

Passing Notes

ParkmontSchool

Sessions 1 and 2, 2019

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Middle School hikers catch their breath on their way up the mountain.



Parkmont first visits the Grand Canyon, 1991.

The Grand Canyon: One of Parkmont's Favorite Classrooms

By Ron McClain

Parkmont's founding families were excited about the prospect of using the nation's capital and its surrounding environs to keep students enthusiastic about learning and adventure. Somerset's spirit of adventure was built into the school's block scheduling, its travel classes, the annual week-long scholarship hike on the C&O Canal, and owning enough VW vans to get everyone on the road simultaneously.

In 1962, my teacher parents took their three children on the road for 66 days, 10,000 miles, 45 nights camping in a dozen national parks, and to the Seattle World's Fair. And an impromptu hike across the Grand Canyon planned for all of 30 minutes upon our arrival (my mother was to drive the 250 miles around to the South Rim while my brother and I, 12 and 13, carried our sleeping bags, a couple of cans of food, and canteens down to Phantom Ranch campground and up the Bright Angel Trail the next day to our rendezvous point).

Parkmont's Classrooms for our near-half-century have included our delightful house on 16th Street and hundreds of locales around town (250+ internship sites and counting) and the DMV region, as well as several hundred more in Florida, the Yucatan,

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Alaska, the Everglades, and Puerto Rico, and a dozen other destinations around the country. We first took on the Grand Canyon as a school in 1991. We left for a 17-day camping trip that had us back to Phantom Ranch campground, surviving April snowstorms, playing basketball with Havasupai teens on their home court in their roadless village (hiked in, rode out on horseback), and skiing at the Santa Fe Ski Bowl before our Mississippi steamboat water-wheel ride in St. Louis. We've been back to the South Rim three times since, the last two trips led by Alex Jennison, whose recent rafting adventure accompanies this note. Our most recent student trip in 2016 included visits to Zion National Park, Horseshoe Bend, the Sedona hills, Glen Canyon Dam in Lake Powell, Hoover Dam, and Antelope Canyon. All of them are on our Parkmont Classrooms list, places for learning and adventure, and memories of a lifetime. ■

Paddling The Ditch: "Awe and Grandeur"

By Alex Jennison

As my first paddle strokes broke the water, the momentum I needed to maneuver the 2,000-pound raft loaded with three weeks of food slowly started to build. I knew the years and final frenzied months of preparation had paid off. This was not my first time visiting the Grand Canyon; as a teacher and trip leader at Parkmont School, I have had the opportunity to take two groups of students on unique trips to the Canyon. With the students, we explored slot canyons, went caving, rode horseback, hiked the Bright Angel Trail, and explored the natural and man-made features that are pivotal to the formation and life of the canyon. This trip to the canyon was inherently different. I had been chosen to be the medical support for the first nine days of a 21-day trip down the 277 miles of Colorado River that run through the Grand Canyon. My portion of the trip was the first 88 miles, which included 36 notable rapids and three major rapids that were no joke for even the most experienced boaters.

Very quickly we found out how big those rapids could be. To survive the rapids and the trip overall, routines became a necessity. Each day began at 5:30 a.m. before the break of dawn. Breakfast needed to be made, tents and camp deconstructed, and boats rigged for the whitewater that lay ahead. We stopped at larger rapids and boat captains ran along the shore to a vantage point to scout the turns and rocks that hid

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Alex at sunrise on Day 1, pushing off from Lee's Ferry into a marble canyon.

in each stretch of whitewater. While routines became a way of life, each day, each bend in the river presented a new moment of awe and grandeur. The thing that I found most captivating and hardest to adjust to was the scale of everything. The stars at night were overwhelming. The colors and shades of the rocks and river were endless, and the canyon walls stretched higher than most city skyscrapers, rising all around to swallow us and the river up and block out the sun. This led us to chase the sunlight from bend to bend and camp to camp. The temperature change between the sunlight and the shade was a drop of 20-30 degrees.

Through hard work, the guidance of some of the more experienced boaters, and some major blisters, I learned how to steer and guide the rafts. As I moved into my new role as a boat captain, I quickly was able to outmaneuver other boats and captains due to the classes I had taught at Parkmont. Suddenly lectures on river

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formations were leading to more efficient and precise lines through the rapids and flat waters. It was so cool to make the connections between the step-pool formations I lecture about and eddy systems we study on field trips to local DC waterways and the twisting, swirling waters of the Colorado River. The group had two other teachers and a geologist along, which led to countless hours of swapping facts and knowledge about the mighty river and the canyon it has been carving for eons.

On Day 6, we woke up to a gray, drizzly, cold Thanksgiving morning. Although the weather was not what most people would be thankful for, we woke smiling and ready for Turkey Day. The previous day had rained continuously, with hail battling the wind. It got so bad that when we made it to camp and there was no end of the foul weather in sight, a short meeting of the boat captains led us all to hop back in the boats and push on with ambitions of making the next camp and earning a rest day. So, a little rain on Turkey Day offered a welcome opportunity to sleep in and a morning free from boat rigging. I will always remember that Thanksgiving Day. It was marvelous; a day spent hiking and exploring, doing chores, doing yoga on the beach, and cooking with friends.

The trip flew by after that, with some of the biggest rapids on the river to hurry us on our way back to civilization. Arriving at Phantom Ranch was a wash of bittersweet feelings. I knew, however much I wanted to stay, that my life and work were calling me back. I also knew this would not be my last time in this sacred and remarkable place. Three of us switched out at Phantom Ranch and hiked the 12 miles and 4,500 feet of elevation gain to the top of the South Rim. While I had been on the Bright Angel Trail with Parkmont students before, I had no idea how truly steep and long it was until I arrived at the top of it, in four feet of snow and exhausted and so excited for a proper shower and bed.

As we sat around the fire on that Thanksgiving night, I was (and still am) in agreement with the rest of my group about our deep gratitude to our fellow travelers, friends, family members, and coworkers who all played a role in our ability to experience such incredible moments and places. I am extremely grateful to the Parkmont community for the support, encouragement, and preparation for such a once-in-a-lifetime undertaking. I know I will bring my experiences and newly stoked excitement to future classes and experiences with students. ■



Making theater magic:
Rob measures out ribbon
for a Keegan prop.



Internship Interview

**Rob Allen, 12th Grader,
Keegan Theatre**

Motivation? I'm a theater guy. It came from watching *Lion King* as a little kid. I was like, this is so cool, that animation was able to evoke so much emotion. That sparked my interest in film and theater.

Goal? Since I am going to a college that is mainly around film and theater, creative arts, I was like, yeah, I want to get an internship that is going to help me build on these skills before I go. I wanted to get a base of experience

with how the people are, the process that it takes to go through a show, build a set and take it down.

Time? I know if I'm late, if I'm supposed to make a prop, then it sets the show back if it's not ready.

Work? I'm helping the guys with the set for the next play. I assist them in cutting shapes, if they need a building in the background or a moon. Wood, styrofoam, they use a plethora of things. I've helped them build a makeshift doorway.

Attitude? It helps to have tolerance and humble yourself and help somebody else out, instead of always worrying about what you want to do. It helps build endurance and stick things through. ■



Ameen is happy to be learning at the Inner Harbor for a few hours.



Trevino makes a new friend at the Baltimore Aquarium.

Heavy Weather Leads To Baltimore High Seas

By Sam Gaul

What does a school like Parkmont do when it calls for torrential thunderstorms? Take a Middle School trip to the only place you can find more water: the Baltimore Aquarium. On October 16th, we headed north to see one of the most famous, and one of the largest aquariums in the United States, one that houses over 10,000 marine and freshwater animals. In groups we toured the massive facility to see an incredible variety of wildlife. Poison Dart frogs, Atlantic Puffins, Yellow-headed Amazon Parrots, Green Moray Eels, largetooth Sawfish Sharks, Clearnose Skates, Lion's Mane Jellyfish, Australian Freshwater Crocodiles...

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Yanna strikes a pose with a passing turtle.

and so many more amazing animals were on display for us to observe. We were even treated to an Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin show, where we watched them perform tricks and huge jumps out of the water. It was great to see the students in awe of such beautiful creatures and to learn about their habitats and behaviors from the exhibits.

Before heading home, we decided to take a quick detour and check out the observation deck of the Baltimore World Trade Center. Even with clouds in the distance, we were treated to an amazing 360-degree view of the city.

We may have gotten wet that day, but we all had a really great time getting to experience a part of our planet that we landlubbers can hardly even imagine. ■

Around 114,600 Words In 30 Days

By Nijole Gedutis and Willa Reinhard

For the past few years, each November, the middle school has taken on the challenge of National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo). NaNoWriMo is a nationwide, month-long writing journey, from November 1 through 30, in which students (and willing adults) set a daily and long-term writing goal for a “novel” they’d like to complete, and then they get to work. As students write, they also study and discuss the elements of plot. This year, student goals ranged from 2,000 words to 20,000 words. Most students achieved their goal and many exceeded it! Cumulatively, the two English classes wrote 114,600 words during the 30-day challenge. That’s 7,347 more words than *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*!

From Bezawit’s story, *The Unspoken Truth About Raven’s Life*

“One morning in July, she woke up as usual, went to the bathroom, brushed her teeth, washed her face and braided her hair, then went back to her room. She started to write music in her red book which had a bunch of tiny flowers around her name when suddenly her uncle walked into her room without knocking, came up to her and snatched her book out of her hand.

‘What are you doing?!’ Raven said.”

From Arsiema’s story, *Untitled*

“She had black hair with brown eyes. Her power was that she could live in the desert without drinking water for a long time. On the tip of her tail there was a poisonous spike that was deadly like a scorpion, and

she could shoot fire with her left hand just like every other one of the Donuts.”

From Yanna’s novel, *The Fallen Ones*

“The teacher gestured for him to leave. He rolled his eyes in exasperation and left the serene classroom. His short, slightly curled, golden-brown hair bounced with each step as he walked down the hall, his black boots hitting the ground were the only things he heard.”

From Jacob’s novel, *School of Myths*

“At this school you are ranked and labeled based off your ability and power level. There is a system that works here. Only the most powerful of the Kingdom get to be here. There is no discriminatory influence in this school; that’s why it is the top school in all of Hysteria.” ■

Parkmont’s
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Helen, Kieran, Rob, and Molly dive into the democratic process at a DC Council hearing.

DC History: Class Tackles Local and Federal Policymaking

By Ethan Kuhnhenh

In Session 1's DC History class, Parkmont Upper Schoolers explored local history and gained insight into local politics. The class revolved around weekly field trips to historical locations or political stages. Highlights of the seven-week course included attending a DC Council legislative meeting, visiting the scene of the only Confederate assault on the city during the Civil War, and eating at the historic Ben's Chili Bowl. Students were exposed to local issues through session-long news-gathering assignments and discussed topics such as gentrification, transportation, and sustainable development, culminating in an editorial in which they presented their views on the subject. With so much history and access in our own backyard, DC History is a unique subject which emphasizes exploration and experience. By the end of the course, students had a perceptibly greater appreciation of the cultural and historical forces that have shaped where they live. ■

Poetry on the Horizon

By Kim Schraf, Poetry Festival Coordinator

The vernal equinox is still down the road a bit, but since the groundhog saw no shadow, we know spring will be upon us soon. And that means that poetry will be right on its heels. At Parkmont, the crocuses and robins and rainboots herald our annual Parkmont Poetry Festival. This year will be our 38th, and we will celebrate it on Saturday, May 2, at 2 pm. Our Blagden Avenue neighbor, Zion Baptist Church, has hosted our event for the last three years, and will do so again in May.

We don't yet know who the finalists will be, but submissions are streaming in. Whatever D.C. public, private, and charter school poets are selected, they are certain to be a breath of fresh verse on a spring afternoon. Please plan to join us and be transported! ■

Spotlight: Willa Reinhard, School Administrator and Internship Program Coordinator

Home Turf: D.C.'s Mount Pleasant. I grew up in a really diverse environment.

Higher Ed Revelation: I was unsure about what kind of college I wanted to go to, and I wasn't that invested in the process. And then we went to New York University and did a campus tour. It was diverse and right in the heart of the city. I went from being ambivalent about college to applying early decision at NYU. I majored in English, with a minor in creative writing. I thought I would do journalism or some other writing job.

The Bug: I had an internship at a magazine. A friend of mine worked for the Latin American Youth Center in Columbia Heights and kept trying to recruit me to be a

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teacher for Upward Bound, their Saturday college prep. I gave it a shot, and I really liked working with the students. I mentioned my interest in teaching to Michelle (Banks), who was a teacher here at Parkmont. There was an afternoon SAT prep class opening up. I ended up doing it and then, mid-year, a full-time office manager position opened up.

Parkmont's Vibe: I like the people I work with. People are really talented. Everyone wears a lot of hats. People handle the stress well. There is a lot of laughter.

Internship Czarina: I'm pretty familiar with the different parts of the city, where people live in relationship to where we might place students, what kind of route that would be. I like making the connections between the kids' interests and local businesses.

Literary Lure: It's always fun to read D.C. writers. You recognize the settings. Edward Jones, he's a big hero of mine. His short story collection *Lost in the City* is one of my favorite books. Anything that talks about race from a different point of view usually is a big draw for me. I really enjoy reading books and reading the creative work of students and seeing their process.

Stashed: I have a collection of short stories that I wrote for my master's in fine arts thesis at the University of Miami, all centered in D.C., and about the changing city. But it's packed in a box. At some point I might revisit it. But, having a 5-year-old and working full time, that aspect of my brain, it's hard to activate it.

Me Time: I do spinning. They have great soundtracks for the classes. It's hard. But I do yoga, too, which is more relaxing. ■



Willa and son Biosah observe a DC favorite: Cherry Blossoms at peak bloom!



Parkmont
Middle
Schoolers
in the
Shenandoah
Mountains.

Camping: Vets, Rookies, Blue Ridge S'mores

By Matt McClain and Ethan Kuhnhenh

For years, Parkmont Middle Schoolers have taken advantage of Washington's beautiful October weather to head to the hills for a weekend of camping. The route is usually west to the Blue Ridge Mountains, a beautiful natural area punctuated by rolling hills, quaint farms and stunning Appalachian ridge lines. In Session One, Parkmont spent a crisp October night in Shenandoah Park's Matthew's Arm campground. We had a mix of veteran and rookie campers, with the students who had camped with the school in prior years eager to show off their knowledge and helpfulness throughout the trip.

As is our custom, we arrived at the campground and took stock of our surroundings with an evening hike around the campground. When we got back, Ethan had the fire roaring and Matt and the students helped prepare a delicious sausage, pepper, and onion dinner, along with hearty helpings of baked beans and sweet corn. For dessert, nothing other than s'mores would suffice. For a few students, this was their first experience eating the sticky sweet, and they relished the process and precision of roasting marshmallows on the open fire.

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Yanna, Noelle, Butheyana, and Nick at the orchard, stocking up on apples and apple treats before heading home.

In the morning we packed the vans and headed to Hawksbill Mountain, the highest point in Shenandoah National Park. Fortunately, Skyline Drive winds its way up and around the mountain so we only had a little over a mile to hike before we made it to the rocky outcrop at the top. With stunning views to the west, this vantage is one of our favorites. After a few photos, we headed back down the mountain to begin the journey home. Of course, a trip to Shenandoah isn't complete without a final stop at the apple orchard. We loaded up the van with pounds of freshly-picked apples, apple cider, and apple pie. Hearts content and stomachs full, we headed back to DC, with thoughts of a return trip in the spring already on our minds. ■

The Annual Giving Campaign

Parkmont School's Annual Giving campaign plays a vital role in sustaining the diverse programs and efforts that you are reading about in our newsletter. We are grateful for the generosity that our friends have shown through our long history and we hope that you will take a moment to make a contribution to our work.

Gifts can be made with a credit card (VISA or MasterCard) or a check. Please call the Parkmont Office at 202.726.0740 with your credit card information or mail a check to:

Annual Giving Campaign
Parkmont School
4842 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20011

Online donations can be made through Paypal (www.paypal.me/parkmont). Thank you for your consideration. ■



New Faces

Zoe McLean

Zoe McLean, a Parkmont School 2012 graduate, has returned to the fold to head up our bustling front office. Zoe cleaved to the hands-on learning style at Parkmont as a student, and she's eager to apply the method in her new role.

Zoe brings a global perspective to the school where "The World Is Our Classroom." Swaziland-born, she spent part of elementary school in El Salvador and has back-packed across Southeast Asia. She has worked at a wildlife rehabilitation center in South Africa and a farm in Wales.

Zoe recently returned to the D.C. area after a stint as an au pair in Australia. "I grew up traveling," she says. Zoe, who also plans to be working on a degree in social work, said being at Parkmont feels like a homecoming. "It's nice. It's really sweet. It feels like the community is stronger."

Mel Kates

Mel Kates was visiting a friend in L.A., thinking about her next career move. She got a ping from a job recruiter website. It was a position at Parkmont. "I had an epiphany," she says. "I had always missed working with kids."

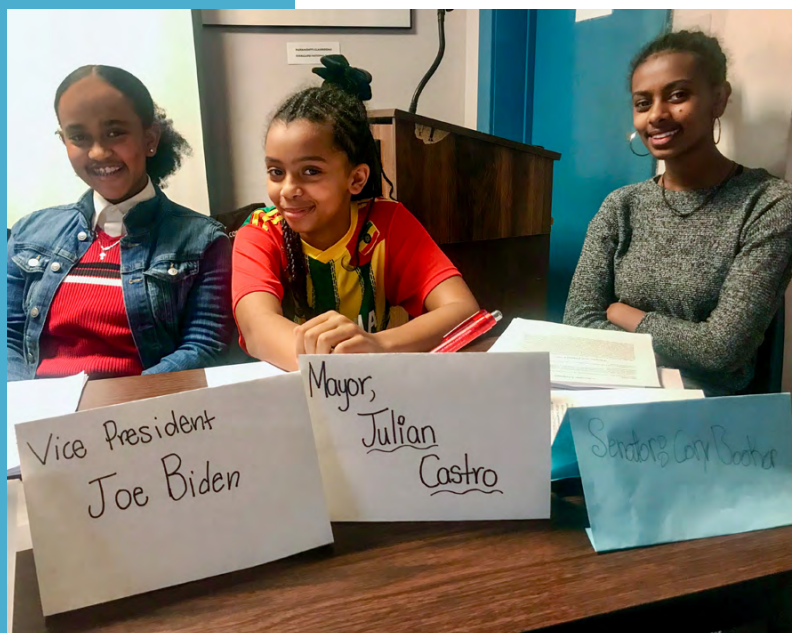
Kates, who grew up in D.C., graduated from Hampshire College with a degree in history and creative writing. Tapping into courses in education, she started teaching at a school with an approach similar to Parkmont's. But, unfortunately, the school lacked Parkmont's staying power. Its closure meant a shift for Mel into bookstore management — until the ping. She had recalled noticing Parkmont on passes along 16th Street. "I wanted a position where I could help kids but didn't need to be in the classroom." So now she's aiding with school development projects and internship program coordination.

And she's tutoring students. "Because they've been able to see some progress, it makes me feel really good," she says.

"I really like the balance of my job. Not only am I able to learn more about the work that goes into running schools behind the scenes, but I'm also able to work directly with students and support them in their academic journey. It's perfect." ■

Alex's Elections Class dove deep into the democratic process by participating in a heated simulated debate.

The student candidates pose post-debate.



Democracy 2020: Elections Class Debates

By Alex Jennison

In December, the Middle School elections class finished up an action-packed session with a mock 2020 democratic debate. The debate was a culmination of five weeks of tracking individual candidates' speeches, campaigns, and positions. While tracking their (and their opponent candidates') every action, students also kept a close eye on Brexit and the impeachment process as they unfolded each day in front of them. The students came dressed to impress and participated in three rounds of debate with an audience of their peers watching. ■

Lily brings her Dad to school for Parkmont's International Potluck.



Fall Potluck Soars On Keonte's Chicken Wings

By Sania Tildon

On November 21st, families and friends gathered for the annual fall potluck. After a busy hour setting up, staff stood back as students and their families filled the Commons, bringing with them hot casseroles and heaping platters of family favorites to share.

From chili to homemade pad thai to Keonte's famous chicken

wings, the first floor was full of culinary delights. Over full plates of this delicious food, students, teachers, and families got to know each other a little better. After eating, they competed in a team trivia game. Sam emceed and Sania, Troy, and Ethan kept score as students and parents answered questions drawn from classes, teacher's lives, and even the student handbook. Questions covered everything from public health to world geography to the types of snacks available in the office. All in all, it was another wonderful potluck to remember. ■



Parkmont Parents work together to set up dinner.



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