to their kids on the trip," Proudman says. "Of course I couldn't do that, but I was astute enough to tell them their request was valid, and that it was perfectly okay if they didn't want to send them on the trip."

By the time he left in 1991, Proudman had laid the groundwork for balancing outdoor exploration with safety—and OES was prepared to continue that work. He appreciated that the school community had made the brave decision to continue making outdoor education a priority and viewed his role as guardian of that promise.

"I realized my work was not just to run an outdoor program," he says, "but really I was doing grief counseling for faculty, [giving] permission for them to start talking about what they had experienced and what they had not been able to process."

Four decades later, OES maintains that thread of devotion to outdoor education. Between Proudman's tenure and the present day, the Experiential Education program was shaped significantly by Tom Handel, who served as director for more than 20 years. According to current director Paul Taylor, Handel's greatest legacy is the program's permanence.

"He really made it a foundational part of our school and our identity," Taylor says.

Taylor recently took over as program leader after five years at OES as Handel's assistant director and director of the Winterim program. His charge is to build on what his predecessors established, shepherding a learning arc that builds in complexity as students grow from Pre-K through grade 12.

As Taylor explains, the present-day program begins with on-campus programming designed to cultivate a curiosity for the natural world and a sense of place for the school's youngest learners. Pre-K through first grade students spend time in the woods as part of Discovery Day. Once they reach second through fourth grades, they are slowly introduced to basic camping skills through rotations from shelter building to land navigation to canoeing.

"In the Lower School, it's guided participation," Taylor notes, "developing that sense of wonder and starting to develop a sense of place on our campus and a sense of safety in their surroundings so they're free to engage and be curious."

By fourth and fifth grade, students begin taking multi-day off-campus trips. Fourth graders travel to Camp Westwind on the Oregon coast for a three-day experience, while fifth graders make a five-day capstone trip to Orcas Island off the coast of Washington.

Programming deepens in Middle School as sixth graders travel to Camp Hancock in the High Desert of Central Oregon. Seventh graders make what has become a legacy trip to Mount St. Helens, camping at the base of the volcano, hiking, and crawling through lava tubes.

"When I have students in the Upper School, they're still referring back to that seventh grade trip," Taylor says, adding that the culminating Middle School experience is an eighth grade rafting expedition on the Deschutes River.

Meanwhile, the modern Upper School program places increasing emphasis on student leadership and decision-making. While each grade takes a class trip during the first week of school, the crown jewel of the Upper School experience is the junior backpacking trip, for which the entire class is divided into groups of about 10 students—each accompanied by a faculty leader and a trained outdoor instructor—to traverse for four days into wilderness areas in Oregon and Washington.

"When they come back to the classroom," Taylor says, "the way they engage with each other, it's amazing."

Beyond required class trips, the Experiential Ed program offers a range of elective opportunities. Among the most popular is a surfing day trip to the Oregon coast each fall, which draws about 40 students for 15 available spots. Taylor recalls a moment on one of those excursions that captures the spirit of the program. While sitting on his surfboard, he observed three girls from the OES residential program—from China, Ukraine, and Afghanistan—standing together in the Pacific Ocean.

"They're all waist deep in the water, waves breaking over them, laughing," Taylor says. "They're just having a blast."

While those experiences are the hallmark of outdoor education at OES today, the 1986 tragedy is never far from the surface when making plans to explore beyond the classroom. "It's not about eliminating risk completely,"

Taylor explains. "We have a very realistic approach to that. The risk philosophy we've developed essentially says we acknowledge the risk and we embrace the opportunity it creates for growth."

That philosophy, Taylor adds, is paired with rigorous safeguards. Instructors are required to obtain wilderness first responder certification (an 80-hour medical training credential) and some hold wilderness EMT certification. Faculty leaders assigned to trips must have prior experience in the specific terrain and activity involved. Pre-trip parent meetings are required for all overnight programs, covering itinerary, risk management specifics, hospital locations, and communication protocols. Students also go through a detailed "duffel shuffle," a gear check before departure to make sure they have everything on the thorough packing list. "We want you to bring the appropriate clothing and equipment and we literally make sure you have everything you need," Taylor assures. "If you only have three pairs of wool socks instead of four, we're going to fix that."

On more technical trips, the student-to-adult ratio is maintained at five or six to one. On the Mount St. Helens trip, 65 students are accompanied by approximately 18 adults. While attempts to summit Mount Hood no longer exist, students do go there for snowshoeing and skiing, activities that carry different risk profiles than mountaineering. The decision to return in any way to Mount Hood was made with extensive consideration.

"There's been a lot of reflection around going back to the place specifically," Taylor says, "and I think we're on a good trajectory with that. Although we'll always honor that part of our experience, we also want to honor it by taking our students to the beauty and magic of those experiences near Mount Hood."

Echoing Proudman, Taylor and Head of Upper School Sarah Grenert-Funk, who oversees Experiential Education, are emphatic about why outdoor learning remains central to an OES education. Taylor references the school's mission of creating global citizens who use their power for good, while Grenert-Funk asserts that growth happens when people are asked to do things they didn't realize themselves capable of, which builds resilience.

"Our students [also] develop something increasingly rare—a genuine sense of place," Grenert-Funk says. "They don't just learn about Oregon from a map or textbook. They come to know it. They build memories. They understand why these landscapes matter and why they're worth protecting. That connection creates gratitude and responsibility."

Reflection is built into every stage of outdoor education at OES, whether through journaling, group discussion, or paired sharing. The continuity of expectation, knowing that each year brings a new and more challenging outdoor experience, is a direct extension of the framework Bill Proudman first established. Both he and Taylor understand that the outdoor experience itself is only part of the purpose. Proudman's approach to the 1988 senior trip in Ochoco National Forest was built around creating space for dialogue. His successors have institutionalized that instinct into a quintessential framework.

That OES never abandoned its pledge to encourage outdoor experiences, even after enduring the ultimate heartbreak, speaks to something that's built into the school's culture.

"The Mount Hood tragedy changed this community forever," Grenert-Funk says. "We've never stopped asking ourselves how we can make our programs stronger, how we can make better decisions, and how we can better prepare our students and faculty. That commitment to continuous learning is part of who we are. But it never changed our belief that students need opportunities to experience challenge, uncertainty, and the natural world if they're going to become resilient, thoughtful, capable adults."

Looking back from a distance at his own role during a critical moment in time, Proudman is proud of the role he played in the aftermath of the Mount Hood accident and heartened by the knowledge that OES has continued to facilitate students' exploration of the natural world.

"It's gratifying that, 40 years later, the school is not just committed to this, but they're fully in," Proudman says. "It's become part of the fabric of everything they do."

For Brinton Clark '88, Caring for Others is a Privilege

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

By the flickering light of a cozy fire, Brinton Clark, MD '88 became connected to the community members who dropped by the compound house she shared with two elderly Ghanaian women. There was no electricity and few modern comforts, but Clark looked forward to those visits and to learning the language and history of the people who lived in the village.

"At night we would just sit around and they would tell stories," recalls Clark, who spent two years in Ghana with the Peace Corps after graduating with a degree in human biology from Stanford. "As my local language got better, I was able to participate more. People would wander in and out in the courtyard and there'd be conversation and little children running in. It was a chance to understand people's stories on an intimate level. I realized I loved that."

Although she grew up as the daughter of two physicians, Clark was not certain she wanted to follow their path. But in her second year in the village in Ghana, she recognized that she was a people person who loved bonding with others. She thought a career in medicine, especially as a primary care doctor, would afford her the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with her patients—and truly learn their stories.

With that in mind, Clark attended medical school at UC San Francisco and eventually chose to become an internist. "I wanted to feel like I was somebody's doctor," she explains. "It's such a privilege to take care of people through so many different phases of their life."

She stayed in San Francisco for residency before moving back to Portland with her husband (who she met in Ghana) and first child. In addition to patient care responsibilities, Clark is now the chair of medical education and helps direct the Providence Portland Internal Medicine Residency Program, which allows her to develop connections with the young doctors she mentors.

Guided by her view of compassionate care, Clark's ethos as a physician and mentor was shaped profoundly by her own experience as a 16 year old trauma patient after the 1986 Mount Hood climb tragedy that claimed the lives of seven OES classmates and two adult faculty members. She and Giles Thompson '88 were the lone survivors from the group of 11 who sought refuge in a snow cave on the mountain for three days, and two of four survivors from the original group

Brinton is pictured here with her parents and fellow physicians, Ed Clark and Janet Roberts, proud OES grandparents. Ed is also a former trustee for the school.

of 13 who entered the cave for the first long night. Following emergency transport and trauma care, Clark spent six weeks at Emmanuel Hospital and its rehabilitation center, where she remembers that ICU staff, especially trauma surgeon William Long, MD, combined excellent medical care with personal concern for Clark and her family. She has remained in touch with Long over the years, and shares that her parents had him over for dinner a few years ago.

"It was so cool hearing about Bill's career and the many lives he has literally saved who've been in extreme trauma situations," Clark says. "I really benefited from knowing him and seeing him as a model."

During her recovery in the hospital, Clark also recalls a nurse who sat with her during a lonely, tearful night, recognizing her needs as a scared teenager and treating her with great compassion. It's an enduring example that informs how she treats her own patients. Encouraged by her parents in the aftermath of Mount Hood, Clark met with all the victims' families to share what she remembered about the tragedy. Reflecting on that experience now, she believes that telling the story helped her process what happened.

"That was actually really important for me in retrospect," she says. "At that young age, it gave me a sense of how to sit with grief and suffering. It also allowed me to tell the story many times, so I didn't have to hold it alone. But it also gave me this sense, because the families were really supportive of me, really kind, that I had their blessing to live my life, that I didn't have to feel like I couldn't move forward with my own growth and development. That was very impactful."

As the mother of three children now, Clark points to parenting as central to her life, calling it a major source of personal growth. Through the years, her family has maintained close ties to OES. Clark herself transferred to the school as a sophomore, while her brother, Matt '90, joined the school community the following fall. Her eldest son, Hayden, graduated from OES in 2023, while her youngest, Evan, is a sophomore. Her middle child, daughter Elise, attended for one year before finishing up at a local public school. Matt's youngest will be a senior at OES this fall and drives Brinton's son to school daily. Meanwhile, her parents, Edgar and Janet, became more involved with OES after Mount Hood. Edgar Clark joined the board of trustees in 1987 and served for many years; the couple built close relationships with the community; and have remained engaged as donors and grandparents.

"It will probably be a sad day for them," Clark says, "once the youngest has graduated from OES and there's not necessarily a lot of reasons to go back to campus anymore."

Clark also has maintained relationships with several families from the climb and formed a close bond with the late Chris McClave, mother of Susan McClave '86, who died in the tragedy. "She and I got together many times for lunch, and I really felt her support of me as a growing young person."

In a career that centers on medical education for the next generation of internal medicine physicians, Clark has passed her philosophy on to hundreds of residents. Her goal is to teach them to approach patients with empathy and recognize that they are not defined by the illness for which they are being treated.

As visual proof of her contributions to mentoring, Clark describes a long hallway within the Providence Portland residency suite that features framed photographs of the residents who have been trained in the program since 1971. She also continues to value the clinical side of her work, noting that she loves what she does, finding it meaningful because of the human connections. She highlights the intimacy of the doctor–patient relationship, where people share details they might not tell anyone else, a privilege she conveys to residents. That feeling traces back to those evenings in Ghana, where Clark realized she loved learning others' stories.

"One of the things I try to model for residents is meeting people where they are," she says. "Wherever that is in life."

Molly (Schula) Shipley '86 Finds Solace in Nature

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

For Molly (Schula) Shipley '86, nature acts as both a spiritual sanctuary and a practical coping mechanism. The OES alumna can often be found hiking, biking, paddleboarding, or quietly sitting in the tranquil landscape of the Pacific Northwest. Habitually by her side is her trio of "personal therapy dogs," Zuzu, Pokey, and Kiwi, offering a reassuring presence.

"Nature is kind of my church," Shipley says, "so I spend a lot of time in the outdoors. I find solace in the outdoors."

Being outside among the whispers of the evergreens and mingling with the woodland creatures who seek their own peace on the trails and waters that surround her Portland-area home has offered Shipley a refuge from the intensity of her work as a victim advocate at the Washington County District Attorney's Office. She retired from her full-time post in December 2025, primarily to help care for her young grandson, but hopes to return in some capacity.

After beginning her professional life as a hospital-based wellness consultant, Shipley discovered advocacy work relatively late in her career. She first joined the DA's office as a volunteer in 2012, before realizing the job felt right and accepting a full-time role. From even the briefest interaction with Shipley, it's evident that she's an empath who approaches others with patience, kindness, and a listening ear, perfect for the weighty situations she encountered in her daily work

"I think I've always had a drive to serve others," she says. "And as I was reflecting back, I was thinking OES really helped cultivate that because I did a lot of volunteer work in high school as well."

In more than a dozen years working in the Person Crimes Unit, alongside the Washington County prosecutors, Shipley extended her natural grace and kindheartedness to victims of some of the most heinous crimes; sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence. She often consoled the families of homicide victims and was present to share their burden as they processed grief and trauma. She describes the unspoken acknowledgment that came with simply sitting with victims and finding ways to connect with them.

"It wasn't until I started working there that I realized I had a gift to connect with others going through a devastating time," Shipley says. "After all the years, I think it's because I had experienced tragedy on a very personal level and it made me better able to appreciate what they were going through. I never talked about my own experiences because it was always about them, but it was an understanding that after you go through something monumental and horrific, life is never going to be the same after that day. And I know what that feels like."

The personal tragedy to which Shipley refers is the 1986 Mount Hood climb that claimed the lives of nine OES community members, including seven of her classmates. As a member of the OES Advanced Climbing Team at the time, Shipley was one of the 20 who went up the mountain. She spent a harrowing night in the snow cave dug for shelter by the group before volunteering to accompany climbing guide Ralph Summers in hiking down to seek help for her friends.

Forty years later, a reflective Shipley shares that she carried survivor's guilt for a long time and expresses gratitude for how spirituality and nature continue to help her heal. She finds empowerment in the outdoors and attributes much of that to the spirit of those lost on Mount Hood.

"In processing what I went through, that's what I want to embody," she says. "I want to absorb what was lost from those people and manifest it into good."

As a victim advocate, Shipley managed dozens of cases simultaneously, supporting vulnerable people through extremely challenging and emotional periods of their lives. During criminal investigations, victims were compelled to recount

the details of what happened to them, often in preparation for testifying in court, which forced them to relive their trauma. Throughout those excruciating times, Shipley stayed connected with victims over months and sometimes years, updating them on case progress and court hearings and shepherding them from the immediate aftermath of the crime through processing, and eventually accepting, the case's resolution. A kind word. A tissue to dry their tears. A warm nod to acknowledge their pain. And Shipley did it all with the care and compassion that are so intrinsic to who she is.

Beyond the emotional support, Shipley also devoted her efforts to helping victims find the resources to address housing and food assistance, transportation, counseling referrals, and medical bills from crime-related injuries.

"If I could do anything to help in their process moving forward," she says, "it was very gratifying."

With no formal counseling background, Shipley says the shift to advocacy "literally just came from my heart." While her skills have developed over the years, she concedes that she's always been emotionally aware, sensitive, and attuned to people's feelings. Her early propensity to care for people in need was recognized by others before she fully saw it in herself. At her graduation from OES in June 1986, Shipley received the Mary Rodney Award, "presented annually . . . to the young woman in the Senior Class who best reflects the intelligence, energy, and self-direction of . . . the founder of St. Helen's Hall. The recipient . . . shows particular promise of continuing the use of her talent in the service of others."

In dedicating countless hours to assisting victims, Shipley says that witnessing the endurance of the human spirit in the most trying of times has served as inspiration. It also has facilitated deeper connections with others as she travels her own path of resilience.

Away from the bustle of work, it's her time in the outdoors, fortified by her three canine companions, sunlight beaming through the clouds, that allows Shipley to truly reflect on a favorite line from the prayer of Saint Francis: "For it is in giving that one receives." That phrase, from what is also known as the "Peace Prayer," remains a core value that has guided her for decades.

"I have a nontraditional path in how I found my calling," Shipley says. "I do attribute it a lot to the fact that I experienced the traumatic event that I did. In a way, it gave me strength."

Lorca (Fitschen) Smetana '87 has spent decades teaching resilience and spreading joy

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

Settling in on the porch of her 20-acre working farm in Montana sipping a glass of water infused with apple mint, strawberry, spinach, berries, and a cinnamon stick, Lorca (Fitschen) Smetana '87 exudes joy. Her smile is wide and her heart is open as she speaks of her meaningful work — on the farm and beyond.

Her daily routine of rising early to tend to cows, sheep, homing pigeons, white doves, dogs, gardens, and land is what sustains Smetana. She points out toward a grove of aspen trees and a tent in its clearing, which serves as a retreat space for the immersive experiences she hosts for the students she trains in leadership and resilience. Within those surroundings, she's even written a series of "lyric micro-essays" inspired by her years of milking cows before dawn. She plans to release the resulting book, *Cheek to Flank*, soon.

"It's very much about resilience," Smetana says of her writing, "but it's nestled within life on a farm."

Between her daily chores, she's busy spreading her message of resilience through extended workshops, single-day retreats, and speaking engagements—in person and online. In 2025, Smetana welcomed a dozen students for an inaugural year-long intensive resilience training aimed at creating long-term health in their professional and personal lives. Her fellows include national-level executives, a therapist who taught in Southeast Asia with therapy involving dance and deep-sea diving, a progressive Montana farmer active in politics, an innovator in children's education, an inventor and PhD in physical therapy, and leaders of Farm to Crag, a nonprofit that connects local food producers with climbers.

"The students are already resilient leaders," Smetana explains, adding that she'll welcome a new cohort in the fall. "They're already doing interesting things in the world, but they don't necessarily know why what works actually works." She adds that filling those gaps "creates a vibrant leader who has well-being through time."

Smetana has been able to find and return to her own well-being—and spread joy—throughout her adult life. Through her efforts as a resilience innovator, she's impacted individuals, leadership teams, institutions, and educators by helping them learn the skills to cope with the pressures of everyday life. No matter who those students are, her charge always begins with the understanding that resilience is teachable and learnable.

"That's what the world needs, so that's where I am," she explains.

It was through building her own inner fortitude that Smetana learned to share the skill with others. At 16, she was a survivor of the 1986 Mount Hood tragedy that claimed the lives of seven of her Oregon Episcopal School classmates and two faculty members. Then a junior and a member of the school's Advanced Climbing Team, Smetana was one of the last of the OES group to turn around on the mountain ahead of the tragedy. In 1987, Smetana was the first recipient of the Susan Elizabeth McClave Award, presented to "a member of the OES senior class who . . . best exemplifies a giving spirit toward others." The award honors the memory of McClave, who died on Mount Hood. In the years that have followed, Smetana has contemplated mortality, embraced her inner reservoir of strength, and become a catalyst for others to find theirs.

Her resilience, Smetana shared in a TEDx talk in 2018, allowed her to embody "great tragedy and great joy at once," noting that putting the talk together "was completely worth it, but it was definitely also a crucible experience. I went through the fire to get to the place where I could do it."

In thoughtfully explaining her mission, Smetana describes joy as both an energy source and a diagnostic tool for resilience. She compares the ability to capture joy to the unrealistic expectation of catching a glimpse of a wild fox on the farm on demand.

"Joy is not a domestic creature," she explains. "We can't just say, 'I'm going to go feel joy this afternoon.' If you cultivate in yourself to be the kind of ecosystem that joy returns to, that has heavy overlap with traits that characterize a resilient person and leader."

In her work with organizations, Smetana has discovered that the presence of joy can become an indicator of resilience. "If I go visit

an organization and they tell me how resilient they are and there's no joy in the hallways, then I get really curious."

Reflecting on the 40th anniversary of the Mount Hood climb tragedy, Smetana recalls having a front-row seat to hundreds of people's responses to extraordinary pain, seeing all choices as human yet noticing that blame and victimhood add collateral pain, while choices rooted in love, vitality, and compassion for self and others do not. She describes her own life as being shaped by meeting that ache and believes a great deal of suffering comes from people not being invited to build skills for embracing hard things.

This fall, Smetana will partner twice with OES Head of School The Rev. Michael Spencer, at the Wilderness Risk Management Conference and at the National Association of Episcopal Schools Conference. Both presentations of "When the Unthinkable Happens: Fostering Post-Traumatic Growth through Lament, Learning, and Love" will address the lasting impact and responses that come with being a school that has experienced tragedy.

"It's everything from things that were done that ultimately had a good impact to things that maybe looking back might've been done differently," Smetana explains. "What are the lessons now that we can offer? It's important that [schools] have everything they can to support themselves, their students,

communities, everybody who was impacted."

For individuals seeking to build their resilience skills, Smetana maintains a private library of playful games designed to be quietly transformative. She also explains a concept she's developed called "resilience triage," a quick, three-question tool for crisis situations. She created it on the fly (literally) while giving advice to a seatmate on a plane as the jet was preparing to land and the man asked for "the short runway version."

The triage questions that emerged were: Where can we add space? Where can we add health to a relevant system? Where can we add lightness? Plus, there's a "just-add-water" bonus. For that one, Smetana gives as examples hydrating, relocating a meeting to somewhere near the water, offering tea, or jumping in a river.

As she sips her infused water on the farm and considers her work, Smetana explains it as investing "40 intentional years into the question and curiosity around what feeds a vital and resilient human who can hold really hard things and really beautiful things in a single life." For Smetana personally, the result is living in joy independent of circumstances for significant periods of time. She finds great satisfaction in watching her students find and spread that feeling as well.

"I hold it as my job to create pebbles that, when they're dropped in the world's ocean of humanity," she says, "the ripples just naturally go out far and long."

Brian Litzenberger '86 has gone through the open doors and encourages his patients to do the same

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

Moments after completing a physics exam as a Yale freshman, Brian Litzenberger '86 had an epiphany.

"I remember walking down toward the main area of campus and thinking, 'I'm done, this isn't me' and having some kind of revolution in my brain," he recalls. "All of a sudden, a bunch of things tumbled into place."

The pivotal realization for Litzenberger was that he was pursuing physics not because it was his true calling, but because he was good at it—and already invested in the field. He'd devoured all the math and science offerings at OES, worked in a physics lab at Portland State University, and developed a science project that was the runner-up in the Westinghouse Science Talent Scholarship Foundation competition. But on that day in May 1987, "it became clear that my soul was not there." What followed was a gut feeling that he was meant to study psychology.

Perhaps a further indicator was that the lightbulb moment came on the first anniversary of the death of Brian's sister, Alison Litzenberger '88, who was one of nine OES community members who lost their lives in the climbing tragedy on Mount Hood the previous spring. Litzenberger remains forever cognizant of those who perished in the tragedy, noting that Alison's birthday each year brings questions about who she would have become.

Of those who died, he describes climb leader Father Tom Goman as a mentor, who taught him geometry and ethics, lived in his neighborhood, and gave him rides to school. He had a joking camaraderie with dorm parent Marion Horwell. He briefly dated Susan McClave '86. She, along with Richie Haeder Jr. '88, Erin O'Leary '88, and Erik Sandvik '88, were all theater friends, who performed with Litzenberger in a school play the night before the group set out for Mount Hood. Patrick McGinness '88 was a member of the stage crew (three survivors of the tragedy, Molly Schula '86, Giles Thompson '88, and John Whitson '88, were also part of the production the night before). That summer, Litzenberger worked at Nature's Fresh Northwest (now known as New Seasons), a local store owned by Stan Amy, whose daughter, Tasha Amy '88, died on the mountain. That enduring sense of loss was a significant undercurrent to Litzenberger's move toward mental health work.

"They are never not with me," he says. "I think there's a sense I have of what they were not able to become and becoming is such a central aspect of my work."

Once he made the decision to change his concentration, there was a seismic shift in Litzenberger's academic and extracurricular life. He became a peer counseling coordinator, joined Yale's Sexual Harassment Board, coordinated a human sexuality class, and became a rape crisis counselor. He instantly knew he'd made the right decision because he felt it deep down.

"In the middle of that revelation, there's this realization that this is who I've always been, that there was a stepping onto a track that had already been a track," Litzenberger explains. "I often have this feeling that when we go through difficult experiences, we tend to want to shut the door behind us and move forward. In that moment of transition, I realized a door was opening and that it was a door back into younger versions of myself. That [predisposition] had always been there to think about how I can use who I am to help other people make the world a better place."

Litzenberger went on to earn a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan. During his doctoral training, he also completed a graduate certificate in women's studies, with a thesis that examined the ordination of women in the 1970s. His postdoctoral work included two years of trauma training. Since 1999, Litzenberger has worked in private psychology practice, initially focusing on adolescents before expanding his patient pool to individual adults and couples.

One of the most significant impacts of losing his sister, along with friends and mentors in the Mount Hood tragedy, was that it expanded Litzenberger's understanding of human resilience.

Through processing trauma, he realized he could tolerate things that were much harder than he believed possible, and that he could still be himself and be okay.

That lived experience informs how Litzenberger now works with patients in his Massachusetts-based practice. His belief in, "the power of each of us to change and craft a positive future," is intertwined with how Litzenberger conceptualizes therapy and life transitions. He refers back to the sense that "doors will open," that when something painful happens, it's important to acknowledge it, set it aside, and return to examine what happened. Expanding on the concept, Litzenberger uses the metaphor of a rotunda, featuring multiple doors, to explain that change is not a single doorway you walk through, but a process of entering a space full of possibilities. For patients, this means he assumes there are always more ways forward if they can feel safe, loved, and connected enough to be open. It's a space Litzenberger has found for himself over the years and a philosophy that informs his practice, where he encourages patients to explore, act, and engage.

"That's the whole thing," he says of getting patients to that place where they can access their full capacity and resilience. "We're all radically different from each other, so your version and my version of that won't look anything like each other. I need to figure out how to speak your language. I need to figure out how to work within your model. I need to figure out how I can understand what your story is so we can disentangle it."

Litzenberger connects the nurturing environment he's created in his practice to his OES experience, before and after the Mount Hood tragedy, noting that he learned to respond to people in crisis with both practical problem-solving and deep human connection. He was on campus when Alison died and learned of her passing via a phone call from his mother from Emmanuel Hospital. School psychologist Bonnie Stankey was there, and Litzenberger remembers that she physically held him as he received the news.

"I got up and walked out of the room and there were all these school people coming to support me," he says. "There's this blending and intersecting of the kind of love and support that I got through OES, that perspective that says we're going to think about what we need to do and then we're going to figure out how to do it. We're going to start with what needs to happen and then ask the question: 'How do we make things happen?' That was essential for me in getting through that moment."

Woven into his mission to help the people who seek his guidance is a deep sense of faith and spirituality, through which Litzenberger endeavors to understand people on a deeper level. Since 2018, he's explored that faith-based side by teaching spiritual formation classes, preaching, and pastoral work. He currently serves as a quarter-time interim minister for youth and families at an Episcopal church near his Massachusetts home. The integration of his church work and therapeutic practice have been shaped by his life experiences and formally pursued when he realized that studying psychology was an open door for him.

"I really believe mental health and being healthy—which also connects deeply spiritually for me—is about having full access to who you are as a human," he says, "being able to move freely between your thoughts and your feelings, so you have access to the entire dashboard of who you are. That then helps us navigate what's happening with full awareness. I see my job as trying to help people to become that."

After losing her daughter on Mount Hood, Caroline Litzenberger's life reflected determination, reinvention, and faith

by Jana F. Brown, Guest Writer

Reinvention was an integral part of Caroline Litzenberger's life story. Over the years, she pursued careers in information systems and academia and was called to the ministry, all with a fundamental determination driven by unwavering values that guided every major decision she made.

"When she bumped up against something that didn't fit," recalls her son, Brian Litzenberger '86, "she dismantled it and worked to create something that fit better with what she believed."

In a eulogy for his mother, delivered on Dec. 13, 2025, at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Portland, Brian shared some examples of how Caroline bumped up against those moments, noting that she did not see them as roadblocks, but as challenges. After graduating in 1964 as one of a minority of female students to earn a BS in mathematics from the University of Washington, Caroline spent the mid-60s and 70s working in computer programming and systems analysis with Boeing and the 1980s with the Port of Portland, where she helped to create handheld devices to track shipping into the port and personally trained the longshoreman on the docks how to use them.

"There were stories about people mistreating her and battles she had to fight," Brian says, "but she always had a very clear sense of what was right and what was wrong and she was going to be very strong about that."

In the midst of building that career, in the 1970s, Caroline and a friend ran a retreat in Oregon for women interested in the priesthood at a time when the Episcopal Diocese refused to welcome them into the clergy. But his mother, Brian shared at her memorial service, was there, "fighting for women's ordination in the Episcopal Church and co-chairing a conference for women in discernment in a diocese that refused to ordain them."

That spirit of fighting for women's rights and breaking glass ceilings was tested again after the death of Caroline's daughter Alison '88, who was one of nine OES community members who lost their lives in the Mount Hood climb tragedy in May 1986.

Brian spoke of his mother's fierce love for her children, and the impact of the loss on Caroline. "Part of her ferocity," he says, "was also to be very inside the lives of her kids. And I know that when Alison died, there was a piece of her that was ripped out of her body."

In the wake of that loss, Caroline once again met challenges instead of barriers. She pivoted from her information systems career and completed a master's degree in 1989 and a PhD in 1993. Her dissertation examined the origins of the English Reformation and

what role the non-ordained laypeople played in that process. She immersed herself in archival research methods, read historical wills, and conducted statistical analysis and modeling of the data, finding evidence that the Reformation was driven significantly by ordinary people.

Reflecting on her life after 1986 in a July 2024 letter to OES Head of School Michael Spencer, Caroline shared how the loss had shaped the ensuing years, including those major decisions to leave her established career, return to school, become a history professor and scholar, and eventually a member of the clergy.

"My life was changed forever," Caroline wrote. "Most fundamentally, through the trauma of the first few months after Alison's death, I discovered contemplative prayer. By the grace of God and with the help of countless friends and acquaintances, I left my career in information systems and became a historian. Along the way, I earned an MA in history at Portland State University and a PhD from the University of Cambridge. I then taught history for about 20 years, first at West Virginia University and then at Portland State University, before retiring at age 70. Also, while I was teaching at PSU, God, who had clearly called me to become a historian, called me to be an Episcopal priest."

After joining the faculty at Portland State University in 2002, Caroline published four books and dozens of articles. In sharing his memories of her, Brian emphasizes that his mother's scholarly work reflected her core values.

"She was interested in honoring and listening to the voices on the bottom, thinking about the people who have been excluded," Brian says, "thinking about folks who are not considered when we think about building systems and dispersing resources in the world. I think her career changes took her closer and closer to those kinds of questions."

Having grown up in the church, Caroline remained a lifelong member and participant, singing in the choir and serving as a lay leader in her home parishes, in the Diocese of Western Oregon, and beyond. Brian explains that her decision to become ordained in the Episcopal Church in 2004 was based in the people-centered faith that guided her to that point, noting that she was always questioning how faith and values translated into real human impact.

Shortly before her death on October 27, 2025, Caroline connected with Michael Spencer at OES once again. In a letter to the board of trustees after her passing, Spencer wrote about Caroline as a remarkable scholar, priest, and faithful person "whose ministry and leadership was a gift to many.

"For OES, she is also someone who endured the horrible tragedy of the Mount Hood climb in 1986, losing her daughter, Alison, in that event," Spencer wrote. "I had the opportunity to meet with Caroline last month so she could share her memories from that experience and also reflect on the way in which a new life for her rose out of that devastating loss and inspired her to pursue her studies as well as eventually become ordained in the Episcopal Church. It was a remarkable conversation, and one for which I am deeply grateful."

Laura Axon '86

by Karen Crandal, Director of Strategic Communications

Class of 1986 Member Committed to Service on Mount Hood Climb Observance Committee

As a southern Oregon native who moved to Portland to live in the dorms and attend OES for her high school years, Laura Axon has a deep connection to the 1986 Mount Hood climb story.

"I have very specific memories about everyone who went on that trip," she shared. Some of the memories are goofy, some are small, some are special, but all feel very important 40 years later, when recalling the end of her time as an Upper School student.

As the oldest child in a logging family, Laura spent her entire childhood living in very small rural towns. Before becoming a "dormie" at OES, she was attending a K-8 school in Toketee Falls, Oregon. The student population was so small that her teacher not only taught all three middle school grades but also worked as the custodian, bus driver, groundskeeper, and principal!

"The close-knit community in the OES dorms felt familiar to what I've always known," she said. Laura felt close to her fellow dormies on account of the community they formed together. "We had formal dinners once a month, weekly dorm meetings where we got our $10 a week allowance and clean sheets—the same clean sheets we used as tablecloths for the formal dinners. And, making cookies with our dorm mom Sue Jensen and learning about journalist H.L. Mencken through the huge collection of articles from dorm parent Jeff Hicks!"

When she left for high school, her parents were living in a 26-foot travel trailer so her dad could work on various logging jobs throughout Oregon. She loved living in a community of people from all over the world. "We had students from Iran, Japan, Spain, Thailand, and Singapore, but also from Oregon towns like Hood River and Bandon, various other cities in California such as Susanville, as well as Longview and Gig Harbor, Washington."

After high school, Laura went on to the University of Oregon in Eugene to study romance languages after falling in love with French while at OES. Early in her college years she also did a study-abroad year in France which she describes as "quite a culture shock" after her smaller school experiences.

"As I was applying for the opportunity to study abroad, I remember the interview committee asking me if I felt that my mental health was in a good enough place for such a new adventure, having just experienced the devastating loss of my friends on the Mount Hood Climb. That was the first time I recall anyone directly asking me how I was doing in light of having just left OES."

Though Laura carries with her the painful memories of how her time at the school ended in 1986, she has found great solace in alumni volunteer leadership over the years. When her children were very young, she began working on the Alumni Council (now known as the Alumni Leadership Circle) in 2011, then later ultimately serving in the role of president.

"In order to coordinate our schedules, we had to hold our council meetings very early at 7 a.m. so I usually needed to bring my children with me." Laura fondly remembers Dan Drinkward '95 who was leading the council at the time referring to their family presence in the room as "Laura & staff."

Then later, in 2015, she was asked by then-Head of School Mo Copeland to Chair the Mount Hood Climb Observance Committee, and was welcomed after an interview with committee members including The Rev. Phillip Craig. She was honored to play an active role in caring for the families and survivors impacted most by the tragedy. "I felt the presence of a higher power in the room at every single one of our meetings," she recalls. "It was so powerful to spend those meetings centering on the families, checking in on how they were doing, and sharing about our recent interactions with them."

She has also appreciated the opportunity to offer input on annual observance practices and to stay informed when media outlets have endeavored to tell the 1986 climb story in books, magazines, podcasts, and movies.

Laura is grateful that OES continues to create a space where climb families and survivors are prioritized and actively considered for their deep loss and life experience as a result of the tragedy. As a member of the small class of 1986, she is a friend to many of the siblings, children, and parents most deeply affected and appreciates the opportunity to stay in contact with those who survived.

Eleven years later, Laura still serves as the chair of the observance committee and sees this work as an inspiration in her own life as a mother and as a public school teacher. "I carry the lessons learned from this tragic event with me every day as I interact with my own children and students. It helps me be a better person. In any experience I have had at OES, then and now, love and community are always at the center."

Oregon Episcopal School

6300 SW Nicol Road | Portland, OR 97223
503-246-7771 | **oes.edu**

Please send OES the new mailing address if the addressee has established a new permanent residence.
Call 503-768-3180 or email development@oes.edu. Thank you.

Change Service Requested

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 334
Portland, OR

Where will your child thrive?

FIND OUT AT ONE OF OUR OPEN HOUSES NOVEMBER 4 OR 8 OR SCHEDULE A TOUR

Oregon Episcopal School

oes.edu/openhouse