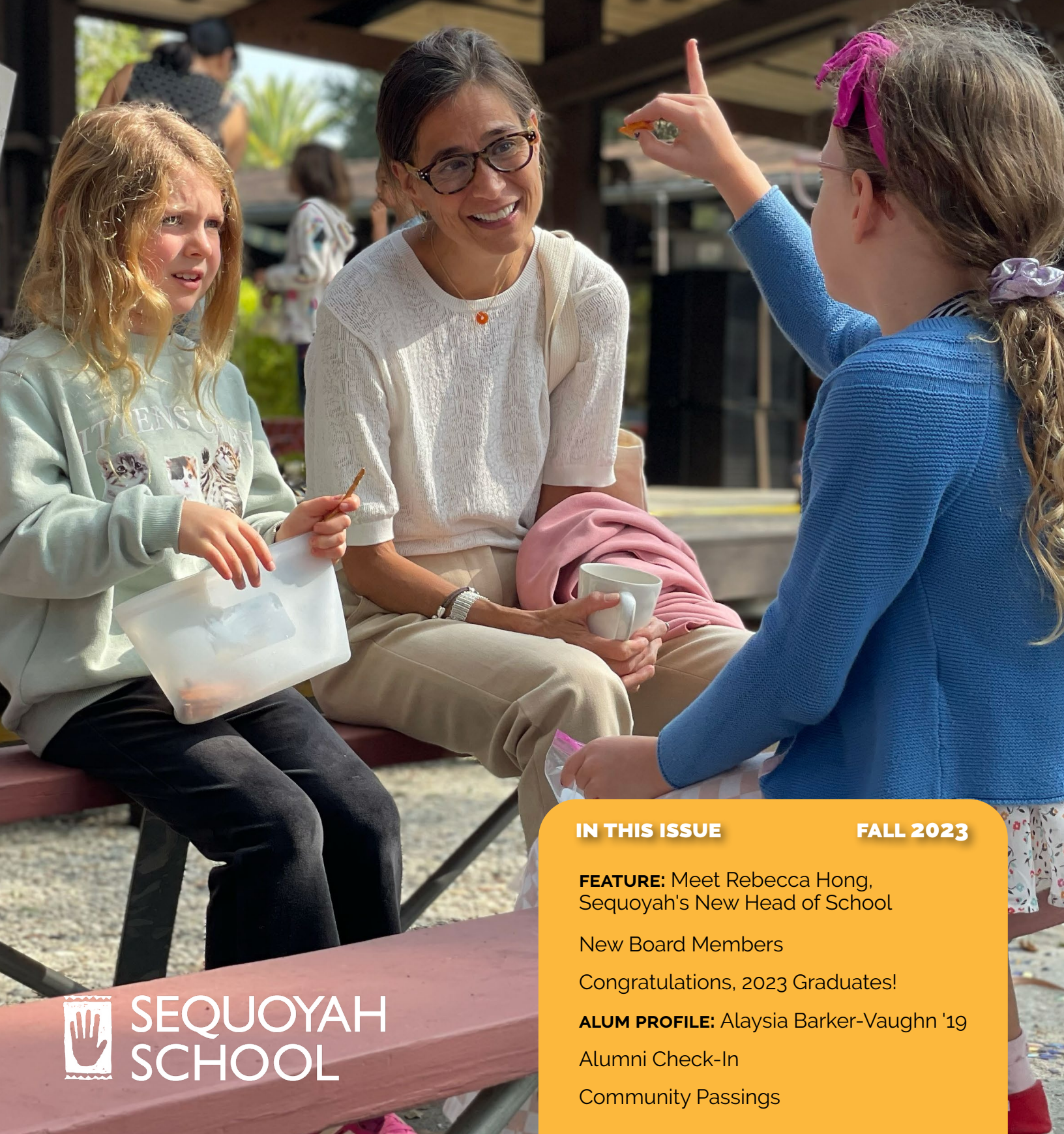


# Phoenix



## IN THIS ISSUE

FALL 2023

**FEATURE:** Meet Rebecca Hong,  
Sequoyah's New Head of School

New Board Members

Congratulations, 2023 Graduates!

**ALUM PROFILE:** Alaysia Barker-Vaughn '19  
Alumni Check-In

Community Passings



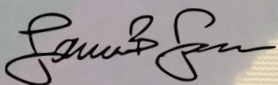
SEQUOYAH  
SCHOOL



Our students regularly see the dawning of new days in beautiful settings, both novel and familiar, through their Field Studies excursions. With fresh eyes they return to Sequoyah, often with slightly (or greatly) shifted perspectives. This year, our community together may experience shifted perspectives of Sequoyah — still the school we love and the culture we cherish, now led with the fresh eyes and full heart of Rebecca Hong, our new Head of School. It's the dawning of a new Sequoyah day, indeed.

Rebecca has arrived amid considerable momentum at Sequoyah and is poised to usher it boldly and strategically toward a new chapter of development as a K-12 school committed to exceptional teaching and dynamic learning. Her experience as an educator and expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion work will further galvanize the school's founding values with our future aspirations. We look forward to continuing to grow as an academic community that challenges the mind, nurtures the heart, and celebrates human dignity.

There is no expectation that Rebecca shoulder this work alone, and we are grateful for the remarkable contributions and collaboration of our students and families, faculty and staff, friends and neighbors in both our day-to-day and long-range efforts. Thank you, Sequoyah community, for your participation and partnership in the educational journey of our children. We could not do this without you.



Laura Gowen  
President, Board of Trustees







# *In Motion*

**New Head of School Rebecca Hong talks about her arrival at Sequoyah and how the school's progressive education model keeps her moving.**

By Matt Hutaff

Long-distance running was a valued place of reflection and quiet for Rebecca Hong. But hard pavement and gradual wear and tear made it less feasible when she moved to New York City, leaving her wondering what the next step should be.

So when her sister Rachel recommended cycling, a gear in her turned. "It was totally thrilling," Rebecca says. "I'd just left the Bay Area—which has some of the best cycling in the world—and decided to start riding in a place where cars get mad and the streets are narrow. But it was still so much fun, like being a kid again! The coolest thing was, accepting my limitations gave me the chance to discover a whole new way to move forward."





“

There's a reason  
that progressive  
education works,  
because kids are  
asked to think  
about the **why**.

**M**ovement, curiosity, and exploration are recurring themes throughout Hong's life. She relocated from Vermont to Stanford University for undergraduate studies and lived as a Fulbright Scholar in Argentina. As a professional, she taught at the University of Michigan, the Bush School in Seattle, and Lick Wilmerding High School in San Francisco before serving as Director of Institutional Equity at Spence School in New York. And while Hong may consider such travels nomadic, she set down deep roots in each place, working with and learning from her shared communities over many years.

"I thrive around educators and students who believe in the pursuit of knowledge together," she says. "I love exploring an educational space where teaching and learning are not based on rules and regulations alone, but on purpose and relevance. I believe those learning this way challenge the status quo and think big about what's possible."

That kind of experiential learning informs Hong's willingness to explore new concepts and shake up her context from time to time. One of the most formative events in her life came mid-career, when she and Rachel—whose own journey went from corporate law to farming and back to public service—researched and trained over six years toward the shared dream of opening a Jewish deli on the West Coast. The takeaways from that adventure still find ways to resonate.

"We had an amazing time learning a whole new industry," says Rebecca. "Even though it felt like a real zigzag as I was going through it, I now understand how useful that experience was. I understand collaboration differently. Teamwork is fundamental to running a restaurant, and understanding teamwork is a crucial part of how I work with people in schools now. Those things have deeply informed everything I do since."



Spring 2023, pictured l-r: 2022-2023 Interim Head of School Mike McGill, Board President Laura Gowen, Head of School Rebecca Hong, Assistant Head of School/K-8 Director Kim Diaz, High School Director Marc Alongi.

In returning to California and embracing her new role as head of school, Hong sees Sequoyah as a major player in reorienting the conversation around progressive education, and education in general. For her, the distinctive education offered by the school since 1958 is becoming an even greater “cultural match” for what the world needs: good people serving as community stewards who can address today’s complex issues.

“We offer a program for students that helps them practice knowing their own motivations and invites them to seek relevance in what they are learning,” says Hong. “By the time they begin their own journey beyond Sequoyah, they know how to work with other people, are not afraid to face questions they don’t immediately have answers to—and are excited by the prospect!—and can leverage their skills while knowing themselves deeply as individuals.

“I got all the way to my 30s before understanding I didn’t know what I wanted, or why. I had to restart assessing all the things Sequoyah kids start considering from a very young age. That’s why this is such a special place; it helps students to tap into their own curiosity, keep them focused on moving forward, support them in gaining real perspective, and do good work.”

For Rebecca, seeing Sequoyah students embrace the mission and ethos of the school is worth the move. “They are allowed to take risks,” she says. “They’re allowed to not do the right thing at every turn, and use ‘failure’ moments as opportunities. They’re excited to learn. They want to learn. They want to learn from each other. And they are therefore kind to each other. It’s a pretty great place for all those reasons.



"There's a reason progressive education works, because kids are asked to think about the **why**. What are they doing, and why? What are they learning, and why? What do they want to be doing, and why?"

With the fall semester underway, Hong continues to make herself available to students so she can talk with them and hear what they have to say about how Sequoyah works best. She also hopes to travel with various Field Studies trips this year to familiarize herself with one of the school's most iconic programs.

Hong is still acclimating to her new home in Southern California, finding the best hiking and biking routes she can, sampling local cuisine, and finding time to see friends and family. The sheer amount of things to see and do around Los Angeles inspires her to remember that, no matter how much she loves what she does, there are other worlds beyond school.

"Let your curiosity take you where it makes sense," she concludes. "If you really listen—and learn to listen to yourself—you'll find yourself in places that feel purposeful and fun. Let those kinds of ways of decision-making be part of your process, and you'll find yourself in the right community, doing the right work."



# WHY I

## Erin Bates

Lead Teacher  
Nest (3rd/4th)

Teaching at Sequoyah means being part of an incredible community.

I love that I get to know my students as whole people, and to be part of their lives in a significant way. I feel so lucky to teach at a school where I'm supported to create a curriculum that is meaningful and exciting for the kids, while focusing on their social and emotional well being. I love that colleagues here feel like family. We support each other and care deeply about the community.

As a teacher at Sequoyah, I get to introduce my students to special traditions (most of which I took part in as a kid!), support them to make lifelong friendships, take them camping, learn with them, share my life with them, and watch them grow up. It's a joy.

## Eric Libicki

High School Mathematics

There is so much authenticity in working with the students. I can both have and hear conversations that do not revolve around grades. The students are achieving what they do because that's the level they want to achieve, not because everybody around them is forcing them to a standard.

There are clubs solely for the passion of that club and not focused on just picking something as a resume builder. I get to be part of a classroom with tremendous flexibility. If we need more time to discuss a topic, we have it. I do not feel controlled/required to be at a certain place in the curriculum each day.

There is so much friendliness at every level, from students to co-workers. I don't feel like I need to prove myself for years before being accepted. It feels so easy to get to know so many people here in such a short time. This place is special!

# TEACH at SEQUOYAH

## Laura Medley

Lead Teacher  
Out Back (5th/6th)

I love teaching at Sequoyah for many reasons. I love the moments when we gather in a circle together and have an important discussion — admiring how willing the kids are to share, to listen, to be vulnerable. I love the authentic relationships I get to enjoy with students — how they come in early and stay after class just to chat. I love that I get to be in a classroom bursting with creativity. When I get to plant a small seed—share an idea, a question, or, my favorite: a book!—and watch them immediately think of all the ways they are going to apply their skills and connect what they are learning to their life. All of these things, and more, bring me so much joy as a teacher at Sequoyah.

## Marisol Pérez

High School Spanish  
Department Chair &  
Co-Director of Diversity,  
Equity, and Inclusion

I am a creator at heart! At Sequoyah it's a joy to co-design meaningful learning experiences with students, parents, and colleagues that honor what everyone can contribute to our community.

Whether it's teaching Street Food, Spanish, or Latinx Women Writers, I take students to galleries, community centers, and museums to apply their learning in real world contexts. I also invite directors, artists, and entrepreneurs into my classroom for intellectual exchange. These experiences are a big part of why I teach at Sequoyah, and my teaching practice has grown so much in my time here.

# No place like it.

No place I'd rather be teaching.

— **Peter Romano**  
Lead Teacher  
Over There (5th/6th)



## Faculty Compensation Endowment

Make a gift today!

.....

The Faculty Compensation Endowment supports Sequoyah's commitment to the art and value of teaching, which is at the heart of the school's mission.

Your contribution will grow the endowment's capacity and impact, always directly benefiting teachers and encouraging them to build their careers at Sequoyah.

**Generations of our students will benefit from this legacy as it honors and celebrates Sequoyah's passionate, deeply caring teacher/role models.**

Click [here](#) for more information and to make a gift online.

Thank you!

# with gratitude

Five of the school's long-standing trustees termed off during or at the end of the 2022-2023 school year:

Helga Eike  
Stacey Mann  
Susie North  
Gwen Owens  
Brian Wilson

Sequoyah School is grateful for their nine years of leadership and guidance during your tenure on the Board of Trustees!

## Board of Trustees

2023-2024

Laura Gowen, *President*  
Joyce Ybarra, *Vice President*  
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Nicole Rabaudi  
Debra Suh  
Carolina Valle  
Renee Dake Wilson

For board member bios, visit  
[sequoyahschool.org/trustees](https://sequoyahschool.org/trustees).

# MEET SEQUOYAH'S NEWEST Trustees



**Erin Beck Acain (she/her)**  
**Community Member**

Erin is an entrepreneur and systems engineer who applies her skills to optimizing processes for large-scale programs. As Founder of Wana Family Network, she developed a cooperative childcare platform serving 30,000 families with "free babysitting!" and providing "family-forward" workplace care benefits for major universities. As a Dragon Mission Director at SpaceX who also led the the control room for spacecraft operations, Erin spearheaded automation of those operations for increased reliability and sustainability. Erin loves the creative and industrious energy of LA and believes in giving back to the city that mentored her; she has served on the boards of Innovate Pasadena and the Cal State Dominguez Hills Innovation Incubator and originated the Family Track of Glendale Tech Week. A lifelong educator, Erin has taught scuba, improv theatre, and gymnastics, and presently enjoys substitute teaching preschoolers at Northeast LA Forest School. She holds a degree in Engineering Physics from Washington University in St. Louis.



**Waleed Ibrahim (he/him)**  
**Current Parent**

Waleed has more than 20 years of corporate finance and accounting experience in a variety of industries in both private and public companies. He began his career at PricewaterhouseCoopers focused on its technology, information, communications, and entertainment sector. More recently, Waleed consults, serving interim executive financial roles, handling mergers and acquisitions due diligence, post-acquisition integration, debt restructuring, and implementing technical accounting guidance. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Southern California. Prior to joining the Board, Waleed was active in development at the Children's Center at Caltech and Sequoyah, where he co-chaired the auction committee. He has one child currently attending Sequoyah's K-8.





**Ed Knell '82 (he/him)**  
**Alum, Current & Past Parent**

Ed is a Professor of Anthropology with a specialty in Archaeology in the Division of Anthropology at California State University, Fullerton. His research focuses on the early Native American inhabitants of California's Mojave Desert, and uses the analysis of stone tools (among other means) to learn how these past peoples organized their lifeways. Though Ed began his schooling at Sequoyah in the 1970s, he has since moved on to earn a BA from the University of Colorado, MA from the University of Wyoming, and PhD from Washington State University. He attributes his successes in part to the early, "wild" days at Sequoyah and is delighted to give back as a member of the Board of Trustees. Both of his children, not to mention both brothers, several nieces and nephews, graduated from or currently attend Sequoyah.



**Debra Suh (she/her)**  
**Past Parent**

Debra worked for nonprofit organizations for over three decades to build a safer and more equitable society. As the executive director of the Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF), an organization founded to support survivors of domestic and sexual violence in the immigrant Asian/Pacific Islander community, she addressed the intersections of gender and racial/ethnic inequity for over 23 years. Prior to joining CPAF, she worked at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles where she established the Asian Unit to increase Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants' access to legal service and representation. Debra serves on the board of the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence and California Office of Emergency Services Domestic Violence Advisory Council. She is the mother of a graduate from Sequoyah's high school.



**Nicole Rabaudi '87 (she/her)**  
**Alum, Past Parent**

Nicole has over 25 years of experience across the fields of film production, curriculum development and mental health. She is currently serving as a consultant to Centro de Niños, a low income child development center in East Los Angeles. Nicole has served the communities of Citrus College, Burbank schools and families in East Los Angeles through her work as a Marriage and Family Therapist. She received her master's degree at Pacific Oaks College and a bachelor's degree from California College of the Arts. Previous to her work in mental health, she worked in television and film production at Lucasfilm, DreamWorks Animation, and CNET Television. As an advocate focused on diversity and equity, Nicole serves as Vice Chair of the Alumnae Board at Westridge School and is a long-time member of the Diversity Committee at Sequoyah. Nicole is a Sequoyah alum and her son is a Sequoyah high school graduate of the Class of 2023.



**Renee Dake Wilson (she/her)**  
**Current & Past Parent**

Renee Dake Wilson is an architect activist creating homes, institutional buildings and communities throughout Southern California neighborhoods. Renee received her Bachelor of Architecture degree from Cornell University in 1992, and is a licensed architect in CA and CO. In 2002 she and her husband Brian co-founded Dake Wilson Architects, a small architecture firm with an environmental focus. A leader of numerous professional and civic organizations with a focus on equity and the environment, Renee seeks the open collaboration and exchange of ideas that comes from working with diverse interest groups. As a Sequoyah parent since 2007, she focuses her volunteer time primarily on facilities and sustainability, and recently co-chaired the Head of School hiring committee. Renee lives in Los Feliz with her husband, one Sequoyah high school student, two Sequoyah grads now in college, and dog Fin. She enjoys cheering on the Angel City Football Club, knitting in meetings, and is always training for some sort of running event because she loves seeing LA from new perspectives.



At the 8th grade graduation ceremony in June 2023, students gave heartfelt, poignant speeches about their time at Sequoyah. Below are a few excerpts that capture common themes shared about their experiences at the K-8 from students whose time at the school span two to nine years.

"When people ask me what is so special about Sequoyah, I always say they don't just teach us how to read and write and multiply numbers, **they teach you how to be a good person.**"

— Luciana —

"I haven't been at Sequoyah as long as most of my peers, but you wouldn't realize this is only my third year.

I never felt like the new kid.

The way you're treated here... makes you feel like you belong and have been here forever."

— Arlen —

"Every teacher at this school is devoted to helping each of us learn while being engaged and interested. **You all put in the effort and time to get to know every student personally.**"

— Clementine —

"Sequoyah is my home.  
YOU are all my home."

— Hart —

"Backpacking at the Grand Canyon was probably one of the greatest experiences of my life and I would never have done it without Sequoyah.

I think that goes for a lot of things...  
**Sequoyah has helped me to grow in so many different ways and step out of my comfort zone."**

— Truman —

**"Sequoyah has taught me to be a deeper thinker,**  
a thinker about history and narrative."

— Morris —



# CONGRATULATIONS, 8th Graders!



Today, we are here together to celebrate not just the completion of a small but significant chapter in our students' lives, but also the beginning of a new and exciting journey. **It is with deep pride and joy that I stand before you surrounded by individuals who have embodied the true spirit of Sequoyah.** Individuals who challenge the mind, nurture the heart, and celebrate human dignity.

— Kim Diaz  
Assistant Head of School/K-8 Director

Clementine Adams  
Zowen Ajemian  
Anika Anant  
Oliver Andrews  
Arlen Barber  
Ila Rae Brookshire  
Quinn Calof  
Astrid Conder  
Edie Coye  
Barnaby Douglas  
Fanny Freeland  
Truman George  
Morris Goldman  
Nico Moon Gurewitz  
Loella Kleiner  
Hart LippSmith  
Luca Lombardi  
Luciana Longhi  
Jenna Nouri  
Eleanor Payne  
Arty Peretti  
Yoshi Peretti  
Haydn Phillips  
Ivory Pierce  
Ghost Raymond  
Murray Stern  
Irene Xue





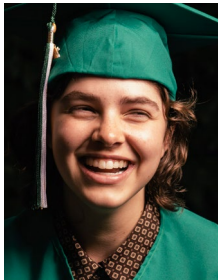
# CONGRATULATIONS, Class of 2023!



**Gloria Aguilar**  
George Washington University



**Mackey Bishop**  
California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt



**Anna Bluestone**  
University of California, Santa Cruz



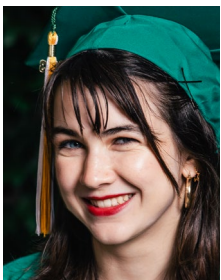
**Adrian Crick**  
Spelman College



**John Deverell**  
Colorado State University, Fort Collins



**Charlotte Dumont**  
Parsons Paris at The New School



**Lana Fleischli**  
Bard College



**Alex Forman**  
University of California, Berkeley



**Roan Fraser**  
Parsons School of Design at The New School



**Oskar Golwala**  
University of California, Berkeley



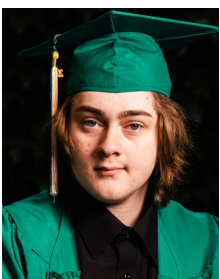
**Leah Haveson**  
Skidmore College



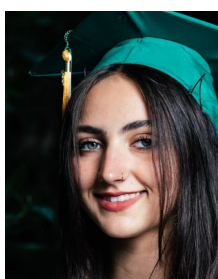
**Julia Hoffman**  
Vassar College



**Dahlia Kim Levy**  
Parsons School of Design at The New School



**Joaquin KirkDacker**  
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona



**Harlow Lehman Rhoads**  
University of San Francisco



**Simone Listiak**  
Lewis & Clark College

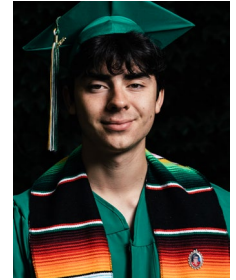
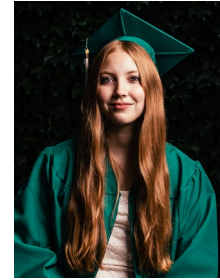


**Penn Neubert**  
Ithaca College



**Tiffany Otsubo**  
Art Center College of Design

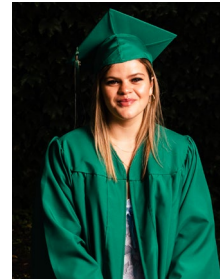
**Ruby Park**  
Pitzer College



**Maria Paz Posada**  
Vassar College

**Max Rabaudi**  
Princeton University

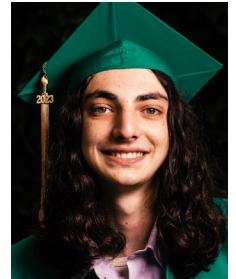
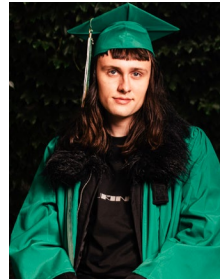
**Ethan Rios**  
Purdue University



**Ana Robl**  
Southern Methodist University

**Penn Schneider**  
Amherst College

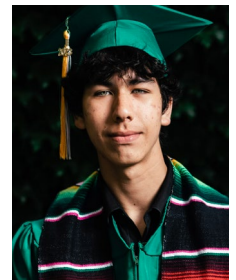
**Greta Simpson**  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo



**Ulysses Spencer**  
Massachusetts College of Art and Design

**Axel Stash**  
University of California, San Diego

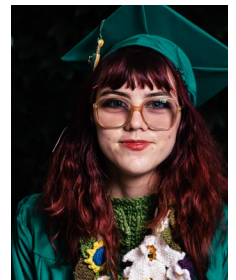
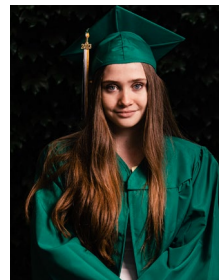
**Owen Thomason**  
Beloit College



**Odinn Thordarson**  
Lees-McRae College

**Nicolas Vallejo**  
Penn State University, University Park

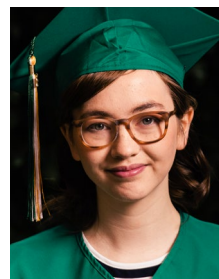
**Brooke Waller**  
AMDA College of the Performing Arts, Los Angeles



**Cooper Westphal**  
University of California, Santa Cruz

**Collette Wilson**  
University of California, Berkeley

**Sofie Wilson**  
Lancaster University



**Talani Wilson**  
The New School

**Nathan Yoo**  
Loyola Marymount University

## ALUM PROFILE

# Alaysia Barker-Vaughn '19



When Alaysia was 16 years old, she transferred schools and set foot on a newly minted Sequoyah high school campus. After attending a large public high school in Bakersfield for 9th and 10th grades, it was a dramatic change. "It was really clear I was just a number there," said Alaysia. "And now here I was at this tiny high school. It was unbelievable to be at a place where there was so much intention to know us, let us be who we were, and explore what we were interested in. The environment at Sequoyah—where students are nurtured—really launched me on my path forward."

Prior to attending Sequoyah, Alaysia spent a period of time in the Los Angeles County foster care system, which was a difficult, life-changing experience. Emerging from the upheaval of that chapter in her life, she was determined to channel her trauma in a direction that would help others in the foster system, but she didn't yet know how. Sequoyah's, Social Innovation Program (SIP) helped her name her purpose. "I knew Sequoyah was special, but then there was SIP, and that was next level," she recalls. "SIP taught me about advocacy: what it is, why it's important, and that it starts with you." The foundation SIP provided helped her to shape her pursuit of this work, already bubbling up within — it helped her to look at a large, overwhelming system in need of reform and understand that, in order to make change, you have to start somewhere. But not just anywhere; beyond spreading awareness, SIP taught Alaysia about action.

"When I was in the system," she says, "no one said anything to me about college or about considering my future. So I started there." Alaysia directed her SIP efforts toward developing a program to identify and support students in foster care interested in preparing for and pursuing a college degree. During her senior year, Alaysia began Spark Your Future, a nonprofit organization developed from her SIP work. Partnering with the Pasadena Unified School District, Spark Your Future provided mentorship, educational resources, and workshops for youth in the LA County foster care system on navigating the college admissions process.

Alaysia continued this work into her college experience at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in fall 2019 with plans to explore how to integrate her nonprofit's work at the university to increase the school's incoming foster youth population. She became a mentor for the Guardian Scholars Program, which provides resources, services, and



support to meet the unique needs of former and current foster youth, emancipated minors, homeless and independent students. But the COVID pandemic brought everything to a halt in spring 2020 and changes in LMU's Guardian Scholars Program made it impossible to host prospective students on campus to engage them in the process. So Alaysia switched gears, leaned into using Spark Your Future as the conduit for action, recruited peers at LMU to participate as mentors, and together, supported five high school seniors through the application process, entirely over Zoom – all of whom were accepted to college in fall 2021.

Leadership, service, and faith have been hallmarks of Alaysia's college experience and continue to drive her forward. In addition to her work in the Guardian Scholars Program, she was a program coordinator for four years in The Learning Community at LMU, supporting the success of first-year students of African descent; a resident advisor during her junior and senior years; and a student leader in LMU's Campus Ministry Ignacio Companions Program for immersion trips serving communities in Alaska and Jamaica. "I never stopped doing SIP work while I was in college — with Spark and in other ways too. SIP is in my blood. Thank you, RJ!"

This past May, Alaysia graduated from LMU, earning her bachelor's degree in Political Science with minors in African-American Studies and Theology. During her college career, Alaysia received the Raymunde McKay Award for Service and Leadership; the Arrupe Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award; and the Learning Community Outstanding Senior Award. She also was named LMU's Newman Civic Fellow for Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities dedicated to higher education civic and community engagement. Member institutions may only select one student per year, nominated by the college or university president, to be awarded the fellowship.

Alaysia continues to find purpose in service and social justice efforts. "I'm currently a program manager for an organization called the Social Impact Firm, which is pretty much about bringing SIP into businesses, nonprofits, and schools to promote social change through collaboration," she explains. This fall, she is excited to move to Hawaii for a few months to pursue faith-based work through community collaborations and service. Looking ahead, Alaysia sees law school in her future, and the pursuit of family or education law as a potential path to deepen her advocacy for youth in foster care systems.

When asked about any advice she might share with Sequoyah students, Alaysia paused. "You know, I think advice is like service; it should be directed and specific to the needs of the population."

“

The environment at Sequoyah — where students are nurtured — really launched me on my path forward.

*\*RJ Sakai has been Sequoyah's Director of Social Innovation at the high school since 2017.*

# GRYPHON alumni CHECK IN

In addition to the notes that follow which have been shared by individuals and families, these are some of the things we've heard our alums have accomplished **in the past year.**

Please let us know what you or others have been up to so we can celebrate the accomplishments in your lives, communities, and wider world!

Send notes and update your contact information by contacting Alumni Coordinator Sarah Gossage, [sgossage@sequoyahschool.org](mailto:sgossage@sequoyahschool.org).

## Congratulations!

### **Sula Bermudez-Silverman '07**

Featured artist in the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A. 2023: Acts of Living* biennial exhibition highlighting the practices of artists working throughout the Greater Los Angeles area

### **Andrea Bizarro '21**

UC Davis Ted Bradshaw Student Scholar

### **Cleo Bluthenthal '20**

David G. Sandberg Award for Campus Leadership  
John Hopkins Office of Dean of Student Life

### **Phoebe Bridgers '09**

Named one of *TIME* magazine's 2023 Women of the Year

### **Tarik Garrett '02**

PhD candidate at Harvard University and featured artist in UC Irvine's "Affective Resistance," a multi-media art show that brings together eight artists focused on the complex histories of oppression

### **Danny Parker 1964-68**

Chair, Pasadena Reconnecting Communities Advisory Group

### **Sammy Potter '22**

Research Assistant ROC-HCI Lab, University of Rochester

### **Ozzy Simpson '20**

Outstanding Sophomore Award  
Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society  
George Washington University

### **Julian Suh-Toma '21**

President, Yale College Council

save the dates

## GRYPHON alumni UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Home for the Holidays FOR COLLEGE-AGE ALUMS**

Reconnect with college-age alums over tacos and a friendly game of Capture the Flag.

**Saturday, January 6, 2024**  
2-4 p.m. • K-8 Campus

### **Reunion for HS Founding Classes**

Sequoyah School's Board of Trustees invites our founding Classes of 2019 and 2020 to your first high school reunion dinner.

**Saturday, June 22, 2024**  
6:30 p.m. • High School Campus



Sequoyah past parent (of **Maya Almaraz '97**) and artist **Carlos Almaraz** was posthumously awarded the 2023 Cesar Chavez Foundation Legacy Award for his contributions to the work of Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers Union. At the ceremony this spring at The Biltmore Los Angeles, mayor Karen Bass had wonderful stories to share about her time with Carlos as cultural activists in the 1970s. Artist Elsa Flores Almaraz, Carlos' wife and Maya's mother, accepted the award. The documentary film, *Carlos Almaraz: Playing With Fire*, is available to stream on Netflix. His works are also featured at The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture in Riverside and have been included at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art scheduled to open in 2025 at Exposition Park in LA. (Pictured below, left to right: Carlos Almaraz with Cesar Chavez, the Legacy Award statuette, Elsa accepting the award, and Maya with Cheech Marin.)



After several years of working on the California Climate Change Initiative out of UC Davis, **Maya Almaraz '97** accepted a position at Princeton University and now lives in Philadelphia. She commutes to the lab at Princeton and is working on Food Systems and how they affect climate change. She is also currently working on a documentary film on the subject. She was recently asked to interview for a permanent professorship at Stanford University which would bring her back to California, which she would greatly welcome. This would allow her to stay put, be closer to family and friends, teach, research and create her own lab instead of searching for science grants every couple of years. Fingers crossed.



**Siena Apodaca '24** writes, "After all the accomplishments I have achieved in the ballet world for the past four years, one would assume that the obvious choice of a career would be a dancer. This is not the case, because my lifelong dream and passion is to become a doctor and to help others. I have always been a compassionate person and have never shied away from helping a friend or any person overcome a difficult challenge or even guiding them through an emotional time. So, during this past year, I decided to move towards my burning hunger to help others and I started 'The Ubuntu Education Fund.' Ubuntu is the African philosophy of 'I am what I am because of who we all are,' which is something I first learned about in my early years at Sequoyah. I cannot help to think I have had the most privileged education and that my entire life will stem from it, whereas some children don't get to follow their passion merely because they don't have access to education. This vision all started over a conversation with my grandfather from South Africa about the value of money and what the US dollar can buy in South Africa. It was in that moment that I realized I could have a major impact on some children's lives in Africa. 'The Ubuntu Education Fund' helps children in South Africa with their school fees, uniforms, and school supplies. I contacted all the families who worked in my grandfather's store and had each child send a video recording of what their dream life would look like if they could go to school. The most surprising lesson was that most of their dreams did not consist of world travel and sports cars, but rather to become specialized so that they were able to help their community, hence the Ubuntu philosophy runs strong. Sharon, a high schooler, has a dream of becoming a doctor; Natasha, a middle schooler, wants to learn about the soil so that she can become a better farmer and provide food for her community. 10-year-old Enoch would like to be a builder, so that he can build a home for

his family. So far, I have raised \$2,000 and offered these three students a one-year full scholarship, including their school uniform and supplies. We were even able to help Enoch enroll in a local private school, where I have committed to pay for his fees until he graduates. I try to support them as much as I can with very limited internet access to help them with their math and other academic needs. My goal is to help more and more children throughout South Africa to have access to better schools. As I reflect on my high school journey at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, I feel deeply motivated, excited, and proud. The Dominican pillars are Faith, Integrity, and Service, I believe that these were the virtues I carried with me from the first day I climbed up on the structure in Bamboo to my final camping trip in 8th grade and led our class to the top of the Grand Canyon."

**Miles Ganon Arney '97** is living in Eagle Rock and working in marketing for music publisher Warner Chappell. He recently revisited Joshua Tree and Baja California Sur (to celebrate the birthday of **Maya Almaraz '97**), places that bring up fond memories of his Sequoyah camping days. In



Joshua Tree, he and his longtime girlfriend Shannon Green were enjoying some remote boulder scrambling and got separated—far enough apart they couldn't hear each other shout. After a somewhat tense five minutes they reunited and Miles realized that while they were wearing hats and had plenty of water in their canteens, they had neglected to bring whistles. They won't be making that mistake again! (Yes, they had bandanas.)



**Erin Bates '04**, current Sequoyah teacher, and her wife Rikki Johnson welcomed River Joseph Bates-Johnson on September 24, 2020, and Arlen Conway Bates-Johnson on May 11, 2023. River and Arlen are looking forward to being Sequoyah students in the near future!



**Andrea Bizarro '21** writes, "I am entering my third year at UC Davis as a Community and Regional Development major and a Geographic Information Systems minor. This past year I have been working in the UC Davis AB 617 Research Team, monitoring the progress of the assembly bill's implementation in different regions of California. Along with that, I have been honored to be named a Bradshaw Scholar under UC Davis' Center for Regional Change. This past summer, I worked with the California Policy Lab as a Summer Institute Research Fellow. I am really excited to have many opportunities to pursue my passion for research and policy work these past couple of years!"

**Jason Chuan '70** writes, "Aloha from Molokai. Our full time move to our home on Molokai has been one of those epic life markers. **Chloe Chuan '26** definitely misses her first home and friends, but Jane and I are proud of how she has navigated gaining her new and growing circle here on Molokai."



**Gabe Dahl '02** celebrated his 10th year at Sequoyah, teaching P.E. to 5th and 6th graders and working in the Over There and Out Back classes. As a coach, he won a couple more championships - junior high basketball and the high school's first-ever league championship with the all-gender soccer team last fall. During the 2023-24 school year, he moves into a new role as Assistant Director of Athletics. While his responsibilities now include supporting the growth of the K-12 Athletics program, Gabe will continue teaching P.E. at the K-8 and coaching.





**Laura Derr '04** started her acupuncture practice Oak Song Acupuncture and Wellness in 2020. She is back from maternity leave after having her son, Sky, in March of this year and is working part time in the Pasadena/Altadena area. Laura discovered the benefits of acupuncture to help cope with stress as a high school student and is now so grateful to be able to provide this healing modality to others. She is especially passionate about the preventative power of this medicine—treating stress and anxiety, boosting the immune system, and balancing the body. Laura also specializes in supporting folks through pregnancy and postpartum. She would be overjoyed to work with Sequoyah community members of all ages in her practice. Visit [oaksongacupuncture.com](https://oaksongacupuncture.com) for more information.

**Felecia Davis '71** had her work featured in a 2021 exhibition at MoMA in New York City called [Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America](#). The exhibition was a catalyst for her involvement as a founding board member of the [Black Reconstruction Collective](#), which was formed to support artists, scholars and designers working on design topics that produce new knowledge about the Black diaspora. She is principal of Felecia Davis Studio and an associate professor at Pennsylvania State University and is the Director of SOFTLAB@PSU.

**Isabella Faith '12** graduated in May 2020 from the University of Puget Sound (UPS) with a B.A. in Comparative Politics and Religion. Throughout her time at UPS, she was a stage manager for the Theater Department, an advocate for survivors of sexual assault and harassment as a Peer Ally, member and event planner for Pi Beta Phi sorority, Director of Programming for the Panhellenic Executive Council, two-term Popular Entertainment Programmer for the Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound, and a volunteer tutor with the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound in the Tacoma women's prison. As a result of her involvement, she won the 2020 Greek Life Member of the Year award,

the Religion Department's Darrell Reeck Award, and Pi Beta Phi's National Amy Burnham Onken Award for Outstanding Scholarship and Campus & Community Leadership.



**Soren Fey '25** is a junior at Poly (graduated from Sequoyah K-8 in 2021). He spent this past summer at the Center for Space Research on the campus of The University of Texas at Austin working with NASA scientists on their Mars Exploration team. Last summer, he conducted astrophysics research at Caltech specializing in near-Earth asteroids while also participating in an observational astronomy research program with the UCLA Physics & Astronomy Department studying Wolf-Rayet stars.



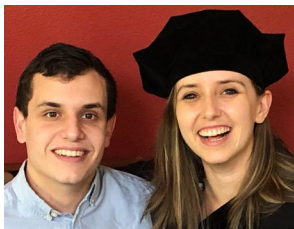
**Solaar KirkDacker '20** continues her dedication and fierce commitment to equity and justice, which started at an early age from attending Sequoyah. She is passionately advocating for equal pay for female professors at Vassar during her senior year this fall. Solaar organized a group that rallied fellow students (*pictured, left*) to show their support and demand equity for their professors. It's inspiring to see the impact that a Sequoyah education makes and how that instills a sense that young people can be a part of positive transformation.



**Harper McDowell '20** writes, "As a third year student, focusing on biology and ecology, with a minor focus on drawing, Bennington College has been a great fit. Academic life includes studies in Ornithology, Geology, and Conservation Ecology. The six-week Field Work term was complicated during Covid, but second year the six weeks in Prague as a melanoma research assistant in a microbiology lab was great. Third year Field Work Term



was spent working long, cold winter days on a beautiful biodynamic farm taking care of livestock and the land in the upper Hudson Valley. Chess Club, Outdoors Club, winter-igloo building, plays, concerts, amazing visiting lecturers, movies, beautiful walks and hikes, the garlic festivals, the National Skipping Stone Tournament, a little skiing, adding to my vinyl collection, lake swimming, Moon-fest and Sun-fest, cooking and house barbecues with my girlfriend and housemates, weekend trips to Montreal and NYC, Sun-fest and Moon-fest, house parties and dorm pranks are some of what make up college life at Bennington. One more year to go!"



As an undergraduate at Stanford, **Maia Mossé '05** was Director of the QuestBridge Medical Vertical, identifying and creating national scholarship magnets for bright, talented

low-income high school juniors with a trajectory for top colleges by communicating closely with key medical philanthropic individuals, corporations, and national foundations. Additionally, Maia spearheaded efforts to consolidate information on the premedical process into a comprehensive online resource, while leading Premedical Career Pathway Research (PCPR). She also co-founded the Happiness Science Research Team, a student group creating a central online resource for research on positive psychology. Before graduating, Maia was awarded a Fulbright for research, training community workers to provide Diabetes education in Spanish in Honduras to patients in inaccessible areas. After graduating from Stanford Medical School, Maia continued as a Stanford Internal Medicine Resident Physician and served as Physician Director of [Be A Good Doctor](#), a nonprofit incubator growing the next generation of social entrepreneurs. She served as their Executive Director for the four years prior. In September, she joined The Village Doctor (TVD) in Woodside, CA (15 minutes north of Stanford) as a Concierge Primary Care Physician. Alongside daily meditation and workouts, she enjoys staying in regular touch with Sequoyah childhood and Westridge high school friends, as well as her ample extended family. She is pictured her with her brother **Milan Mossé '11** at her "hooding" at medical school.



**Lianna Xiaokui Nakashima '10:** After graduating from UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) double majoring in Art and Dance while minoring in Multimedia Communication,

Lianna worked in various fields of marketing and event planning jobs. Ultimately, she found her passion in wedding photography, starting her own business, LXXN Photography, in 2014 during her first year at UCSB. After photographing hundreds of weddings, Lianna's excited to celebrate her engagement with her fiancé, Andrew Soriano, whom she met at UCSB.



**Hadley Radt '05** gave birth to daughter Emma on February 8th, making her a first-time mother, while also making Sequoyah teacher, Jeff Radt, a first-time grandfather.



**Sarah Vernallis '11** starts the fifth year of her Berkeley philosophy PhD program in the fall, and has been teaching all but her first two semesters. As the TA for 50 students she hopes to channel

her encouraging Sequoyah teachers who nurtured her intellectual curiosity and excitement! Writing comments on student papers gives her great appreciation for the rich end-of-year reports written by her Sequoyah teachers! On semester breaks or long weekends, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her spouse, Peter, who is as game for overnight backpacks and trail runs as she is. (Pictured: Sarah and Peter at Petra, Jordan.)



**Selina Yang '20** writes: "I am a senior majoring in Astrophysics at Columbia University. Fascinated by the velvety night sky dressed with diamond stars, I found

astrophysics to be an elegant and rigorous attempt to answer some of the most romantic questions about our

# Community Passings

origin and the world that made us possible. During my college time, I am thrilled to be able to connect to a community of like-minded peers when I served as the president (and currently, the senior advisor) of Blueshift, the Columbia astronomy club. I also actively find opportunities to be closer-knit to the broader community. To share my enthusiasm about the universe, I take part in organizing the departmental public lecture series that offers the New York community a chance to appreciate the night sky. I also serve as a group leader volunteering for the Reading Team Math literacy program. This summer, I got a research grant from the Columbia College Summer Funding Program to work to advance my understanding of the universe in the field of gravitational wave research as a research intern at the Columbia Experimental Gravity Group. More specifically, I aim to investigate triple-body compact object (blackholes, neutron stars) merger detections. In addition, I will conduct various data quality and instrument checks for the LIGO detectors. To explore my interests in more subfields of Astrophysics, I will also be working on research exploring binary systems that might produce Lithium-rich red giant stars. (Pictured: Selina with her research advisor and team member at the LIGO Livingston detector in January 2023.)

## Ady Barkan '95

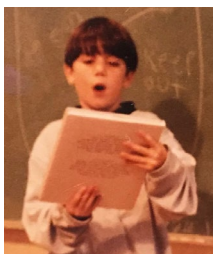
Ady Barkan passed away November 1, 2023 due to complications from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). He is fondly remembered by his teachers, Ann Liashkov and Shari Majumder, as possessing a passionate interest in the state of the world, even at 9 years old, and for his wonderfully loquacious nature and caring heart. Qualities which made him a courageous and powerful force for good.

Ady graduated cum laude from Columbia College, then earned his Juris Doctor from Yale Law School. He worked on immigrant rights as an attorney in New York – his parents were immigrants from Romania and Israel – and then clerked in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. He took up activism when he worked for the Center for Popular Democracy and later developed the Fed Up campaign.

In 2016, Barkan was diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, and his healthcare activism expanded to include campaigning for the U.S. to adopt a single-payer healthcare system. In 2017, with cuts being threatened to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, Barkan had a chance encounter with then U.S. Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona. Barkan asked Flake to vote against the cuts, telling him, "You can save my life." Flake voted for the cuts.

Barkan developed the Be a Hero campaign to advocate for candidates who support healthcare reforms in the U.S. As his condition worsened, Barkan testified before Congress in 2019 using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device. His advocacy earned him widespread accolades: he was honored in TIME's 100 Most Influential People list in 2020; named among 50 most influential American Jews by Forward in 2018; recognized in Politico's Top 50 Political Thinkers of 2016; and more. In 2019, he published a biography, *Eyes to the Wind: A Memoir of Love and Death, Hope and Resistance*. The 2021 documentary "Not Going Quietly" chronicled his activism.

Ady is survived by his parents; his wife; their children, Carl, 7, and Willow, 3; a brother, Muki Barkan; and several aunts and uncles. (Pictured left: Ady as a Sequoyah Backyard student. Middle: Shari and Ady at his book talk at All Saints Church in 2019 for his biography *Eyes to the Wind*.)







## Debbie & Doug Deems

*written by Colleen Dunn Bates*

In May of 2023, three years after the great loss of her husband, Doug, Debbie McConville Deems died unexpectedly from complications of cancer surgery. Doug died three years earlier, in May of 2020, after a five-year struggle with multiple myeloma.

Everyone involved with Sequoyah's lower school in the 2000s knew Debbie and Doug, and everyone connected with the high school knew Debbie in more recent years. The family arrived at Sequoyah in 2000 when eldest daughter Kathleen started in the Bamboo Forest; not far behind her were son Rory and younger sister Maeve. While the children thrived at Sequoyah, the parents jumped in with both feet. Doug served on the board, Debbie co-chaired several auctions, both went on countless camping trips, and Debbie became "the other Betty" in the office when Betty Chavez needed a day off. Debbie later went on to work in the office of the high school campus.



Both Debbie and Doug were native Angelenos, first meeting at St. Genevieve High School in Panorama City at age 14, and then reconnecting and falling in love in their 20s. Debbie was an alumna of the University of San Diego who built a career in Democratic politics (most notably as an aide to Lt. Governor Leo McCarthy) before transitioning to motherhood. Doug graduated from Occidental College and UC Law SF, working as an attorney for both legal and accounting firms before co-founding The Claro Group in 2005. Doug was a passionate Dodgers fan who didn't miss an opening day for 33 years. Born of Irish parents, Debbie was a Rose of Tralee as a teenager, and her storytelling skills rivaled those of any great Irishwoman.

Doug was the youngest of six and Debbie the youngest of ten, and family meant everything to them. They were famous for Thanksgiving dinners for 100+ in their backyard every year, and for three decades, their house on Palm Terrace in Pasadena has been a hub for family, friends, kids, and dogs. From Debbie's "Tea Gals" group to Doug's poker group and fishing buddies, their Sequoyah-founded friendships ran wide and deep; particularly close friends included Caroline and Rick Purvis and Gwen and Barry Russakis.

The family held a memorial for Doug in September 2022 and held Debbie's one year later in September 2023.

## Jacinto Dyson '07

*written by Jacinto's mother, Carmen Guevara*

Jacinto passed on May 2, 2020. He attended The Evergreen State College in Washington state and then settled in Denver, Colorado with his soulmate Rachel Bilys and their faithful dog companion Daikon. He worked in construction and did some design, developing close, caring relationships with the people he worked for. He was loved by family, friends and his clients.

His Denver friends describe him best: as a really special person who made the world a better place. He was the kind of person that brought people together. He loved to engage in respectful debates about social issues, and was also a person of action. He and his friends would prepare food and toiletry bags for the homeless, paid for from their own pockets, carefully map out where the homeless might be any particular week, and distribute what they had assembled.

He also loved a good practical joke. Of course, you'd have to watch when he got a twinkle in his eye. This indicated he was about to play a joke, or do something really silly, or goofy. He also loved to dance and was an excellent dancer.

Jacinto's friends describe him as funny and brilliant. He attended comedy night at Chain Reaction Brewing Company and rarely missed a show. He even developed his own book of jokes. He watched *Jeopardy!* faithfully and knew all the answers. He was kind and caring. He really cared about how people around him were feeling and could read feelings really well. He would engage in random acts of kindness. He anonymously shoveled snow out his friend's driveway while he was out of town to help this friend's wife. He was athletic and led his friend Derek's soccer team to a championship. He loved playing kickball every year. To sum him up, one of his friends said it best, "He was a really special person. He brought people together. The world was a better place because of him."



## Okuwah Garrett

William Okuwah Garrett, Sequoyah parent of alums Tarik Garrett '05 and Lateef Garrett '99, passed away on December 9, 2022. Born on April 17, 1949 in Edenton, North Carolina, Okuwah graduated from Emerson College in 1980 and was later accepted to the master's program at the USC School of Cinematic Arts. A film editor and music video director in the 1990s, Okuwah's passion later turned to education. After earning a master's degree in special education at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), he and a group of educators launched Leadership in Entertainment and Media Arts (LEMA), a pilot high school in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. As Sequoyah parents, Okuwah and his wife of 41 years, Marlene McCurtis, were active members of the school community as mindful supporters of Sequoyah's founding values and its commitment to an intentionally inclusive community. Okuwah was instrumental in developing the school's initial policies surrounding admissions and financial support for applicant families.

*Editor's Note: The names of Okuwah's and Marlene's sons, Tarik and Lateef, were misspelled in the previous posting of this issue. We are deeply sorry and apologize for the error.*





## Lorin Knell '86

Sequoyah alum and current parent Lorin Knell passed away on February 1, 2023. Lorin was a dedicated member of Sequoyah's Board of Trustees for 16 years, 13 of which he served as treasurer and played an essential role in the past decade of the school's growth, strengthened financial position, and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lorin obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Economics from Colby College and later earned his MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration. With professional experience including corporate roles as CEO, member of several Boards of Directors, and managing director for a private equity fund, Lorin brought his expertise in business and finance to Sequoyah. From the establishment of the indexed tuition structure in 2008, to the K-8 enrollment and campus expansion in 2013, to the founding of the high school in 2016, Lorin's legacy is palpable at Sequoyah School. In a 2022 interview for a Sequoyah feature, Lorin shared, "I love [Sequoyah]... and I'm proud of the work we've done to expand and grow this beloved community. I hope the school continues to grow and prosper, and that my grandchildren will attend Sequoyah. The education here is priceless." Lorin is survived by his wife Amy and sons Gabriel '32 and Avi '36; his parents Harvey and Ellen; and siblings Ed '82, Peter '84, and their families.



## Mardig "Mardy" Madenjian

Mardiros "Mardig/Mardy" Maadenjian, former Sequoyah staff member, died at his home in Pasadena, California on January 1, 2021 at 82 years old. He was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to Armenian parents who were survivors of the genocide of 1915. He immigrated in 1986 to Pasadena, California, where he lived with his wife and two children. Mardy worked as Sequoyah's Assistant Librarian for 20 years and had endless affection for every child who walked through the library door and for his colleagues. He was a man of many interests who was always ready with a warm greeting and to strike up a conversation on any number of topics. With great passion for his Armenian heritage, he worked with Representative Adam Schiff to gain recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and shared about the history of his people through conversation and his writings as a published author. To celebrate Mardy's retirement from Sequoyah, the All-School Meeting on June 9, 2016 was dedicated to honoring his many contributions to the school community where students, teachers, staff, alumni families, and former colleagues shared beautiful stories of love and affection about Mardy.



## Cormac Roth '11

Cormac Roth passed away on October 16, 2022 at the age of 25 after a battle with cancer. "He was a wild and electric ball of energy and his spirit was filled with light and goodness," his family shared. "As wild as he was, Cormac was also the embodiment of kindness. A gentle soul who brought so much happiness and hope to those around him. The grief comes in waves, as do the tears and laughter, when we think of that beautiful boy across the 25 years and 10 months that we knew him. An irrepressible and joyful and wild and wonderful child. Only recently a man. We love him. We will carry him with us wherever we go." Cormac is survived by his parents, Tim and Nikki Roth, and his brother, Hunter Roth '09.



## Mary Austin (Polly) St. John



Polly St. John, Sequoyah parent of alums Austin St. John '74 and Nora St. John '73, passed away peacefully on April 20, 2020 at age 96. Born on March 20, 1924, Polly grew up in Naugatuck, Connecticut and married her high school sweetheart, David St. John, in 1944. They lived and grew their family in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and finally Pasadena, California, where they raised five children. Polly was predeceased by her eldest son, Dave, and is survived by Austin '74, Nora '73, Peter, and Marcy, and their families. Her children shared, "We will miss her humor, her love, her willingness to be silly, her love of movement and dance, and all those things that made her our Mom. May she forever rest in peace."

## Keep Sequoyah Connected

Alumni check-ins and community passings are published when they are shared by community members with the school. If you would like personal news to be included in the *Phoenix*, please let us know.

### **Sarah Gossage**

Advancement Associate & Alumni Coordinator  
sgossage@sequoyahschool.org

### **Kay Yamamoto**

K-8 Admissions & Advancement Associate  
kyamamoto@sequoyahschool.org



## Why is Sequoyah's school magazine called the *Phoenix*?

Our school's namesake, Sequoyah, was a Cherokee leader and inventor who created the Cherokee syllabary in 1821. His legacy made it possible for the Cherokee people to read and write in their native language. In 1828, the first Native American newspaper was printed in the United States — the Cherokee Phoenix.

Sequoyah School's *Phoenix* continues to honor his legacy through community sharing, celebrating culture, and capturing tradition in the present and for generations to follow.



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**HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS** • 301 N. Orange Grove Boulevard, Pasadena, CA 91103

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SEQUOYAH SCHOOL ANNUAL CAMPAIGN



Like all non-profit independent schools, Sequoyah fulfills its mission by relying on donations to sustain the quality of its program. Gifts to the Annual Campaign enrich each student's day-to-day learning and enhances the dynamic, thriving school community that supports each student from their first day to their graduation.

Our collective giving is an acknowledgment that we share responsibility for every student's success. Consistent generosity over time assures that Sequoyah is an extraordinary, inclusive, and socioeconomically diverse school community.

**Because of your involvement, Sequoyah can provide a powerful education that challenges the mind, nurtures the heart, and celebrates human dignity.** Learn about ways to give or make your gift by scanning the QR code above. **Thank you!**